

Community Profile of Primary Education in Madras Presidency in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Part II: 1885–1935

Indian Historical Review

46(1) 150–166, 2019

© 2018 ICHR

Reprints and permissions:

in.sagepub.com/journals-permissions-india

DOI: 10.1177/0376983617747993

journals.sagepub.com/home/ihr



Probal Roy Chowdhury¹

Abstract

In the second part of this article, we discuss the changing community profile of boys studying in primary schools in Madras Presidency during the period 1885–1935. From the annual reports of the Department of Public Instruction in Madras Presidency (RDPI), we compile the community profile of boys under instruction in the Presidency of Madras for the years 1889–90, 1895–96, 1899–1900, 1905–06, 1920–21 and 1934–35, and compare these trends with the community profile of boys studying under the indigenous education system in ca. 1825 and also under the governmental education system during the nineteenth century. Since the reports of the DPI provide us only with the aggregate data on the levels of enrolment of Vaisyas and Sudras as also of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), a nuanced understanding of the educational deprivations suffered by various communities can be arrived at only from the Census data on literacy. For this purpose, we also present a detailed analysis of the data on the literacy of selected communities as reported in the Census of 1921.

Keywords

Primary schools in Madras Presidency, community profile of boys studying in schools, levels of male literacy achieved by different communities, Mahatma Gandhi

¹ Assistant Professor (Senior Grade), Amrita Darshanam International Centre, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham (Deemed University), Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

Corresponding author:

Probal Roy Chowdhury, Assistant Professor (Senior Grade), Amrita Darshanam International Centre, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham (Deemed University), Coimbatore 641112, Tamil Nadu, India.

E-mail: rc_probal@cb.amrita.edu

Introduction

In Part I of this article, we have discussed the community profile of boys studying under the indigenous education system as per the survey conducted in the Madras Presidency during 1822–25 and compared it with the community profile of boys studying in primary schools of the new English education system during the period 1861–85. In this part, we shall consider the community profile of boys studying in primary schools in Madras Presidency during the period 1891–1935.

At the outset, it may be mentioned that, after the decade of 1881–90, the annual reports of the Department of Public Instruction in Madras Presidency (RDPI) do not present any district-level data on the community profile of students undergoing instruction in the Presidency. They do, however, give the community profile of students studying at different levels in the Presidency as a whole. This format of annual reporting continued till the end of 1930s. Based on these reports, we have compiled the aggregate community profile of boys studying in primary schools, in Madras Presidency as a whole, for some selected years during the period 1891–1935. These will be compared with the community profile of students studying under the indigenous education system as well as the later governmental education system during the nineteenth century.

Firstly, a few remarks are in order regarding the various categories under which the community profiles are presented in the annual reports of the Department of Public Instruction during 1891–1935. The RDPI volumes for the years 1895–96 and 1899–1900 present the profile of students under the following categories: ‘Europeans and Eurasians’,² ‘Native Christians’, ‘Muhammadans’, ‘Hindus–Brahmans’, ‘Non-Brahman Caste Hindus’,³ ‘Hindus–Panchamas’, ‘Aborigines’ and ‘Others’. Here, it may be noted that the earlier category of ‘Hindus–Others’, used in the reports of the 1880s, has now been split into ‘Panchamas’ and ‘Aborigines’—which may be taken to roughly correspond to present-day Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), respectively.

The annual reports for the years 1904–05, 1921–22 and 1934–35 also use the same categories as above, except for the separate mention of ‘Buddhists’ and ‘Parsis’, who had been included among ‘Others’ in the earlier reports. The annual reports for the years 1921–22 and 1934–35 make use of the categories ‘Europeans and Anglo-Indians’ and ‘Indian Christians’ instead of ‘Europeans and Eurasians’ and ‘Native Christians’, respectively. Further, in place of the category ‘Panchamas’, the reports of 1921–22 and 1934–35 use the categories ‘Adi-Dravida cum Adi-Andhra’ and ‘Depressed Classes’, respectively. While the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) reports placed the ‘Aborigines’ outside of the Hindu fold during this entire period, they have been included within the Hindu category in the tabulations presented in this article.⁴ Table 1

² The RDPI annual report for 1899–1900 mentions only ‘Europeans’.

³ After the 1890s, the reports of DPI explicitly use the category ‘Non-Brahman Caste Hindus’ instead of the category ‘Vaisyas and Sudras’ employed in the reports of the 1880s. As was mentioned in Part I of this article, this scheme of broad categories, under which the information regarding the community profile of students was compiled in the DPI reports, happens to be a typical instance of the British imperial strategy of dividing the so-called caste Hindu society into two groups: ‘Brahmins’ and ‘Non-Brahmins’.

⁴ As was noted in Part I, the British policy of classifying the SCs and the STs outside of the Hindu fold, at various times in the Census and other official records, was a part of the imperial strategy of dividing the majority Hindu society and also to promote conversion away from the majority religion.

Table 1. Concordance between the Categories Used in the Annual Reports of DPI during 1881–1935

Categories Used in this Thesis	Categories Used in the Annual Reports of the Department of Public Instruction						
	1884–85	1889–90	1895–96	1899–1900	1904–05	1921–22	1934–35
Brahmanas	Hindu—Brahmans	Hindu—Brahmans	Hindu—Brahmans	Hindu—Brahmans	Hindu—Brahmans	Hindu—Brahmans	Hindu—Brahmans
Vaisyas and Sudras	Hindu—Vaisyas and Sudras	Hindu—Vaisyas and Sudras	Non-Brahman Caste Hindu	Non-Brahman Caste Hindu	Non-Brahman Caste Hindu	Non-Brahman Caste Hindu	Non-Brahman Caste Hindu
Scheduled Castes (SCs)			Hindu—Panchamas	Hindu—Panchamas	Hindu—Panchamas	Adi-Dravida cum Adi-Andhra	Hindu—Depressed Classes
Scheduled Tribes (STs)			Aborigines	Aborigines	Aborigines	Aborigines	Aborigines
SCs & STs	Hindu—Others	Hindu—Others					
Hindu Total							
Muslims	Muhammadans	Muhammadans	Muhammadans	Muhammadans	Muhammadans	Muhammadans	Muhammadans
Native Christians	Native Christians	Native Christians	Native Christians	Native Christians	Native Christians	Indian Christians	Indian Christians
Europeans and Eurasians	Europeans and Eurasians	Europeans and Eurasians	Europeans and Eurasians	Europeans and Eurasians	Europeans and Eurasians	Europeans and Anglo-Indians	Europeans and Anglo-Indians
Others	Others	Others	Others	Others	Others + Parsis	Others + Parsis + Buddhists	Others + Parsis + Buddhists
Grand Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total

Sources: Report of the Department of Public Instruction in Madras Presidency (hereafter RDPI) 1884–85, Appendix, pp. 157–60; RDPI 1889–90, Appendix D, pp. xxxvi–xxxix; RDPI 1895–96, General Statistics, pp. 7–8; RDPI 1899–1900, General Statistics, pp. 8–9; RDPI 1904–05, Supplementary Statistics, pp. 67–69; RDPI 1921–22, Supplementary Statistics, pp. 3–7; and RDPI 1934–35, II, Supplementary Statistics, pp. 5–11, 67–69.

Table 2. Males and Females in the Age Group of Five to Ten Years in Madras Presidency 1871–1931

	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Percentage of Males in Age Group 5–10 years	14.69	13.80	13.91	14.34	13.34	13.56	13.14
Percentage of Females in Age Group 5–10 years	13.87	13.54	13.46	14.06	13.12	13.50	12.59

Sources: *Census of India* (hereafter *COI*) 1871, Madras, Volume I, Report, Chapter IX, p. 86 for the Census year 1871.

COI 1901, Vol. XV, Madras, Part I, Chapter IV, p. 62 for the Census years 1881, 1891 and 1901.

COI 1931, Vol. XIV, Madras, Part I, Chapter IV, p. 120 for the Census years 1911, 1921 and 1931.

presents a concordance between the categories used in the tabulations presented in this article and the various categories employed in the annual reports of the Department of Public Instruction.

Community Profile of Boys Studying in Primary Schools in Madras Presidency during 1891–1935

In order to analyse the community profile of boys studying in the primary schools of the Presidency, it will be useful to have an estimate of the number of boys, belonging to the different communities, who were in the school-going age group of five to ten years. The data on the number of boys in the age group of five to ten years may be obtained from the Census data on the age distribution of the population. Table 2 presents the data from the various decadal Censuses, for the period 1871–1931, on the percentage of males and females who were in the age group of five to ten years. From the table, it is clear that, over this entire period, the average percentage share of boys of age group five to ten years may be taken to be 14 per cent of the total male population.⁵ Further, the same percentage of 14 per cent will be assumed to give, on the average, also the share of the boys in the age group of five to ten years belonging to different communities.

The community profiles of boys studying in primary schools in Madras Presidency as a whole, during the years 1884–85, 1889–90, 1895–96, 1899–1900, 1904–05, 1921–22 and 1934–35, have been compiled and presented in Table 3. For each of these years, the table first gives the data on the number of boys in the age group of five to ten years, which is taken to be 14 per cent of the total male population of each community. This is worked out from the data given in the annual reports of the DPI for the number of boys in the age group of five to twelve years for each community (by estimating it to be 15 per cent of the male population of the community).⁶

⁵ In Part I of this article, it was seen that in 1825 Thomas Munro had estimated that the boys in the age group of five to ten years constituted one-ninth or 11.11 per cent of the total male population. Based on the Census data on age distribution, this share may be taken to be around 14 per cent during the entire period 1881–1935.

⁶ As was mentioned in Part I, the reports of the DPI are using the age group of five to twelve years as the relevant age group for students studying at all levels: primary and secondary schools, and colleges. This is of course not entirely accurate. In Table 3, the age group of five to ten years is taken as the relevant age group for students studying in primary schools.

Table 3. Community Profile of Boys Studying in Primary Schools of Madras Presidency during 1885–1935

Year		Brahmanas		Vaisyas and Sudras		SCs and STs		Total Hindus	Muslims	Native Chr.	Others*	Grand Total
1884–85	Boys in age group: 5–10 years	77,156	1,273,731	607,060	1,955,885	132,766	45,438	4,624	2,138,813			
	Percentage of Total	3.61	59.55	28.29	91.45	6.21	2.13	0.22				
	Boys in Primary Schools	38,418	215,513	21,104	275,035	24,624	18,732	2,252	320,643			
1889–90	Percentage of Total	11.98	67.21	6.58	85.78	7.68	5.84	0.70				
	Percentage of boys of 5–10 years	49.79	16.92	3.48	14.06	18.55	41.13	48.70	14.99			
	Boys in age group: 5–10 years	77,156	1,273,731	607,060	1,955,885	132,766	45,438	4,624	2,138,813			
1895–96	Percentage of Total	3.61	59.55	28.29	91.45	6.21	2.13	0.22				
	Boys in Primary Schools	47,858	302,730	26,037	376,625	59,196	22,906	827	459,554			
	Percentage of Total	10.41	65.87	5.67	81.95	12.88	4.98	0.18				
1899–1900	Percentage of boys of 5–10 years	62.03	23.77	4.29	19.26	44.59	50.30	17.88	21.49			
	Boys in age group: 5–10 years	78,182	1,733,472	437,213	2,248,867	155,676	56,805	6,167	2,467,516			
	Percentage of Total	3.17	70.25	17.72	91.14	6.31	2.30	0.25				
1899–1900	Boys in Primary Schools	60,830	416,973	36,055	513,858	75,868	33,481	2,613	625,820			
	Percentage of Total	9.72	66.63	5.76	82.11	12.12	5.35	0.42				
	Percentage of boys of 5–10 years	77.81	24.05	8.25	22.85	48.73	58.94	42.37	25.36			
1899–1900	Boys in age group: 5–10 years	78,182	1,733,472	437,213	2,248,867	155,676	56,805	6,167	2,467,516			
	Percentage of Total	3.17	70.25	17.72	91.14	6.31	2.30	0.25				
	Boys in Primary Schools	59,910	442,873	48,335	551,118	82,642	33,369	2,621	669,750			
1899–1900	Percentage of Total	8.95	66.13	7.22	82.29	12.34	4.98	0.39				
	Percentage of boys of 5–10 years	76.63	25.55	11.06	24.51	53.09	58.74	42.50	27.14			

1904-05	Boys in age group: 5-10 years	81,789	1,983,066	285,326	45,619	330,944	2,395,799	169,500	67,521	5,055	2,637,875
	Percentage of Total	3.10	75.18	10.82	1.73	12.55	90.82	6.43	2.56	0.19	
	Boys in Primary Schools	62,954	488,238	48,361	4,035	52,396	603,588	87,192	46,896	2,574	740,250
	Percentage of Total	8.50	65.96	6.53	0.55	7.08	81.54	11.78	6.34	0.35	
	Percentage of boys of 5-10 years	76.97	24.62	16.95	8.84	15.83	25.19	51.44	69.45	50.92	28.06
1921-22	Boys in age group: 5-10 years	102,351	2,048,357	437,626	40,577	478,203	2,628,911	196,560	91,945	5,489	2,921,905
	Percentage of Total	3.50	70.10	14.98	1.39	16.37	89.97	6.73	3.15	0.15	
	Boys in Primary Schools	72,352	835,743	131,989	11,199	143,188	1,051,283	137,207	78,219	2,523	1,269,232
	Percentage of Total	5.70	65.85	10.40	0.88	11.28	82.83	10.81	6.16	0.20	
	Percentage of boys of 5-10 years	70.69	40.80	30.16	27.60	29.94	39.99	69.80	85.07	45.96	43.44
1934-35	Boys in age group: 5-10 years	92,845	2,270,323	490,067	24,335	514,402	2,877,570	228,441	120,911	4,699	3,231,620
	Percentage of Total	2.87	70.25	15.16	0.75	15.92	89.04	7.07	3.74	0.15	
	Boys in Primary Schools	96,534	1,288,198	256,925	21,582	278,507	1,663,239	223,008	131,671	3,821	2,021,739
	Percentage of Total	4.77	63.72	12.71	1.07	13.78	82.27	11.03	6.51	0.19	
	Percentage of boys of 5-10 years	103.97	56.74	52.43	88.69	54.14	57.80	97.62	108.90	81.32	62.56

Sources: *RDPI / 1881-82*, pp. 9-10, 13-14; *RDPI / 1884-85*, Appendix, pp. 157-60; *RDPI / 1889-90*, Appendix D, pp. xxxvi-xxxix; *RDPI / 1895-96*, General Statistics, pp. 7-8; *RDPI / 1899-1900*, General Statistics, pp. 8-9; *RDPI / 1904-05*, Supplementary Statistics, pp. 67-69; *RDPI / 1921-22*, Supplementary Statistics, pp. 3-7; and *RDPI / 1934-35*, II: Supplementary Statistics, pp. 5-11, 67-69.

*Others' includes 'Europeans and Eurasians' also.

Note: (i) The rows titled 'Boys in Age Group 5-10 years' give the estimate of the boys in this age group, which is taken to be 14 per cent of the male population of the community based on the age distribution of the population as given in Censuses of 1881-1931. This is worked out from the data given in the annual reports of the DPI for the number of boys in the age group 5-12 for each community, by assuming it to be 15 per cent of the total male population of the community.

(ii) The rows titled 'Percentage of Total' give the share of the number of boys of each community, as a percentage of the total number of boys studying in primary schools.

(iii) The rows titled 'Percentage of boys of 5-10 years' give the share of the number of boys who are studying in primary schools, as a percentage of the total number of boys of the community in the age group 5-10 years.

For each of the selected years mentioned above, Table 3 also gives the number of boys belonging to different communities who were studying in primary schools in the Madras Presidency. Based on this data, the share of boys of each community, among all the boys undergoing instruction, has been calculated as a percentage and tabulated under the caption 'percentage of total'. Similarly, the percentage of boys in the age group of five to ten years of each community who are studying in the primary schools, or the enrolment ratio for each community, is also calculated and tabulated under the caption 'percentage of boys of five to ten years'.

The data for the year 1884–85 has already been discussed in detail in Part I of this article. Here, it will suffice to note the fact that, in 1884–85, 14.99 per cent of the boys in the age group of five to ten years were studying in the primary schools in Madras Presidency as a whole (the total enrolment at that time was reported to be around 3.2 lakhs), which percentage went up to 21.49 per cent by 1889–90. By the turn of the century, in 1899–1900, this percentage was reported to be 27.14 per cent. After two decades, by 1921–22, the percentage of boys in the age group of five to ten years who were undergoing instruction in primary schools rose to 43.44 per cent; and a decade and a half later, in 1934–35, it was reported to be 62.56 per cent. In 1921–22, the total number of boys enrolled in the primary schools was more than 12.5 lakhs, and in 1934–35, this total enrolment was over 20 lakhs.

However, the data on the enrolment of students in primary schools do not give the correct picture of the number of students receiving an adequate basic education. This is mainly because of the fact that a vast majority of the students did not study for full five years in the primary schools. The reports of the DPI do not give regular data on the average number of years studied per student, or the dropout rates, though there are various estimates which show that the dropout rates were more than 80 per cent between Class I to Class IV in the 1920s.⁷ Therefore, we will have to take recourse to the decadal census data on literacy to get a better estimate of the percentage of boys who may be receiving an adequate basic education so that they could be counted among the literates.

The decadal census data on literacy of males for the Presidency as a whole is compiled in Table 4, for the period 1901–51. Since the longevity of males in the Presidency was in the range of twenty-six to twenty-nine years during the period 1901–31,⁸ the literacy figures enumerated in the Censuses of 1931–51 should serve as an estimate of the 'true level' of enrolment in the primary schools during the period 1921–35. From Table 4, it is seen that the level of male literacy in Madras Presidency as a whole stood

⁷ This was noted by Sir Philip Hartog, who states in his *Some Aspects of Indian Education Past and Present* (1939) that: '[In British India] Out of 100 boys in Class I only 26 were reading in Class IV in 1934–5; ...in 1925–6 only 19 boys and 10 girls reached Class IV out of every 100 who had been in Class I in 1922–3, four years earlier. ...the fact remains that no less than 74 per cent. of the boys and 87 per cent. of the girls in primary schools leave without even attaining permanent literacy [in 1934–35]' (pp. 34–35). As regards the Madras Presidency, the Central Bureau of Education's decennial review of the progress of education in India during 1937–47 reports that the proportion of boys in Class IV to Class I was 32 per cent in 1936–37 (see Table V, p. 61 in *Progress of Education in India: 1937–1947: Decennial Review: Vol. I*).

⁸ The Census of 1931 reported the following figures for the average male life expectancies at birth in Madras Presidency for the period 1901–31: 26.21 [1901], 25.92 [1911] and 28.71 [1931] (see Table XXXI, p. 165 in *COI 1931, All India Volume I: Part I*).

Table 4. Levels of Male Literacy in Madras Presidency, 1901–51

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951
Population (in 1000)	38,654	41,870	42,794	47,194	49,342	57,016
% Persons Literate	6.3	7.48	8.57	9.26	14.4	19.3
% Males Literate	11.85	13.81	15.22	16.1	22.4	28.6

Sources: *COI 1911*, Vol. XII, Madras, Part I—Report, Chapter VIII, p. 132 for Census years 1901 and 1911; *COI 1921*, Vol. XIII, Madras, Part I—Report, Chapter VIII, pp. 128–29, 161–62 for Census year 1921; *COI 1931*, Vol. XIV, Madras, Part I—Report, Chapter IX, pp. 281–82 for Census year 1931; *COI 1941*, Vol. I: India: Part I: 116 for Census year 1941; and *COI 1951*: Vol. III: Madras & Coorg, Part I, pp. 10, 208–09 for the Census years 1941 and 1951.

at 22.4 per cent in 1941 and it was reported to be 28.6 per cent soon after the end of the British rule in 1951.

Thus, after nearly a hundred years of the new English education system, during 1920–35, the percentage of boys of age group five to ten years who were enrolled in schools was reported to be in the range of 43.5 per cent to 62.5 per cent. But, from the male literacy levels reported in the Censuses of 1941 and 1951, it should be clear that a vast majority of them dropped out with only a year or two of schooling and the percentage of boys, who received adequate basic education so as to be counted as literates, was most likely in the range of 22.5 per cent to 28.5 per cent in the period 1921–35.⁹

In the discussion on the 1822–25 survey of indigenous education in Part I, it was noted that the percentage of boys who were studying in the indigenous schools was found to be around 21.5 per cent in ca. 1825. Many of the district collectors mentioned in their survey reports that those who were studying in the indigenous schools at that time underwent instruction for a period of not less than five years on the average, so that each student acquired adequate basic education in the three Rs. Further, it was also noted that a large number of boys were undergoing instruction at home and, based on the information available on this for the district of Madras, it was estimated that the percentage of boys of school-going age receiving instruction in ca. 1825, either in the schools or at home, was at least 65 per cent or more.¹⁰ Hence, as was claimed by Mahatma Gandhi in his 20 October 1931 speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in London, the Presidency of Madras was clearly more illiterate in the 1930s than it was hundred years earlier in the 1820s.¹¹

We shall now consider the data presented in Table 3 regarding the community profile of boys studying in the primary schools in Madras Presidency for the period

⁹ It should be noted that the above discussion, on the inadequacy of the total enrolment figures as an indicator of the percentage of boys who are receiving adequate basic education, is equally applicable to all the enrolment figures given in Table 3 for the various individual communities.

¹⁰ We may recall that, after taking note of the fact that a large number of boys were being instructed at home, Governor Thomas Munro had, in an *ad-hoc* manner, estimated the number of boys undergoing instruction (both in schools and at home) in ca. 1825 to be ‘nearer to one-third’ or 33 per cent. This suggestion of Munro, as was argued in Part I, was a gross underestimate of the percentage of boys undergoing instruction, as it did not really take into account the available information on the number of boys undergoing instruction at home for the district of Madras.

¹¹ Mahatma Gandhi’s statement of 1931 is cited in Part I of this article.

1885–1935. Of the various communities, the Native Christian community seems to have achieved a substantial increase in the share of its population from 2.13 per cent in 1880s to 3.74 per cent in 1930s. The Native Christians accounted for almost 5 per cent of all the boys studying in schools in 1889–90, which share rose to more than 6 per cent in 1921–22, and was reported to be around 6.5 per cent in 1934–35. Of the Native Christian boys in the age group of five to ten years, about 50 per cent were found studying in the primary schools in 1889–90. This percentage rose to nearly 59 per cent at the turn of the century in 1899–1900; it further rose to 85 per cent by 1921–22. By 1934–35, it was reported that almost all the Native Christian boys in the age group of five to ten years were enrolled in the primary schools in Madras Presidency.

The Muslim boys also had a significant representation among students at the primary level even in the 1880s. The share of Muslims in the total population of the Presidency is reported to have gone up from 6.21 per cent in the 1880s to 7.07 per cent in the 1930s. Muslim boys accounted for nearly 13 per cent of all the boys under instruction in 1889–90; this share was reported to be around 11 per cent in 1921–22 and 1934–35. Of the Muslim boys in the age group of five to ten years, nearly 45 per cent were reported to be enrolled in primary schools in 1889–90; the level of enrolment rose to 53 per cent by the turn of the century in 1899–1900, and further to 70 per cent by 1921–22. It was reported that in 1934–35, almost 98 per cent of the Muslim boys in the age group of five to ten years were enrolled in the primary school in Madras Presidency.

As regards the Hindus, their share in the population of the Presidency is reported to have decreased from 91.45 per cent in 1880s to 89.04 per cent in the 1930s. The Hindu boys accounted for around 82 per cent of the boys enrolled in the primary schools in 1889–90; their share remained the same during the entire period 1890–1935. Of the Hindu boys in the age group of five to ten years, around 19 per cent were enrolled in the primary schools in 1889–90; this percentage rose to nearly 25 per cent by the turn of the century in 1899–1900 and further to 40 per cent in 1921–22. In 1934–35, it was reported that nearly 58 per cent of the Hindu boys in the age group of five to ten years were enrolled in the primary schools in Madras Presidency.

The annual reports of the DPI, from the year 1883–84 onwards, present data on the number of Brahmana students as well as the number of Vaisya and Sudra students undergoing instruction at various levels. The Brahmanas constituted 3.61 per cent of the population of the Presidency in the 1880s; their share in the population came down to 2.87 per cent in the 1930s. The Brahmana boys accounted for nearly 10.5 per cent of all the boys enrolled in the primary schools in 1889–90; this share came down to around 9 per cent at the turn of the century in 1899–1900, and further to less than 6 per cent in 1921–22. In 1934–35, it was reported that the Brahmana boys accounted for less than 5 per cent of the boys enrolled in the primary schools of the Presidency. In 1889–90, around 62 per cent of the Brahmana boys in the age group of five to ten years were enrolled in the primary schools; this percentage went up to 77 per cent by 1899–1900, but came down to nearly 71 per cent in 1921–22. In 1934–35, it was reported that almost all the Brahmana boys in the age group of five to ten years were enrolled in the primary schools of the Presidency.

The Vaisyas and Sudras together (or the so-called ‘Non-Brahman Caste Hindus’) constituted 59.55 per cent of the population in the 1880s. It is important to note that the successive decadal censuses give significantly different figures for the share of the

Vaisyas and Sudras together in the total population—and similarly for the share of the SCs and STs—during the period 1881–1931.¹² The share of the Vaisyas and Sudras together in the total population of the Presidency was reported to be 70.25 per cent in the 1890s, 75.18 per cent in the 1900s, 70.10 per cent in the 1920s, and 70.25 per cent in the 1930s. Similarly, the SCs were reported to be 16.33 per cent of the total population of the Presidency in the 1890s, 10.82 per cent in the 1900s, 14.98 per cent in the 1920s and 15.16 per cent in the 1930s. The STs were reported to be 1.39 per cent of the total population of the Presidency in the 1890s, 1.73 per cent in the 1900s, 1.39 per cent in the 1920s and 0.75 per cent in the 1930s. These variations in the demography of the different community groups, under which the community profile of boys under instruction is presented in the reports of the DPI, need to be kept in mind while analysing the various changes in the levels of enrolment of these community groups in the primary schools of the Madras Presidency.

In 1889–90, the Vaisya and Sudra boys accounted for about 66 per cent of all the boys enrolled in primary schools; over the next four decades, this share slowly decreased to about 64 per cent as was reported in 1934–35. In 1889–90, nearly 24 per cent of the Vaisya and Sudra boys in the age group of five to ten years were enrolled in the primary schools. At the turn of the century, in 1899–1900, this percentage stood at 26 per cent. However, it rose to nearly 41 per cent by 1921–22 and further to about 57 per cent in 1934–35.

It was noted in Part I of this article that there were no SC or ST students studying in the primary schools of the governmental education system till the 1870s.¹³ Now, as may be seen from Table 3, in 1884–85, only 3.48 per cent of boys of these communities, in the age group of five to ten years, were enrolled in the primary schools of the Madras Presidency. This percentage continued to be low during the decade of 1880s and stood at 4.29 per cent in 1889–90.

Starting from the decade of 1890s, the annual reports of the DPI present data on the students belonging to the SCs and the STs separately. From Table 3, it may be seen that, at the turn of the century in 1899–1900, the SCs, who were said to constitute 16.33 per cent of the total population, accounted for 6.63 per cent of the boys enrolled in the primary schools of the Madras Presidency. In 1921–22, the SCs, who were then said to constitute 14.98 per cent of the total population, accounted for 10.40 per cent of the boys enrolled; and in 1934–35, the SCs who were then said to constitute 15.16 per cent of the population, accounted for 12.71 per cent of the boys enrolled in the primary schools of the Madras Presidency. Of the SC boys in the age group of five to ten years, about 11 per cent were enrolled in the primary schools in 1899–1900; this percentage rose to about 30 per cent in 1921–22 and to nearly 52.5 per cent in 1934–35.

The STs constituted 1.39 per cent of the total population of boys in the age group of five to ten years in 1890s, and they accounted for 0.59 per cent of all the boys enrolled in primary schools in 1899–1900; this share became 0.88 per cent in 1921–22. In 1934–35, the STs were said to constitute 0.75 per cent of the population, and they accounted for 1.07 per cent of the boys enrolled in the primary schools of the Madras

¹² This variation is perhaps due to the different ways in which individual *jatis*/castes were grouped by the Census authorities under the categories of ‘Sudras’ and ‘Other Castes’ (or the SCs and STs).

¹³ See Table 5 in Part I of this article.

Presidency. Of the ST boys in the age group of five to ten years, around 11.5 per cent were enrolled in the primary schools in 1899–1900; this percentage rose to nearly 28 per cent in 1921–22 and jumped to almost 89 per cent in 1934–35.¹⁴

It should be amply clear from the above discussion that, during the period 1885–1921, there were persistent and wide-ranging differences between different communities in their access to primary education in Madras Presidency. While around 85 per cent of the Native Christian boys, 71 per cent of the Brahmana boys and 70 per cent of the Muslim boys of school-going age were enrolled in the primary schools, only around 40 per cent of the boys of Vaisya and Sudra communities, and 30 per cent of the SC and ST boys (in the age group of five to ten years) were enrolled in the primary schools of the Madras Presidency in 1921–22. There was some improvement in the enrolment of all the communities during the period 1921–35. Even then, while almost all the boys of the Native Christian, Muslim and Hindu-Brahmana communities in the age group of five to ten years were enrolled in the primary schools, only about 57 per cent of the Vaisya and Sudra boys and 54 per cent of the SC and ST boys in the age group five to ten years were enrolled in the primary schools of the Madras Presidency in 1934–35.

As was noted earlier, because of the high dropout rates which hovered in the range of 70–80 per cent during 1921–35, the above enrolment figures are highly exaggerated and do not reflect the actual percentage of boys who were receiving adequate basic education so as to be classed as literates. We therefore need to look at the rates of literacy attained by males of different communities to get a better understanding of the level of access to basic education enjoyed by different communities. Further, the figures for the levels of enrolment of the Vaisya and Sudra boys together, and of the SC and ST boys, do not at all reveal the high levels of disparity which prevailed in the access to education among the various individual *jatis*/castes which were subsumed under these broad categories. It is possible to get a clear picture of the disparities in the access to education that existed between various individual *jatis*/castes by looking at the data compiled in the decennial census reports which record the levels of literacy attained by individual *jatis*/castes. This will be taken up in the next section.

Levels of Male Literacy among Select Communities in Madras Presidency in 1921

The Census reports of the period 1901–31 give data on literacy in general, and also on English literacy in particular, for different religious groups as well as for a select group of castes. In Table 5, the information pertaining to the levels of general literacy in 1921 for different religious groups is presented. Here, literacy is defined as number

¹⁴ Apart from the fact that the enrolment in the primary schools increased significantly during 1921–35, this sudden jump in the rate of enrolment of the ST boys could also be due to the fact that there was a significant change in the way the STs were counted between the Censuses of 1921 and 1931 so that their share in their total population came down drastically from 1.39 per cent to 0.75 per cent in this period. In view of the fact that the Census of 1931 reports that the ST males had the lowest levels of literacy at around 0.53 per cent (see discussion in the next section), it is clear that one cannot take the 1934–35 RDPI data on the enrolment of ST students at face value.

Table 5. Male Literacy by Religion in Madras Presidency in 1921

Religion	Percentage of Persons Literate	Percentage of Males Literate
Total	8.57	15.22
Hindus (excluding Scheduled Tribes)	8.28	14.95
Muslims	9.38	17.40
Christians	17.85	23.47

Source: *COI 1921*, Vol. XIII, Madras, Part I—Report, Chapter VIII, pp. 128–29, 161–62.

of literates considered as a percentage of the total population of the relevant group. It may be seen that in 1921, while the literacy of the total population was 8.57 per cent, that of the male population was much higher at 15.22 per cent, which reflects the fact that only a small fraction of the women were literate at that time.

From Table 5, it may again be seen that, in 1921, the literacy was highest amongst the Christians. About 23.5 per cent of the Christian males were reported to be literate at that time.¹⁵ The extent of literacy amongst the Muslim males stood around 17.4 per cent. As regards the Hindu population excluding the STs, it may be seen that only around 15.2 per cent of the Hindu males were reported to be literate.

The Census data on the literacy of select *jatis*/castes are even more revealing as it clearly brings out the enormous disparities which prevailed, till the very end of British rule, between different communities as regards their access to adequate basic education. In Tables 6 to 10, we have extracted and compiled data on the levels of male literacy for selected castes from the Census of India 1921 volume for Madras Presidency.

Table 6 presents the literacy data for communities which had a male literacy level larger than 30 per cent in 1921. Following this, Table 7 presents the data for communities which had a male literacy level between 15 per cent and 30 per cent; Table 8 gives the data for those communities with male literacy levels between 7.5 per cent and 15 per cent; and finally, Table 9 compiles the data for those communities with male literacy level below 7.5 per cent. The literacy data for various communities, which are classed under the SC and ST categories, are presented separately in Table 10. In each of these tables, the various communities have been listed in the alphabetical order of their names.

In Table 6, comprising of all those communities which had male literacy levels higher than 30 per cent in 1921, the highest literacy figures are reported by the various subsects of the Brahmanas. The Brahmanas as a whole had a total (male and female) literacy level of nearly 37 per cent and male literacy of 59 per cent in 1921. Some subsects such as the Telugu Brahmanas and the Malayali Brahmanas had somewhat higher male literacy figures of around 60 per cent and 63 per cent, respectively. The Tamil-Brahmanas had an even higher male literacy figure of around 72 per cent.

¹⁵ It may be of interest to note that the level of female literacy amongst Christians (12.35 per cent) was comparable to that of the men; on the other hand, the levels of female literacy were much lower for women among the Hindus (1.80 per cent) and the Muslims (1.54 per cent).

Table 6. Communities with Male Literacy Levels above 30% in 1921

Castes	Percentage of Persons Literate	Percentage of Males Literate
Kannada-Brahmanas	29.90	52.50
Malayalam-Brahmanas	44.70	63.20
Oriya-Brahmanas	21.00	44.00
Tamil-Brahmanas	46.60	71.50
Telugu-Brahmanas	37.50	59.70
Brahmanas (Total)	36.90	59.00
Chetti	20.40	39.50
Komati, Arya Vaisya	29.10	52.10
Nayar	28.00	42.90

Source: *COI 1921*, Vol. XIII, Madras, Part I—Report, Chapter VIII, pp. 128–29, 161–62.

On the other hand, the Kannadiga-Brahmanas had a lower male literacy level at around 53 per cent, and the Odiya-Brahmanas had an even lower male literacy level at around 44 per cent in 1921.

The Brahmanas were closely followed by the Vaisyas belonging to the Komati and the Chetty communities who had male literacy levels around 52 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively. The Malayalam-speaking community of the Nayars, who traditionally seem to have been included in the Kshatriya *varna*, but were generally classed among the Sudras in the nineteenth century Census reports, also had a comparable male literacy level of 43 per cent in 1921.

Table 7 lists the communities which had male literacy levels somewhere between 15 per cent and 30 per cent in 1921. In this group, the Labbai community of the Muslims had the highest male literacy level of 30 per cent. They were very closely followed by the Vaisyas belonging to the Vaniya communities, who also had a similarly high male literacy level. The Telugu-speaking and Tamil-speaking artisan communities of Kammalan, Kamsala, Panchala, Visva Brahmana and Visvakarmas also had equally high male literacy figures at around 27 per cent. They were closely followed by the weaving communities of Kaikolan, Sengudar and Senguda Kshatriyas, whose male literacy level stood at around 26 per cent. The male literacy level among the Indian Christians stood at about 22 per cent. The Nadars reported a male literacy level of 20 per cent. The Kallan (16.30 per cent), Sale (15.20 per cent) and Ambattan (15 per cent) communities were reported to have the least male literacy in this group of communities.

In Table 8, which lists the communities which had male literacy levels somewhere between 7.5 per cent and 15 per cent in 1921, the Illuvans were reported to have the highest percentage of male literacy at nearly 15 per cent, while the Vannans and the Ambalakarans reported the lowest level of male literacy around 8 per cent. The Maravan and the Kamma communities were reported to have male literacy levels close to 14 per cent. The Kusavan (Potter) and the Mappila (Muslims) communities were found to have nearly 12 per cent male literacy. The Idaiyan, Yadava and the Palli,

Table 7. Communities with Male Literacy Levels between 15% and 30% in 1921

Castes	Percentage of Persons Literate	Percentage of Males Literate
Agamudaiyan	10.60	20.80
Ambattan	7.80	15.00
Baliya, Kavarai	12.80	22.30
Devanga	13.20	24.80
Indian Christians	16.20	21.90
Kaikolan, Sengundar, Senguda Kshatriya	14.10	26.20
Kallan	8.20	16.30
Kammalan, Kamsala, Panchala, Visva Brahmana, Visvakarma (Tamil)	13.90	26.60
Kammalan, Kamsala, Panchala, Visva Brahmana, Visvakarma (Telugu)	15.00	27.60
Labbai (Muslim)	14.50	30.00
Nadar	10.50	20.00
Sale	8.70	15.20
Tiyan	12.30	21.00
Vaniyan, Vaniya Vaisya	15.90	29.80
Vellala	13.30	24.20

Sources: *COI 1921*, Vol. XIII, Madras, Part I—Report, Chapter VIII, pp. 128–29, 161–62.

Table 8. Communities with Male Literacy Levels between 7.5% and 15% in 1921

Castes	Percentage of Persons Literate	Percentage of Males Literate
Ambalakaran	3.90	7.50
Idaiyan, Yadava	5.90	11.20
Illuvan (& Panikkan?)	7.40	14.60
Kalingi & Kalinji	4.70	9.90
Kamma	7.60	13.60
Kapu	5.40	10.20
Kusavan	6.10	11.80
Mangala	4.60	8.60
Mappila (Muslim)	6.20	11.70
Maravan	7.00	13.70
Palli, Vanniya, Vanniya Kshatriya, Vannikula Kshatriya, Agnikula Kshatriya	5.70	11.10
Telaga	6.70	11.90
Vannan	4.20	7.80

Sources: *COI 1921*, Vol. XIII, Madras, Part I—Report, Chapter VIII, pp. 128–29, 161–62.

Table 9. Communities with Male Literacy Levels below 7.5% in 1921

Castes	Percentage of Persons Literate	Percentage of Males Literate
Billava	3.70	7.00
Boya	1.40	2.50
Gamalla	2.60	4.10
Golla	1.60	2.90
Idiga, Arya Hihida, Setti Balija	3.50	6.70
Kuravan	3.00	5.50
Kurumban	2.30	4.50
Mutracha	3.20	5.90
Odde	1.40	2.60
Tsakala	1.00	1.80
Uppara	1.40	2.60
Valaiyan	2.60	5.10
Velama	4.00	7.00

Sources: *COI 1921*, Vol. XIII, Madras, Part I—Report, Chapter VIII, pp. 128–29, 161–62.

Vanniya, Vanniya-Kshatriya, Vannikula Kshatriya and Agnikula-Kshatriya communities reported male literacy levels of just around 11 per cent.

In Table 9, which lists those communities whose male literacy levels were reported to be less than 7.5 per cent in 1921, there are a few communities which had a slightly higher male literacy levels such as the Billava, Idiga and Velama (about 7 per cent), Mutracha and Kuravan (6 per cent), and Kurumban and Valaiyan (5 per cent). On the other hand, there are several communities which had very low levels of literacy such as the Boya (2.5 per cent), Golla (2.9 per cent), Odde and Uppara (both 2.6 per cent) and Tsakala (1.80 per cent).

Among the various SC communities listed in Table 10, the Pallans reported a male literacy level of 4.20 per cent in 1921; they were closely followed by the Paraiyan and Panchama communities whose male literacy levels stood collectively around 3.50 per cent. Then, there are the Chakiliyans (2.80 per cent), Malas (1.60 per cent) and Holeyas (1.30 per cent), who reported male literacy levels above 1 per cent. The Madigas (0.90 per cent) and the Cherumans (0.80 per cent), among the SCs, reported levels of male literacy even lower than 1 per cent in 1921. The STs as a whole had the lowest male literacy levels of 0.42 per cent.

An examination of the Census data on literacy for the period 1901–31 serves to throw further light on the high levels of disparity that existed in the early decades of twentieth century among different *jatis*/castes in their levels of access to primary education. On the one hand, the Tamil-Brahmanas recorded the highest male literacy levels during the period 1901–31 (73.60 per cent in 1901 to 87.60 per cent in 1931), while at the other end, the STs as a whole recorded the lowest male literacy levels for the same period (0.50 per cent in 1901, 0.36 per cent in 1911, 0.42 per cent in 1921, and 0.53 per cent in 1931). Among the SCs, Holeyas (0.01 per cent in 1901 to 0.70 per cent in 1931), Chakiliyars

Table 10. Male Literacy Levels of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in 1921

Castes	Percentage of Persons Literate	Percentage of Males Literate
Scheduled Castes		
Chakiliyan	1.50	2.80
Cherumam	0.40	0.80
Holeya	0.60	1.30
Madiga	0.50	0.90
Mala	0.09	1.60
Pallan	2.20	4.20
Paraiyan, Panchama	1.80	3.50
Scheduled Tribes		
Total Scheduled Tribes	0.23	0.42
Khond	0.40	0.80
Savara	0.40	0.80

Sources: *COI 1921*, Vol. XIII, Madras, Part I—Report, Chapter VIII, pp. 128–29, 161–62.

(0.10 per cent in 1901 to 1.40 per cent in 1931), Cherumans (0.20 per cent in 1901 to 1.30 per cent in 1931), Madigas (0.20 per cent in 1921 to 0.90 per cent in 1931) and Malas (0.60 per cent in 1901 to 1.60 per cent in 1931) recorded equally low male literacy levels as the STs. There were also some other individual communities, not classed under the SCs or STs, such as the Oddes (0.40 per cent in 1901 to 2.60 per cent in 1921), Upparas (0.50 per cent in 1901 to 2.60 per cent in 1921), Tsakalas (0.60 per cent in 1901 to 1.80 per cent in 1921)—and may be several other *jatis*/castes, whose literacy levels were not tabulated in the Census reports—who recorded equally low male literacy levels.

Conclusion

In this article, we have traced the changing community profile of boys studying in primary schools in Madras Presidency during the period 1885–1935. It is seen that the annual reports of the Department of Public Instruction record that by the turn of the century, in 1899–1900, about 27 per cent of the boys of schoolgoing age were studying in primary schools. This enrolment ratio is reported to have gone up to 44 per cent by 1920–21 and further to 63 per cent by 1934–35. However, since it was also reported that in the 1920s over 80 per cent of the boys dropped out between classes I and IV, these enrolment figures do not give a picture of what percentage of boys received adequate education so as to be classed as literate. The Census of 1941 records that the male literacy in the Presidency was around 22 per cent, which may be taken as a better indicator of the percentage of boys that were receiving adequate basic education during the early decades of the twentieth century. Comparing this with the much larger percentage of boys who were reported to be receiving adequate basic education in the Presidency in ca. 1825 under the indigenous education system, we see that the claim made by Mahatma Gandhi in his lecture in London in

1931, that India was then more illiterate than it was hundred or fifty years ago, seems entirely justified.

The data on community profile of boys studying in primary schools show that by 1934–35 almost all the boys of school-going age among the Christians and Muhammadans were studying in primary schools. The same was true of the Brahmanas among the Hindus. But, only around 57 per cent of the Vaisya and Sudra boys of schoolgoing age, and 53 per cent of the SC boys of school-going age, were enrolled in the primary schools. Further, given the high dropout rates, the actual percentage of boys of these communities who were receiving adequate basic education would have been much smaller.

We can get a more adequate picture of the level of access to basic education among different communities from the Census data on levels of male literacy achieved by different communities. According to the Census of 1921, about 24 per cent of the Christian males and 17 per cent Muslim males were literate. The level of literacy was much higher among Hindu Brahmana males at 59 per cent. There were, however, several *jatis*/castes (many of them classed under the backward classes today) who recorded levels of literacy much lower than the average male literacy level of 15 per cent. In particular, most of the *jatis*/castes, which are classed under the SCs today, reported literacy levels below 5 per cent. The STs as a whole reported an abysmally low literacy level of around 0.4 per cent.

Thus, after nearly a hundred years of the English education system, around 1935, there were large sections of the population in the Presidency of Madras, who reported low levels of enrolment in primary schools and even abysmally lower levels of male literacy, which is a better indicator of the level of access enjoyed by them for adequate basic primary education. This situation persisted till the end of British rule and continues to be one of the major issues that is being attended to by Independent India.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my gratitude to Professors Dr M.D. Srinivas (Chairman, Centre for Policy Studies, Chennai), Dr Gita Dharampal-Frick (Head, Department of History, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg) and Dr Ramanathan P.V. (Head, Department of English, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri Campus, Kollam, Kerala), without whose constant support and encouragement this article would not have been possible.

References

- Census of India 1901*, Vol XV, Madras, Part I, Report, Government Press, Madras 1902.
Census of India 1911, Vol XI, Madras, Part I, Report, Government Press, Madras 1912.
Census of India 1921, Vol XIII, Madras, Part I, Report, Government Press, Madras 1922.
Census of India 1931, Vol I, India, Part I, Report, Manager of Publications, Delhi 1933.
Census of India 1941, Vol I, India, Part I, Tables, Manager of Publications, Delhi 1946.
Census of India 1951, Vol III, Madras & Coorg, Part I, Report, Madras, 1953.
 Hartog, Philip. *Some Aspects of Indian Education Past and Present*. Oxford, 1939.
 RDPI. 'Reports of the Department of Public Instruction in Madras Presidency', Government Press, Madras 1884–85, 1889–90, 1895–96, 1899–1900, 1904–05, 1921–22 and 1934–35.