The Lost Manuscript and the “Unmasked” Missionary

Pondichéry Jesuit Contributions to Enlightenment & Colonial Fantasies of India

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Cover Image: “The chapel of the Carmel in Muthialpet.” *Le Carmel de Pondichéry*, n.d., p.50
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I credit Vera Garg’s mentorship and brilliance as a teacher for cementing my interests in Indian and British history, with twentieth-century Algerian, Italian, Japanese, and German variants added in for good measure. It was in her HL History of Asia class in New Delhi that I first studied the eighteenth-century Anglo-French rivalries discussed in this thesis.

Lastly, I thank my family, who have supported me unceasingly—with a special thanks to my mother, Renu Sisodia, for sparking my initial love for history. This is for her and my late naniji (maternal grandmother), Sumitra Devi, two of the strongest people I know.
Note to the Reader

On translation. All translations from French and Sanskrit are my own, if not otherwise cited. For primary sources, I have given the original versions in the footnotes.

On linguistic conventions. Roman transliterations of Sanskrit terms are standardized following IAST conventions in the body of this thesis, although I preserved any irregular transliterations, orthography, and capitalizations that appear in the primary sources when providing direct quotations. The titles of papal bulls and decrees are left in Latin by convention.

On “mœurs.” Depending on context, mœurs can be translated as mores, morals, manners, and/or customs. When quoting primary sources, I give the term in French with a contextualized translation. When the term appears in the titles of published sources, I generally defer to official translation (e.g. Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations for Voltaire’s Essai sur les mœurs et de l’esprit des nations), with the exception of Jesuit missionary Gaston-Laurent Cœurdoux’s Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens. This text was rendered as Hindu Manners and Customs in nineteenth-century British publications. I instead translate its title as Morals and Customs of the Indians to emphasize Cœurdoux and his fellow Jesuits’ preoccupation with systems of morality and the difference in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century contexts.

On naming. French Pondichéry (also anglicized as Pondicherry in Anglophone sources) is present-day Puducherry, and British Madras is present-day Chennai. I use names from the colonial period for consistency with primary sources.

On chronology and characters. For convenience, I have included a timeline of key events and short biographies of relevant figures from Jesuit missions, European Indology, and the British and French colonial regimes at the beginning.
Dramatis Personae

Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656). Italian Jesuit who arrived in India in 1605 and led the establishment of the Jesuits’ Madurai Mission in 1606. (Chapter 1)

Jean Venant Bouchet (1655–1732). French Jesuit in Pondichéry who served as superior from 1710–32. His letters were heavily cited by Montesquieu in De l’esprit des lois. (Chapters 1, 2)


Jean Calmette (1693–1740). French Jesuit who reached Pondichéry in 1725. Likely author of the Satyavedasārasaṁgraham and Ezour-Vedam. (Chapters 1, 2)

Joseph François Dupleix (1697–1763). Governor-General of French India from 1742–54. Pioneered the strategy of using native rulers as intermediaries for European powers. (Chapter 3)

François-Louis Lavaur (1700–63). French Jesuit in Pondichéry who was superior from 1751–63. Mediated between civil and military authorities in the Seven Years’ War. (Chapter 3)

Thomas Arthur, comte de Lally (1702–66). Governor-General of French India during the Seven Years’ War. Executed for treason. His son recruited Voltaire to clear his name. (Chapter 3)

John Zepheniah Holwell (1711–98). British East India Company functionary in Bengal whose survey of Indian scripture was cited by Voltaire and other philosophes. (Chapters 2, 3)

Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805). French Indologist who traveled to India during the Seven Years’ War and corresponded with Coêrdoux from 1768–73. (Chapters 2, 3)

Nicholas-Jacques Desvaulx (1745–1817). French East India Company functionary born in Chandernagore. Sent Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens to Paris in 1777. (Chapter 3)

William Jones (1746–94). British Orientalist and colonial jurist whose 1796 theory of a common origin between Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin resembles Coêrdoux’s. (Chapter 2, Epilogue)

Jean-Antoine Dubois (1765–1848). Missionary from the Missions étrangères de Paris. Sold British officials a modified copy of Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens under his own name in 1806. (Epilogue)

William Bentinck (1774–1839). Governor of British Madras in 1803, overseeing the purchase from Dubois. Became first Governor-General of British India in 1834. (Epilogue)
Timeline

1606 Malabar rites controversy begins with an investigation of Roberto de Nobili in Madurai
1674 French East India Company officials establish a colonial settlement in Pondichéry
1689 French Jesuit missionaries establish their Carnatic Mission in the Pondichéry region
1702 French Jesuits in Paris begin publishing the the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*
1704 Malabar rites controversy ignites in Pondichéry with the Vatican’s *Inter graviores* decree
1744 Cœurdoux becomes superior of the Carnatic Mission; Malabar rites controversy ends with the passage of the papal bull *Omnium sollicitudinum*
1748 Cœurdoux establishes the Carmel Convent of Pondichéry
1751 Cœurdoux steps down as superior of the Carnatic Mission, succeeded by Lavaur
1756 Beginning of the Seven Years’ War (Third Carnatic War)
1760 Voltaire is presented with the *Ezour-Vedam*, supposedly a lost work of Hindu scripture
1761 France loses Pondichéry to Britain after a yearlong wartime siege
1764 Louis XV expels the Society of Jesus from France, cutting off their missions; Pondichéry-region missions are transferred to the Missions étrangères de Paris
1770 Guillaume Thomas François Raynal and Denis Diderot publish *Histoire des deux Indes*
1771 Cœurdoux proposes common origin of Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek to Anquetil-Duperron
1773 The Vatican suppresses the Society of Jesus, affecting Jesuits of all nationalities
1774 Raynal and Diderot publish a second edition of the *Histoire des deux Indes*, containing a line repeated verbatim in Cœurdoux’s *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens*
1777 Cœurdoux entrusts *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* to Nicholas-Jacques Desvaulx in the French East India Company for publication in the metropole
1786 Jones posits his Indo-European language theory, resembling Cœurdoux’s 1771 theory
1806 Dubois sells a modified version of Cœurdoux’s manuscript to British officials
1817 British officials publish their English translation of the Dubois version in London
1971 Sylvia Murr discovers the 1777 manuscript in the British Library and later “unmasks” Dubois to reveal Cœurdoux as the true author of *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens*
This thesis begins with a “near-miss” linking India, France, and Britain at the turn of the eighteenth century. In 1777 Pondichéry, a French colonial holding in southeast India, the Jesuit missionary Gaston-Laurent Cœurdoux (1691–1779) entrusted his magnum opus to an officer in the French East India Company named Nicholas-Jacques Desvaulx. The text, entitled Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens [Morals and Customs of the Indians], surveyed topics ranging from the origins of Indian peoples to the possibility of a native uprising against British rule, engaging with Enlightenment debates over India’s place in universal history. Cœurdoux likely composed the text during the 1770s and intended for the younger Desvaulx to secure its publication in Paris.

Unbeknownst to Cœurdoux, these best-laid plans would be thwarted by the French Revolution of 1789. Desvaulx sent the manuscript to Paris later in 1777. It was lost two decades later when his superiors, affiliates of the deposed French monarch, fled to Spain—only for a copy to be discovered in Pondichéry by Jean-Antoine Dubois, a member of a rival Catholic missionary group called the Missions étrangères de Paris that had long opposed the Jesuits. In 1806, Dubois modified the manuscript and sold it to the British East India Company in the neighboring territory of Madras under his own name. Heartened by the acquisition of a “manual” to train their officers on how to govern natives, British officials published their English translation of the manuscript in London in 1817.

For over a century, this version of the manuscript circulated in Europe and India as colonial Indology par excellence, a “masterly view” into the “vie intime” of natives. It was only in 1971 that

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1 I am borrowing the expression “near miss” to describe this chain of events from Anthony T. Arlotto, “Jones and Cœurdoux: Correction to a Footnote,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 89, no. 2 (April-June 1969): 417.
2 See Note to the Reader on p.iv on the translation of mœurs as “morals” for this title.
Sylvia Murr discovered the 1777 copy Desvaulx had sent to Paris in the collections of the British Library. Murr proceeded to “unmask” Dubois, revealing that the author of this supposedly nineteenth-century Orientalist colonial tract was in fact an eighteenth-century French Jesuit.5 “I am glad that Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens finally sees the light of day, that the name of Father Cœurdoux—and with him, all of eighteenth-century Jesuit Indology—finally emerges from the shadows,” Murr wrote to the Jesuits’ librarian.6

Cœurdoux’s manuscript provides an empirical link between the worlds of early modern Jesuit missions, eighteenth-century Enlightenment and revolutionary Paris, and nineteenth-century British colonial Madras. Taking this link as its point of departure, my thesis offers a critical genealogy of Orientalism by reconstructing the relationship between Jesuit and Indian spirituality and Enlightenment political culture. I argue that the spiritual commitments of these Jesuit missionaries—and of the Indians they engaged with—enable us to globalize and pluralize Enlightenment universalism and French revolutionary thought by locating their contradictions in the social, religious, and political tensions confronting late eighteenth-century Pondichéry. Writing at the end of Enlightenment and eve of modern empire, Jesuit missionaries developed alternative universalisms based on mystical theology and spiritual practice that had the capacity to undermine the foundations of European political domination in India. It was in the dismemberment of their intellectual and devotional tradition that we see the beginnings of colonial epistemic and legal order.

5 Murr initially believed Desvaulx to be the author; see Sylvia Murr, “Nicolas Jacques Desvaulx (1745–1823). véritable auteur de ‘Mœurs, Institutions et Cérémonies des peuples de l’Inde’ de l’Abbé Dubois,” Purusārtha 3 (1977): 245-58. She later revised this to conclude Cœurdoux was the true author, and provides a full account of the manuscript’s history in Sylvia Murr, L’Indologie du Père Cœurdoux: Stratégiq

0.1 Pondichéry Jesuits and the Anxieties of Empire

Cœurdoux’s Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens belongs to a corpus of writings produced by Pondichéry-region Jesuit missionaries in the second half of the eighteenth century, which emerged from a longer history of Jesuit missions and colonial encounters in the Indian subcontinent. Portuguese and Italian Jesuits arrived in the sixteenth century, journeying to the Nayak kingdom of Madurai in the southeast, the Portuguese territory of Goa in the southwest, and the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar in the northwest. They became the first Europeans to form relationships with native scholars to study the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit and access Indian scriptures. In turn, their writings offered European audiences some of the earliest accounts of the knowledge and belief systems now termed Hinduism.

French Jesuit missionaries arrived a century later, reaching Pondichéry in 1689. As Danna Agmon notes, late seventeenth-century Pondichéry was itself a land of “newcomers.” The Sultanate of Bijapur had granted the territory to the French East India Company (FEIC) in 1673. It lay along the Malabar Coast within the Carnatic, a peninsular region across southeastern India that extended from the southern tip of the subcontinent to the Bay of Bengal. To its immediate north was the territory of Madras, held by the British East India Company (BEIC) since 1639; to its west was the territory of Mysore, governed first as a Hindu kingdom until 1761, when it became an Islamic sultanate.

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8 The term Hinduism can be anachronistic: early modern sources often use “Indian,” “native,” or “Gentoo” instead. While I use “Hindu” for readability, it is meant in this broader sense. On the construction of Hinduism as a “world religion,” see Tomoko Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 18-20, 37-64.

Although French officials had assured the Bijapur sultan that they would not interfere in native religious affairs, as a stream of French settlers arrived in Pondichéry, so too did Jesuits and other Catholic missionaries. By the early eighteenth century, their presence became central to the FEIC’s interest in promoting what Agmon calls “a colonial vision of order, authority, and morality.” Jesuit missionaries journeyed past the ville blanche [white town] inhabited by settlers to the surrounding

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12 Agmon, A Colonial Affair, 2.
villages inhabited by natives. Following their Portuguese and Italian counterparts, they cultivated relationships with native scholars and sent detailed accounts of Indian knowledge systems to their superiors in Paris and Rome. Ironically, their accounts were used by Enlightenment *philosophes* in Paris such as Montesquieu and Voltaire—despite these writers’ professed antipathy for Jesuits and the papacy.

![Figure 0.2. Eighteenth-century map of Pondichéry depicting the separation between the *ville blanche* [white town] (center, lower-half) and the surrounding Tamil villages.](image)

Yet by the second half of the eighteenth century, this vision of order was crumbling, and these various French actors were instead writing from a place of decline. France was defeated by Britain in the Seven Years’ War (1756–63), a global conflict that reduced Pondichéry’s status from the epicenter of France’s extensive Indian empire to one of five isolated *établissements* [settlements] that were all that remained of French India as British power expanded across the subcontinent. The original FEIC was dissolved. French writers, including the *philosophes*, cultivated what Kate Marsh calls a “nostalgia” for *l’Inde perdue* [lost India] and anxiety that their nation was being displaced by British power. For

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French Jesuits, anxieties about decline were not only geopolitical, but also religious. During this period, they came under fire in Europe for a host of negative associations: their allegiance to the papacy, their defense of royal absolutism, their persecution of the rival Jansenist party, their affinity with Christian mysticism, and their controversial conversion practices in India and China.\textsuperscript{15} The campaign against them culminated in two blows that fell in quick succession. In 1764, they were expelled from France, and in 1773, they were suppressed by the Vatican and made to shut down their overseas missions. Most of their unpublished writings were lost, or, in the case of \textit{Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens}, unknowingly appropriated and assimilated in other colonial contexts.

\textit{0.2 Historical and Historiographical Interventions}

Using this corpus, this thesis proposes to investigate the development of the Jesuits’ intellectual and devotional tradition, its global transmission and influence, and its relationship to colonial power. Here I draw on Michel de Certeau’s notion of “formality of practice,” that texts assume vastly different meanings based on the contexts in which they are deployed and read (their “formality”—in this case, early modern and modern, colonial and metropolitan, British and French, Jesuit and Hindu.\textsuperscript{16} This thesis reconstructs both an evolving textual tradition of Jesuit writing on Indian spirituality and the shifting conceptual fields of Enlightenment, revolution, and empire from which these texts emerged. What unfolds is a series of generative contingencies along the path from the initial India/Europe encounter to colonial domination, culminating in the paradoxical assimilation of eighteenth-century French Jesuit anxieties into the nineteenth-century British colonial regime.

Both historically and historiographically, I treat Pondichéry Jesuit writings as a missing link between Enlightenment political thought and a colonial epistemology that emerges from a position of


marginality. Marginality operates on three overlapping levels: (1) the social marginality of native converts, primarily women and low-caste Indians, vis-à-vis the elite scholars with whom Jesuits studied Indian scripture, (2) the religious marginality of the Jesuits vis-à-vis church authorities and rival missionary groups since the mid-eighteenth century, (3) the geopolitical marginality of France vis-à-vis the British in India after the Seven Years’ War. This emphasis on marginality is neither to write out asymmetries of power between Europeans and Indians, nor to suggest that the Jesuits’ views were entirely determined by their declining status. Rather, it is to prevent us from reducing either side to a monolith, and to turn to the margins of empire—a historically-contingent, moving target—to understand its epistemic structures.

As we will see, the writings of Pondichéry Jesuits offer a means to trace the fragility of Enlightenment and early colonial knowledge of India, revealing how spiritual and moral anxieties persisted alongside visions of European domination and progress. Pondichéry was a limit-case within the French and British regimes. After the Seven Years’ War, it became an “embattled space” in India, to draw on Ann Stoler’s model of “degrees of imperial sovereignty”: a site that reveals the contradictions underpinning European power. Pondichéry Jesuits’ embattled position adds another dimension to these contradictions. Alongside their standing commitment to erudition and humanistic learning, Jesuits maintained a close relationship to Christian mysticism, which, as Certeau argues, had become “marginal” in the early modern church. The mystic was cast as effeminate, passive, irrational, and dispossessed. Not only did these terms factor into the Jesuits’ expulsion and suppression, but they

17 Scholars analogously describe France’s position in India relative to Britain as “peripheral” or “subaltern”; see Marsh, India in the French Imagination, 1-5 and Jyoti Mohan, Claiming India: French Scholars and the Preoccupation with India in the Nineteenth Century (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), xix. I use “marginal” to extend the analysis from the Anglo-French relationship to dynamics among natives and rival missionary groups.
also resemble how Orientalists would reify and condemn the colonized native subject. This raises the issue of how Jesuit writings could be assimilated into Orientalist discourse when the Jesuits were fending off similar criticisms of their own spirituality—suggesting an important distinction between what Murr calls the “gestation period” of Indology and the advent of high Orientalism.21

Historiographically, this thesis intervenes in three literatures: scholarship on Jesuit missions in the early modern world, on Enlightenment debates over religion, revolution, and empire, and on knowledge-production and colonial power in the Indian subcontinent. First, while there is a vast literature on Jesuits in the early modern world, scholarship on the Indian context centers on the early generations of Portuguese and Italian Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, ending its coverage in the mid eighteenth century as the Jesuits fell into decline.22 To date, no comprehensive history of Pondichéry Jesuits has been written. By taking their decline as its point of departure, this thesis follows how these missionaries responded to the political and religious pressures of late eighteenth-century Pondichéry. As we shall see, their writings departed from those of their predecessors in critical ways and did not directly lend themselves to Orientalist binaries. The assimilation of early modern missionary writings into the modern British colonial regime—what Ines Županov and Angela Xavier call the “tragedy of Catholic Orientalism”—was evidently fraught with contingency.23

Second, my focus on relatively marginal writers outside Europe foregrounds an intervention in Enlightenment historiography. Sebastian Conrad argues that “the Enlightenment’s global impact was

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not energized solely by the ideas of the Parisian *philosophes,*” and was instead “the work of historical actors around the world, writing in a range of different political, religious, and intellectual contexts.” I follow Conrad’s call to trace how actors outside Europe contributed to Enlightenment universalism, while extending this analysis to the political fallout of their contributions amidst empire and revolution. Here, I draw on recent scholarship in the history of science regarding circuits through which knowledge traveled between European and non-European sites, specifically focusing on European scholars who journeyed to the colonies. Stéphane Van Damme argues that these individuals, whom he calls “travelers of doubt,” developed alternative and critical views of universalism that sought to invent the world, not to order it. The transmission of their writings to the metropole facilitated what Emmanuelle Sibeud calls the “intellectual translation” of “colonial experience,” framing my investigation of how Jesuit-Hindu encounters in Pondichéry were adapted into fantasies of India in Paris.

My aim here is not solely to show transmission (i.e., that missionary writings traveled to Enlightenment and revolutionary France), but to make an argument for influence. This thesis will trace a red thread from Jesuit and Indian spirituality, which frequently disavowed Europe’s temporal power and material progress, to a doubleness in Enlightenment and early colonial thought, which alternated between certainty and anxiety, progress and decline. Recent scholarship has established how Enlightenment notions of universalism and revolution grew increasingly fragmented in the late

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eighteenth-century—precisely due to the fallout of empire.28 For *philosophes* such as Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, Keith Baker argues, visions of “social progress” dovetailed with “fears of cataclysmic social collapse.”29 Van Damme extends this analysis to the more obscure French scholars that traveled to Asia and the Americas. He argues that their work gave rise to an alternative universalism grounded in “skepticism,” which opposed the “messianic and religious vision of [France’s] absolute power” that he identifies with colonial functionaries and Jesuit missionaries.30 Cœurdoux tests the bounds of this claim. Writing after the crises of war and suppression, this Jesuit contributed another alternative universalism to Enlightenment and revolutionary discourse, grounded instead in mysticism.

Finally, the notion of doubleness between certainty and anxiety dovetails with this thesis’s intervention into the historiography of colonial knowledge-production in British India. C.A. Bayly refers to the late eighteenth century as the “imperial meridian,” along which Britain consolidated the legal and political regimes of its overseas empire.31 This “conquest of power,” Bernard Cohn argues, was animated by a “conquest of knowledge,” whereby British scholars studied native religious beliefs to produce a canon of Hindu law.32 The 1806 sale of Cœurdoux’s stolen manuscript to the BEIC reminds us that Pondichéry Jesuits were *in* the meridian, and played an unwitting—and largely occluded—role in this consolidation. This thesis thus draws questions of spirituality and marginality into histories of colonial knowledge of India. Britain’s assimilation of missionary writings elucidates


what Stoler calls the “epistemic anxieties” of empire, fragility and doubleness at the heart of modern colonial power.  

0.3 Sources and Chapter Outline

Central to this investigation is the corpus of Pondichéry Jesuit missionary writings produced in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, including letters the Jesuits exchanged with their interlocutors in Paris and the text of *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* itself. These texts provide the content of their views on Indian spirituality as well as context for whom their audience was in France—with letters often being published and forwarded to reach the sphere of the *philosophes*. To retrace the immediate contexts in which these missionary texts were produced, I draw on French and British East India Company records of their dealings with the Pondichéry Jesuits, British documents concerning their purchase of Cœurdoux’s stolen manuscript, and unpublished Jesuit and Carmelite histories of the Pondichéry-region missions and a Carmelite convent Cœurdoux founded in Pondichéry in 1748. Additionally, to reconstruct the intellectual worlds these missionary texts moved between, I draw on published Sanskrit, French, and English materials: the Indian source-texts these missionaries encountered, published works of British Indology, and the writings of Enlightenment *philosophes*, who frequently turned to India—mediated by Jesuit writings—to develop their concepts of universalism and revolution.

The thesis is organized into three chapters and an epilogue, following the circuitous trajectory of Cœurdoux’s manuscript between Pondichéry-region Jesuit missions, Enlightenment and revolutionary France, and nineteenth-century British Madras. This organization thus reconfigures the notion of knowledge being produced in the metropole and exported to the colonies, beginning instead with the ideas and contexts of obscure colonial actors and tracing their circulation to the metropole.

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and assimilation into imperial administration. Chapter 1 examines the evolution of an early modern Jesuit tradition of writing on Indian spirituality, revealing how religious and political crises in the mid-eighteenth century led Coœurdoux to adapt the work of his predecessors into a new universalism grounded in mystical theology and marginal spiritualities. Chapter 2 follows the circulation of Pondichéry Jesuit writings to Enlightenment Paris, mapping the constellation of figures surrounding their metropolitan interlocutors to follow the Jesuits’ engagement in debates over universal history.

Having established the development and transmission of texts such as *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens*, I then turn to their shifting political significance between 1770s Pondichéry and Paris and 1810s Madras. Chapter 3 centers on Coœurdoux’s prophesy of a native uprising against what he called Britain’s “systematic tyranny,” exploring how the missionaries’ spiritual commitments related to Enlightenment critiques of empire and currents of revolutionary thought that crystallized in 1789 Paris. Finally, the epilogue follows the British appropriation and assimilation of *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* to investigate how a longer Jesuit devotional and intellectual tradition was dismembered to produce a corpus of colonial law governing native “manners and customs.”
Mystical Theology and Marginal Spiritualities: Jesuit Accommodation in Eighteenth-Century Pondichéry

Salutations to the Lord in every way—
To Him who is the origin of the universe,
To Him who is one,
Who is to be spoken of carefully here with regard to scripture, tradition, and the desire to know.

The scholars of the true Veda relayed this knowledge, indicated by the Lord,
To the followers of other Vedas, who are longing for truth.34

So began the *Satyavedasārasaṁgraham* [Distillation of the Essence of the True Veda], a Sanskrit poem attributed to the eighteenth-century French Jesuit missionary Jean Calmette (1693–1740), Cœurdoux’s predecessor in Pondichéry. Consisting of 132 ślokas [verses], the poem endeavored to translate Catholic theology into Hindu terms. The Bible was cast as the “true Veda,” a reference to the four Vedas (c.1500–900 BCE) that are the oldest and most sacred of Hindu scriptures. Jesuit missionaries were “scholars of the true Veda,” and had arrived in India to enlighten Hindus, “followers of the other Vedas,” through conversion.

As is evident from this poem’s form and content, previous Jesuits cultivated relationships with native scholars to study Sanskrit in order to access the Vedas and other works of Hindu scripture. These scriptures, they believed, would reveal the content of Hindu theology—and an underlying compatibility between Hinduism and Christianity. This compatibility was crucial to the Jesuits’ project of conversion. If Christianity encapsulated the teachings of “true” Hinduism, the missionaries insisted, then conversion freed natives to pursue universal truth [satya], free of present-day Hinduism’s “false gods” and “poisoned” teachings.35 Cœurdoux’s *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* was part of this longer Jesuit tradition that can be traced to texts such as the *Satyavedasārasaṁgraham*.

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34 Jean-Paul Calmette, *Satyavedasārasaṁgraham* (n.d.), ślokas 1-2, Fln 4/2, A]. [श्रुतिसमूहीं मीमांसे यदेकं वाच्यमादर्शेत् || तस्मै विशेषत्वमूलाय नमो देवाय सर्वस्वम् || सत्यवेदसामान्तरस्तु अन्यवेदायाय स्वादिशम् || सत्यसृप्तामाय तत्वाचार्यसृप्ताय तत्वाधिकाराय ||]
This strategy of studying native scriptures and emphasizing their compatibility with Christianity came to be known as accommodation. As Županov and Stuart McManus observe, the accommodation strategy’s emphasis on close engagement with indigenous languages and textual traditions drew on the Jesuits’ humanistic training. Moreover, its syncretic tendencies developed a claim to the universal: Christianity was the universal religion that encapsulated the true message of all other scriptures, and conversion thus offered natives a means to regain the original, uncorrupted form of their religious teachings, which could be accommodated within those of the church. This strategy was pioneered by Jesuit missionaries across the early modern world, from India to China, Japan, and the Americas.

Jesuit missionaries first reached southeast India in the late sixteenth century. Led by the Italian Jesuit Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656), they secured permission to establish a mission in Madurai, the capital of the Nayak kingdom ruled by a Hindu dynasty that lay within the Portuguese sphere of influence. They were followed a century later by a group of French Jesuits who reached Pondichéry, to the northeast of Madurai, in 1689. Fleeing persecution in Siam, these missionaries secured permission from the French monarch Louis XIV (r.1643–1715) to establish the Jesuit Carnatic missions in the Tamil villages surrounding Pondichéry. As this period wore on and religious and

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38 Županov, *Disputed Mission*, 1-5.

political tensions intensified, Jesuit accommodation came under fire, condemned by rival missionary groups and church authorities for promoting heresy, hypocrisy, and idolatry.

Figure 1.1: A map of the Jesuits’ missions in south India, with arrows indicating Pondichéry and Madurai.40

This chapter will relate Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens to this intellectual and devotional lineage of Jesuit writings on Hinduism. I situate Coëurdoux’s embattled position in late eighteenth-century Pondichéry within two contexts. The first is doctrinal: the longer history of Jesuit accommodation and anti-Jesuit polemics since the seventeenth century, spanning India and China. The second is more immediate: the religious and political crisis that unfolded in Pondichéry after France’s defeat to Britain in the Seven Years’ War in 1763, the Jesuits’ expulsion from France in 1764, and the Vatican’s suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773. Amidst these contexts, Coëurdoux adapted

40 Compagnie de Jésus, “Carte des missions des PP. de la Compagnie de Jésus dans le Madure et royaumes circonvoisins,” map, c.1700, GED-7971, BnF. http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40749130w
previous Jesuits’ strategies of accommodation—centered on textual exchanges with elite Hindu scholars—from a position of social, religious, and geopolitical marginality. He did so by turning to mystical theology and marginal spiritualities to accommodate Hinduism into Christianity—a break from previous Jesuit missionaries and contemporary British Indologists, both of whom emphasized the inherent rationality of Hindu scripture to demonstrate its compatibility with Christianity. In Cœurdoux’s framework, rationality was complemented by transrational expressions of mysticism and devotion, forming the basis for a new iteration of accommodation that extended to the margins of society.

Figure 1.2: An eighteenth-century college established by Jesuits in Pondichéry.

1.1 The Origins of Accommodation

Before turning to the last generation of Pondichéry Jesuits, it is worth considering the origins of their accommodation strategy across the broader chronological and geographical scope. This section examines how debates over Jesuit accommodation brought the issue of social marginality to the forefront and compelled missionaries to delineate separate civil and religious spheres. Accommodation, Margherita Trento writes, “consisted of... the partial adoption to local customs,” in which missionaries

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41 “Pondicherry, Jesuit College. Published 18th Cent,” engraving. c.1700, P281, BL.
embraced local “cultural categories” to render Christianity “intelligible” to the native populations they sought to convert. For instance, the *Satyavedāsārasaṁgraham* uses the Sanskrit term *mokṣa*, which in Hinduism refers to the soul’s liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth, to refer to the Catholic concept of salvation. In a similar vein, Ronnie Po-chia Hsia notes that Jesuits in China used terms such as *tian* and *shangdi*, taken from Chinese classics, to refer to their Catholic concept of God.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, accommodation came under fire in two parallel controversies: the Chinese rites controversy (1643–1715) and Malabar rites controversy (1606–1744) in China and India, respectively. Jesuits were charged with failing to carry out their mission due to an excessive tolerance of native “rites.” These were specific practices of worship, marriage, burial, and other customs that Jesuits allowed neophytes—or new converts—to retain after conversion. The Chinese rites controversy began in the 1640s–50s, intensified with the arrival of new rival missionary groups in the 1690s–1700s, and ended in 1715, when Pope Clement XI (r.1700–21) threatened Jesuits with excommunication should they continue to permit Chinese neophytes to continue Confucian sacrificial and ritualistic practices. In India, the Malabar rites controversy followed a similar chronology, with its geographical coordinates shifting from Madurai to Pondichéry, and thereby from de Nobili to Calmette and Cœurdoux.

The Indian case is distinct in its emphasis on gender and caste. Anti-Jesuit polemics seized upon Jesuits’ toleration of Hindu marriage rituals and caste-based distinctions among neophytes, drawing attention to gender, caste, and broader questions of marginality. Here I draw on scholarship by Županov, Trento, Geeta Dharampal-Frick, and Paolo Aranha on the controversy’s origins in seventeenth-century Madurai. As Trento explains, de Nobili interpreted accommodation to mean that

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Jesuit missionaries should form close relationships with local Hindu scholars. These scholars were generally Brahmans, upper-caste Hindu men whom he believed could teach him Sanskrit and grant him access to Hindu scriptures such as the Vedas. He began living among Brahmans and adopting their customs of dress, eating, and behavior. This drew condemnation from church authorities, who accused de Nobili of “going native” and launched inquisitorial investigations into his Madurai mission in the 1610s. In response, he published three Latin treatises defending his actions. Županov argues that de Nobili’s defense rested on an argument for a “strong compatibility between Brahanical and Christian systems of morality” based on their shared rational foundations. According to de Nobili, “Brahmanism [i.e., Brahmanical Hinduism] could be transfigured, ‘converted,’ into Christianity.”

Underpinning these claims was a separation of the civil and religious spheres. Caste constituted the Indian “civil order,” de Nobili wrote, but lacked religious content, so he could engage in Brahanical rituals and permit neophytes to retain caste distinctions without compromising his religion. By identifying these rites with the civil sphere, de Nobili effectually secularized them. Jesuits could accommodate Hindu rites into a universal vision of Christianity as the theologians of antiquity had assimilated Greek and Roman customs—a comparison that is telling of de Nobili’s humanistic training and his engagements with Hindu scholars. His closest interlocutor was a Brahman named Śivadharma (b.1584), whom he met in 1608. Śivadharma converted in 1609 and took on the name Bonifacio Xastri, a juxtaposition of the Latin bonifacio [auspicious] with the Sanskrit śāstrī [one who is

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46 Trento, “Śivadharma or Bonifacio?,” 94-95.
47 The paradigm of “going native” or “inculturation”—is discussed in Gita Dh rampal-Frick, “Revisiting the Malabar Rites Controversy: A Paradigm of Ritual Dynamics in Early Modern Catholic Missions of South India,” in The Rites Controversies, 128.
50 As an example of such a comparison to ancient Greece and Rome, see de Nobili, Responsio, 121. His references to antiquity are discussed in Ines Županov and Pierre Antoine Fabre, introduction to The Rites Controversies, 13.
versed in scripture).\textsuperscript{51} As Trento observes, he instructed de Nobili in the Vedas and \textit{Dharmaśāstras} (c.1000 BCE), a set of legal, political, and ethical codes that de Nobili cites to delineate the Indian civil sphere.\textsuperscript{52} Constituted by the rational knowledge \textit{[scientia]} of Brahmans, this civil sphere was distinct from the “superstition” that pervaded present-day Hindus’ religious sphere—which could be remedied by conversion.\textsuperscript{53}

While temporarily resolved in 1610s Madurai, the Malabar rites controversy was revived in 1690s Pondichery with the arrival of competing missionary groups. Joan-Pau Rubíés offers a framework to distinguish the early seventeenth-century “Catholic, Jesuit-led Indological moment,” identified with figures such as de Nobili, from “a second Indological moment” that began in the early eighteenth century. The second moment shared certain resemblances with the first—with French Jesuits seeking to “rene[w] the mission in South India along the principles of Roberto de Nobili”—but the field of actors involved expanded considerably.\textsuperscript{54} Protestants, rival Catholic missionaries, and amateur BEIC and FEIC Indologists began contributing writings on Hinduism. Jesuit missionaries also entered into dialogue with writers in the French metropole with the publication from 1702 of their \textit{Lettres édifiantes et curieuses} [\textit{Edifying and Curious Letters}]. Chapter 2 will take up the \textit{Lettres édifiantes} and transmission of missionary writings in Paris. Here, it is worth noting that competing within Pondichery reignited the controversy.

Pondichery Jesuits faced two rival Catholic missionary groups: the Capuchins, members of the Franciscan order who arrived in 1674, and the Missions étrangères de Paris (MEP), an organization of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[51] Trento, “Śivadharma or Bonifacio?,” 98-100.
\item[52] Trento, “Śivadharma or Bonifacio?,” 100-103.
\item[53] De Nobili, \textit{Responsio}, 74-87. The Latin term \textit{scientia} literally translates to knowledge (and not solely the natural sciences); de Nobili’s use of the term should be construed broadly to include Indian knowledge systems contained in the Vedas and \textit{śāstra} [learned discourse, a term that parallels \textit{scientia} and \textit{sciences} in its broad scope, encompassing law, mathematics, aesthetics, ethics, and more]. See Sheldon Pollock, “The Languages of Science in Early Modern India,” in \textit{Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 22-25.
\item[54] Rubíés, “From Christian Apologetics,” 108-11.
\end{footnotes}
diocesan priests not belonging to a particular religious order that arrived in the late 1690s. When the French crown granted the Jesuits exclusive access to surrounding Tamil villages—with Capuchin and MEP missionaries restricted to ministering to French settlers in the *ville blanche*—rivalries between these groups exploded. As Dharampal-Frick notes, missionaries “instrumentalised” rites to compete for supremacy. Capuchin and MEP missionaries argued that the rites Jesuits permitted Indian neophytes to retain were religious, not civil and secular, so their accommodation strategy violated Christian doctrine.

These condemnations centered on gender and caste. For instance, in his *Traité de la religion des Malabars* [*Treatise on the Religion of the Malabars*] (n.d.), MEP missionary Jean-Jacques Tessier de Queralay (1668–1736) condemned Jesuits for “maintain[ing] the prejudices of the Malabars [i.e. the natives] against the pariahs,” the lowest caste, “by excluding them from shared mass.” Jesuit apologists responded by invoking de Nobili’s separation of spheres and likening caste to Christian notions of hierarchical complementarity and the system of orders in *ancien régime* France. Ironically, each side of the polemic privileged contradictory aspects of Christianity. MEP and Capuchin missionaries cited what Isabel and Jean-Louis Vissière describe as the “universal spirit of Christianity” to condemn the Jesuits; Jesuits cited what Aranha describes as divinely-ordained “social distinctions” to defend accommodation.

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55 Dharampal-Frick, “Revisiting the Malabar Rites Controversy,” 135.
Thus began a series of anti-Jesuit polemics and Jesuit apologia that revived the Malabar and Chinese rites controversies at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In 1704, the Savoyard prelate Charles-Thomas Maillard de Tournon was sent to India and China by Pope Clement XI. In Pondichéry, he issued *Inter graviores*, a decree that banned Jesuits from allowing natives to continue various “obscene” and “idolatrous” rites after conversion and enjoined them to “enter the pariahs’ homes out of the spirit of Christian equality and humility.”

Jesuit accommodation was fundamentally imperiled. By demanding that Jesuits cease to recognize caste and gender-based rites, *Inter graviores* threatened to end their relationships with Brahman scholars—at the pinnacle of gender and caste-based hierarchies—and accommodation itself.

It is in this context that Calmette reached Pondichéry in 1725, shortly before Coeurdoux. His letters made reference to “recover[ing] the four Vedas” and to studying Indian “philosophy, morality, theology, *Dharmaśāstra*, which is to say, *the science of virtue*, and other sciences.”

Thus, like de Nobili, Calmette was also interested in delineating an Indian civil sphere constituted by legal and ethical codes that could be assimilated into Christianity, and in demonstrating the compatibility of Hindu and Christian doctrine through projects such as the *Satyavedasārasaṁgraham*. His use of the French *sciences* to characterize Indian scripture recalls de Nobili’s analogous use of Latin *scientia* [knowledge], from which the French term derives: both draw on the Jesuit commitment to erudition to emphasize Hinduism’s rational foundations.

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61 Jean Calmette to Jean Baptiste du Halde, August 25, 1732, p. 112-13, 115, Fln 4/2, Aj. [“l’ai recouvert enfin les quatre Vedam”; “La Philosophie, la Morale, la Théologie, la *Darmachastram*, c’est-à-dire la *Science de la Vertu*... et les autres sciences...”]

62 J.B. Shank argues “there was no such thing as science in the French Enlightenment.” *Sciences* in plural, as Calmette uses the term, instead referred to all knowledge. See J.B. Shank, “Science,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Enlightenment*, ed. Daniel Brewer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 60-61.
Yet Calmette’s letters also reflect anxieties that de Nobili’s tradition of accommodation was giving way in light of the resurgence of the Malabar rites controversy. His access to de Nobili’s successors in Madurai was already limited due to Franco-Portuguese imperial rivalries that restricted passage between Pondichéry and Madurai. In a 1732 letter to the Jesuit priest and historian of China Jean Baptiste de Halde (1674–1743), based in Paris, Calmette wrote,

Since Father de Nobili, it does not seem like missionaries have had extensive contact [grand commerce] with Brahman scholars. Two things are necessary for this to happen. One is that we are aided by the Brahmans and that we maintain the caste order [la police de la caste] in civil affairs. The other is to know Sanskrit and to have had some entry point into their intellectual traditions [sciences]. Without these two things, it is very rare for learned Brahmans, that is to say, those who bear the title of doctor, śāstri, to approach our missions.64

Calmette’s reference to caste as “civil” and therefore secular invokes de Nobili’s separation of spheres. Yet the tenor of his letter also reflects anxieties about how eighteenth-century French Jesuits could maintain relationships with Brahman scholars in light of Inter graviores. In its preoccupation with the Vatican’s demands to disavow caste distinctions, Calmette’s letter reveals how accommodation could no longer center solely on elite intellectual exchanges with Brahman scholars. It had to directly engage the spirituality of marginal converts—particularly female and low-caste natives—whose subordinate status had been called to question by the rites controversy.

1.2 Resolving the Rites Controversy

It is on this note that we turn to Cœurdoux’s intervention and questions of social, religious, and political marginality. Cœurdoux arrived in 1732, eight years before the death of Calmette, who

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63 Dharampal-Frick, Religion des Malabares, 22.
64 Calmette to du Halde, August 25, 1732, p. 118. On du Halde’s contributions to Jesuit writings on China, see Isabelle Landry-Deron, La Preuve par la Chine. La « Description » de J.-B. Du Halde, jésuite, 1735 (Paris: Éditions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2002). [“Depuis le P. de Nobilibus il ne paraît pas que les missionnaires aient eu grand commerce avec les savants Brames. Il faut pour cela deux choses, l’une que nous nous fassions servir par les Brames et que nous gardions dans les choses civiles la police de la caste. L’autre est de savoir le Sanscritom et d’avoir eu quelque entrée dans leurs sciences. Sans ces deux choses, il est très rare que les Brames savants, c’est-à-dire ceux qui portent le titre de docteur, Chastri, approchent nos maisons.”]

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considered him to be an “excellent missionary and a mathematician.”

His tenure in Pondichéry coincided with the culmination and resolution of the Malabar rites controversy. In 1744, Pope Benedict XIV (r.1740–58) issued the Omnium sollicitudinum, a papal bull condemning the Jesuits’ tolerance of caste and gender-based rites. Cœurdoux, who served as superior of the Jesuits’ Carnatic missions from 1744 to 1751, was tasked with implementing its terms. Jesuit records note that his time as superior was devoted to addressing the Vatican’s demand that missionaries engage directly with female and low-caste converts.

In certain respects, Cœurdoux appears to have followed de Nobili and Calmette’s accommodation strategy by engaging with indigenous textual traditions and knowledge systems. With his background in mathematics, he conducted astronomical measurements of lunar and solar eclipses from his post in southeast India and sent these to the astronomer Joseph-Nicholas Delisle (1688–1768) and Jesuit scholar Étienne Souciet (1671–1744) in Paris. His letters interspersed astronomical calculations with discussions of material culture and political life in Pondichéry. In a 1736 letter to Souciet, he sent “an Indian idol, a lingam, an idol of lord Śiva,” describing how natives adorned it for worship. In a 1757 letter to Delisle, he lamented that “the English took Chandernagore from us,” a reference to Britain’s capture of the French territory of Chandernagore in northeast India in the Seven Years’ War.

Yet in other respects, Cœurdoux departed from Jesuit precedent in response to the dictates of Omnium sollicitudinum. While he too maintained relationships with Brahmans to access Sanskrit scripture, he grew convinced that these upper-caste Hindu men were unlikely candidates for

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65 Calmette to du Halde, August 25, 1732, p. 111. [“un excellent missionnaire et un mathématicien.”]
66 The Omnium sollicitudinum is discussed in Dharampal-Frick, Religion des Malabars, 43.
68 Gaston-Laurent Cœurdoux to Étienne Souciet, September 2, 1736, p.17, Fln 6/4, AJ; Gaston-Laurent Cœurdoux to Joseph-Nicolas Delisle, September 27, 1757, p.9, Fln 6/4, AJ. [“une idole indienne, c’est un lingam, idole du dieu chiva”; “les Anglais nous ont enlevé Chandernagor.”]
conversion. Conversion would cause a Brahman to lose his privileged position in the civil sphere and be expelled from native society altogether, a fate that was far more dire than even “our excommunication,” he wrote in *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens.* This view stands in contrast to those of his predecessors. De Nobili’s 1610s treatises considered Brahmans to be “wise” purveyors of knowledge whose reason would lead them from Hindu “superstition” to the truths of Christianity, and the very form of Calmette’s *Satyavedasārasaṁgraham* suggested an intent to convert Brahmans, given that they were the only natives with the linguistic background to read this Sanskrit explication of Christian theology. In giving up any hope of converting Brahmans, Cœurdoux had implicitly reconfigured de Nobili’s separation of spheres. De Nobili’s civil sphere corresponded to Cœurdoux’s scholarly exchanges with Brahmans, but these interactions were no longer oriented towards eventual conversion in the religious sphere. Rather, the religious sphere now corresponded to spiritual exchanges with low-caste and female Indians, who became the primary focus of Cœurdoux’s conversion efforts.

To recast Rubiés’s framework, we might then identify a new “Indological moment” in mid-eighteenth-century Pondichéry that began from a place of marginality. Cœurdoux faced the Jesuit order’s embattled status in France and Pondichéry, the marginalization of Christian mysticism in the church, and France’s dwindling empire in India. In response, he formulated a new claim to the universal that operates on two registers. One was scriptural, based on mystical strains in Hindu and Catholic sacred texts, and the other was spiritual, based on the faith that marginal natives could espouse through conversion and membership in the church. These two registers—elite textual and intellectual exchanges with Brahmans, and spiritual oversight of marginal converts—advanced the Jesuits’ project of evangelizing while also reflecting anxieties about their imperiled status in France and India. Jesuit missionaries could be dominant vis-à-vis the natives, in appropriating native knowledge systems and faith to their own ends, while also being dominated vis-à-vis ecclesiastical and temporal

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69 Cœurdoux, *Les mœurs,* 11. [“notre excommunication.”]
authorities. Indeed, Cœurdoux’s turn to the mystical and marginal suggests the missionaries might have identified with their native converts, likening their own dominated structural position (vis-à-vis the rival missionary groups, church authorities, and the British) to that of their neophytes (vis-à-vis the Brahmans).

*Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* reveals a site where these registers arise and converge. The text opened with a discussion of caste distinctions in Indian society, with multiple chapters dedicated to caste-based marriage and purity rites that resemble Jesuit apologia from earlier phases of the Malabar rites controversy. Cœurdoux then turned his focus to the four stages of a Brahman’s life:

- *brahmachārya* [years in their teacher’s hermitage]
- *gṛhasta* [householder life after marriage]
- *vanaprastha* [retreating to the forest for prayer and scriptural study after their children’s marriages]
- *samnyāsa* [asceticism, a total retreat from the world]

It is in his discussion of *samnyāsa* that Cœurdoux offered a novel basis for Hinduism’s compatibility with Christianity. The most crucial aspect of *samnyāsa*, Cœurdoux wrote, is *yoga*, “the contemplation [Brahmans] practice almost continuously.”

His use of the term “contemplation” recalls Jesuit contemplation, a four-stage method of prayer and interiorization developed by the order’s founder, Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556). He thus inaugurated a comparison of the mystical elements of Hinduism and Christianity. *Yoga* leads Brahmans through four stages of spiritual elevation, explained Cœurdoux. In the first stage, *sālokiam*, “unity of place,” “the soul somehow finds itself in the same location as God.” In the second stage, *sāmīpiam*, “proximity,” “the knowledge and the thought of God become more familiar and the contemplative *samnyāsi* [practitioner of *samnyāsa*] appears to approach God.” In the third stage, *sārūpium*, “resemblance,” the “soul now reaches a resemblance of divinity.” In the fourth stage, *sāyogiam*, the soul undergoes “the perfect transformation

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70 Cœurdoux, *Les mœurs*, 123. [“la contemplation à laquelle ils s’appliquent presque continuellement.”]

into divinity,” becoming one with God.72 Presented in this manner, sālokiam, sāmīpiam, sārūpium, and sāyogiam almost seem to mirror the four stages of Jesuit contemplation described by Ignatius: purifying oneself of sin to draw towards God, dedicating one’s life to the service of God in Christ’s example, communing with Christ at the moment of his passion and earthly death, attaining a perfect union with God.73

Finally, Cœurdoux made explicit the alignment of yoga with Jesuit contemplation: “I imagine that the majority of these terms, taken in large part, would not be rejected by our mystical theologians” [emphasis mine]. His negative phrasing underlines the unexpectedness of this finding, which “must be spoken of in a more exceptional manner than we have done up to now.”74 In what follows, I offer two readings of this statement, reflecting the two registers of this latter-day Pondichéry Jesuit claim to the universal. The first reading is explicitly textual, taking Cœurdoux's invocation of these four Sanskrit terms as a point of departure to reconstruct the scriptural exchanges taking place at an elite level between Jesuits and Brahmans. The second reading is contextual, treating the text—and its author—as embedded in the social, religious, and political upheaval of eighteenth-century Pondichéry to illuminate spiritual exchanges at the margins of native society.

1.3 A Mystical Turn in Scriptural Exchanges

It is evident from this passage that Cœurdoux, like de Nobili and Calmette before him, had some familiarity with Sanskrit scripture. This likely came from interactions with local Brahmans. The task of

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72 Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 123. [“Sālokiam, unité de lieu...l’ame se trouve en quelque Sorte dans le même lieu que Dieu et comme en sa présence...Sāmīpiam...proximité...la connaissance et la pensée de Dieu deviennent plus familières et semblent approcher de Dieu le contemplatif. Sārūpiam...Sārūpiam, ressemblance...l’ame parvient alors à la ressemblance avec la divinité...Sāyogiam, la parfaite transformation en la Divinité et la réunion intime avec elle”]


74 Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 123. [Je m’imagine que la plupart de ces termes, pris en bonne part, ne Seroient pas rejettés par nos docteurs mystiques”; “C’est de cette contemplation qu’il faut parler d’une manière plus Spéciale que nous n’avons fait jusqu’à-présent.”]
identifying which Brahmans Cœurdoux consulted—and thereby, which schools of Hindu thought he would have encountered—is made more challenging by the fact that he does not name his native interlocutors, nor do Sanskrit manuscripts from this period name particular missionaries.\(^7\) This difficulty is compounded by the relative paucity of French and Vatican records on this last generation of Jesuits due to expulsion and suppression. Unlike the earlier case of de Nobili and Śivadharma/Bonifacio, there are no archival fragments of Cœurdoux engaging with specific Brahmans. The work of reconstruction can draw only on textual traces—where the terms sālokiam, sāmīpiam, sārūpium, and sāyogiam come from, and which group(s) of Brahmans might have introduced them to Cœurdoux during the composition of *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens*. Murr hypothesizes that these terms originate in the *Bhāgavata*, a tenth-century Sanskrit epic that teaches devotion to the lord Viṣṇu to attain oneness with God.\(^6\) Cœurdoux’s correspondence indicates that he was certainly aware of the epic by the 1770s.\(^7\)

I will develop Murr’s reference further, comparing the presentation of these four terms in the original Sanskrit to Cœurdoux’s French. The *Bhāgavata* was foundational for the Vaiṣṇava school of Hinduism, dedicated to the worship of lord Viṣṇu as the primary manifestation of God. Francis Clooney notes that Vaiṣṇavism was one of three schools that predominated in early modern South India. The other two were goddess worship, centered on the adoration of female deities, and Śaivism, dedicated to the worship of lord Śiva. De Nobili and other Jesuits from the Madurai mission had the most sustained engagement with Śaivism, the sect to which Śivadharma/Bonifacio belonged.\(^8\) In contrast, Jesuits in Pondichéry appear to have also engaged with Vaiṣṇavism. For instance, Calmette

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\(^7\) The latter is owing to a trope of “authorlessness” in the Sanskrit tradition: writers denied their own authorship, let alone contact with Muslim or Christian interlocutors. See Sheldon Pollock, “Mīmāṃsā and the Problem of History in Traditional India,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 4 (October/December 1989): 606-9.

\(^6\) See Murr’s n1 in Cœurdoux, *Les mœurs*, 123.

\(^7\) Gaston-Laurent Cœurdoux to Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, 10 February 1771, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises (hereafter NAF) 8871, BnF.

wrote of “how [followers of Vaiṣṇavism] do not communicate their vedānta to [followers of Śaivism],” referencing a particular instance in which a Vaiṣṇava scholar refused to share books with his Śaiva counterpart."79

Cœurdoux’s four Sanskrit terms are introduced in a section of the Bhāgavata where Viṣṇu was asked to describe the path of bhakti [devotional] yoga. “Bhakti yoga is manifold,” Viṣṇu declared, discussing how the “divided nature” of men causes them to approach prayer in different ways—out of a wrathfulness towards their enemies, a desire for material objects and fame, a commitment to ritual sacrifice. Bhakti yoga did away with such distinctions and internal divisions. It developed an underlying unity that was devoid of all individualizing qualities [nirguṇa] and boundless, even universal [ātyantika].80 Viṣṇu then introduces sālokiam, sāmīpiam, sārūpiam, and sāyogiam as “forms of liberation” the soul can attain through bhakti yoga.81

Curiously, the Bhāgavata does not provide the stadial progression from sālokiam to sāmīpiam, sarūpiam, and sāyogiam found in Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens. Perhaps Cœurdoux’s Brahmanical interlocutors presented this ordering to him. Or perhaps he introduced it himself in an attempt to translate Hindu theology into Christian terms, reversing the direction of Calmette’s project in the Satyavedasārasaṁgraham. Religious translation might have gone both ways, Christian-to-Hindu in Calmette and Hindu-to-Christian in Cœurdoux. The notion of stadial prayer, whereby the soul progresses in stages towards union with God, certainly existed in the conceptual vocabulary of Christian mysticism. Certeau argues that it emerged as a means of formalizing mystical

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79 Jean Calmette to Jean Baptiste du Halde, January 2, 1735, p.121, Fln 4/2, A).
80 Bhāgavatapurāṇa, Canto 3, 29:7-11, 14. Ātyantika [आत्यांतिक] literally means “without bounds,” formed from the joining in sandhi of ati [passing, going beyond] and antika [bounds, limits]. Thus, “boundless” is a more literal translation, although “universal” is given in certain dictionaries as an idiomatic translation specific to the term’s usage in the Bhāgavata. For instance, see Monier Monier-Williams, “आत्यांतिक,” in A Sanskrit English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899), 136. [अत्यतिक, बहुविभयो...]
81 Bhāgavatapurāṇa, Canto 3, 29: 12. [सालोकिसामीपिसारूर्णायक्तमन्युत्तदीयवान न गृहणित्विना मल्लेशवान जनाः.]
theology in early modern Christianity. Jesuit contemplation was itself organized in four stages, paralleling Cœurdoux’s formulation of samnyāsi’s practice of yoga.

Thus, Cœurdoux’s reference to these four Sanskrit terms injects a new element into our analysis of scholarly exchanges between Jesuits and Brahmans: mystical theology, as it is manifest in Jesuit contemplation and Vaiśnava bhakti. This mystical turn was bound up with marginality. As Certeau argues, Christian mysticism became a marginal, heterodox theology by the eighteenth century, condemned by church authorities for its emphasis on the annihilation of the self to attain direct communion with God. Its insistence on spiritual abandonment imperiled the church’s role as an intermediary between God and humanity—and thereby its source of legal authority. In the Hindu case, Anand Venkatkrishnan argues that the Bhāgavata gave rise to a widespread bhakti movement founded on “the public expression of personal devotion.” This mystical strand likewise threatened the authority of elite scholars. If bhakti yoga was truly nirguna and ātyantika, then its adherents could also be low-caste Indians and women, otherwise excluded from the Sanskrit textual tradition—a prospect that undermined elite scholars’ place in rigid caste and gender-based hierarchies altogether. In both the Christian and Hindu contexts, mysticism extended past elite theologians and scholars to individuals at the margins of society, undermining existing forms of legal and political order.

There are limits to how far we can take this analysis. Not knowing whether the scholars who introduced Cœurdoux to the Bhāgavata were elite Brahmans, more marginal Sanskritists, or adherents of bhakti themselves, we can only speculate as to the relationship between Cœurdoux’s mystical turn and the marginality of his religious beliefs and his native interlocutors. It is nonetheless evident that Cœurdoux’s emphasis on mysticism marked a departure from the accommodation tradition pioneered

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82 See the discussion of la science mystique [mystical science] in Certeau, The Mystic Fable, 142.
by de Nobili and early eighteenth-century Pondichéry Jesuits such as Calmette and Jean Venant Bouchet (1655–1732). These Jesuits emphasized the static, abstract ordering of the Indian civil sphere—governed by codes of ethics, law, and morality—to make a claim to the universal. They might not have even encountered strands of Hindu mysticism such as bhakti yoga: as Trento notes, Śivadharma/Bonifacio “did not teach [de Nobili] any devotional texts” such as the Bhāgavata. Cœurdoux had thus drawn together their emphasis on erudition in writings on Indian scientia/science with mysticism and devotion.

Moreover, Cœurdoux’s turn to mystical theology also breaks from his British contemporaries. Here, I draw upon Jessica Patterson’s survey of BEIC writings on Hinduism during the 1760s and 1770s, examined more closely in Chapter 2 and the epilogue. Like Cœurdoux, these British Indologists were interested in what Patterson calls “a philosophically inclined interpretation of what they saw as India’s ‘native religion.’” Unlike him—and rather like his Jesuit predecessors—they characterized Hinduism as essentially rational and dismissed its devotional and mystical strands as superstitious. In contrast, Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens makes reference to Indian science(s) alongside Hindu and Christian notions of mystical communion with God. It draws together the Jesuits’ dual commitment to erudition and mysticism, to the rational and transrational, where earlier authors had exclusively privileged the former. Cœurdoux’s claim to the universal thus casts pure Hinduism as compatible with Christianity based on a current of mystical theology that runs through both religions—“lost” upon present-day Brahmans, even while it permeates their ancient scriptures.

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85 Bouchet was another French Jesuit based in the Carnatic missions, whose writings on Hindu law are discussed further in Danna Agmon, “Law in Theory, Law in Practice: Legal Orientalism and French Jesuit Knowledge Production in India,” Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques 45, no. 1 (2019): 28–49.
86 Trento, “Śivadharma or Bonifacio?,” 103
87 Patterson, Religion, Enlightenment, and Empire, 4, 25–26.
1.4 Spirituality from the Margins

This raises the question of what kind of spirituality present-day natives could espouse according to Cœurdoux, if not these lost forms of yoga. Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens focuses almost exclusively on scriptural instructions for male Brahmans and current Brahmans’ failures to uphold them, with only brief references to more marginal natives. “There is little to say about the... wives of Brahmins,” Cœurdoux declared in an earlier chapter, “because women, in general, are held in very low esteem in the Indies.”

To answer this question, I develop an alternative reading of this passage of Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens that takes these textual absences and material records of missionary activities as evidence for how Cœurdoux was embedded in the social, religious, and political worlds of eighteenth-century Pondichéry. This contextual approach demonstrates how Jesuits’ claim to universality operated on a second register: the spirituality of female and low-caste native converts, whose predicament was brought to the forefront during the rites controversy. The Jesuits’ engagement with these figures suggested the possibility of spiritual regeneration at a time when mystical theology was under threat in the church and, in their view, lost upon present-day Brahmans.

For all his interest in intellectual exchanges with Brahmans, Cœurdoux would have primarily interacted with marginal natives while promoting conversion—even more so than his predecessors in light of Omnium sollicitudinum. Ananda Ranga Pillai (1709–61), the Chief Dubash, or highest ranking Indian functionary in the FEIC, recorded an argument with Cœurdoux that reveals this dissonance between elite and marginal interactions. Angered that the Company would promote Pillai, a Hindu, to the position of Chief Dubash, Cœurdoux declared,

89 Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 87. [“Il y a peu de choses à dire Sur les Brahmanidis ou femmes de Brahmes, parce que les femmes en général sont fort peu considérées aux Indes.”]
If we had a Christian as Chief Dubash... we could trust him; and before you became Dubash, you were favorable to us; but as soon as you were appointed you began patronizing the Hindu temples, giving them privileges, and quite neglecting the Christians. Brahmans and Hindus have received honour while we have suffered... We all know that you belong to a respectable family... You have held important places and won the good will of Europeans. But if you had been a Christian, many others would have become so too.

“Your words astonish me,” Pillai retorted:

The Christians form only a sixteenth of all the people here, and all are poor save [one] family... It is only of late years that a few have been able to keep themselves in comfort as Europeans’ dubashes or in other employments; they have been able to build themselves brick houses and to save [money]... The rest are all servants and coolies. You know this well and that it is not so with the Hindus. They are the Company’s merchants.90

These lines reveal emergent tensions between missionaries, natives, and French colonial authorities. As Agmon notes, Jesuits were critical of the FEIC’s decision to promote natives who had not converted to Christianity, such as Pillai, in their ranks.91 Meanwhile, as Pillai reminded Cœurdoux, his own converts lacked social, political, and economic capital. Cœurdoux’s religious encounters centered on a marginal group of natives, straining his relationship with the FEIC. His generation of Jesuits was evidently far less politically “powerful” after the 1740s than Agmon construes them to be in the 1710s.92

This is perhaps most evident in Cœurdoux’s decision to found the Carmel Convent of Pondichéry in 1748. The Carmel was the first Carmelite convent in India, and, according to its sisters, the oldest convent still in operation in Asia.93 Cœurdoux purportedly conceived of it while trapped in a deadly storm. Praying to Teresa of Ávila (1515-82), the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic who led the revival of the Carmelite order of nuns, he promised to establish a convent in her name should his ship

91 Agmon, A Colonial Affair, 15.
92 Agmon, A Colonial Affair, 4.
93 Le Carmel de Pondichéry (unpublished typescript, Carmel Convent of Puducherry, Puducherry, India, n.d.), 4; Mary Gratia de Jésus, O.C.D., interview by the author, Carmel Convent of Puducherry, India, August 16, 2023. There was another convent established in the seventeenth century in what became British Madras by Augustinian monks, but this was shut down in the early nineteenth-century by British authorities.
safely reach Pondichéry. An unpublished history of the convent compiled by its nuns in the twentieth century offers the following account:

Although immediately committed to the project of evangelization for which he had been sent, Father Cœurdoux was still intent on fulfilling his promise. One wonders what prompted him to take this seemingly unfathomable vow to establish a convent of contemplatives in a region where Christianity, while not entirely novel, was however far from being ready to supply apt vocations to this kind of life. Was it a special devotion to the great Teresa of Ávila, the compatriot and the companion in canonization to Ignatius of Loyola, the Father of the Jesuits? Or instead a particular knowledge of the mode of living of Teresanian monasteries due to some previous contact with them? Or even still, a sort of luminous prescience of the irreplaceable role of contemplative life in the countries with missions? Perhaps it was all of these...\(^94\)

The convent created an environment in which native women could pursue mystical contemplation—at a time when Orthodox Hindus “denied” female asceticism—by drawing upon the gendered dimension of Christian mysticism pioneered by Teresa.\(^95\) It was precisely the nuns’ marginality that justified the convent’s founding. As Teresa argued when founding her own convent in 1562, her nuns’ debased position within society prepared them to evacuate their self and prepare it for mystical communion. They would pursue God through their devotion instead of pure intellect—a rhetorical move that allowed Teresa to deflect criticisms that the nuns’ direct communion with God transgressed their inferior societal status as women.\(^96\)

If the textual reading of *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* points to mysticism, a marginal theology, as the basis for latter-day Jesuit universalism, then this contextual reading points to its capacity to drive spiritual regeneration by granting socially-marginalized converts a means to practice

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\(^94\) *Le Carmel de Pondichéry*, 2-3. [“Bien qu’immédiatement livré à la tâche d’évangélisation pour laquelle il avait été envoyé, le P. Cœurdoux n’en agea pas moins à remplir sa promesse. On aimerait voir ce qui l’incita à faire ce vœu humainement insensé d’établir un couvent de contemplatives dans une région où christianisme, sans être précisément récent, était cependant en loin d’être prêt à fournir les vocations aptes à ce genre de vie. Était-ce une dévotion spéciale à la grande Thérèse d’Avila, la compatriote et la compagne de canonisation de Saint Ignace de Loyola le Père des Jésuites? ou bien une connaissance particulière du mode de vie des monastères Thérésiens dû à quelque contact antérieur avec l’un d’eux? Ou bien encore une sorte de prescience lumineuse du rôle irremplaçable de la vie contemplative dans les pays de missions? Peut-être y eût-il de tout cela...”]


mystical contemplation. Here is another break from earlier Jesuits, which we might contextualize with Souleymane Bachir Diagne’s theoretical distinction between “top-down, vertical universalism” and “horizontal, lateral universalism.”97 Earlier iterations of Jesuit accommodation, not unlike contemporary British Indology, lent themselves to a vertical universalism. By delineating a separation of spheres, they strategically appropriated Hindu practices and doctrine, imposed Catholic categories upon them, and stripped them of their original religious significance. Cœurdoux’s appeal to mysticism—both in his invocation of the Bhāgavata and in his role in leading the convent—suggest the possibility of a horizontal universalism based on missionaries’ interactions with marginal elements of native society.

Figure 1.3: A twentieth-century photograph of the convent.98

Again, there are limits to what we can make of Cœurdoux’s intentions in establishing the convent. No primary sources from its founding survive, beyond a brief financial record from 1763 of “Brother Cœurdoux, superior of the former self-proclaimed [ci-devant soi-disants] Pondichéry Jesuits,” requesting funds for “the education of poor Malabar girls and widows,” and Cœurdoux does

not reference the convent in his surviving letters or *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens.* We might still critically engage with how the convent’s nuns remember its founding to investigate how Jesuit spirituality extended beyond the worlds of Brahman scholars and Sanskrit scripture to reach marginal neophytes. “At the beginning, it was very challenging to recruit for the convent, because most families in the nearby villages practiced child marriage,” Mary Gratia O.C.D. (1940–) explained, so the convent’s founding members were a six-year-old unmarried girl and two child widows aged twelve and thirteen. As the convent was structured to require the oversight of missionary priests, Cœurdoux was positioned to guide these nuns’ spiritual progress.

His work thus marked an important departure from the earlier Jesuits that pioneered the accommodation strategy in southeast India. As Županov and Antoine Fabre argue, seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Jesuit accommodation “was developed among and for aristocratic or high class, intelligent, philosophically-minded and virtuous men [such Brahmans], whom reason alone, the missionaries believed, could lead to a belief in true God,” resembling the construction of Hinduism as a “rational religion” in the 1760s–70s BEIC writings surveyed by Patterson. Cœurdoux no longer had recourse to their strategy. The Malabar rites controversy had brought gender and caste to the forefront, while debates over the status of mysticism in the metropole and confrontations over the status of France in the subcontinent placed the last generation of Pondichéry Jesuits in a place of material and ecclesiastical decline. Through his engagement with the *Bhāgavata* and role in establishing the convent, Cœurdoux developed a new claim to universality in the second half of the eighteenth century. The marginal and the mystical became the universal, a formulation that opens

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99 Joseph-Marie Terray, *Compte rendu aux Chambres assemblées, par M. l’abbé Terray, conseiller de Grand Chambre, des effets trouvés sous les scellés apposés après le décès du ci-devant soi-disant jésuite François-Louis de Lavur,* July 12, 1763, p.397, 44CAM_ALMA, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Cambridge. *Ci-devant soi-disant* would later reference ex-Jesuits who remained in France after 1764 and former members of the French nobility after the Revolution of 1789. [“Frère Cœurdoux, Supérieur des ci-devant soi-disants Jésuites de Pondichéry... 750 roupies de capital... [pour] les pauvres filles et veuves Malabares.”]

100 Mary Gratia de Jésus, interview by the author; *Le Carmel de Pondichéry,* 2-3.

101 Županov and Fabre, introduction to *The Rites Controversies,* 6; Patterson, *Religion, Enlightenment, and Empire,* 4.
radical possibilities for reconceiving Enlightenment universalism as we follow the transmission of
Cœurdoux’s writings to Paris.
2. Between Pondichéry and Paris: Competing Universalisms in the Republic of Letters

In 1756, an account entitled *Dialogue entre un Brachmane et un Jésuite sur la nécessité et l’enchaînement des choses* [Dialogue between a Jesuit and a Brahmam Regarding the Necessity and Logic of Things] was published in Paris. It relayed a discussion of the relationship between free will and destiny between two unnamed individuals:

The Jesuit: You have a strange opinion of contingent futures [des futurs contingents]. Do you not know that man is free, that our will freely disposes of all that occurs on the earth? I assure you that the Jesuits alone have changed it considerably.

The Brahman: I do not doubt the science and power of the reverend Jesuit fathers; they are a highly esteemed part of the world, but I do not believe them to be its sovereigns. Every man, every being, Jesuit as much as Brahman, is governed by the universe: he obeys destiny, and he does not command it.102

While *Dialogue’s* references to Indian sciences and civil order recall the Jesuit-Hindu exchanges of Chapter 1, perhaps the most curious aspect of this conversation is that it never occurred at all. The *Dialogue* was a satirical piece by the philosophe Voltaire (1694–1778), composed between 1748 and 1751 and published in a 1756 collection entitled *Mélanges de littérature, d’histoire, et de la philosophie* [Miscellany on Literature, History, and Philosophy].103 This was one of many instances in which Voltaire developed a fictional dialogue between two characters from different religious and cultural backgrounds to illustrate a philosophical debate. He made this rhetorical move elsewhere in the *Mélanges* and in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* [Philosophical Dictionary] (1764).

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102 Voltaire, *Dialogue entre un Brachmane et un Jésuite sur la nécessité et l’enchaînement des choses*, in *Mélanges* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 311–12. [“LE JÉSUITE: Vous avez une étrange opinion des futurs contingents. Vous ne savez donc pas que l’homme est libre, que notre volonté dispose à notre gré de tout ce qui se passe sur la terre? Je vous assure que les seuls jésuites y ont fait pour le parti des changements considérables. LE BRACHMANE: Je ne doute pas de la science et du pouvoir des révérends pères jésuites; ils sont une partie fort estimable de ce monde, mais je ne les en crois pas les souverains. Chaque homme, chaque être, tant jésuite que brachmane, est un ressort de l’univers: il obéit à la destinée, et ne lui commande pas.”]

As is evident from the Dialogue, echoes of eighteenth-century Jesuit encounters with natives made their way from Pondichéry to Enlightenment Paris. They thus reached the sphere of philosophe such as Voltaire. By providing these Francophone authors with accounts of Indian society, Pondichéry Jesuit writings shaped a preoccupation with religious and cultural difference that lay at the heart of Enlightenment universalism—manifest in the figures of the Brahman scholar or native woman in philosophical tracts such as the Dialogue.

This chapter will trace the transmission and influence of the Pondichéry Jesuits’ writings about Indian spirituality. Jesuit missionaries confound the secularization thesis that has long been commonplace in Enlightenment historiography. This narrative credits the philosophe for wrenching universalism from its Christian roots to usher in a secular modernity, bookended by the Catholic theologian Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), who traced the origins of humanity to the Biblical flood, and by Voltaire, who envisioned a universal history independent of the Flood that culminated in material progress instead of divine providence. To cite Paul Hazard’s influential formulation, “one day, the French people... were thinking like Bossuet,” and “the day after, they were thinking like Voltaire,” moving definitively from a Christian to a secular universal.104 As Tamara Griggs argues, secularization was an “incomplete” process.105 This is not least because universalism, from its inception, was preoccupied with religious and cultural difference. Voltaire’s own efforts to secularize universal history invoked Hindu scripture, drawn from Jesuit letters, and was fiercely disputed by latter-day Jesuits such as Cœurdoux.

Taking Griggs’s claims as a point of departure, I argue that there was not a linear shift from Christian to secular universalism, and that universalism itself was not bound to a single set of ideological and geographic coordinates. Rather, Enlightenment philosophe drew on Jesuit portrayals of

105 Griggs, “Universal History,” 221.
Indian scripture to theorize universalism, and in the final decades of the eighteenth century, missionaries such as Cœurdoux wrote back, challenging the *philosophes’* appropriation of their scholarship. What emerges is a dialectical interplay between spirituality and secularism, experience and fantasy, and colony and metropole, as competing universalisms traveled in circuits between Pondichéry and Paris. This argument heeds Jeffrey Burson’s call for “restoring agency to Jesuit writers in helping to forge the scholarly milieu from which emerged the wider European Enlightenment,” although with an emphasis on this milieu’s global dimensions.106

This chapter first surveys how India figured into the *philosophes*’ early attempts to negotiate universalism and difference through their engagement with the Jesuit *Lettres édifiantes.* Next, I take up Voltaire’s universal history as an revealing example of the *philosophes*’ appropriation of Jesuit scholarship on India. I then examine how latter-day Pondichéry Jesuits wrote back. Cœurdoux’s 1760s–70s correspondence with the French Indologist Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805) reveals a sustained effort to adjudicate between competing models of universalism and draw India back into Biblical time, restoring Christianity’s place as the universal religion. These exchanges reveal what Conrad calls “transnational production of knowledge” across multiple sites—in other words, a Pondichéry Jesuit contribution to a global Enlightenment.107

2.1 Ironic Appropriations

The early eighteenth century marked a new proliferation of European scholarship on India.108 This was spurred by the publication in France of the *Lettres édifiantes,* an edited collection first published in 1702 that eventually ran to dozens of volumes until publication ended in 1780. As Isabelle and

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Jean-Louis Vissière observe, Jesuits across India, China, the Levant, and the Americas had long written to their superiors in Europe about the “geography, history, morals and customs [maëres et coutumes], religions, and governments” of natives at the behest of the order’s founder Ignatius. The Lettres édifiantes, compiled by senior Jesuits in France, formalized and publicized their findings. It also drew the attention of other historical actors in the metropole—from philologists and astronomers in the French academies to philosophes such as Montesquieu and Voltaire.

This first section examines the early stages of transmission, tracing how the first generation of Pondichéry Jesuits’ contributions to the Lettres édifiantes made their way into debates about universalism and difference in the writings of Montesquieu and Voltaire. In content and form, the Lettres édifiantes represented a critical contribution to the République de lettres [Republic of Letters], a term of art referring to an early modern literary polity comprised of learned scholars known as hommes de lettres [men of letters]. As Alexander Bevilaqua demonstrates in his survey of seventeenth-century European writings on Islam, this polity extended from Francophone Europe to cross-cultural and cross-religious encounters in Asia. The Enlightenment was an eighteenth-century subset of this scholarly community, “a moment in the history of the Republic of Letters,” as Dena Goodman argues.

Montesquieu and Voltaire’s engagements with India via the Lettres édifiantes enable us to extend this analysis to the Jesuit-Hindu context during the Enlightenment’s early eighteenth-century beginnings. Indeed, Montesquieu’s corpus serves as a compelling reminder that Enlightenment universalism was bound up in questions of cultural and religious difference—and therefore of marginality—from its inception. We need only turn to one of his earliest works, the Lettres persanes.

109 Vissière and Vissière, Lettres édifiantes, preface, 14.
[Persian Letters] (1721), which scholars have long cited as announcing the advent of the French Enlightenment.\textsuperscript{112} This novel follows the trajectory of Usbek and Rica, two fictional Persian men journeying to France, who discuss their observations of French society and Usbek’s attempts to control his wives, whom he left behind in a seraglio. As the novel progresses, Persian and French mœurs [mores, manners] transform into each other: Louis XIV is said to govern with “oriental policies,” while Rica’s mind [esprit] “gives way to European mœurs.”\textsuperscript{113} The novel ends when Usbek’s favorite wife, Roxana, commits suicide.\textsuperscript{114} Their fates become a cautionary tale about the perils of despotic power, with Usbek’s regime in the seraglio serving as an allegory for the despotism of the French crown.

These preoccupations came to the fore in Montesquieu’s influential De l’esprit des lois [The Spirit of the Laws] (1748).\textsuperscript{115} The work moved from cultural and religious difference (the mœurs of particular communities) to universal typologies of legal and political power (republican, monarchical, and despotic). If the mœurs of a community could radically change, as with Lettres persanes, so too could these typologies. Montesquieu specifically emphasized the risk of monarchy degenerating into despotism in France. He did so by projecting his anxieties onto the so-called Orient, giving rise to the trope of Oriental despotism: his chief examples of despotism were the Mughal empire in India, alongside China, Persia, and the Ottoman empire.

To illustrate how the universal “principle” of despotic power operated in India, Montesquieu turned to the scholarship of Pondichéry Jesuits from the Lettres édifiantes. Despotism is “empty,” devoid of “civil laws,” Montesquieu declared. As evidence, he cited a 1714 letter by the Jesuit Bouchet that claims that Indians do not have a detailed legal code.\textsuperscript{116} Here is an early instance of the philosophes’

\textsuperscript{113} Montesquieu, Persian Letters, trans. C. J. Betts (London: Penguin Classics, 1973), 91, 129. I have modified Betts’s translation of the second excerpt. [“mon esprit... se plie sans effort aux mœurs européennes.”]
\textsuperscript{114} Montesquieu, Persian Letters, 281.
\textsuperscript{115} On the widespread reach of De l’esprit des lois, see Kates, The Books, 221-56.
appropriation of Jesuit scholarship: Danna Agmon argues that Montesquieu was actually misreading Bouchet’s letter. As we saw in Chapter 1, Bouchet belonged to the first generation of Pondichéry Jesuits that emphasized the rational ordering of the Indian civil sphere as part of their accommodation strategy. He attributed the absence of a detailed legal code to a “deep knowledge of the law” that transcended the need for writing.\textsuperscript{117} Montesquieu interpreted this to mean that India under Mughal rule existed in a state of total lawlessness—and that this lawlessness was a universal characteristic of despotism.

As further evidence for India’s lawlessness, Montesquieu cited Jesuit letters dating from 1702–13 on widow-burning, reviving his preoccupation with gender from the \textit{Lettres persanes}. “Wives burn themselves when their husbands die; only innocent people suffer violent death [in India],” he concluded.\textsuperscript{118} We begin to see a dialectic of experience and fantasy: the scriptural and spiritual exchanges of Jesuits in Pondichéry, on the one hand, and the fantasies of \textit{philosophes} in Paris, on the other. The Jesuits who authored the original letters were writing amidst the resurgence of the Malabar rites controversy at the start of the eighteenth century, as \textit{Inter graviore}s reshaped their relationship to native women and low-caste converts. Montesquieu recast their preoccupation with gender- and caste-based marginality to conceptualize the problem of universalism and difference. For him, the treatment of marginalized natives serves as a litmus test of the universal principle of a political regime: in this case, the oppression of Indian women revealed the lawless nature of despotism. The marginal again becomes the universal, although Montesquieu’s claim—unlike Cœurdoux’s from Chapter 1—operated on the level of fantasy.

Ironically, Montesquieu did not trust his Jesuit sources to accurately interpret the signs of despotic power, in part because he believed the Society of Jesus to be associated with despotism itself.

\textsuperscript{117} Agmon, “Law in Theory,” 33.
\textsuperscript{118} Montesquieu, \textit{The Spirit of the Laws}, 474. See also 267, n11, 313, n11, and 476, n35.
This was partly a result of another set of anti-Jesuit polemics in France that coincided with the rites controversies in India and China. The Jesuits, who had enjoyed a close relationship to the French monarch, came into conflict with members of the rival Jansenist party. By the 1750s, Jansenists succeeded in winning the support of parlements [sovereign law courts], including the one Montesquieu served on in Bordeaux. As Dale Van Kley argues, Jansenists and their allies framed the Jesuits as an “embodiment of ‘despotism’” due to their submission to the pope and association with the monarchy. Political and religious despotism went hand in hand, bridging the parlements’ and philosophes’ critiques of the monarch with the Jansenists’ critique of the Jesuits.\footnote{Dale Van Kley, “Jansenism and the International Suppression of the Jesuits,” in \textit{Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660–1815}, ed. Timothy Tackett and Stewart J. Brown, vol. 7, \textit{The Cambridge History of Christianity} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 310-11.} Montesquieu likely had this dual critique in mind when he claimed Jesuit missionaries were vulnerable to being “deceived” by despotism “in the courts of the kings of India.”\footnote{Montesquieu, \textit{The Spirit of the Laws}, 127. Montesquieu’s corresponding footnote cites the aforementioned Jesuit du Halde (Calmette’s Paris-based interlocutor, discussed in Section 1.1 of Chapter 1), whose histories of China were another valuable source for the philosophes.}

These concerns were taken up by Voltaire, who likewise projected his philosophical preoccupations onto a fantasy of India while distrusting the credibility of his Jesuit sources. The \textit{Dialogue} offers a case in point. The text’s Jesuit character defends “free will” and asserts that praying to God will grant his “desires... [and] needs,” whereas the Brahman counters that the aim of prayer is “to submit oneself” to God in a world that is bound by “constant order.”\footnote{Voltaire, \textit{Dialogue}, 312-15.} The notion of Hindu prayer as a total submission of the self to God evokes Courdoux’s discussion of parallels between Hindu and Christian mysticism from Chapter 1. Yet for Voltaire, the Brahman and Jesuit play out his longstanding preoccupation with free will and destiny—an issue that also divided the Jesuit and Jansenist camps, with the Jansenists’ position resembling the fatalism of Voltaire’s Brahman.\footnote{On the philosophical debate at the heart of the \textit{Dialogue}, see Gerhardt Stenger, “Voltaire et le fatalisme: Du \textit{Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne} aux derniers contes,” \textit{Cahiers Voltaire} 14 (2015): 36.}
Dialogue ends satirically: the Jesuit’s “free will” compels him to teach a schoolboy, while the Brahman is “called by destiny” to return to his wife.\textsuperscript{123}

These 1720s–40s examples from Montesquieu and Voltaire reveal a series of ironic appropriations. The philosophes projected their philosophical preoccupations onto a fantasy of India derived from Pondichéry Jesuits’ contributions to the Lettres édifiantes. Contorting these accounts of Hindu scriptures, gender relations, and spirituality to fit their arguments involved stripping them of the social, religious, and political contexts in which they were written. Colonial experience was rendered into an Enlightenment fantasy, often at odds with the views of the original Jesuit authors—not to mention those of actual Indians, which remain totally occluded.

2.2 The Lost Veda and Problem of Origins

Nowhere is this irony more evident than in Voltaire’s appropriation of Jesuit scholarship on Hinduism to secularize universal history, which offers an insightful example of how debates over universalism and difference played out in the Indian case. His Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations [Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations] was published in 1756, the same year as the Mélanges.\textsuperscript{124} This multivolume work was a refutation of Bossuet’s Discours sur l’histoire universelle [Discourse on Universal History] (1681), which centered the Biblical flood as point of rupture: present-day humanity could trace its origins to Noah’s Ark and the Flood, which had destroyed everything that came before it. Voltaire countered that the origins of certain present-day civilizations predated the Flood, suggesting it had not destroyed and remade the world—and perhaps that it had not happened at all. In disrupting Bossuet’s chronology, he wrenched human history from Biblical time: the arc of history culminated in the realization of material progress, not the unfolding of divine providence. Given this claim, it is perhaps ironic that to make such an argument, he revised the text in the 1760s to draw upon Indian

\textsuperscript{123} Voltaire, Dialogue, 315.

\textsuperscript{124} I use the standard English translation of the title of Voltaire’s Essai sur les mœurs; see Note to the Reader on p.iv.
scripture documented by Pondichéry Jesuits.\(^\text{125}\) This section reconstructs Voltaire’s unlikely appropriation of these Jesuit sources, and thereby, the place of India in debates over universal history.

The *Discours sur l’histoire universelle* was one of a number of texts in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that drew all of humanity in a single chronology, moving beyond parochial histories that documented the developments within a particular kingdom or empire. As Bossuet explains, his objective was to present his reader, Louis XIV, with a “grand view” of “the entire sequence of time.” “You will see how empires succeeded one another and how religion, in its different states, maintains its stability from the beginning of the world to our own time,” declared Bossuet, casting his (Christian) religion as a means of interpreting political developments around the world.\(^\text{126}\) He then organized human history into a series of epochs, from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to Noah’s Ark and the Flood, to Christ and the dawn of a new epoch as Christianity spread across the world. India was barely mentioned in his universal origin story for humanity. Bossuet only left a fleeting reference to how “the nascent Church spread out all over the earth” after Christ’s lifetime, reaching as far as “Armenia, Persia, India” and other territories outside the Roman Empire.\(^\text{127}\)

It is precisely this lacuna that Voltaire seized upon in his *Essai sur les mœurs*. The work begins with India, China, and Persia, before moving to discuss developments in Western Europe. To dispute the centrality of the Flood, Voltaire invoked the case of India. “If one might form conjectures, the Indians... are perhaps the most ancient body of people,” he wrote, claiming that Chinese and Persian rulers learnt from Indian coinage, and the Greeks learnt from Indian philosophy.\(^\text{128}\) His primary

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\(^{125}\) Antonin Debidour notes that Voltaire significantly expanded the section on India in the *Essai sur les mœurs* after 1760, due to his engagement with Jesuit sources such as the *Ezour-Vedam* (discussed later in this chapter). In what follows, I cite the revised edition of the *Essai sur les mœurs* containing these new additions. See A. Debidour, “L’Indianisme de Voltaire,” *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 4 (January 1924): 27-28.


\(^{127}\) Bossuet, *Discourse on Universal*, 76.

evidence for these claims is Indian scripture, which he regarded to be “the oldest texts in the world,” predating—and surviving—the Flood.129

Voltaire’s understanding of Indian scripture drew on two references: one from the BEIC, the other from the Pondichéry Jesuits. He cites BEIC official John Zephaniah Holwell’s (1711–98) monograph Interesting Historical Events, Relative to the Provinces of Bengal, and the Empire of Indostan (1765). This two-volume survey of Indian śāstra [learned discourse] appeared in French in 1768, capturing the interest of philosophes and scholars from Voltaire to Anquetil-Duperron—although Voltaire, who read English, likely did not need to await the arrival of a translation.130 As Patterson observes, Howell argued that Hinduism rested on rational, monotheistic foundations.131 His analysis relied on an ambiguously-defined body of śāstra that he inaccurately believed to predate the Vedas.132 Praising Holwell’s “erudition,” Voltaire accepted his arguments for these texts’ antiquity.133

Voltaire’s second source on Hindu scripture was a text called the Ezour-Vedam. “A most fortunate coincidence has procured an ancient book of the Brahmans in the library of Paris,” declares Voltaire, and “this is the Ezour-Vedam, written before Alexander [the Great]’s conquest of India.”134 The Ezour-Vedam was a French manuscript sent to Paris in the 1740s by an unnamed Jesuit missionary in Pondichéry who would have been a contemporary of Cœurdoux. The missionary claimed that the text was a French translation of a lost Sanskrit Veda. The Ezour-Vedam presented a dialogue between Vyāsa and Sumantu, two sages who appear in the Mahābhārata, a Sanskrit epic from the third-century

129 Voltaire, Essai sur les mœurs, 11:52. [“Nous pouvons donc nous flatter d’avoir aujourd’hui quelque connaissance des plus anciens écrits qui soient au monde.”]
130 For the French translation of Holwell, see John Zephaniah Holwell, Événements historiques intéressants relatifs aux provinces de Bengale et à l’empire de l’Indostan (Amsterdam: Arkstee & Merkus, 1768).
131 Patterson, Religion, Enlightenment, and Empire, 70-72. See Patterson’s Chapter 2 for an analysis of Holwell.
133 Voltaire, Essai sur les mœurs, 11:52. [“l’érudition de M. Holwell.”]
134 Voltaire, Essai sur les mœurs, 11:52. [“Un hasard plus heureux a procuré à la bibliothèque de Paris ancien livre des brames; c’est l’Ézour-Vedam, écrit l’expédition d’Alexandre dans l’Inde.”]
BCE. Invoking a single “true God,” the sages express their desire to “enlighten” men and “dissipate the thick darkness” of idolatry that had “completely obscured their reason.”

This lost Veda “no longer exists, and perhaps never did exist,” Dermot Killingly writes. To date, no Sanskrit original has been found. Nineteenth and twentieth-century scholars argue that the Ezour-Vedam was in fact composed by a Jesuit—likely de Nobili or Calmette—a claim that was disputed by the Jesuit order. Its authorship notwithstanding, it is clear that the Ezour-Vedam served a vastly different function for Pondichéry Jesuits as compared to Voltaire. For the Jesuits, it was further proof that Hinduism was compatible with Christianity, drawing Hindus into Biblical time to advance their accommodation strategy and project of conversion. For Voltaire, the Ezour-Vedam served the opposite function. It was proof that Hindu monotheism predated the Judeo-Christian tradition and was preserved in an Indian civilization that survived till this day. If the Flood had happened at all, it did not bring about the total destruction and renewal of the world—calling to question the Bible’s centrality to the arc of human history.

As if to signify his distrust of his Jesuit sources, Voltaire had no praise for the “erudition” of the anonymous Jesuit who retrieved the Ezour-Vedam. Yet his admiration of the text itself was unquestionable. “There is nothing in antiquity as majestic or as philosophical,” he wrote:

> These mysteries of the Brahmans finally reached Syria: there they must have been well known, because the Jews heard of them in the time of Herod [the first-century BCE Roman Jewish king in the Kingdom of Judea who ruled at the time of Jesus’s birth]. It was perhaps then that the Book of Enoch [an ancient Hebrew text attributed to Enoch, great-grandfather of Noah], quoted by the apostle Jude [in the New Testament].

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135 *L’Ezour-Vedam; ou, Ancien commentaire du Vedam, contenant l’exposition des opinions religieuses & philosophiques des Indiens* (1740) (Yverdon: Imprimerie de M. de Felice, 1778), 1:173. “[Chumontou, touché du fort malheureux des hommes, qui tous livrés à l’erreur & à l’idolâtrie, couroient aveuglement à leur perte, forma le dessein de les éclairer ou de les sauver. Pour dissiper donc les épaisses ténèbres, qui avoient tout-à-fait obscurci leur raison, il composa l’Ezour-Védam, où les rappellant à leur raison même, il leur fit connaitre & sentir la vérité qu’ils avoient abandonnée.]”


137 On the authorship of the Ezour-Vedam, see Ludo Rocher, *Ezourvedam: The French Veda of the Eighteenth Century* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984), 28-52, 68-71. This became a point of contention when Murr wrote to the Jesuit archivists about Cœurdoux’s manuscript; see Murr/Dehernge letters in Fln 6/5, AJ.
Here is Voltaire’s Jesuit-Hindu-secular rejoinder to Bossuet. For Voltaire, resemblances between Hinduism and Christianity are not proof of a Christian universal (Judeo-Christian scripture offers the origin and the telos of human history) but rather of a secular one (ancient India is the origin of human history, and Jewish and later Christian scripture drew on its Hindu antecedents). He reinforced this point in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*, which makes ample reference to the *Ezour-Vedam*. In an entry on Genesis, for instance, he claimed the story of Adam and Eve was based on the *Ezour-Vedam*’s account of “Adimo, child of the earth, and his wife Procriti, life.”

As Griggs observes, however, we cannot be too sanguine about Voltaire’s efforts to unmoor human history from Biblical time. Unlike Montesquieu’s political forms, Voltaire’s universal history had a telos: not the unfolding of divine providence, which was Bossuet’s telos, but the realization of material progress. This material progress was specifically identified with Western Europe—more specifically, with Europeans who had thrown off the yoke of Christian dogma. Thus, the *Essai sur les maurs* moved from ancient India, China, and Persia to contemporary European society, not unlike how nineteenth-century liberal imperialists would portray India as a land with a great past that had fallen into decay, at once the cradle of civilization and site of the colonial civilizing mission.

For Voltaire, present-day Indians are “debased” and their religion is “corrupted.” Following Montesquieu and Holwell, he cites widow-burning as evidence of Indian society’s degeneration,

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though the *Essai sur les mœurs* takes this critique further than *De l'esprit des lois*.\textsuperscript{141} Rather than attribute widow-burning to despotism, an ahistorical, universal political form, Voltaire absolved the Mughal rulers of India and placed blame for India’s degeneration squarely on the Brahmans, who he characterized as Hindu “priests.” As Marsh observes, this is in keeping with his support for an enlightened despotism and critique of priestcraft in France.\textsuperscript{142}

Voltaire’s use of the *Ezour-Vedam* thus offers a revealing example of how *philosophes* appropriated the work of Pondichéry Jesuits to theorize universalism in Enlightenment Europe. In a stunning irony, Voltaire did to Christian universalism what earlier Jesuit accommodationists had done to Hindu rites: he secularized it with religious sources. De Nobili and other seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Jesuits drew on Vedas and *śāstra* to delineate a separation of Indian civil and religious spheres. Hindu rites could be accommodated into Christianity, they insisted, because these rites belonged to a secular civil sphere. Voltaire drew upon Jesuit scholarship on Hinduism to disrupt and de-Christianize historical time, arguing that the antiquity of these very scriptural source-texts disputed the centrality and even veracity of the Flood in human history. Not only was this secularization ironic; it was also incomplete by design. For the Jesuits, as we have seen in Chapter 1, stripping of Hindu rites of religious content facilitated Indians’ conversion to Christianity. For Voltaire, wrenching universal history from Biblical time enabled his efforts to recover a pure rational religion, grounded in the pre-Judeo-Christian monotheism of texts such as the *Ezour-Vedam*.\textsuperscript{143} Far from a linear progression, religion and secularization were evidently in a dialectical relationship. The same could be said for the relationship between the European center and Indian periphery.


\textsuperscript{142} See Marsh, *India in the French Imagination*, 115-17.

2.3 Pondichéry Writes Back

The story does not end in the metropole. While the publication of the *Lettres édifiantes* died out as the Jesuits fell into decline, with the last contributions from Jesuits in India dating to the 1750s, Jesuit scholarship on Hinduism persisted well into the 1760s and 1770s. Cœurdoux and his fellow missionaries continued to correspond with scholars such as Anquetil-Duperron, who circulated their letters and thereby transmitted their findings to the *philosophes*. Through these interlocutors and intermediaries, the missionaries became aware of how *philosophes* such as Voltaire appropriated and deployed their scholarship and sought to refute the new secular universalism. The circuits linking Paris and Pondichéry were far more intricate than we might have originally imagined: not only did *philosophes* extract intellectual raw material from Pondichéry Jesuit writings to theorize universalism in the metropole, but the latter-day missionaries themselves developed competing theories of universalism from the colony. To follow this process, I take up letters exchanged between Cœurdoux and Anquetil-Duperron that reopened the question of India’s place in universal history.

One of Van Damme’s “travelers of doubt,” Anquetil-Duperron had traveled in India as an enlisted soldier of the FEIC during the Seven Years’ War. He was originally trained in theology, Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, through which he grew interested in the religions of the so-called Orient, journeying to the Netherlands to study Arabic with Jansenist scholars and then to India to study Persian and Sanskrit. His time in India led him to form relationships with Jesuit missionaries and native scholars across the subcontinent, from the FEIC territories of Pondichéry, Mahé, and Chandernagore, to neighboring BEIC holdings in Madras, Benares, and Bengal, to the Mughal city of Surat. Upon his return to Paris, Anquetil-Duperron was appointed to the Académie des inscriptions

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144 See Vissière and Vissière, preface, 15.

Anquetil-Duperron first became aware of Cœurdoux in 1768. An archeologist in the Académie, Abbé Jean-Jacques Barthélemy (1716–95), had sent Cœurdoux a letter in 1767 asking him to investigate the structures and vocabulary of the Sanskrit language in relation to Ancient Greek and Latin. Barthélemy came to know of Cœurdoux through his two contributions to the *Lettres édifiantes*: a 1749 letter on Indian painting, and a 1758 letter on Indian textiles.\footnote{David d’Angers, “Portrait d’Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805), orientaliste,” sculpture, n.d. (c.1800), Musée Carnavalet, Paris.} As with Cœurdoux’s 1757 letter to Delisle on representations of the lord Śiva, these letters speak to an interest in material culture that evidently complemented his interests in Sanskrit scripture—collapsing Van Damme’s distinction between earlier Jesuits’ exclusive focus on textuality and later travelers’ growing interest in material...
In writing to Cœurdoux, Barthélemy was likely aware that he was one of the few French Jesuits to remain in Pondichéry after the order’s expulsion from France and subsequent break with French officials overseas.

Cœurdoux replied in 1768, offering a detailed explication for each of Barthélemy’s questions. To a query about the “history of the nations and kingdoms of India,” he observed that “in thirty-one years of residence in the Indies, I have never known of a single history of this country,” beyond a Persian history produced by the Mughals of their “conquest of northern India.” He then provided multiple tables of words in Sanskrit that are similar to Latin and Ancient Greek, drawing upon both his humanistic training and exchanges with native scholars. Finally, he asked: “why is it that one finds, in the Sanskrit language, a large number of words in common with Latin and Greek, and

149 Van Damme distinguishes earlier Jesuits’ emphasis on “textual edifices” from the late eighteenth-century “skeptical scholars,” such as Anquetil-Duperron, who “mobilize[d] material traces” to engage with Indian antiquity in Van Damme, Les voyageurs du doute, 262-63.
150 Cœurdoux, Réponse au mémoire in Anquetil-Duperron, Supplément au mémoire, 49:651.
especially with Latin?”153 In raising this question, Cœurdoux shifted the terrain to the philosophical issue that had preoccupied the *Discours sur l’histoire universelle* and took on a new significance in debates over Enlightenment universalism with the publication of the *Essai sur les mœurs*—the question of origins. Asking why Sanskrit resembles Latin and Greek struck at the heart of a broader question: what did the roots of ancient languages and religious scriptures reveal about the origins of humanity?

Cœurdoux proceeds to offer six possible explanations—commerce, science, travel, religion, domination, a common origin, or a combination of multiple causes—before settling on the common origin theory as his preferred explanation. “I have something more to say... about the origin of Brahmans, to whom the Sanskrit language belonged,” he explained. According to Cœurdoux, after the Flood, Noah’s son Japhet moved westwards with his sons, who spoke the “original languages” of different language families including Latin, Green, and Sanskrit. Eventually Japhet’s second son, Magog, “separated from his brothers, went north, passed up to Mount Caucasus, and there founded the nations that populate the great Tartary” (present-day central Eurasia). Brahmans originated from this region, entering India from the north, and bringing with them the Sanskrit language.154

Brahmans, Sanskrit, Indian scripture—all this came out of the Flood, not the other way around. We might read Cœurdoux’s letter as more than a passive source of technical information—i.e., intellectual raw material—for scholars in the Académie such as Barthélemy, and, by extension, the *philosophes* such as Voltaire who read their published work. Cœurdoux’s endeavor to posit his own theory of origins reveals an interest in philosophical speculation and a self-conscious effort to contribute to the Republic of Letters. “I hope,” he wrote elsewhere, “that the discoveries [of European

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scholars] about the Indies will be such that we can applaud them here, confirm them, and extend them for our profit and that of the Republic of Letters.\textsuperscript{155}

His new theory of origins piqued Anquetil-Duperron’s interest. Upon reading Cœurdoux’s letter to Barthélemy, Anquetil-Duperron contacted Cœurdoux with his own set of questions later in 1768. “You have shown me friendship... [and] obliged me,” he began, requesting “new services... [that] will not be rendered to me alone: the Republic of Letters will take account of the insights you give into Indian Literature.”\textsuperscript{156} At the time, Anquetil-Duperron was working on his translation from Persian of the Zend-Avesta, though his letters to Pondichéry Jesuits Cœurdoux and Antoine Mosac (1704–79) betray an interest in deepening his understanding of Sanskrit. Despite acknowledging the “critical circumstances” these Jesuits found themselves in after 1764, he urged Cœurdoux to aid him in understanding “the languages, the antiquities, and the opinions of the peoples of Asia, or at least to multiply the resources that can facilitate the knowledge of [these] different objects.” “A single man cannot do everything,” he explained, extending an invitation for Cœurdoux to enter into a “literary commerce” and join the scholarly community of \textit{hommes de lettres}.

The objects of this “commerce” were twofold. First, Cœurdoux would send and comment upon dictionaries, grammatical aids, and other materials to enable a greater understanding of Sanskrit and other Indian languages, and Anquetil-Duperron would add his materials to the collection of “Oriental manuscripts” in the Bibliothèque du roi [Library of the King] in Paris, which already

\textsuperscript{155} Gaston-Laurent Cœurdoux quoted in Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron to Gaston-Laurent Cœurdoux, July 28, 1768, NAF 8871, BnF. ["Je souhaite...que leurs découvertes (des savants d’Europe) soient telles, sur les Indes, que nous puissions y applaudir ici, les confirmer, et les étendre pour notre profit et celui de la République des Lettres.”]

\textsuperscript{156} Anquetil-Duperron to Cœurdoux, July 28, 1768. ["Vous m’avez témoigné l’amitié. Vous m’avez obligé. J’ai droit dès là de vous demander de nouveaux services et ces services, ce ne sera à moi seul que vous les rendrez: La République des Lettres vous tiendra compte de des veilles que vous donnera à la Littérature indienne."]

\textsuperscript{157} Anquetil-Duperron to Cœurdoux, July 28, 1768. ["Mais un seul homme ne peut pas tout faire”; “à faire connôitre les langues, les antiquités et les opinions des peuples de l’Asie, ou du moins de multiplier les secours qui peuvent faciliter la connaissance de différents objets”; "Je sai [sais] qu’un Missionaire, surtout dans les circonstances critiques où vous vous trouvez, n’est pas trop maître de son temps, et a difficilement cette tranquillité d’esprit que demandent les Lettres”; “commerce littéraire.”]
contained the aforementioned Ezour-Vedam. As Van Damme observes, French scholars envisaged the Bibliothèque du roi as a “universal library,” “the site of the accumulation of distant knowledge and the instrument of France’s cultural projection.”\(^{158}\) Assembling its vast collections of manuscripts was an extensive commercial enterprise, requiring interlocutors abroad such as Cœurdoux to make manuscript copies and evaluate metropolitan scholarship.\(^{159}\) To this end, Anquetil-Duperron enclosed with his letter a copy of the 1768 French translation of Holwell’s *Interesting Historical Events*, and referred to his search for the fourth Hindu Veda by writing its name in devanagari and nastaliq, scripts used for Sanskrit and Persian, respectively.

![Figure 2.3. An excerpt from Anquetil-Duperron’s 1768 letter to Cœurdoux. In the left margin, the first line spells rajarveda in devanagari (रजर्वेद) and the third line spells jadarjū vedā, the text’s Persian title, in nastaliq (جدرجوید).](image)

There was a second aspect to this “commerce.” Cœurdoux would share “clarifications about these languages and antiquities,” specifically regarding the theory of origins he had posited in his response to Barthélemy. “For a long time,” Anquetil-Duperron explained, “I have had the same ideas as

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\(^{160}\) Anquetil-Duperron to Cœurdoux, July 28, 1768. Sanskrit manuscripts in southeast India were more likely to be written in the grantha script than in devanagari, although Cœurdoux might have had exposure to both.
you about the relationships [...] one might claim to find between the customs of peoples that are the most distant from one another.” He urged Cœurdoux to plumb the depths of Indian scripture for further proof of the Brahams’ origins from Magog and the Flood.161

Owing to difficulties in conveying the letter and supplementary materials, Cœurdoux only responded in 1771—a reminder of the material conditions that impeded circuits between Paris and Pondichéry. His letter provided additional details for his theory on the origins of Sanskrit and the Brahmans. The Hindu deity Kṛṣṇa, he claimed, is in fact Moses from the Hebrew Bible, a view that reflects that of earlier Pondichéry Jesuit missionaries in the Lettres édifiantes such as Bouchet.162 He also referenced Calmette, whom he considered a gifted Sanskrit scholar, as well as the Ezour-Vedam, which he believed to have been composed after the Biblical flood and took as proof that Hindus were originally monotheistic.163

The correspondence between Cœurdoux and Anquetil-Duperron died out soon later. Anquetil-Duperron explained that he was too busy with his translation of the Zend-Avesta to offer a substantial reply, beyond a brief letter thanking Cœurdoux in 1772. Cœurdoux responded with a longer memoir supporting his theory of origins, excerpted from a “book of occult sciences” that “fell into his hands” in 1773.164 That was the last Anquetil-Duperron heard from him.165 Cœurdoux included his theory of origins almost verbatim in Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens, intending “report, after a great amount of research, what seemed [to him] to be the most probable” explanation for readers “who like to return to the original principle of things.”166

161 Anquetil-Duperron to Cœurdoux, July 28, 1768. [“Le seconde consiste en éclaircissements sur ces langues et ces antiquités”; “il y a longtemps, mon R.P, que j'ai les mêmes idées que vous sur les rapports, sur l'identité que l'on prétend trouver entre les coutumes des peuples les plus éloignés les uns des autres.”]


163 Cœurdoux to Anquetil-Duperron, February 10, 1771.

164 Gaston-Laurent Cœurdoux to Abraham Hyacinte Anquetil-Duperron, October 5, 1773, NAF 8871, BnF. [“Il m’est tombé entre les mains un livre des sciences occultes qui ont cours ici; et j’en fis alors l’extrait.”]

165 See the account presented in Anquetil-Duperron, Supplément au mémoire, 49:695.

166 Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 18-20.
Neither Cœurdoux’s letters nor his manuscript were published immediately in the metropole. As we shall see in the epilogue, *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* would only surface in print in 1817 under Dubois’s name and with subtle modifications. As for the letters, despite Cœurdoux’s request that they be circulated, Anquetil-Duperron did not publish them in the annals of the Académie until 1793. At that point, as John J. Godfrey notes, Cœurdoux’s theory about the common origins of Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit no longer seemed quite so novel. The British Indologist and colonial jurist William Jones (1746–94) had already grown famous for positing a similar conjecture in his *Third Anniversary Discourse* (1786) presented in Bengal.¹⁶⁷

### 2.4 Towards a Global Enlightenment

Cœurdoux’s correspondence reveals how missionaries in the colony could serve a dual function for intellectuals in the metropole, from *philosophes* such as Montesquieu and Voltaire to philologists such as Anquetil-Duperron. Montesquieu’s appropriation of the *Lettres édifiantes* in *De l’esprit des lois* and Voltaire’s appropriation of the *Ezour-Vedam* in the *Essai sur les mœurs* and *Dictionnaire philosophique* suggests that missionaries were unwittingly a source of the raw materials for Enlightenment theorizing on universalism. Yet the direction of influence between Paris and Pondichéry was hardly unidirectional. Cœurdoux’s correspondence with Anquetil-Duperron demonstrates that the missionaries developed their own theorizing on universalism in dialogue with speculations emanating from France. We are left with a dialectic of colony and metropole, religion and secularization, and experience and fantasy—striking at the heart of a globalized, pluralized Enlightenment.

The contested genre of universal history offers an illuminating case study of how these dialectics played out. As Conrad observes, “the Enlightenment was obsessed with the problem of

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This question of origins was at the heart of debates over universalism and cultural difference, and took on new stakes when philosophical tracts such as Voltaire’s *Essai sur les mœurs* called to question the primacy of Christian scripture to explain the origins and telos of humanity. Both in form and content, Cœurdoux’s “literary commerce” with Anquetil-Duperron reveals a Pondichéry Jesuit contribution to these Enlightenment debates.

The Cœurdoux/Anquetil-Duperron letters and earlier *Lettres édifiantes* were a crucial part of the Republic of Letters, the virtual polity extending past the national borders of France to the colonial world. By inviting Cœurdoux to “shed some light” [*donner quelques lumières*] on the fraught question of origins, Anquetil-Duperron drew him into the late eighteenth-century iteration of this literary polity—which was precisely the Enlightenment [*les Lumières*] itself. As Céline Spector observes, the “self-reflexive” notion of a *siècle des Lumières* [Age of Lights, Enlightenment] had already entered these eighteenth-century historical actors’ conceptual vocabulary through religious sources that invoked the mystical, spiritual connotations of light.

Moreover, Cœurdoux’s attempt to write back against the appropriation of Jesuit scholarship reveals how a third, competing model of universalism, formed under the spiritual and temporal pressures of eighteenth-century Pondichéry, traveled to Enlightenment Paris. Here I break from Murr, who argues that Cœurdoux’s theory of origins was a direct extension of Bossuet’s Christian universalism to the Indian case. Such an argument does not account for how both Bossuet and Voltaire—despite their diametrically opposed stances on universal history—were staunch opponents of Christian mysticism, the theology that formed the basis for Cœurdoux’s claim to the universal.

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169 See Anquetil-Duperron to Cœurdoux, July 28, 1768.
can it account for the problems of social, religious, and political marginality. Bossuet’s project of instructing the French king on the unfolding of divine providence in political affairs would have been a distant prospect for Cœurdoux, given his focus on socially-marginalized converts after the Malabar rites controversy and the breakdown of the Jesuits’ relationship to the French monarchy during their 1764 expulsion. So too would have been Voltaire’s vision of material progress culminating in Western Europe for an inhabitant of Pondichéry after the Seven Years’ War surrounded by indications of decline. As we shall see, Cœurdoux’s universalism carried its own political stakes in the broader political fallout of a global Enlightenment.
3.
A Global Fallout: 
Morals and Customs in Times of War and Revolution

Une tyrannie méthodique a succédé à l'autorité arbitrale.\textsuperscript{172}
[A systematic tyranny has replaced arbitrary power.]

During the 1770s, the above sentence appeared verbatim in two different sources. One was none other than Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens, which Cœurdoux entrusted to FEIC official Nicholas-Jacques Desvaux (1745–1817) in 1777. It belonged to the final chapter of the manuscript, entitled “Tableau de l’Indostan [Portrait of India].” Since “this work is aimed principally at making known the Indians and their customs,” Cœurdoux explained, “it would not seem strange that we finish with some geographic and political details about their country and their present government.”\textsuperscript{173} He proceeded to characterize the Mughal empire, which ruled India since the sixteenth century, as violent and lawless. Now British “systematic tyranny” has replaced Mughal “arbitrary power,” plunging India into an unbearable “state of oppression.”\textsuperscript{174}

The other source was the Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes [Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Commerce of Europeans in the Two Indies], published anonymously in Amsterdam by a group of French philosophes seeking to evade censorship and arrest. The Abbé Guillaume Thomas François Raynal (1713–96) served as its primary author, while Denis Diderot (1713–84) made substantial contributions. The Histoire des deux Indes was a massive undertaking, expanding upon the scope of universal histories such as Voltaire’s Essai sur les mœurs by considering both the ancient past of peoples

\textsuperscript{172} This exact line appears in Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 189; Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes, 1774 ed. (Amsterdam, 1770), 1:534; Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes, 1780 ed. (Amsterdam, 1770), 1:381-82.

\textsuperscript{173} Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 185. [“Cet ouvrage étant destiné principalement à faire connoitre les Indiens et leurs coutumes, il ne paraîtra pas extraordinaire qu’on finisse par quelques détails géographiques et politiques Sur leur pays, et leur gouvernement présent.”]

\textsuperscript{174} Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 188-89.
across the world and the recent fallout of European colonial encounters in the Americas (new Indies) and Asia (old Indies). A six-volume first edition was published in 1770, a seven-volume second edition in 1774, and a five-volume third edition in 1780. The sentence appears in the 1774 and 1780 editions in a section dedicated to Britain’s conquest of India. Like *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens*, the *Histoire des deux Indes* contends that Britain imposed “systematic tyranny” where the Mughals ruled with “arbitrary power,” effecting a “sinister revolution” across India.  

In both its content and provenance, this repeated allegation adds a new *political* dimension to the role of Pondichéry Jesuits in a global Enlightenment. It draws attention to a transnational field of ideas around political power that coalesced during the 1770s, linking France to its colonial holdings in India and the Americas. For all its seemingly otherworldly interest in the self’s dissolution into God and Indian scripture, Cœurdoux’s manuscript cannot be extricated from the political conditions within which it was produced. Rather, the text suggests Britain’s *tyrannie méthodique* [systematic tyranny] had ruptured “modern” India from its mythic, mystical past—giving credence to a politics that opposed British rule and contributed to global shifts in the conceptual meaning of revolution.  

The second half of the eighteenth century was a time of immense political turbulence around the globe in the wake of the Seven Years’ War and buildup to the French Revolution. French writers became consumed by anxieties of decline, haunted by the specter of *l’Inde perdue* [lost India] and their newfound marginality in India and the Americas. This translated into a political strategy of *revanchisme* towards Britain. As Marsh and Elizabeth Cross argue, *philosophes* and FEIC writers envisioned a “revolution of India” [*révolution de l’Inde*] that would replace British domination with a supposedly more humane system of French rule based on free commercial exchange.  

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176 Marsh, *India in the French Imagination*, 4-5. On eighteenth-century French anxieties about stagnation more broadly, with reference to France’s colonial presence in the Atlantic, see Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce*.
Yet the conceptual meaning of the term “revolution” was rapidly shifting. Baker observes how in the premodern sense, “revolutions,” in the plural, connoted “disruptions, upheavals, and disorders, turns of fortune.”\(^\text{178}\) Political revolutions were cyclical events that happened to a particular group of people, mirroring the revolutions of celestial bodies in astronomy, from which the concept derived. In 1789 Paris, revolution, now in the singular, took on its modern meaning: a conscious act undertaken by a group of people to radically transform their society.\(^\text{179}\) Baker draws our attention to how this political resignification was prefigured by a “cultural transformation” in Enlightenment thought.\(^\text{180}\) Montesquieu’s critiques of despotism and Voltaire’s forays into universal history recast revolution to be a “complete transformation of humanity” in response to despotism, “a conflict universally inscribed in human nature.” In linking revolution to despotism, these authors internalized and universalized its meaning. Revolution entailed a profound transformation in the minds of oppressed individuals seeking to remake their social order, becoming a “world-historical event” in humanity’s struggle against political despotism.\(^\text{181}\)

If Enlightenment universalism was at once mystical, marginal, and global, as we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, then so too was this cultural transformation in the meaning of revolution. That Cœurdoux would charge the British with inflicting despotism on Indians in precisely the same terms as Raynal—who figures prominently in Baker’s account—suggests Pondichéry Jesuits contributed to the political fallout of a global Enlightenment.\(^\text{182}\) Cœurdoux’s manuscript offers a means of relating the spiritual and cultural \((\text{les mœurs des Indiens})\) to the political \((\text{récoulements de l’Inde, tyrannie méthodique})\). Moreover, the text’s unexpected relationship to the \textit{Histoire des deux Indes} suggests that

\(^{178}\) Baker, “Revolutionizing Revolution,” 72, 80-81.
\(^{179}\) Baker, “Revolutionizing Revolution,” 84.
\(^{181}\) Baker, \textit{Inventing the French Revolution}, 221.
intellectual circuits linking colony and metropole persisted into the late eighteenth century. While the direction of transmissions between Pondichéry and Paris in the 1770s becomes harder to establish due to a paucity of archival records, there remains an argument to be made for influence—that is, for reading Cœurdoux and metropolitan writers within the same field of ideas that was radically altering the concept of revolution.  

This chapter begins with a discussion of the implications of the Seven Years’ War for the Pondichéry Jesuits, examining how the conflict alienated them from the metropole and gave rise to moral anxieties about the corrupting effects of “revolutions of India.” It subsequently tracks Cœurdoux’s response to these developments vis-à-vis Voltaire, Raynal, and Diderot, examining how these authors posited a rupture between “modern” India and its mythic past. I finally turn to the sentence that is repeated verbatim in Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens and the Histoire des deux Indes, with an eye towards what it reveals about a potential relationship between these texts, and how the concept of tyrannie méthodique facilitated the transition from premodern to modern revolution. If the nature of despotism had changed to become systematized, rupturing the “modern” from the “mythic,” then perhaps the nature of revolutions was about to change as well.

3.1 Revolutions of India

Jesuit missions in the Carnatic lay “deserted,” wrote an FEIC official to his superiors in 1773. The Jesuits’ expulsion from France had thrown the missions into crisis; now “all the revolutions that the French settlements in India endured during the last war” dealt the coup de grâce.  

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183 This formulation of “a field of ideas” draws on Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” introduction to Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 4, 18. I discuss this further at the end of the chapter.

184 “Correspondance concernant l’abbé de Mosac, préfet apostolique, et la situation des missionnaires,” October 1773, COL F5 A 45, ANOM. [“... depuis leur extinction en France... mais ces événements survenus à la suite [suite] de toutes les révolutions que les établissements français avaient éprouvée dans l’Inde pendant la dernière guerre a porté une attente considerable au service des missions qui se trouvent aujourd’hui abandonnée à elles mêmes...”]
implies, Pondichéry Jesuits’ world was wracked by revolutions—in the term’s premodern sense—during the 1760s and 1770s. The Seven Years’ War engulfed the globe, spanning colonial holdings in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. After 1764, Jesuits would no longer occupy a privileged position in the French colonial administration, and Pondichéry would be relegated to the margins of ancien régime empire. While a full account of these events casts beyond the scope of this thesis, this section follows how the war linked the fates of Jesuits in the metropole, the Caribbean, and India, setting the stage for a global field of ideas on revolution.

War between Britain and France broke out in 1756, although fighting had begun in the colonies by 1754 and soon drove the Jesuits to political and financial ruin. In 1755, the Jesuit missionary Antoine Lavalette (1708–67) was returning to France from Martinique, a French colonial holding in the Caribbean, when his ship was stopped by British corsairs. When they seized his merchandise—worth an astonishing 600,000 livres amassed through unchecked speculation on coffee and sugar—French Jesuits were left 5.3 million livres in debt. As Maurice Whitehead observes, the ensuing Lavalette affair set off a chain of events that culminated in the Jesuits’ expulsion. Their Jansenist critics mobilized the parlement of Paris, which pressured a reluctant Louis XV (r. 1715-74) to banish his former confessors and cut off their missions.185

The reverberations of an Anglo-French skirmish in Martinique were felt by Jesuits in Pondichéry. The Seven Years’ War—known as the Third Carnatic War in southeast India—reignited tensions between the BEIC, FEIC, and Mughal empire. In 1760, for the second time in two decades, Pondichéry was under a British siege. The siege strained relations between the military administration, led by Thomas Arthur, comte de Lally (1702–1766), the Governor-General of French India, and the civil administration, led by Georges Duval de Leyrit (1716–64), head of the Superior Council of

Pondichéry. When the Council rebuked Lally’s military policies in what he referred to as the “revolution” of August 1760, the Pondichéry Jesuit François-Louis de Lavaur (1700–63) was called to mediate between the two sides.\(^{186}\)

Lavaur had succeeded Cœurdoux as superior of the Jesuits’ Pondichéry-region missions in 1751.\(^{187}\) While Cœurdoux’s tenure as superior had been consumed by the Malabar rites controversy, Lavaur’s tenure brought him in closer proximity to the French administration during the war. When Pondichéry fell to the British siege in January 1761, it was Lavaur who delivered the terms of surrender. BEIC forces proceeded to sack Pondichéry, destroying FEIC properties in the \textit{ville blanche} and the Jesuits’ churches in surrounding Tamil villages. Lally was arrested and returned to France, where the Jansenists—the Jesuits’ old rivals—mobilized the parlement of Paris to try him for treason in an effort to undercut the authority of the king.\(^{188}\)

Ironically, it was Lavaur who enabled their efforts. He had secured a “speedy passage” back to France from the BEIC in 1762, and died some months later in 1763.\(^{189}\) Upon his death, the Abbé Joseph Marie Terray (1715–78), Controller-General of Finances for Louis XV, raided his belongings to search for assets that could be liquidated to pay off the Jesuits’ debts—a common practice after the Lavalette affair.\(^{190}\) Terray’s findings worsened the Jesuits’ financial scandal and sealed Lally’s fate. Lavaur had hidden a stunning 1,024,790 livres, some obtained from Jesuits in China, in addition to a 300-page diary condemning Lally.\(^{191}\) Lally was convicted of treason and executed in 1766, with the


\(^{188}\) See Mole, “Incriminating Empire,” 40-45.

\(^{189}\) François-Louis Lavaur to the Board of Directors of the British East India Company, 1762, IOR/E/1/44, pp.274-79, BL.


\(^{191}\) Terray, \textit{Compte rendu}, 397, 404. On the financial ties between Jesuits in Pondichéry and China, see “Pondicherry, Governor and Council, claim of Jesuit missionaries’ deposit to be disregarding, reasons respecting,” January 31, 1770 or April 10, 1771 (date unclear), IOR/E/4/865, p.109, BL.
diary serving as a key piece of incriminating evidence. Here is another Jesuit manuscript wrenched from its original context: refusing to take sides, Lavaur had actually written two diaries, one for Lally and the other against him. Terray had unearthed the latter. By the time the exculpatory diary was found, it was too late.

Both the FEIC and Jesuit order fell into disgrace, while this chain of events soon reached the philosophes. Vowing to avenge his father, Lally’s illegitimate son Trophime-Gérard, marquis de Lally-Tollendal (1751–1830), contacted Voltaire in 1773. Knowing of Voltaire’s skepticism towards the parlements and longstanding interest in India, Lally-Tollendal convinced him to condemn Lally’s execution as a gross miscarriage of justice. Voltaire did this, and more: the first part of his *Fragments sur l’Inde et le général Lalli* (*Fragments on India and General Lally*) (1773) surveyed recent “revolutions of India,” from the invasion of Mughals to the arrival of Europeans and aftermath of the war, ending with a vindication of the disgraced general. The second part turned to Indian antiquity, reviving Voltaire’s arguments in the *Essai sur les mœurs*. Narrating the transition between these two sections, he wrote, “it is a consolation to leave the ruins of the [FEIC]... [and] return to the philosophical contemplation of India,” which “the prevarications of the Jesuit Lavaur... will never make known to us.”

Yet the Pondichéry Jesuits had not died out by the second half of the eighteenth century. While records are sparse, a 1769 survey conducted by a deputy of the Superior Council declared the Jesuit missionaries “bankrupt,” and explained that the few who remained in India—Cœurdoux included—now resided in a single house in Pondichéry. Their missions and libraries were ceded to Charles Mallet de Maisonpré, “Riposte de Mallet de Maisonpré,” June 6, 1769, COL F5 A 42/3, ANOM.
the MEP, and many of their churches had been destroyed during the 1761 sack of the ville blanche and surrounding villages. The question remains, then, how they related their “philosophical contemplations” on Indian spirituality to their reflections on these “revolutions of India.”

3.2 Rupturing the Mythic Past

It is Cœurdoux’s answer to this question that leads us from the Enlightenment question of origins to the conceptual history of revolution. While there are no preserved records of his activities during the war, the final chapters of Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens offer his reflections on recent political affairs. Reading these chapters against the writings of Cœurdoux’s metropolitan contemporaries—specifically Voltaire’s Fragments sur l’Inde and Diderot and Raynal’s Histoire des deux Indes—reveals the war’s cultural and intellectual repercussions in both colony and metropole. Ancient India’s morality had been corrupted by a series of revolutions, these authors insisted, which ruptured modern India from its mythic past. This rupture set the stage for their shared fixation on British tyrannie méthodique.

Cœurdoux first takes up contemporary events in the penultimate chapter of Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens dedicated to the Indian military. He divides Indian history into three periods: “fabled times,” the age of “ancient kings,” and the “present times.” This is the first time in this manuscript that Cœurdoux actively distinguishes the “fabled” and “ancient” worlds of India—described in Sanskrit epic poetry and the writings of Greek travelers who journeyed to the subcontinent during the era of Alexander the Great—from the “modern” world he inhabits.197 He carries this periodization into the subsequent chapter, the aforementioned “Tableau de l’Indostan.”

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197 Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 176. [“Dans les guerres indiennes, il en faut distinguer de trois Sortes: Celles des tems fabuleux, Celles des ancien Rois, et celles enfin du tems présent.”]
Ancient India was stable, unchanging, and unperturbed by revolutions, Cœurdoux tells us; it had none of the “discord, misery, and anarchy” that he observes in his present-day.\footnote{Cœurdoux, \textit{Les mœurs}, 187. [“L’Indostan gouverné par ses princes naturels n’étoit pas désolé par la discorde, la misere et l’anarchie, comme il l’est depuis que les Mogols en sont les maîtres.”]}

His nostalgia for ancient India was shared by his contemporaries in France. This sentiment pervaded the Bishnapore narrative, a series of philosophical speculations in the \textit{Fragments sur l’Inde} and \textit{Histoire des deux Indes} based on Holwell’s \textit{Interesting Historical Events}. Holwell claimed there was a remote village near Bengal called Bishnapore untouched by Mughal and European invaders.\footnote{Holwell, \textit{Interesting Historical Events}, 1:197-200.} His account enraptured Voltaire, who dedicated a chapter to Bishnapore in the second half of the \textit{Fragments sur l’Inde}. “Since time immemorial,” the Brahmans of this village “conserved their liberty and virtue” declared Voltaire.\footnote{Voltaire, \textit{Fragments sur l’Inde}, 256-58. [“Cette province appartient de temps immémorial à une race de brames qui descend des anciens bracmanes. … La caste des brames y a conservé sa liberté et sa vertu… ils n’ont jamais été subjugués par les étrangers.”]} This village’s “mœurs used to be those of all of India, before avarice led armies of oppressors” into the region who inflicted despotism on its inhabitants. He concludes with an analogy: Bishnapore was “never subjugated by foreigners. This is how Amsterdam protected itself from all invasions.”\footnote{Voltaire, \textit{Fragments sur l’Inde}, 258. [“ ils n’ont jamais été subjugués par les étrangers. C’est ainsi qu’Amsterdam s’est mise à l’abri de toutes les invasions.”]} Voltaire’s comparison to Amsterdam is particularly revealing—both because of the city’s role as a refuge for philosophes escaping censorship in France, as well as for its centrality to networks of trade.\footnote{Voltaire, \textit{Fragments sur l’Inde}, 258.} Evidently uncorrupted mœurs could go hand-in-hand with material progress.

By the time the story made its way to Diderot and Raynal, the idea of a village free of despotism in India—and the basis for material progress—had grown suspect. The \textit{Histoire des deux Indes} referenced the Bishnapore story early in their accounts of the British in India.\footnote{Mole, “Incriminating Empire,” 46.} Unlike Voltaire, Diderot and Raynal insisted the story was a myth. Launching into a direct address to the reader, they declared,
Readers, whose sensitive souls have just blossomed with joy at the story of the pure morals [maeurs simples] and wisdom of the Bishnapore government: you who, tired of the vices and disorders of your own country, ... Alas! Bishnapore and all I have told you may well be little more than a fable.  

These lines recall the interplay of experience and fantasy from Chapter 2, whereby the philosophes projected anxieties about despotism within their “own country” onto a fantasy of India. Yet for Diderot and Raynal, Bishnapore was perhaps a fantasy from the beginning. It becomes a kind of utopia, unmoored from any geographical coordinates that link it to the material conditions in Europe or India: gone is Voltaire’s analogy to Amsterdam. This mythic village could not exist in present-day India, and might never have existed at all.

For the Histoire des deux Indes, the significance of the Bishnapore story lies not in its veracity, but in its capacity to illustrate the rupture between ancient India and its present-day. Mughal and European invasions spurred “revolutions of India” that irrevocably corrupted Indian maeurs, rendering the village a utopian fantasy of what India might originally have been. This formulation recalls Rousseau’s state of nature, a purer original state “which no longer exists, perhaps never existed, and probably never will exist,” lost upon us due to a series of revolutions: it was in speculating on to its nature that we might “judge our present state.” As Blake Smith observes, the Bishnapore myth surfaced elsewhere in late eighteenth-century French writings on utopia and the state of nature, contributing to the broader Enlightenment preoccupation with the question of origins.

If we read Bishnapore as a stand-in for ancient India, then we see how Coœrdoux’s views on “revolutions of India” hew closer to Diderot and Raynal’s than to Voltaire’s. He too posited a radical rupture between modern India and its ancient past, beginning with the invasion of the Mughals: “as

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204 Raynal, Histoire des deux Indes, 1780 ed., 352-54. [“Lecteurs, dont les ames sensibles viennent de s’épanouir de joie au récit des mœurs simples & de la sagesse du gouvernement de Bispopause: vous qui, fatigués des vices & des désordres de votre contrée...Hélas! ce Bispopause & tout ce que je vous en ai raconté, pourrait bien n’être qu’une fable.”]
much as the former constitution [of Ancient India] opposed revolutions, this one [of the Mughals] was created to produce them.” His characterization of Mughal power recalls Montesquieu’s formulation of Oriental despotism. “There are no laws other than those of the strongest usurper” in Mughal India, wrote Cœurdoux, describing how despotic power was diffused through society: “a thousand tyrants, instead of one, oppress this vast empire.”

The next set of revolutions came with the Europeans. Describing the arrival of the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British, Cœurdoux observed that “the state of Europeans in the Indies, for more than a century, was purely commercial. But things changed in the epoch when Dupleix imagined his system of domination and sovereignty that rendered his nation [France] the arbiter of affairs in India.” Governor-General Joseph Marquis Dupleix (1697–1763) had overseen Pondichéry during its material and commercial peak prior to the war. Dupleix’s “system of domination” was a strategy his British rivals would later call the “nabob game,” wherein he recruited local nawabs—emissaries of the Mughal emperor—to serve French interests, enabling France to rule by proxy through native intermediaries. Cœurdoux observed that it was the BEIC who took this strategy to its furthest extreme after Dupleix was recalled to France in 1754 and war broke out across the globe. Now Britain governed by “violence and oppression,” bringing about the latest revolutions of India.

Here is the critical shift from the question of origins towards a conceptual history of revolution. In referencing the invasions of the Mughals and Europeans, Cœurdoux and these philosophes all use the term “revolutions” in what Baker would call a premodern sense, referring to

207 Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 187. (“Autant l’ancienne constitution s’opposoit aux révolutions, autant celle-ci est fait pour en produire”; “Mille Tyrans, au lieu d’un, oppriment ce vaste empire: Il n’y a d’autres loix que celles de l’usurpateur le plus fort.”)
208 Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 188. (“L’état des Européens aux Indes, pendant plus d’un Siècle, fut un état purement commerçant.”; “Mais les choses changèrent de face à l’époque où Dupleix imagina son système de domination et de souveraineté que devoit rendre sa nation l’arbitre des affaires de l’Inde et qu’elle rejetta de propos-delibéré.”)
209 Marsh, India in the French Imagination, 9-13; More, Pondichéry, Tamil Nadu, and South India, 24-25.
210 Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 188-89. (“Lorsqu’un fois les Anglais eurent chassé en 1761 les français de l’Inde et démolé tous leurs établissements... ils commencèrent à consolider leur puissance... si elle étoit appuyée Sur la justice et la modération, comme elle l’est sur la Violence et l’oppression...”)

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cyclical events that happen to a society. Yet in Cœurdoux—as in Diderot and Raynal—we also glimpse the kind of political thinking that would drive post–1789 understandings of revolution. Despotism had corrupted Indian mœurs and ruptured a mythic past from the modern-day. There is no part of India where its effects are not felt; the entire subcontinent is closer to the brink, growing nearer and nearer to a point of no return.

Indeed, these authors’ writings betray anxieties not only about an Oriental despotism unleashed by India’s Mughal rulers, but also about a commercial despotism unleashed by the European presence on the subcontinent, which brought the second round of revolutions. This was linked to what Anoush Fraser Terjanian characterizes as a “doubleness” in Enlightenment views on commerce. On the one hand, there was the idea of doux commerce [gentle commerce], that commerce had a civilizing, salutary effect on human society, which was identified with the mainstream writings of philosophes such as Montesquieu and Voltaire. On the other hand, there existed an intellectual undercurrent—evident in texts such as the Histoire des deux Indes—that feared commercial enterprises could result in new forms of despotism and tyranny.211 It is precisely here that the colonial context becomes important: to these authors, the exploitation of colonized peoples was proof that Europe’s doux commerce had morphed into something more sinister. And so where Montesquieu claimed that “Indians have been, and the Indians will be, what they are at present” while Europeans purchase their “commodities” in De l’esprit des lois and Voltaire lauded the BEIC’s superior patriotism and restraint in Fragments sur l’Inde, Diderot, Raynal, and Cœurdoux insisted the British had in fact unleashed a new form of despotism that was at once political and commercial.212 It is on this note that we turn to their common discussion of tyrannie méthodique.

3.3 Systematic Tyranny and Spectral Encounters

Here I return to the line with which I began this chapter: “a systematic tyranny has replaced arbitrary power.” Not only is this line repeated verbatim in Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens and the Histoire des deux Indes, but the passages within which they appear are also remarkably similar. In Cœurdoux’s Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens:

The true hand that oppresses the Indiens is masked: but these people are not so churlish that they do not feel the artifice that seeks to abuse them: a systematic tyranny that has succeeded arbitrary power; the destructive art of monopolies, perfected. The alteration, the corruption of sources of public confidence, all this makes them see clearly enough that they are bent under a yoke even stronger than that of the phantoms that are presented to them, their head crowned and their hands in chains.213 [emphasis mine]

And in Diderot and Raynal’s Histoire des deux Indes, in both the 1774 and 1780 editions:

Who would have imagined that the same company [the BEIC], suddenly changing its conduct and system, would soon reach the point of making the peoples of Bengal miss the despotism of their ancient masters [the Mughals]? This sinister revolution was all too swift and all too real. A systematic tyranny has succeeded arbitrary power... oppression has become continual and absolute. The destructive art of monopolies is perfected... In a word, the sources of public trust and happiness have been altered, corrupted.214 [emphasis mine]

Both texts point to a fundamental transformation that has taken place with the consolidation of British power. Mughal despotism was diffuse; the British have centralized it. Indian nawabs had once governed the subcontinent on behalf of the Mughal emperor with little oversight. Now the British had recruited them to serve as intermediaries, establishing a complete monopoly on commercial and

213 Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 189. [“le vraie main que opprime les Indiens [les Anglois] se trouve masquée: Mais ces peuples ne sont pas tellement grossiers qu’ils ne sentent l’artifice dont on voudroit les abuser: une Tyrannie méthodique qui a Succédé à l’autoritaire arbitraire, l’art destructeur des monopoles perfectionné; L’altération, la corruption des sources de la confiance publique, tout cela leur fait voir assez clairement qu’ils sont courbés sous un joug encore plus dur que celui des Phantômes qu’on leur presente, la tête couronnée et les mains aux fers.”]
214 Raynal, Histoire des deux Indes, 1774 ed., 534; Raynal, Histoire des deux Indes, 1780 ed., 381-82. [“Qui auroit imaginé que cette même compagnie, changeant tout-à-coup de conduite & de système, en viendroit bientôt au point de faire regretter aux peuples du Bengale, le despotisme de leurs anciens maîtres? Cette funeste révolution n’a été que trop prompte & trop réelle. Une tyrannie méthodique a succédé à l’autorité arbitraire. Les exactions sont devenues générales & régulières; l’oppression a été continuelle & absolute. On a perfectionné l’art destructeur des monopoles; on en a inventé de nouveaux. En un mot, on a altéré, corrompu toutes les sources de la confiance, de la félicité publiques.”]
political power. A newly systematized despotism had been unleashed on the subcontinent, these authors insisted, which was far worse than Mughal arbitrary power.

Before considering the conceptual implications of this formulation, there are important questions of provenance to consider. How could this line appear in both Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens and the Histoire des deux Indes? What does the apparent appropriation of the former by the latter tell us about the circuits linking the Enlightenment in Paris and Amsterdam with colonial settings such as Pondichéry? As the comparison of these passages reveals, not only is the line exactly the same in the original French, but the key concepts identified in both passages are also virtually identical: the corruption of public trust, the use of native intermediaries, the oppression, violence, and despotism that intensifies under British rule. What, then, is the relationship between these two passages, and between their authors? There are four possibilities: (1) spontaneous generation, (2) a common source, (3) Diderot and Raynal read Cœurdoux, or (4) Cœurdoux read Diderot and Raynal.

The first possibility would require Diderot, Raynal, and Cœurdoux to arrive at the exact same formulation of this idea in precisely the same terms. Their phrase is by no means a common French expression, or even one that appears in other pre–1789 sources. Indeed, the concept of tyrannie méthode was something of an oxymoron. In classical political theory, tyranny was a lawless, capricious, arbitrary form of power emanating from a single individual.\(^{215}\) Systematizing tyranny—and thereby transforming Mughal despotism into something centralized, ordered, and consolidated—was cast by these authors as a uniquely European innovation. Additionally, there is no evidence of a common source from which the phrase derived. ARTFL databases containing all three editions of the Histoire des deux Indes, as well as other central Enlightenment texts such as Diderot’s sprawling Encyclopédie [Encyclopedia] (1751) and Voltaire’s collected works, reveal no other instances of tyrannie

métodique. Nor does this phrase appear in the 1770 edition of the *Histoire des deux Indes*, which makes reference to European “tyranny” in India but never introduces the idea of a systematized, methodical tyranny that distinguished British and Mughal rule.

This leaves us with the latter two possibilities, both of which imply that there is some deeper relationship between the content and authors of *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* and the *Histoire des deux Indes*. Given the Pondichéry Jesuits’ alienation from France after the war, the idea of Cœurdoux accessing the 1774 edition of the *Histoire des deux Indes* from Pondichéry and incorporating the line into *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* before his death in 1779 seems highly unlikely. The other possibility is that Diderot and Raynal somehow read Cœurdoux. This exchange would have taken place between 1770 and 1774, the publication year of the original *Histoire des deux Indes*, which did not contain the line, and the second edition, where the line first appeared in print, respectively. Cœurdoux could have penned the line in a letter to one of his Parisian interlocutors in the late 1760s or early 1770s—who then circulated it to the *philosophes*—and later incorporated it directly into his manuscript. Indeed, this is precisely what happened with Cœurdoux’s theory of origins: as we saw in Chapter 2, passages from Cœurdoux’s earlier correspondence with Anquetil-Duperron appear verbatim in the 1777 version of *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens*.

If the concept of *tyrannie métodique* did in fact travel in circuits linking colony and metropole, then there are two likely conduits that link Cœurdoux to Diderot and Raynal. The first is

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216 Via the University of Chicago ARTFL searchable databases: see https://artflsrv04.uchicago.edu/philologic/4.7/encyclopedie0922/, https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/raynal-search, https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/tout-voltaire. To date, the only other instances of the phrase *tyrannie métodique* that I have encountered in the primary sources seem to be after 1789 (with reference to the Terror)—pre-1789, the only instances seem to be the 1774 and 1780 *Histoire* and the 1777 Cœurdoux manuscript.

217 Compare excerpts from the 1774 and 1780 editions to the original 1770 version in Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (Amsterdam, 1770), 1:316.

Anquetil-Duperron, who sent Cœurdoux scholarly works on India published in Europe as part of their correspondence between 1768 and 1773, including Holwell’s *Interesting Historical Events* and the annals of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. Anquetil-Duperron was also interested in the nature of political power in India, publishing a monograph entitled *Législation orientale [Oriental Legislation]* (1779) that addressed the state of India under Mughal and British rule—although *tyrannie méthodique* does not appear there either—and engaged in disputes with Diderot over his translation of the *Zend-Avesta*. The other possible conduit is Desvaulx, who, as Murr notes, had both a close relationship to the Pondichéry Jesuits and a network through which to publish and reach the sphere of the *philosophes*. The 1777 copy of *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* that Desvaulx sent to Paris also passed through Amsterdam: as Murr notes, the British Library purchased it from an Amsterdam bookseller in the 1950s, though records of when the bookseller originally acquired it have since been lost.

Not unlike the spiritual and scriptural exchanges of Chapter 1, these will have to remain speculations, spectral presences haunting these two texts. Much of the relevant archive has been lost and destroyed with the sack of Pondichéry in 1761 and handover of Jesuit missions to the MEP in the late 1760s. There are no traces of this sentence or mentions of Diderot and Raynal in any of Cœurdoux’s preserved correspondence; nor is Cœurdoux mentioned by these *philosophes*—although, as we have seen in Chapter 2, rarely did they cite their Jesuit sources. Concretely, what we have is the fact that the same sentence appears in these two manuscript sources, that there was a probable

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221. See Murr, *L’Indolégie du Père Cœurdoux*, 1, n.4.

222. Indeed, AJ archivists note that there are far fewer records of Jesuits in India for the late eighteenth century than there are for the period of de Nobili and Calmette in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries due to the war and the Jesuits’ expulsion. François Dubois (archivist), email message to author, May 24, 2023.
relationship between them, and that this relationship was likely mediated by a conduit such as Anquetil-Duperron or Desvaulx.

This paucity of material information regarding the process of transmission enables a different kind of interpretive claim, one that expands upon the conclusions of Chapter 2 regarding a global Enlightenment. We do not have correspondence with which to explicitly reverse vectors of directionality between colony and metropole, as with the Cœurdoux/Anquetil-Duperron letters on the Enlightenment question of origins: even if we can establish a relationship between Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens and the Histoire des deux Indes, we cannot conclusively establish directionality or the channel of transmission. Yet these archival gaps do not preclude us from “treat[ing] metropole and colony in a single analytical field,” to draw on Stoler and Frederick Cooper’s agenda for new imperial histories—a project that evokes Conrad’s call to retrace the “transnational production of knowledge” in his article on global Enlightenment. 223

The concept of tyrannie méthodique and the relationship between these two texts enables us to situate Cœurdoux and the Pondichéry Jesuits in the broader history of revolution during this period. We might thereby globalize the “cultural transformation” of revolution that Baker describes, extending it from France and the Atlantic Ocean world—where revolution from the colonies has a richer historiography with the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution—to the Indian subcontinent. As Laurent Dubois observes of the Atlantic case, concepts from texts such as the Histoire des deux Indes often traveled between France and its Caribbean colonies through rumors, letters, and expectations. While these media did not always leave behind an archival trail, they nonetheless left an indelible mark on colonial and metropolitan political imaginaries. 224 We might extend this insight to Les mœurs et

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coutumes des Indiens in 1770s Pondichéry, thinking across the two oceans in a manner that follows the primary sources’ calls to appraise the fallout of empire in the deux Indes [two Indies].

3.4 The End of Empire?

If the repetition of a critique of “systematic tyranny” enables us to draw Pondichéry Jesuits into this global field, its contents enable us to say something more: that it contributed to the shift from premodern to modern revolution, from revolutions of India to a revolution by Indians. Diderot and Raynal’s possible appropriation of Cœurdoux suggests these three thinkers shared similar views on the nature of political despotism encapsulated in their discussion of tyrannie méthodique. There was something distinctive about how modern Europe centralized despotic power in its colonies, they maintained, which had driven the corruption of mœurs to a point of no return. As we shall see, this claim held revolutionary potential in a manner that its authors could not have fully foreseen—and that British colonialism would subsequently deny.

Both the Histoire des deux Indes and Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens affirmed that the intensification of Indians’ suffering under British tyrannie méthodique would lead them to rise up against the BEIC. In the Histoire des deux Indes, Diderot and Raynal imagine a “revolution” in India that will replace the BEIC with a supposedly more humane French regime. “The French, regarded as the liberators of India,” will inaugurate a new colonialism founded on “fair” and “flourishing” trade, upholding the principles of free commercial exchange.225 In Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens, the final paragraph—directly after tyrannie méthodique—predicts an imminent native uprising. “This state of oppression cannot endure,” Cœurdoux declared: “I dare to guarantee that the Indians are more ready than we think to wake up from their lethargy.” There were two possible outcomes. The Indians might

“come to break their chains on their own,” which would spell out “the end of other European nations in India.” Alternatively, “one of those [nations]” could “wrench” India from the BEIC. In that case, “let it remember, above all, to make the Indians forget, by its good faith, its moderation, and its humanity, the injustices, the brigandages, and the cruelty of the British.”\(^226\)

It remains to read Cœurdoux’s foreshadowing of a native uprising—and description of these two possible outcomes—vis-à-vis this conceptual field of ideas of revolution. I would submit that these final lines consider a possibility—indeed independent Indian revolution—that even the *Histoire des deux Indes* did not. Here I break with Carolina Armenteros’s reading of this passage, which situates it in a “global discourse” of “Enlightened conservatism,” likening Cœurdoux to Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), who would vehemently condemn the French Revolution of 1789 as a disruption of the “universal order of things.”\(^227\) For Armenteros, Cœurdoux’s final sentence is a thinly-veiled call for France to retake India, “free the Indians,” and restore natural order to Indian society, “prefigur[ing]” Maistre’s “counterrevolutionary” views.\(^228\)

Perhaps this account is too quick to presume that Cœurdoux’s prophesy of a native uprising was a call for the French to recolonize India. It is true that a large number of French writers during this period—from *philosophes* such as Raynal and Diderot to FEIC officials—speculated on the possibilities of a “revolution of India” that would replace British despotism with a supposedly more humane French regime. Marsh and Cross are right to remind us not to accept such condemnations of British

\(^{226}\) Cœurdoux, *Les mauvies*, 189. [“Or cet état d’oppression ne peut pas durer, j’ose garantir que les Indiens sont plus prêts que l’on ne pense de se relever de leur léthargie. S’ils viennent à briser leurs chaînes d’eux-mêmes, ç’en sera fait des autres nations Européennes dans l’inde. Si au contraire c’est une de celles-ci que arraché aux Anglois le Scéptré de l’Asie, qu’elle se Souvienne Soutout de faire oublier aux Indiens par Sa bonne foi, Sa moderation et son humanité les injustices, les brigandages, et les cruautés des Anglois.”]


\(^{228}\) Armenteros, “The Enlightened Conservatism,” 461.
“despotism” at face value, and to interrogate the self-serving ends to which French actors capitalized on the oppression of natives to develop anti-British polemics in both India and the Americas.\textsuperscript{229}

We cannot so easily reduce Cœurdoux—and this final passage of \textit{Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens}—to this position. His world had disintegrated before his eyes, as Pondichéry fell to Britain, churches were destroyed in surrounding Tamil villages, and Jesuits were stripped of their missions and spiritual authority. By 1777, having spent a career dedicated to controversies over the status of a group of socially-marginalized native converts, Cœurdoux was deeply alienated from the French state, church authorities, and the FEIC. He seemed less convinced that French colonialism was necessarily more humane than British colonialism: unlike Diderot, Raynal, and the figures Cross and Marsh survey, he identified the FEIC functionary Dupleix as the progenitor of \textit{tyrannie méthodique}, even as he argued the BEIC carried Dupleix’s strategy to its furthest extreme.\textsuperscript{230} Although he suggested another European power might establish a more humane regime in India, he also left open as an equally viable possibility the end of European power on the Indian subcontinent. The masses of marginalized Indians might launch a regeneration of their own society that differed in nature from previous “revolutions” because the nature of despotism itself had shifted from “arbitrary power” to “systematic tyranny.” This formulation is remarkably close to the idea of a conscious act undertaken by a “bitter and oppressed people” to remake their society—precisely what Baker characterizes as our modern concept of revolution.\textsuperscript{231}

In other words, Cœurdoux perhaps recognized something Diderot and Raynal did not: the end of empire in India. As we have seen in their treatment of the Bishnapore myth, Diderot and


\textsuperscript{231} See Baker, \textit{Inventing the French Revolution}, 221.
Raynal constructed ancient India as a kind of utopia, which foregrounds their utopian reimagining of “humane” colonial relations that would be ushered in by the advent of French rule in the subcontinent after the “revolution of India.” In contrast, India was not an abstraction for Cœurdoux; he was making sense of the immense political, religious, and social turbulence he had lived through in Pondichéry. There is a profound sense of loss that suffuses his work, as if to mourn the lost spirituality of ancient India. At the end of his earlier passage on samnyāsa, for instance, Cœurdoux remarked on how “this beautiful knowledge, corrupted by idolatry, degenerated into countless excesses and insensible practices,” how the “tranquil and contemplative” Indians were replaced by “insensible men.”

Cœurdoux’s mournful tone recalls Certeau’s discussion of mysticism as a “mourning, an unaccepted mourning that has become the malady of bereavement,” which emerged as a means to reconcile with the rupture between the divine and temporal spheres in the early modern period. The mystic seeks to recover the “One,” humanity’s unity with the divine, through a “radical interiority” in which they evacuate their self and dissolve into God. While Cœurdoux’s discussion of contemporary political affairs and a native uprising comes only at the very end of the manuscript, it would appear that his mournfulness and alienation—tied to his historical conditions and perhaps also to his spiritual commitments—led him to posit an analogous rupture between mythic, mystical India and its present day. In doing so, he leads us to the cusp of a “revolution by,” and writes himself and other Europeans out of the narrative arc of Indian history—a move that recalls mystical attempts to write out the self.

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232 Cœurdoux, Les mœurs, 125. [“Mais ces belles connoissances corrompues par l’Idolâtrie dégénérèrent en des excès sans nombre et en pratiques insensées... À ces contemplatifs Indiens qui se tenoient un temps considérable tranquiles et recueillis... succédèrent des hommes insensés.”]

233 Certeau, The Mystic Fable, 1-2; Certeau, “Mysticism,” 20. Certeau makes specific reference to mourning when discussing the Jesuit order in The Mystic Fable, 258.

234 On mystics’ writing out the self, see Certeau’s discussion of how “mysticism appears in paradoxical forms” in Certeau, “Mysticism,” 16. Teresa’s aforementioned autobiography from Chapter 1 provides a case-in-point.
What is more, Cœurdoux might have also contributed an idea that was central to how Diderot and Raynal came to conceptualize revolutions in France. The *Histoire des deux Indes*, as Baker argues, was central in redefining the conceptual meaning of revolution, moving between premodern “revolutions” of the two Indies brought by European contact and modern “revolution” led by colonized peoples in response to European despotism.235 This move resurfaces elsewhere in the text as Raynal turns to the French Caribbean, describing the brutality of the slave trade and positing the emergence of a Black Spartacus figure that will unleash a hellscape of “fire and brimstone” upon Europeans. The liberator emerges from the most extreme form of tyranny and dispossession—that of enslavement—as a self-possessing subject, capable of restoring the “rights of the human race” through a “revolution” ending the slave trade and European domination.236 It is a new kind of methodical, systematic, calculated despotism, *tyrannie méthodique*, that foregrounds a conscious political uprising for Diderot and Raynal—perhaps abstractly in the colonies and more imminently in France.237

We thus arrive at a very different reading of Cœurdoux’s final paragraph than that of Armenteros by reading it against Raynal and Diderot. Murr herself had speculated about conceptual parallels between *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* and the *Histoire des deux Indes* in her pioneering study of Enlightenment writings on India in the 1980s.238 Now the repeated phrase provides an empirical link to draw together these texts into a global history of the “cultural transformation” of revolution. For reasons that will not surprise the reader, the final chapter of *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* did not make it into the 1806 version that was sold to the BEIC.

237 Scholars diverge on whether Raynal’s Black Spartacus figure should be interpreted primarily as a warning to Europeans to reform and ultimately advance a “humane” colonialism, or as a direct call to action to colonized and enslaved people that contributed to the Haitian Revolution and uprisings in the Caribbean. For instance, compare Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 2nd rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Hill Press, 2015), 81-86 and Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*, 85-86. What remains firmly established is the text’s role in “revolutionizing revolution” from France.
Cœurdoux, among the last of the Pondichéry Jesuits, died in 1779. With him died the Jesuit devotional and intellectual tradition that had begun with de Nobili in 1610s Madurai. The Jesuits’ library in Pondichéry was transferred to the MEP, and it is likely amongst these rich collections of French, Sanskrit, Latin, and Tamil writings that an MEP missionary named Jean-Antoine Dubois (1765–1848) encountered Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens.239 In 1806, Dubois presented a modified version of the manuscript to the Madras Board of Directors for the BEIC under his own name. They purchased it for 2,000 pagodas—a “modest” sum of half-gold coins worth 20,000 francs—convinced that their investment would “be fully repaid by the sale of the publication, which [would] excite considerable interest.”240

Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens did not become a colonial “training manual” via a natural transition. This process required a “disabling” and “containment” of a pre-existing Jesuit intellectual and spiritual tradition that had emerged in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and took on new forms under the pressures of the mid-to-late eighteenth century.241 The development, influence, and eventual dismemberment of this tradition are encapsulated in the textual vignettes I have introduced at the beginning of each chapter: the Sanskrit devotional poem written by a French Jesuit (Calmette’s Satyavedasārasamgraham), the conversation between a Jesuit and a Brahman conceived of by a philosophe (Voltaire’s Dialogue), the sentence repeated verbatim in a lost Jesuit manuscript and a revolutionary Enlightenment text (Cœurdoux, Diderot, and Raynal’s “une tyrannie méthodique a

239 Murr, L’Indologie du Père Cœurdoux, 27.
241 I am drawing on Mrinalini Sinha’s discussion of a contingent “containment of [...] political agency” in Mrinalini Sinha, Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of Empire (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 198 and Stoler’s discussion of “disabling” as an active forgetting or “aphasia” (distinct from passive forgetting or “amnesia”) in Stoler, “Colonial Aphasia: Disabled Histories and Race in France” in Duress, 167.
succédé à l’autorité arbitraire”), and now, the purchase of a stolen version of this manuscript by BEIC officials (the “training manual”).

With Calmette’s poem, Chapter 1 followed how Jesuit claims to universality through the accommodation strategy evolved in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. Amidst religious and political crises, Cœurdoux broke from his predecessors to formulate a new “horizontal” universalism grounded in the spirituality of marginal converts and mystical communion with God. With the Dialogue, Chapter 2 examined how these ideas contributed to an Enlightenment Republic of Letters—fixated on the question of origins—to reveal dialectics of religion and secularization, metropole and colony, and experience and fantasy at the crux of Enlightenment universalism. With the repeated line in Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens and the Histoire des deux Indes, Chapter 3 argued that Cœurdoux’s concept of tyrannie méthodique figures in the conceptual history of revolution by rupturing India from its mythic, mystical past. Now, with the sale of Cœurdoux’s manuscript to the BEIC, the epilogue proposes to sketch how this Enlightenment and revolutionary-era Jesuit text became a colonial and Orientalist one.

By 1806, the political, religious, and intellectual worlds of India and Europe had been radically reconfigured by war and revolution. British Madras had expanded its powers considerably, occupying French Pondichéry in 1761-65, 1778-83, 1793–1802, and 1803–16, and annexing the neighboring Sultanate of Mysore in 1799. As the surrounding territories changed hands, so too did the Catholic missions. Alongside the Jesuits’ library, in 1809, the MEP inherited the responsibility of overseeing the Carmelite convent that Cœurdoux had founded in 1748.242 There are no records of how the nuns or other native converts adapted to this change in their spiritual direction, although current members of the convent believe that it was during this period that their predecessors were instructed to don habits in lieu of the saris that had previously been permitted under the Jesuits’ accommodation strategy.243

242 Le Carmel de Pondichéry, 49.
243 Mary Gratia de Jésus, interview by the author.
France, meanwhile, was in the throes of war and revolution. BEIC records detailing the purchase of the manuscript note repeatedly how Dubois came to India seeking “refuge” from the “massacres of the French Revolution,” having narrowly escaped the outbreak of the Terror in 1793.\footnote{244}{“Purchase of the Abbé Dubois’s Manuscript,” IOR/F/4/275/6154, p.2, 17.} This was the period of upheaval during which the 1777 copy of Cœurdoux’s manuscript that Desvaulx sent to Paris was lost—and the cultural and political transformation that his concept of \textit{tyrannie méthodique} would seem to have prefigured. Dubois spent the majority of his Indian career within British territories. After disembarking in Pondichéry, he moved to Madras and later to Mysore after the sultanate fell under British occupation. He maintained warm relations with the Madras Board of Directors of the BEIC throughout his time in India. They referred to him as a “gentleman of irreproachable character,” providing annual donations to support his Catholic chapels in Mysore and later financing his voyage back to Europe in 1823.\footnote{245}{“Annual Donation of Rs. 300 for the Expenses of the Catholic Chapels in Mysore,” January 19, 1821, IOR/F/4/781/21071, BL; “Advance of Rs. 1500 made on account of the Abbé Dubois’ passage to England conforming to Court’s orders, and his intended departure, at his request, officially announced to the Court,” January 14, 1823, IOR/F/4/726/19715, BL. Dubois would serve in the MEP’s Paris headquarters until his death in 1848.}

\begin{figure}[h!]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure4_1}
\caption{A nineteenth-century portrait of Dubois. There are no surviving depictions of Cœurdoux.\footnote{246}{“Depiction of Jean-Antoine Dubois (1766–1848),” lithograph, n.d. Institut de Recherche France-Asie (IRFA).}}
\end{figure}
But what they most admired him for was the manuscript, the title of which they loosely translated in English as *Hindoo Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies*. Among those involved in the 1806 purchase was Lord William Bentinck (1774–1839), then Governor-General of British Madras. Bentinck would later be known for imposing the first legal ban on widow-burning—as described in Jesuit *Lettres édifiantes* and deplored by Montesquieu and Voltaire—with the Bengal Sati Regulation of 1829, and for serving as the first Governor-General of British India from 1834 to 1835. His belief in empire as a means of moral and material improvement for backwards native subjects was shaped by British liberal imperialists such as James Mill (1773–1836), author of the influential *History of British India* (1817) that condemned Voltaire, the Jesuits, and a host of other eighteenth-century European writers for falling prey to the “fable” of a great Indian past. Indians had always been “rude and irrational,” Mill argued; the British were destined to civilize them.

A decade earlier, a much younger Bentinck endorsed the purchase of Cœurdoux’s stolen manuscript, a text he believed to be authored by Dubois. As he explained to his colleagues,

> Europeans generally know little or nothing of the customs and manners of the Hindus [...] We understand very little of their language. They perhaps know more of ours [...] We do not, we cannot, associate with the natives. We cannot see them in their houses and with their families. [...] we are in fact strangers in the land. [...] I am of the opinion that, in a political point of view, the information which the work of the Abbé Dubois has to impart might be of the greatest benefit in aiding the servants of the Government in conducting themselves more in unison with the customs and prejudices of the natives. [emphasis mine]

For all Mill’s certainty of the backwardness of Indians, Bentinck was wracked with anxieties that he did not understand them. His comments recall a number of themes that arise frequently in new imperial histories: the epistemic anxieties of early colonial knowledge, the sense of being “not at home in

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249 William Bentinck quoted in Dubois, *Description of the Character*, vii-viii.
empire,” the turn to the intimate to understand the workings of colonial power.\textsuperscript{250} Here is the most powerful British official in southern India telling his colleagues how \textit{little} they know of their native subjects. The British are “strangers” groping their way through unfamiliar territory, surrounded by natives who might understand them better than they understand the natives.

Somehow, the manuscript they had purchased from Dubois was supposed to quell these anxieties, restoring epistemic and political order to a world of confusion. Yet the work from which it derived, \textit{Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens}, was itself produced in worlds fraught with anxiety and instability. As we saw in preceding chapters, the text emerged out of a longer Jesuit tradition that grappled with a series of tensions in the second half of the eighteenth century: between scriptural exchanges with Brahmans and spiritual exchanges with low-caste and female converts, between the \textit{philosophes’} appropriations of Jesuit scholarship and Jesuit attempts to write back and draw Hindus back onto Biblical time, between admiration for the stability of ancient India and horror at the revolutions and oppression wrought by Mughal and European invaders. When considered in these contexts, the original manuscript would seem far better suited to reflecting Bentinck’s anxieties than to fulfilling his desire for certainty and order.

How was \textit{Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens} so effectively assimilated into the nineteenth-century British administration? This epilogue will sketch an answer, arguing that the text’s resignification resulted not only from surface-level revisions to its content—which were surprisingly limited—but also from a reconfiguration of the conceptual fields of European Indology. Mysticism was recast as irrational, passive, and essentially Indian, and the manuscript’s original political, philosophical, and religious agendas were stripped away. This argument draws on Certeau’s formulations of the “formality of practice” and the “mystic fable.” Near-identical versions of the same

text took on radically different valences based on the contexts in which they were read and redeployed. As we shall see, there was a conceptual gulf separating 1777 Pondichéry and 1806 Madras. The “othering” of the mystic in the early modern church had been mapped onto the “othering” of the colonized native subject, ushering in an era of high Orientalism.

4.1 A Partial Dismemberment

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the appropriation of the manuscript is not how much of its contents Dubois and the BEIC changed, but how little. There is an intricate nineteenth-century publication history of the stolen manuscript, which Jyoti Mohan discusses at some length.251 Most relevant to this investigation is the chain of events between the BEIC’s purchase of Dubois’s version of the manuscript in 1806 and their publication of it 1817. Officials initially arranged for Lieutenant John Harvey (1778–1852), a Persian interpreter in Mysore, to translate it to English. They later decided that publication would proceed “in a more satisfactory manner” in Britain, and sent the manuscript to BEIC’s London headquarters in 1809 after permitting Dubois to make “corrections” to its content.252 There, it was translated by “a private individual” supervised by the BEIC and published as Description of the Character, Manners, and Customs of the People of India; and of Their Institutions, Religious and Civil in 1817—the same year Mill published the History of British India.253 Dubois sent additional revisions of the text to the BEIC between 1820 and 1822, and published a French version in 1825 after his return to Paris.254

253 “Transmission to England of certain corrections and additions to the Abbé Jean Dubois work on the people of India,” IOR/F/4/577/14059, p.272, BL.
Since this thesis is principally concerned with the deployment of Cœurdoux’s manuscript in the British colonial context, I draw upon the 1817 publication to develop a textual comparison to the 1777 version of the manuscript, setting aside Dubois’s 1825 version and the original French version purchased in 1806 (which remains inaccessible). In comparing these two texts, three modifications stand out as particularly significant. The first should not surprise us: Cœurdoux’s final chapter, “Tableau de l’Indostan,” is entirely gone. Dubois himself had likely removed this chapter, lest he offend his buyers—on whom he was dependent financially—by charging them with *tyrannie méthodique*.255

The second change is more subtle. In the penultimate chapter dedicated to the Indian military, there was now a prefatory note in which the author discussed the apparent “inconsisten[cy]” between his spiritual commitments and the political subject matter of the chapter. “My profession will appear to disqualify me from giving a full or satisfactory account of what relates to the subject of war,” wrote Dubois in the BEIC version. Nonetheless, the allusion to war in the sacred Hindu texts, fables, icons, and monuments authorized him to offer “a few remarks on that subject.” He proceeded to follow the Cœurdoux manuscript in discussing the changes that have taken place between antiquity and “modern” times.256

Finally, the third modification is a minor—but revealing—addition to the passage on *samnyāsa* [ascetic retreat from the world], discussed in Chapter 1. For the most part, the passage in the BEIC-Dubois version remained virtually identical to Cœurdoux’s. It introduced *sālokiam, sāmīpiam, sārūpium, and sāyogiam*, the four Sanskrit terms from the *Bhāgavata* that Cœurdoux had invoked to describe the soul’s dissolution into God. It then drew the same parallel between Hindu and Christian forms of mysticism: “I am disposed to think that, upon a candid consideration of what we have now before us, our mystical teachers, and such of us as devote ourselves to a contemplative life, ought not be

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256 Dubois, *Description of the Character*, 530.
scandalized by such doctrine.” The minor addition occurs at the end of the chapter. After decrying how these contemplative practices had been lost upon present-day Brahmans, as Cœurdoux had, the BEIC-Dubois version added a final sentence not present in Cœurdoux’s text: “but we have often had occasion to remark that it is the natural disposition of the Hindus neither to embrace nor to follow up any thing that does not border on the wonderful.” Here are the systematic binaries and essentialisms that characterize nineteenth-century Orientalist portrayals of India. The Indians’ very nature is fantastical and irrational; “we,” the rational European observer, are the ones capable of knowing it.

Taken together, these three modifications speak volumes for the dismemberment of a manuscript and of the intellectual and devotional tradition it represented. The amputation of the final chapter and the newly-added preface to the penultimate chapter stripped the manuscript’s subject matter of its political potential. Ancient India and contemporary Indians were passive and apolitical, and any kind of uprising against tyrannie méthodique was rendered unimaginable. While we cannot know which of these changes were enforced by British officials as opposed to by Dubois himself, the following BEIC record from c.1806–9 provides valuable insight into how officials viewed the text:

It may have occurred to his Lordship [Bentinck] that although absolutely divested of all political matter, [the manuscript] contains a variety of opinions, for example on the utility of sub-division of Castes, on the origin of the Hindoo System, &c. &c., which, like all speculative opinions, are liable to be questioned, & may perhaps be safely left to find their own supporters & opponents, the public interests having only to do with the facts... [emphasis mine]

To this end, while the BEIC-Dubois version did not remove chapters on the origins of Brahmans, it added another prefatory note, as if to discount the author’s theory: “the true origin of the Brahmans... is not distinctly known; and we are therefore reduced to fables or mere conjecture.” Colonial Indology would become a modern science comprised of established “facts” about Indian “manners and

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258 Dubois, Description of the Character, 361.
260 Dubois, Description of the Character, 40-42.
customs,” rather than “speculations” about the question of origins—not to mention about the fallout of present-day colonial oppression.

4.2 Mysticism at a Crossroads

Yet these modifications to the text do not tell us the full story, which becomes abundantly clear when we return to the near-identical passages on samnyāsa in the 1777 and 1817 versions. In the 1777 manuscript, this passage foregrounded a latter-day Jesuit claim to the universal that emphasized the compatibility of the mystical elements of Hindu and Christian theology. As we have seen in Chapter 1, this claim drew together the rational and transrational elements of Indian spirituality to formulate a new “horizontal” universalism, one that could draw marginalized native converts such as the nuns into the spiritual regeneration of society. In the 1817 manuscript, this passage instead served to “other” the Indians by framing their spirituality as fantastical, and thereby entrenched Orientalist binaries between the irrational native and the rational European subject. Something had changed, not in the manuscript, but in the conceptual fields within which it was deployed and read. Mysticism had taken on a radically different cast.

To see how this change took place, we need only turn to William Jones (1746–94), the British Indologist whose theory of linguistic origins so closely resembled Cœurdoux’s. While Edward Said frames Jones as a “pioneer” of Orientalism, Patterson reminds us that we must also see him as the inheritor of the legacies of eighteenth-century European Indology.²⁶¹ Initially trained at Oxford in Latin, Greek, Persian, Arabic, and a range of other languages, Jones soon garnered acclaim for his translations of Persian poetry and was elected to London’s exclusive Literary Club in 1773. He struck

up a friendship with a fellow member, the philosopher and parliamentarian Edmund Burke (1729–97), whose support enabled him to secure a judgeship in BEIC-held Bengal in 1783.262

![Figure 4.2: A plaque displayed at Oxford depicting Jones in conversation with Brahmans and Maulvis (Muslim scholars). The caption reads, “he formed a digest of Hindu and Mohammedan Laws.”](https://oxfordandempire.web.ox.ac.uk/article/sir-william-jones)

It was this turn of events that led Jones to take up Sanskrit. Rather than imposing a uniform legal code on Indian inhabitants, British officials set up a system of personal status laws that purported to preserve native “manners and customs”—a phrase that evokes Cœurdoux’s *mœurs et coutumes.* Cases involving Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, and other Indians were to be adjudicated based on the laws of their religious communities, and BEIC jurists such as Jones were tasked with codifying and interpreting these religious laws in collaboration with native scholars. With his background in Arabic and Persian, Jones could access the Qur’an, Mughal legal tracts, and other Islamic sources, but not the Hindu legal tracts written in Sanskrit. He commissioned local Brahmans to teach him Sanskrit and the content of the *Dharmaśāstras*, the same ethical and legal codes that Śivadharma/Bonifacio

taught de Nobili in seventeenth-century Madurai. Jones’s ultimate goal was to compile a “Digest of Indian laws,” although he died before entirely completing this project.

The “immediate advantage” of studying Sanskrit convinced Jones of a larger project: “bringing to light many useful and interesting tracts” in Sanskrit and other Indian languages that might otherwise lie “concealed” or “irrecoverably perish.” To this end, he established the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784. During his third annual discourse in 1786, he laid out his theory of linguistic origins. As Jones explained, “the Sanscrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity.” It followed, then, that they “sprung from some common source.”

This statement—now accepted as the first iteration of the Proto-Indo-European language theory—made Jones’s name in the history of philology and Orientalism. However, as we have seen, Cœurdoux advanced a similar theory in his 1771 letter to Anquetil-Duperron, which likewise analyzed similarities between Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit to posit a common origin. Cœurdoux did not have the means to publish himself, and Anquetil-Duperron only published the letter in the 1790s after Jones’s theory had become established. That Cœurdoux arrived at nearly the same theory some twenty years prior to Jones has been either dismissed by most histories of Orientalism or treated as a curious instance of spontaneous generation. For instance, Thomas Trautmann writes that “if Jones had not played the role he did in the discovery of the Indo-European languages, someone else would have

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played it.” Describing Cœurdoux’s “not quite as ‘modern’” theory, Trautmann concludes that “someone else did, in some measure.” 268

I wish to take this comparison of Cœurdoux and Jones in a different direction—one that emphasizes historical contingency as opposed to necessity. The parallels between Cœurdoux and Jones’s writings on India run deeper than external resemblances between their theories on the question of origins. Here, I draw on Patterson’s efforts to situate Jones in the longer history of British Indology dating to 1760s writers such as Holwell, and on Chapter 1’s endeavor to situate Cœurdoux in the longer history of Jesuit Indology beginning with de Nobili in the 1610s. If we reconstruct these genealogies, it becomes clear that both figures represent a departure from the traditions from which they had emerged: they both represent a mystical turn, with diametrically opposed political implications.

Cœurdoux’s mystical turn, as we have seen in Chapter 1, came amidst the spiritual and temporal pressures of the Malabar Rites Controversy. Earlier Jesuits’ accommodation strategy had focused on the ethical and legal codes that ordered the Indian civil sphere, arguing that these rational structures—and the Brahman scholars who upheld them—could be assimilated into Christianity. With his invocation of the four Sanskrit terms from the Bhāgavata, Cœurdoux introduced a new element into their accommodation strategy by arguing for the compatibility of mystical and devotional elements of Hinduism and Christianity.

Jones’s mystical turn, Patterson argues, came at the tail end of 1760s–70s British Indology. Earlier British Indologists were likewise convinced of a rational foundation to Indian knowledge: Holwell’s Interesting Historical Events, used by Voltaire to wrench universalism from Biblical time and posit a pre-Christian monotheism, offers a case in point. While Jones would also seek out the philosophical structures underpinning Hinduism, Patterson notes that his emphasis lay on “the

mystical and sublime.” A number of factors contributed to this shift. Jones’s background in literary Persian made him interested in affinities between the mysticism of Sufism and vedānta in the Islamic and Hindu traditions. Moreover, his ties to Burke, that great theorist of the sublime, furnished him with a conceptual vocabulary with which to describe the “boundless imagination of the Vedānti [followers of vedānta] and Sufi theologians.”

What is more, Jones’s mystical turn was manifested in a number of ways that appear to resemble Cœurdoux’s: he, too, drew on the Bhāgavata and broader bhakti movement to liken Hindu and Christian forms of mysticism. In a 1791 address to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, he offered the following commentary on a passage from the Christian mystical theologian and mathematician Isaac Barrow (1630–77):

Now this passage from Barrow (which borders, I admit, on quietism and enthusiastic devotion) differs only from the mystical theology from the Sufis and Yógis, as the flowers and fruits of Europe differ in scent and flavour from those of Asia... the same strain... would rise up in the odes of Spenser... [as] the raptures of Masnawi, and the mysteries of the Bhāgavat.

In a single line, Jones draws together the mystical elements of Hindu, Muslim, and Christian theology: the poems of early modern Christian mystics Barrow and Edmund Spenser (1552/3–99), the thirteenth-century poem Magnāvī-e ma’navī by Sufi poet and mystical theologian Rūmī (1207–73), the tenth-century Hindu Bhāgavata.

Here is Jones citing the same Sanskrit source-text as Cœurdoux and making the same parallel between Hindu and Christian mysticism. Yet the cast of mysticism has shifted, which we see in his cautionary parenthetical. “Enthusiasm,” a pejorative in eighteenth-century English, suggested an

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269 Patterson, Religion, Enlightenment, and Empire, 293.
individual’s behavior transgressed the bounds of reason and bordered on excesses of the imagination, while “quietism” signaled complete passivity.273 For Jones, mysticism was irrational and passive, not rational and active. This portrayal evokes early modern condemnations of mysticism made by figures ranging from Bossuet to Voltaire, and Jones’s own theological commitments. Patterson argues that Jones adhered to rational dissent, a strand of protestant Christianity based on accessing God through one’s rational faculties.274 In this framework, the mystic’s abdication of their rational faculties would be highly suspect.

Yet Jones took this chain of associations one step further by identifying mysticism with the Sufis and Hindus of the so-called Orient: the few premodern Christians who espoused mystical theology wrote with “a glow of expression perfectly oriental.”275 A double-binary emerged, linking the rational, active, and European, on the one hand, in opposition to the irrational, passive, mystical and Oriental, on the other. As Jones stated to the Asiatic Society, “reason and taste are the great prerogatives of European minds, while Asiatics have soared to loftier heights in the sphere of imagination.”276

His categories of reason, taste, and imagination are likely drawn from Burke, whom Jones cited as a key literary and philosophical influence.277 In A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), Burke explained that in the imagination, “pleasure is perceived from [identifying] resemblance,” which was why “Homer and the oriental writers” often produce “admirable” similitudes.278 These examples suggested an affinity between imagination and a timeless

274 On Jones’s affinity for rational dissent, see Patterson, Religion, Enlightenment, and Empire, 269-81.
278 Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, 17-18.
Orient, prefiguring Jones’s comparison of European and “Asiatick” minds. Later, Burke introduced the
sublime as that which excited “the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling,” at once
terrible, mystical, and horrifying.279 The French Revolution of 1789 and Terror of 1793–94 were
among Burke’s chief examples; but his “leading moral example of the sublime,” Sara Suleri Goodyear
argues, was India.280

A fuller discussion of Burke’s relationship to Jones and writings on India, the French
Revolution, and the sublime casts beyond the scope of this thesis; certainly Burke’s positions cannot be
collapsed to Jones’s, and their friendship ended in the 1790s over their politics on India.281 For our
purposes, it is worth noting that Jones takes Burke’s association of the Orient with the imagination
and sublime and recasts it in this double-binary. In Jones’s writings, the sublime and mystical were
excesses of the imagination that cannot be reconciled with reason, and they were identified with the
very essence of India—explaining the statement regarding Indians’ “natural” propensity for the
“wonderful” (read: mystical, sublime) added to the 1817 BEIC-Dubois version of the manuscript. It
was for the rational British administrators to preserve Indian “manners and customs” through a system
of colonial law, while sequestering the mystical elements of Indian spirituality to apolitical scholarly
endeavors such as the Asiatic Society.

This stands in sharp contrast to Cœurdoux’s mystical turn. Mysticism and reason were
complementary aspects of his intellectual and devotional tradition as a Jesuit, rather than
mutually-exclusive elements of a binary.282 Moreover, there was no fixed mystical essence of Indian
“manners and customs” that could be preserved in colonial law—Indian mœurs had already been
irrevocably corrupted by “revolutions” rupturing contemporary India from its ancient past. As we saw

279 Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, 36.
the Enquiry cite the “late unfortunate regicide in France”; see Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, 36.
282 On the relationship between mysticism and erudition in Jesuit thought, see Certeau, The Mystic Fable, 241-60.
in Chapter 3, this rupture enables a shift from the question of origins to the conceptual history of revolution, as Cœurdoux suggested that Indians would recognize and oppose Britain’s *tyrannie méthodique* in an uprising that might drive European power out of the subcontinent altogether.\footnote{283} Jones never made this shift.\footnote{284} For him, there was no rupture: India was as it always had been, and Indian spirituality was inherently passive and apolitical.

It is within this conceptual framework that we can grasp what had changed between the 1777 Cœurdoux manuscript and the 1817 BEIC-Dubois version. Because mysticism was cast as irrational and passive, and because these qualities were essentialized, BEIC officials could claim that the 1817 version was “divested of all political matter” and preserve much of the original text while totally shifting its meaning. By contrasting Cœurdoux’s and Jones’s mystical turns, we see the contingency to this shift. It is not that Cœurdoux would have necessarily generated the same ideas as Jones, but rather that a mystical turn need not have entrenched colonial power. Mysticism was at a crossroads in late eighteenth century Indology. One path led to a rupture between ancient and modern and spiritual regeneration from the margins of society; the other entrenched Orientalist binaries and colonial domination. It was after this contingent shift to the second path, as Cœurdoux’s tradition was effaced and Jones’s was enshrined in colonial law, that the 1817 manuscript could fulfill Bentinck’s political imperative of liberal imperialism.

\footnote{283} On temporal rupture and revolution, see the discussion of a revolutionary “mythic present” with “no history”—i.e., a total rupture from the past—in Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 26-27.

\footnote{284} Indeed, Griggs observes that what Trautmann calls Jones’s “mosaic ethnology” resembles eighteenth-century universal histories that sought to draw humanity into Biblical time—i.e., the same Enlightenment question of origins. See Griggs, “Universal History,” 246, n82 and Thomas Trautmann, “The Mosaic Ethnology of Asiatick Jones,” in *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 28-61.
4.3 Genealogies of a Fantasy

We are left, then, with the genealogy of a European fantasy of India—a fantasy entwining the spirituality, antiquity, and political conditions of Indians that was eventually codified into a regime of colonial law.\textsuperscript{285} In arguing that Pondichéry Jesuits such as Cœurdoux were crucial sources for Enlightenment *philosophes* and BEIC officials and jurists, I show that understanding the transition between the intellectual categories of Enlightenment and empire requires that we seriously grapple with the devotional, social, and political commitments of these missionaries and of the natives they encountered. The Malabar and Chinese rites controversies, the Jesuits’ expulsion and suppression, France’s defeat in the Seven Years’ War—all of these contexts and experiences must be brought to bear on the fantasy in question.

Moreover, I have argued that Pondichéry Jesuits represent more than sources of raw material for *philosophes* and Orientalists. Their endeavors signal an alternative genealogy, a path not taken, a mystical turn that gave rise not to cultural essentialisms and political domination, but to the prospect of spiritual regeneration from the margins of society, perhaps even of uprisings and revolutions that could undo the foundations of European power on the Indian subcontinent. Cœurdoux’s theory of origins and discussion of *tyrannie méthodique*, and the manner in which his writings traveled in circuits linking India, Europe, and the Americas, make clear that these ideas had global reverberations and carried radical political and philosophical potential. If the terminus of the story is the crystallization of Orientalist binaries between Europe and its colonized native subject, then the Pondichéry Jesuits remind us—to borrow Mrinalini Sinha’s formulation—that this system of domination was “a historical turn that need not have been.”\textsuperscript{286}


\textsuperscript{286} Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*, 197.
Historiographically, this thesis has approached Cœurdoux and these latter-day Pondichéry Jesuits as a test case not only to intervene in three literatures—on early modern Jesuit missions, Enlightenment and revolutionary political culture, and knowledge-production in colonial India—but also to bring them in dialogue around an understudied source-base to generate new lines of inquiry. Both recent scholarship on the Enlightenment and new imperial histories appear to have a critical intervention in common: exposing the instability of what was originally construed to be a stable, coherent, and definitively European body of knowledge unilaterally imposed on the rest of the world, whether in arguments for a doubleness in Enlightenment views on commerce and imperial expansion (progress/decline, certainty/anxiety) or in arguments for the epistemic anxieties that underpin colonial knowledge.287

The writings of Pondichéry Jesuits from their embattled position in the “imperial meridian” suggests that these insights might be drawn together to investigate the transition period between Enlightenment and empire. These sources allow us to globalize not only Enlightenment knowledge-production, as Conrad has called for, but also the currents of revolutionary thought extending between France, the Americas, and India. Moreover, while this thesis follows Patterson’s interventions in examining European understandings of Indian religion during this transition period, it introduces a new element by focusing on French Jesuit missionary writings during the long eighteenth century as opposed to BEIC writings from the 1760s–70s. In drawing on these missionary texts, I seek to relate eighteenth- and nineteenth-century developments to early modern forms of

missionary and native knowledge that predated the *philosophes*, Anglo-French rivalries, and entrenchment of the BEIC.

Little has been written on Pondichéry Jesuits or *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens* itself, beyond the aforementioned volume by Murr, article by Armenteros, and brief discussions in histories of Orientalism by scholars such as Nicholas Dirks and Thomas Trautmann. I have already highlighted where my readings of the manuscript diverged from these scholars in preceding chapters. The more fundamental departure is in how I have proposed to read this text—not as an isolated manuscript, nor as an expository footnote to the histories of Enlightenment or Orientalist discourse, but as part of a corpus of texts that linked the worlds of Pondichéry Jesuit missions, Enlightenment and revolutionary France, and British India. Alongside *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens*, this corpus includes letters, poems, diaries, published works of Enlightenment philosophy and colonial Indology, sacred Hindu texts, and unpublished Jesuit and Carmelite histories.

I have sought to gather and read these texts not only for their content, but for the spiritual, political, and cultural work they did in these worlds—worlds that lie effaced, obscured, and forgotten—and for what they tell us about the circuits that linked them. Here, I have drawn on Certeau’s “formality of practice,” an operation that requires historians to attend both to the *contents* of texts and to the *contexts* in which they are deployed and read. To that end, this thesis has offered two kinds of readings of these texts. Certain readings were expressly textual, following references in a text to locate its source texts and thereby reconstruct encounters and circuits. Other readings were contextual, relating the contents (and absences) in a text to what we know of the historical actors involved, from Jesuits, *philosophes*, and colonial officials to the spectral figures of native interlocutors and converts. Indeed, it seems that this was the project Murr envisioned when she initially discovered the

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Our analysis leads us to our own limit,” she noted at the end of her volume of commentary on *Les mœurs et coutumes des Indiens*: “however rich an isolated work may be, its meaning and scope can only be given through the study of representativeness within the various populations of texts to which... it belongs.” She died in 2002 without entirely completing this project. This thesis is indebted to her exhaustive forensic work that established Cœurdoux’s authorship of the text, which provided the missing empirical link that was my point of departure.

The question remains: why piece together the fragments of a forgotten, dismembered intellectual and devotional tradition? Why tell a French Jesuit story of European knowledge of India when it was the BEIC that ultimately prevailed? As I have endeavored to show in the preceding chapters, Pondichéry Jesuits demonstrate to us that there were alternative configurations of the India/Europe encounter that predated European colonial power and persisted even as it grew entrenched—configurations that privileged mystical theology, grappled with social marginality, posited a radical transformation of *mœurs*, and foresaw an uprising against systematized despotism. The point is not to suggest that these views were greatly superior to those of other Europeans, or that they accurately represented the beliefs and experiences of natives. Rather, following Cooper, the point is to deploy historical analysis “not to commend one kind of politics or condemn another but to spell out the range of possibilities,” [emphasis mine] a project that seems as critical for this eighteenth century transition period as it is for the twentieth-century nationalist struggles that Cooper surveys.

In other words, forgetting the Pondichéry Jesuits’ role in Enlightenment and early colonial knowledge-production does not just obscure a curious history. It forecloses possibilities for how to relate Enlightenment and empire, spirituality and political culture, and colonial experience and intellectual categories in ways that do not result in Orientalist binaries and colonial domination. How

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291 Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 232.
are we to understand the manner in which nationalists, reformers, mystics, missionaries, feminists, and a host of other European and Indian actors called upon spirituality to remake their political and social order in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries if we ignore alternatives that existed while this order was crystallizing in the century prior? The lost manuscript and unmasked missionary offer a means to restore this world of possibility that was denied under colonial power.

292 A fuller discussion of nineteenth- and twentieth-century resonances, of course, casts beyond the scope of this thesis. As just one example, see the discussion of how nineteenth-century Hindu and Baha’i universalisms that “destabilized the very categories of East and West” a century later in Ruth Harris, “Vivekananda, Sarah Farmer, and Global Spiritual Transformations in the fin-de-siècle,” *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 2 (2019): 179-80.
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