

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN CENTRAL KARNATAKA DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD: A HISTORICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the growth, structure and character of the education system in the Central Karnataka region — comprising the present-day districts of Chitradurga, Ballari (Bellary) and Tumkuru (Tumkur) — during the colonial period, roughly from the early nineteenth century to Indian independence in 1947. The region's colonial experience was administratively divided: Ballari formed part of the Madras Presidency and was governed directly by the East India Company and later the British Crown, whereas Chitradurga and Tumkuru lay within the princely State of Mysore, which retained indigenous Wodeyar rule under British paramountcy (except for the period of direct Commission administration between 1831 and 1881). This administrative divergence produced two overlapping but distinct educational trajectories that nonetheless shared common colonial-era features: the survival and gradual decline of indigenous vernacular schools (chatrasalas and village pathashalas), the introduction of Anglo-vernacular and English-medium instruction, the expansion of missionary education, the slow and uneven spread of schooling to rural areas, women and depressed classes, and the eventual emergence of a modern departmental system of public instruction. Drawing on district gazetteers, missionary records, administrative reports and secondary historical scholarship, the study traces the pre-colonial base of indigenous learning, the impact of Munro's 1822 survey and the Bellary Collector's report of 1823, the influence of Macaulay's Minute of 1835 and Wood's Despatch of 1854, the reforms following the Hunter Commission of 1882, and developments under the Mysore Department of Public Instruction after the Rendition of 1881. It concludes that colonial education in Central Karnataka, while introducing English learning, printed textbooks, teacher training and institutional structures that laid the foundation of the modern school system, remained urban-centred, socially uneven and slow to reach the rural cultivator, artisan and lower-caste communities of the region.

KEYWORDS: Colonial education, Central Karnataka, Chitradurga, Bellary, Tumkuru, Madras Presidency, Princely Mysore, missionary schools, vernacular education, Department of Public Instruction

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is among the most enduring instruments through which a colonial power reshapes the society it governs, and the history of schooling in any Indian region cannot be separated from the wider political economy of colonial rule. Central Karnataka — the belt of dry, semi-arid taluks stretching across present-day Chitradurga, Ballari and Tumkuru districts — occupied a peculiar position in this history because it straddled two different systems of colonial governance. Ballari, annexed after the fall of Tipu Sultan and the subsequent territorial settlements of 1800, was incorporated into the Ceded Districts of the Madras Presidency and administered directly by British collectors. Chitradurga and Tumkuru, by contrast, remained part of the Mysore territory that was restored to the Wodeyar dynasty in 1799 after the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War, and later placed under a British Commission from 1831 to 1881 before being handed back to indigenous administration at the Rendition of 1881. This meant that the same broad region experienced both the direct educational policy of the Madras Government and the semi-autonomous, though British-supervised, educational policy of a Native State.

This paper attempts a comparative historical study of how formal and informal education evolved in these three districts under colonial conditions. It examines the pre-colonial base of indigenous schooling, the early British surveys of village schools, the arrival of Christian missionary education, the impact of major colonial education policies (the Munro survey of 1822, Macaulay's Minute of 1835, Wood's Despatch of 1854 and the Hunter Commission of 1882), the growth of government and aided schools, and the specific institutional developments recorded for Chitradurga, Ballari and Tumkuru. The paper argues that while colonial rule introduced new structures of literacy and instruction, its benefits in Central Karnataka were unevenly distributed — favouring urban centres, upper castes and male students over the rural, low-caste and female population that formed the majority of the region.

2. INDIGENOUS EDUCATION ON THE EVE OF COLONIAL RULE

Before the systematic British survey of indigenous schooling in the 1820s, Central Karnataka possessed a functioning, if informal, network of village schools attached to temples, mathas and individual teachers, in addition to home instruction. When the Governor of Madras, Sir Thomas Munro, directed district collectors in his Minute of 25 June 1822 to gather authentic data on native schools — in order to counter what he described as unsupported conjecture about the ignorance of the Indian population — the Collector of Bellary, A. D. Campbell, produced one of the most detailed of all the district reports submitted.

Campbell's 1823 survey recorded 533 indigenous schools in Bellary district, instructing 6,581 boys and 60 girls out of a district population of nearly 928,000. The medium of instruction varied considerably: roughly two hundred and thirty-five schools taught in Kannada, a similar number in Telugu, and smaller numbers in Marathi, Persian, Tamil and English, reflecting the multilingual character of the Ceded Districts on the Deccan borderland. Campbell also noted that the most common texts used across castes were the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata, and that pupils of different castes, including a substantial proportion of Shudra and other non-Brahmin students, attended these schools together, complicating any simple picture of pre-colonial schooling as an exclusively Brahminical preserve.

For the Mysore tracts that later became Chitradurga and Tumkuru districts, comparable quantitative surveys are less abundant, but the same broad pattern of temple- and matha-based instruction, itinerant teachers and household learning prevailed. The princely administration under the Wodeyars, and subsequently the British Commissioners who governed Mysore between 1831 and 1881, inherited this indigenous base and built upon it only gradually.

3. COLONIAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND THEIR REGIONAL REACH

Colonial education policy in India moved through several defining phases, each of which left its mark on Central Karnataka in different measure depending on whether a given taluk lay within British Ballari or princely Mysore.

3.1 The Orientalist–Anglicist Debate and Macaulay's Minute (1835)

Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute on Education of 1835 tilted official policy toward English-medium instruction for a select group of upper- and middle-class Indians, on the premise that Western learning would 'filter down' to the wider population. Because Ballari lay under direct Madras Presidency rule, this Anglicist turn was applied there through Presidency-level institutions such as the University Board established at Madras in 1840, which explicitly proposed provincial schools at centres including Bellary to serve the Kannada-speaking districts of the Presidency.

3.2 Wood's Despatch of 1854 and the Department of Public Instruction

The Despatch of 1854, associated with Sir Charles Wood, marked the first comprehensive colonial scheme for mass education, recommending a properly graded system of primary, middle and high schools, grants-in-aid to private and missionary institutions, teacher training, and the creation of Departments of Public Instruction in each province. Its implementation gave rise, over subsequent decades, to a hierarchy of vernacular primary schools feeding into Anglo-vernacular middle schools and English high schools — a structure that, in modified form, was adopted both in Madras Presidency Ballari and in Mysore State once its own Department of Public Instruction was strengthened after the Rendition of 1881.

3.3 The Hunter Commission (1882)

The Indian Education Commission of 1882, chaired by W. W. Hunter, rejected the exclusive filtration approach and urged expanded government responsibility for primary education in the vernacular, transfer of local primary schooling to district and municipal boards, and greater attention to female education outside the large towns. These recommendations shaped the subsequent expansion of primary schooling in both Ballari district under the Madras local boards and in Mysore State, where local fund and municipal boards were similarly entrusted with village school management by the early twentieth century.

3.4 The Distinct Path of Princely Mysore

Chitradurga and Tumkuru, as parts of Mysore State, followed a somewhat different institutional timeline. Colonel Mark Cubbon, who administered Mysore as Commissioner from 1834, encouraged the gradual development of schools, including the Raja's School at Mysore city, opened in 1833, which later grew into a High School. Following the Rendition of 1881, when administration was restored to the Wodeyar Maharaja under Dewan C. V. Rangacharlu, the Mysore Durbar took a more active role in extending its own Department of Public Instruction, and by the early twentieth century Mysore State was noted among contemporaries for a comparatively systematic

approach to schooling, including notable initiatives in girls' education such as the Maharani's High School and the Vani Vilas Institute at Mysore city, and the Empress Girls' School raised to the status of a vernacular high school at Tumkur.

4. BALLARI (BELLARY): EDUCATION UNDER THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY

As a Ceded District administered directly by the Madras Government, Ballari's schooling history is comparatively well documented through Presidency-level records. Campbell's 1823 survey, discussed above, provides the clearest baseline picture of indigenous schooling strength in the district on the eve of systematic colonial intervention. Over the following decades, government and grant-in-aid schools were gradually superimposed upon this indigenous base.

Christian missionary activity reached Ballari relatively early: the London Missionary Society established a church and associated educational work at Bellary from 1810, making it one of the earlier missionary stations in the Kannada-speaking country, well before the more famous Basel Mission schools of coastal and northern Karnataka (from 1834) or the Wesleyan Mission institutions that developed around Bangalore from 1820. Bellary's location as a garrison and administrative town on the frontier between the Telugu and Kannada linguistic zones of the Presidency also made it a natural site for a provincial school under the Madras University Board's 1840 scheme, intended to serve the Kannada-speaking population of the Presidency in the same way that Trichinopoly, Masulipatam and Calicut served the Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam regions respectively.

Through the later nineteenth century, Ballari district thus developed a layered educational structure: indigenous vernacular schools that persisted, though in reduced number and prestige; government and board vernacular primary schools following the post-1854 and post-1882 reforms; Anglo-vernacular and English high schools in the district headquarters town; and mission schools that, in Ballari as elsewhere in the Presidency, often reached social groups — including outcaste and depressed-class children — that government institutions were slower to serve.

5. TUMKURU (TUMKUR): MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE AND MYSORE STATE SCHOOLING

Tumkuru district, within Mysore State, presents a somewhat different pattern, in which Christian missionary societies played an unusually prominent role in extending education to rural taluks and to socially marginalised communities. Missionary teachers were posted to schools serving untouchable and outcaste children in the district, evening classes were organised for working children, and a night school was specifically opened for left-hand outcaste communities. A teacher-training institution established at Badachowdanhalli in Madugiri taluk was regarded, in contemporary accounts, as one of the better institutions of its kind in the region, while enrolment at schools in centres such as Gubbi grew steadily through the early twentieth century, with the strength of the Gubbi schools reported to have risen from 131 to 170 pupils in a single year during this period, and the new Forts school at Tumkur, inaugurated by the Maharaja of Mysore in 1900, similarly recording growth in its early enrolment.

Girls' education in Tumkuru also advanced under Mysore State patronage: the Empress Girls' School at Tumkur was among the institutions raised to the status of a vernacular high school, providing continuing education for girl pupils who had completed the vernacular lower classes — a status Tumkur shared with only the Government Girls' School at Bangalore outside the state capital itself. Missionary and government efforts in the district were, however, not always aligned: mission schools frequently pioneered work among Dalit and Shudra communities that state schools reached only later, and mission teachers worked to raise pedagogical standards in composite English-Kannada schools following recommendations of the Inspector-General of Education.

6. CHITRADURGA: A FORT DISTRICT WITHIN MYSORE STATE

Chitradurga, restored to Wodeyar Mysore after 1799 and briefly used as a British military garrison and supply depot linked to Madras Presidency operations during the Anglo-Maratha Wars until troop withdrawal by about 1831, developed within the same Mysore State administrative and educational framework as Tumkuru. As one of the constituent districts covered in the Mysore Gazetteer series — first compiled in outline by the mid-nineteenth century and comprehensively revised in the Mysore State Gazetteer volume for Chitradurga edited by B. N. Sri Sathyan — its colonial-period educational history is recorded largely through the same institutional lens of taluk boards, primary schools, examinations and inspection standards that governed Tumkuru and the rest of the State. The district's six taluks — Chitradurga, Hiriyur, Hosadurga, Holalkere, Challakere and Molakalmuru (with Davanagere, later separated into its own district, then still part of Chitradurga) — were characteristically dry-zone, agrarian and dispersed in settlement pattern, conditions that, as in much of the Deccan interior, slowed the spread of formal schooling relative to the more urbanised centres of the State. As elsewhere in Mysore, primary

schooling expanded chiefly around the taluk headquarters towns and larger villages, with the Department of Public Instruction and, after the early twentieth-century reforms, local and taluk boards responsible for extending the network into the countryside. Female literacy and schooling in Chitradurga, as across the dry-zone taluks of the State, lagged well behind the level attained in Mysore city and Bangalore, a disparity the Mysore Durbar's own officials and inspecting authorities repeatedly acknowledged in the early twentieth century.

7. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Placed side by side, the three districts illustrate how a single administrative variable — direct British rule versus indirect rule through a princely Durbar — shaped the pace, character and financing of colonial-era schooling even among neighbouring, culturally similar districts.

- Administrative framework: Ballari fell under the Madras Presidency and was governed by Presidency-wide statutes, Collectors' reports and the Madras Department of Public Instruction; Chitradurga and Tumkuru were governed through the Mysore Durbar's own Department of Public Instruction, subject to British political oversight but administratively distinct.
- Timing of reform: Ballari experienced the Anglicist turn of the 1830s and the Presidency-wide 1854 reforms directly and early; Mysore's comparable expansion gathered momentum chiefly after the Rendition of 1881, once the restored Durbar under Rangacharlu and his successors invested more deliberately in schooling.
- Role of missions: missionary schooling was a significant, sometimes decisive, channel of education for depressed-class and rural children in both Tumkuru and Ballari, though the specific societies involved (London Mission at Bellary from 1810; Wesleyan and other missions working through Tumkur and Mysore taluks) differed by locality.
- Common limitation: in all three districts, the dry, dispersed, agrarian character of the countryside meant that formal schooling remained concentrated in taluk and district headquarters towns well into the twentieth century, leaving rural primary education, and especially the education of girls and depressed-class children, considerably behind the urban and Presidency/State-capital norm.

8. CONCLUSION

The colonial period transformed the educational landscape of Central Karnataka from a network of informal, temple- and household-based indigenous schools into a graded system of government, board and mission institutions offering vernacular and English instruction. This transformation, however, unfolded along two administratively distinct tracks — direct Madras Presidency rule in Ballari and semi-autonomous Mysore State governance in Chitradurga and Tumkuru — that produced differences in the pace, financing and institutional character of schooling even as they shared a common colonial framework of policy ideas, from Munro's 1822 survey through Macaulay's Minute, Wood's Despatch and the Hunter Commission. Missionary enterprise supplied a crucial, if uneven, channel through which education reached rural, depressed-class and female populations that government schooling was slower to serve. By the close of the colonial period, all three districts possessed the institutional skeleton of a modern school system — primary, middle and high schools, teacher-training institutions and a small number of colleges reachable at Mysore or Bangalore — yet the benefits of this system remained concentrated in taluk and district towns, leaving the agrarian, dry-zone interior of Central Karnataka with comparatively low levels of literacy and school enrolment at the time of independence in 1947. A fuller reconstruction of this history would benefit from systematic examination of the annual Reports on Public Instruction for Madras Presidency and Mysore State, taluk-level school registers, and missionary society archives specific to each of the three districts.

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