Pathshalas and Patronage: Re-Examining Indigenous Education in Colonial India (Eighteenth–Nineteenth Century)

A Review Based on Dharampal, "The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century" (Other India Press, 2000)

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Abstract

This paper looks again at the facts collected by Dharampal in his book The Beautiful Tree (2000) about Indian education in the late 1700s and early 1800s. The book gives some big numbers about how many schools and students there were. But instead of taking those numbers as the final word on how big pre-colonial education really was, this paper goes back to the district-by-district data and looks at it from several angles: schools, home teaching, caste, gender, subjects taught, and money. This is a review of one book's documents, not a full systematic review — it only covers the seven original documents and the introduction printed in that one book. The picture that comes out is mixed, not one simple picture. Caste among students changed a lot from region to region. In some Tamil areas, more than eighty percent of students came from Soodra and other castes. In several Telugu districts, twice-born castes (Brahmin and Vysee) formed the larger group instead. Home teaching and private tutoring are recorded in only two of the twenty-one Madras districts, but where they are recorded, they were several times bigger than school attendance. This means that counting schools alone can give a false idea of how much learning was actually happening. Girls' education was rare almost everywhere, except in Malabar and the Jeypoor Zamindary, where it was noticeably higher. Large amounts of land revenue were given to temples, individuals, and institutions, but the book does not tell us exactly how much of this money was spent on education itself, as opposed to worship, charity, or medical care. This paper ends by pointing out which claims the evidence supports clearly, which ones it supports only weakly, and which questions it simply cannot answer.

Keywords

Indigenous education; colonial India; Madras Presidency survey; Dharampal; history of education; caste and schooling; home-based education; revenue grants

1. Introduction

Much of what we know about Indian education before the twentieth century comes from records that British officials wrote for their own administrative reasons, not for the sake of education history. The most important of these records are: a survey of schools and colleges done across the Madras Presidency between 1822 and 1826; William Adam's reports on Bengal and Bihar, finished in 1838; and a later survey of the Panjab by G.W. Leitner. District collectors and government officers gathered all of these to answer specific administrative questions, not to write a history of schooling.

Dharampal's book The Beautiful Tree puts these three surveys together in one place. It also adds shorter accounts by Fra Paolino Da Bartolomeo (1796) and Alexander Walker (around 1820), a set of revenue records from Tanjore, and the full letters exchanged between Mahatma Gandhi and Sir Philip Hartog. Those letters came out of a claim Gandhi made at Chatham House in 1931 — that literacy in India had gone down under British rule.

This paper uses the same set of documents, but for a different purpose than the book itself. Dharampal wrote his introduction to support Gandhi's claim, arguing that India once had a strong, well-funded system of local education that broke down under colonial rule. That is one fair way to read the material, but it is not the only way, and the underlying data is more uneven than any single headline number suggests. This paper does not try to settle the Gandhi–Hartog argument. Instead, it goes back to the collectors' district reports and to Adam's and Leitner's tables, and reorganises them by theme — school structure, home and private teaching, caste and gender, subjects taught, teaching methods, and money — to see what the numbers, read carefully, actually show.

Significance of the Study

This review matters because public and even some academic discussion of India's education history often reaches for a single dramatic number — either a claim that there was once a rich, widespread system of village schools everywhere, or a claim that written education was rare and limited to a narrow elite. Both of these positions are easier to state than to defend once the original district-by-district records are read closely. This review does not choose between them.

Instead, it sets out clearly what each historical record does and does not support, region by region and theme by theme, so that later discussion of India's own educational past — by historians, students, or policymakers — can rest on a fuller and more honest reading of the evidence, rather than on a single figure taken out of context. In this sense, the contribution of this paper is methodological as much as historical: it shows how a single, much-cited documentary source can be read more carefully, and it offers a model for reading similar colonial-era survey material on other topics.

2. Historical and Documentary Background

The Madras Presidency survey began with a government order asking collectors in all twenty-one districts to report, on a set form, how many schools and colleges existed in their area, and how many boys and girls attended, split into five caste groups: Brahmin, Vysee, Soodra, all other castes, and Mussalman. Three districts — Vizagapatam, Masulipatam, and Tanjore — added an extra group for Chettri or Rajah students. The collectors sent their answers between 1822 and 1826, and the quality varied a great deal. About half reported at the taluk level; the rest reported only for the whole district. The collector of Canara refused to send any numbers at all. He argued that what happened in his district could not fairly be called “public education,” and that preparing a report would take longer than it was worth.

Thirteen years later, William Adam — a former Baptist missionary who had become a journalist — wrote three reports on Bengal and Bihar for the Governor-General. His first report used material collected after 1800. His second was a small pilot study of one administrative area, the Thana of Nattore in Rajshahy district. His third report, the most detailed of the three, covered parts of Murshedabad and all of Beerbhoom, Burdwan, South Behar, and Tirhoot.

Forty-five years after Adam, G.W. Leitner carried out a similar survey in the Panjab, comparing how things stood when the British took over the region with what he found in 1882. The book reprints or quotes all three of these surveys, along with the shorter accounts by Bartolomeo and Walker, the Tanjore revenue records, and the Gandhi–Hartog letters, which argue that the whole set of documents matters for a political debate that took place a century later.

3. Research Gap

The history of this period has already been studied — by the government's own Selections from Educational Records, by Nurullah and Naik, and by Pandit Sundarlal's chapter on the decline of indigenous education. So this is not an unstudied topic. The gap this paper addresses is

narrower than that. Most writing on this material, including much of Dharampal's own introduction, pulls out a small number of headline numbers — a total number of students for the whole presidency, or Adam's much-quoted (and disputed) estimate of a hundred thousand village schools in Bengal and Bihar — and uses them to support one big argument about the size or decline of Indian education.

What is less often done is to read the same district reports across several angles at once. For example: does the caste pattern seen in one language region of Madras also appear in another region? Can the home-tuition numbers reported for just two districts really stand in for all twenty-one? This paper's main contribution is doing that side-by-side reading carefully enough to show where the evidence holds up across regions and where it does not.

4. Research Questions and Objectives

This paper is built around six questions:

RQ1. What does the Madras Presidency survey (1822–25) tell us about how schools and colleges were organised and spread across the region, and how much can we trust this as a base for wider conclusions?

RQ2. What patterns of caste participation in schooling show up across the five language regions of the Presidency, and how similar are these patterns from region to region?

RQ3. What does the evidence say about girls' education and home teaching, and what are the limits of what we can conclude from it?

RQ4. How do school-based teaching, private tuition, and specialised higher learning fit together as parts of one education system?

RQ5. What does the evidence show about the money (revenue) behind education and related institutions, and how strong is the actual link to education?

RQ6. What do the figures from across the nineteenth century tell us about change over time, and what problems limit that comparison?

The matching aims are: to bring together the district-level data on schools while noting its own gaps; to compare caste participation across regions instead of giving one presidency-wide number; to judge what the evidence on girls' education and home tuition can and cannot support; to describe school teaching and home or private teaching as two parts of the same

system rather than separate categories; to look at the revenue evidence without claiming a link to education that the source does not actually make; and to check whether the pre- and post-1822 figures can honestly be compared.

5. Methodology

This is a documentary review based on one source, not a systematic review in the strict sense. There was no database search, no screening process, and no second independent source to check the material against, because the scope of this paper is limited to one compiled book. The method had five steps.

First, a close reading of the Introduction and all seven documentary sections (Annexures A–G), pulling out figures along with the district, region, and time period each one belongs to.

Second, sorting the extracted evidence into the themes used in the findings sections below.

Third, comparing documents against each other — checking, for instance, whether a pattern found in one Madras district is backed up, contradicted, or simply not tested by the Bengal or Panjab material, keeping in mind these surveys cover different places and different decades.

Fourth, keeping a clear line, all through the findings, between what a document actually says, what Dharampal concludes from it, what this paper concludes on its own, and what remains unclear.

Fifth, treating all numbers on the source's own terms. Original units and regions are kept as given, and any figure the source itself flags as incomplete or as the author's own estimate — Adam's often-quoted “hundred thousand village schools” being the clearest case — is labelled as such rather than treated as an exact count.

This paper makes no claim to fieldwork, citation-counting, or statistical analysis beyond the simple percentages and ratios the source itself calculates, or ones that can be worked out directly from numbers it reports. Where this paper does its own calculation rather than quoting the source, both the original figures and the calculation are shown.

6. Documentary Basis of the Study

The seven documentary sections differ a lot in date, geographic coverage, and type of evidence, and should not be treated as equally reliable just because they sit in the same book. Table 1 sums up these differences.

Table 1. Documentary sources reprinted in The Beautiful Tree

Document	Period	Region	Type of evidence	Main contribution	Limitation
A. Madras Presidency Survey	1822–1826	21 districts, Madras Presidency	Official collectors' returns, set form	District-level counts of schools, colleges, and students by caste and sex	Canara withheld data; Ganjam and Vizagapatam flagged as incomplete; format inconsistent across districts
B. Fra Paolino Da Bartolomeo	Observed 1776–89, published 1796	Malabar coast	Missionary traveller's account	Descriptive detail on teaching method, fees, and the guru–pupil relationship	Single observer, narrow geography, no numbers
C. Alexander Walker	c. 1820	Western India	Administrator's notes on education and literature	Supports other qualitative detail on schooling practice	Unpublished notes, limited coverage
D. William Adam's Reports	1835–1838	Bengal and Bihar (5 districts in detail)	Semi-official survey; personal and assistant-conducted enquiry	Detailed caste, curriculum, and teacher data for surveyed districts; Nattore pilot survey	Adam's presidency-wide guesses (e.g. 100,000 schools) go beyond his directly surveyed base; evangelical outlook
E. G.W. Leitner	Survey published 1882	Panjab	Official-turned-independent survey, comparing 1849 and 1882	Long-term comparison at annexation and 35 years later	Earlier (1849) figure is a later reconstruction, not a count taken at the time
F. Gandhi–Hartog Correspondence	1931–1939	National (referencing Panjab, Madras, Bengal data)	Personal letters, published	Shows how the Madras, Adam, and Leitner data were argued over in the 1930s	A political dispute, not new evidence on its own
G. Tanjore Revenue Records	1810–1813	Tanjore district	Government pension and assignment registers	Direct figures on temple and individual revenue grants	Covers revenue generally, not education specifically; link to schooling not proven item by item

Two points follow from this comparison. First, only Document A gives a genuinely presidency-wide set of numbers, and even that is incomplete for at least three of the twenty-one districts. Second, the book's most often-quoted claim — Adam's estimate of a hundred thousand village schools across Bengal and Bihar — is stretched from a directly surveyed sample far smaller than the whole province. The book does not hide this, but it is easy to lose sight of when the number is quoted on its own.

7. Institutional and Home-Based Structure of Education

Where Madras collectors reported on higher-learning institutions — called "colleges" in the survey — eleven districts together reported 1,094 such places (Dharampal, 2000: p.33). Table 2 shows the district-by-district numbers.

Table 2. Institutions of higher learning by district, Madras Presidency, 1822–25

District	Institutions	Scholars
Rajahmundry	279	1,454
Coimbatore	173	724
Guntoor	171	939
Tanjore	109	769
Nellore	107	not reported
North Arcot	69	418
Salem	53	324
Chingleput	51	398
Masulipatam	49	199
Bellary	23	not reported
Trichnopoly	9	131
Malabar	1 (Samudrin Raja's institution)	75
Total	1,094	5,431 (of the districts reporting scholar numbers)

The district numbers add up exactly to the presidency total of 1,094 given separately in the book. That is a useful check on the data itself, though this paper has not independently verified it against the original archival records. Beyond these listed institutions, several collectors — including those from Guntoor, Cuddapah, Masulipatam, Madura, and Madras — reported that higher learning in subjects such as Theology, Law, and Astronomy was also taught informally, in agraharam settlements or in private homes, usually by Brahmins holding land grants (called maunium) for that purpose, and usually free of charge.

The clearest sign that counting institutions alone gives too small a picture of schooling comes from the two districts where collectors separately recorded private and home teaching. In Malabar, the collector recorded 1,594 students receiving private lessons in Theology, Law, Astronomy, Metaphysics, Ethics, and Medical Science (Dharampal, 2000: pp.35–41). Of 808 Astronomy students in this group, only 78 were Brahmins. Of 194 Medicine students, only 31 were Brahmins — showing that these specialised subjects, unlike Theology and Law, drew students from a much wider range of castes than is usually assumed. In Madras city, the collector reported 26,963 school-age students learning at home, a number the book says was 4.73 times the number attending school in the same area (Dharampal, 2000: p.41). Using that ratio, school attendance in Madras city itself would have been around 5,700 students — a figure

this paper works out from the stated ratio, not one given directly by the source. Of the home-tutored group, roughly half came from Brahmin and Vysee families, 28.7 percent were Soodras, and 13 percent came from other castes.

This evidence should not simply be applied to the other nineteen districts. The book itself suggests, as a guess rather than a proven fact, that private teaching may have been common elsewhere too. That guess is reasonable, since local doctors and religious teachers existed in most districts, but it remains a guess, and this paper treats it as one.

8. Regional Distribution of Schools

The survey covered five language regions — Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Oriya — that together made up the Madras Presidency. The quality of reporting varied by region as much as by district. The Telugu-speaking collectors of Rajahmundry, Bellary, Cuddapah, and Guntoor usually gave detailed written comments along with their numbers. The Tamil-speaking collectors of Tinnevelly and Chingleput, and the Oriya collector of Vizagapatam, mostly let the tables speak for themselves.

The language used for teaching also varied by district. North Arcot reported 365 schools teaching in Tamil and 201 in Telugu, along with smaller numbers teaching Hindvee, Grantham, and Persian. Bellary reported almost equal numbers of Telugu- and Kannada-medium schools, plus twenty-three teaching Marathi. Across the whole presidency, only ten schools were reported as teaching English, and seven of those ten were in North Arcot (Dharampal, 2000: p.30).

9. Social and Caste Participation

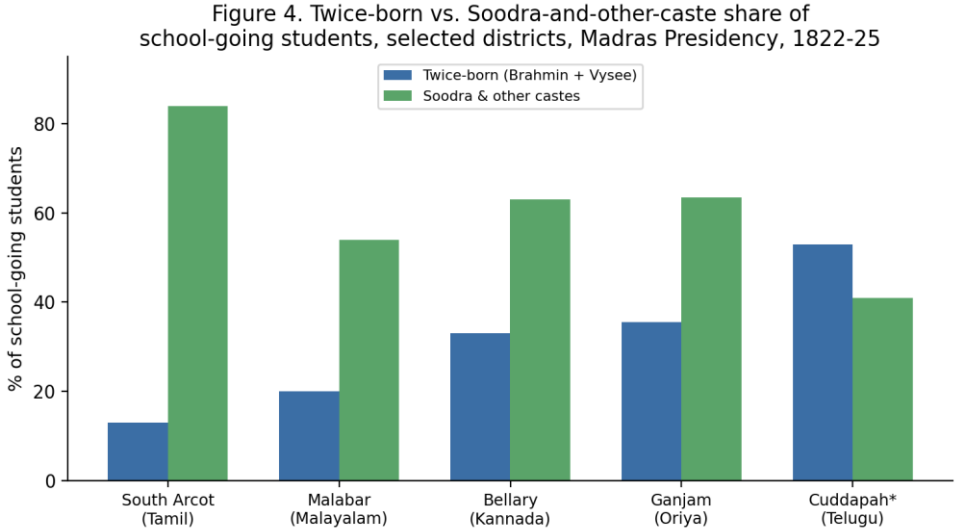
The most important finding from the Madras survey — and the one that most directly challenges an old assumption in earlier history writing, that pre-colonial schooling was mostly limited to Brahmins and other high-status groups — is about the caste make-up of students. The survey used the caste categories common in colonial administration at the time (Brahmin, Vysee, Soodra, “all other castes,” and Mussalman). This paper reports these categories exactly as given, without converting them into modern classifications, and treats the differences between regions as an important finding rather than smoothing them into one average number for the whole presidency.

Table 3 shows the figures as reported, by district and by the categories the source itself gives. Blank cells mean the text does not give a number for that category and district — they are left blank rather than guessed at.

Table 3. Caste-wise share of school-going students by district (percent of total, as reported)

District (language region)	Twice-born (Brahmin + Vysee)	Muslim	Soodra & other castes
South Arcot (Tamil)	13	< 3	84
Madras (Tamil)	23	not reported	not reported
Salem (Tamil)	not reported	10	~70
Tinnevelly (Tamil)	not reported	not reported	~70
Malabar (Malayalam)	< 20	~27	~54
Bellary (Kannada)	33	not reported	~63
Ganjam (Oriya)	35.6	not reported	63.5
Cuddapah (Telugu)	53 (Brahmin 24 + Vysee 29)	not reported	over 41
Vizagapatam (Telugu)	56.5 (Brahmin 46 + Vysee 10.5)	1	over 41
Nellore (Telugu)	not reported	8	not reported
Guntoor (Telugu)	not reported	not reported	35

Source: figures compiled from the district commentary in Dharampal (2000: pp.27–30); percentages marked with "~" or "over" follow the source's own qualified wording. Figures for Cuddapah and Vizagapatam twice-born shares are this paper's sum of separately reported Brahmin and Vysee figures.

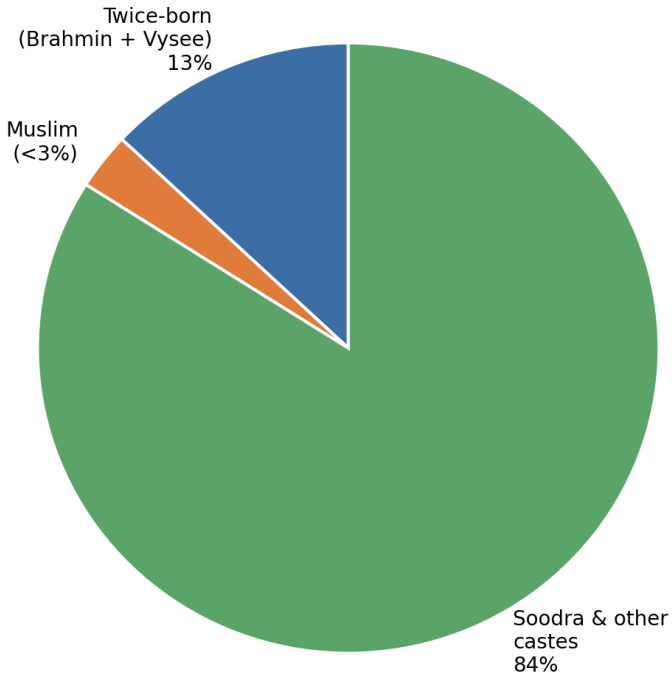


*Note: Muslim-student shares are omitted here because the book does not report them for every district shown; see Table 3 for the figures where available. *Cuddapah twice-born share is the sum of its separately reported Brahmin (24%) and Vysee (29%) shares; its Soodra-and-other share is reported as 'over 41%'.*

Read district by district, the pattern is not the same everywhere, and averaging it into one presidency-wide number would hide more than it shows. In the Tamil-speaking districts, especially South Arcot, students from Soodra and other castes made up the large majority — a pattern for which the survey gives one full, clean set of numbers (13 percent twice-born, under

3 percent Muslim, 84 percent Soodra and other castes), shown in Figure 5. Malabar looks different again: a low twice-born share sits alongside a large Muslim share, matching the district's different population mix. In the Kannada- and Oriya-speaking districts sampled, the twice-born share rose to about a third of students. Only in the Telugu-speaking districts did twice-born students reach or pass half of those enrolled, and even there, the “Soodra and other castes” group stayed large — over 41 percent in both Cuddapah and Vizagapatam.

Figure 5. Caste composition of school-going students, South Arcot District, Madras Presidency, 1822-25



Note: South Arcot is used here because it is the one district for which the book's own text gives three mutually exclusive category shares summing to the whole (100%).

What this pattern shows, and does not show, should be said carefully. It shows that, for the districts and years the survey covers, groups outside the twice-born castes made up the majority — often the large majority — of enrolled students in most of the Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and Oriya districts sampled, and a large minority even in the Telugu districts where twice-born enrolment was higher. It does not give us one national or even one presidency-wide number, because the regions differ too much from each other for a single figure to represent them fairly, and because several districts (Madras, Salem, Tinnevelly, Nellore, Guntoor) only give partial breakdowns.

10. Women's Education

In most districts covered by the Madras survey, very few girls attended school. Outside Malabar and the Jeypoor Zamindary division of Vizagapatam district, girls from the Brahmin, Chettri, and Vysee castes were, in the source's own words, “practically non-existent” in the school records (Dharampal, 2000: p.42). Some Muslim girls were recorded — 56 in Trichnopoly and 27 in Salem — and the Hindu girls who did attend came mainly from the Soodra and other castes. Several collectors, including those from Masulipatam, Madura, Tinnevelly, and Coimbatore, noted that many of these girls were connected to temple service.

Malabar and the Jeypoor Zamindary look very different, as Table 4 shows.

Table 4. Ratio of girls to boys in school, Malabar and Jeypoor Zamindary (percent)

Region	Category	Girls as % of boys
Jeypoor Zamindary (Vizagapatam)	All categories	29.7
Jeypoor Zamindary (Vizagapatam)	Brahmin	37.0
Malabar	Muslim	35.1
Malabar	Vysee	15.5
Malabar	Soodra	19.1
Malabar	Other castes	12.4
Malabar	All categories	18.3

The book points out, and this paper agrees, that finding comparatively high numbers of girls in school in two places that are far apart and otherwise quite different — the Malabar coast and the hill areas of the Jeypoor Zamindary near the southern edge of Orissa — is striking enough to deserve closer study than either the survey or this paper can give (Dharampal, 2000: p.45). What can be said with confidence is narrower: girls' attendance at school, as recorded by this survey, was low almost everywhere in the Madras Presidency, with these two clear regional exceptions. What this data cannot tell us is the full extent of girls' education overall, because the survey only measures school attendance, and the collectors themselves said much of girls' learning happened at home — a category that, unlike boys' home tuition in Madras and Malabar, was never separately counted for girls. The claim sometimes made elsewhere, that women in this period were either fully educated or completely excluded, is not something this evidence can settle either way.

11. Curriculum and Knowledge Domains

The main subjects reported in the elementary schools of the Madras Presidency were reading, writing, and arithmetic, taught using locally produced texts. The Bellary collector listed the

most commonly used books — the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavata — along with separate reading lists for children from manufacturing castes, for Lingayat children, lighter texts like the Panchatantra, and standard dictionaries and grammar books (Dharampal, 2000: p.32). The Rajahmundry collector gave a list of forty-three Telugu texts used in schools — the most detailed list in the whole survey.

Adam's third report, covering the five Bengal and Bihar districts, gives the most detailed subject-by-subject numbers in the book, because it records exactly how many students studied each subject in institutions of Sanskrit learning. Across the surveyed districts, 1,424 students studied Grammar, 378 Logic, 336 Law, 120 Literature, 82 Mythology, 78 Astrology, 48 Lexicology, 19 Rhetoric, 18 Medicine, 13 Vedanta, 14 Tantra, 2 Mimansa, and 1 Sankhya (Dharampal, 2000: p.55). Persian was studied by 3,479 students, with the largest group — 1,424 — in South Behar. More than half of these Persian students were Hindus, mostly Kayasthas, which goes against any assumption that Persian learning at this time was only for Muslim students. Arabic, on the other hand, was studied by 175 students, mostly Muslim, though fourteen Kayasthas, two Aguris, one Teli, and one Brahmin were also recorded among them.

One gap in this material deserves to be stated plainly rather than filled in with guesswork: the documents in this book contain almost nothing about how craft and technical skills — metalworking, textile making, boat-building, and the many trades listed elsewhere in tax records of the time — were taught or passed down. Dharampal himself points out this gap and suggests it reflects the interests of the British officials, missionaries, and travellers who wrote these records, rather than a real absence of such teaching (Dharampal, 2000: pp.57–58). This paper does not try to fill that gap using outside sources; it is noted here as a limit on what this set of documents can tell us about the full range of learning in this period.

12. Teachers and Teaching Practices

Payment arrangements for teachers varied by district but generally followed a similar pattern: a small monthly fee per student, usually somewhere between a few annas and one or two rupees, sometimes with gifts added when a student joined, finished a particular text, or left school. In Ganjam, teachers were paid between four annas and one rupee a month per student. In Vizagapatam, payment ranged from one anna to one rupee, with two schools also getting a fifty-rupee yearly grant from a local zemindar. In Rajahmundry, of 279 recorded teachers of “the Sciences,” sixty-nine held land grants and thirteen held cash grants from former

zemindars, while 196 taught without charging any fee at all, relying instead on the wider system of gifts and community support described for Cuddapah (Dharampal, 2000: pp.35–36, 154–56).

The Nellore collector's report gives a rare, complete breakdown of school types within one district: of 804 local schools recorded, 642 were general ("Genttoo") schools, 83 taught the Vedas, fifty taught Persian and Arabic, fifteen taught Law, five taught Astronomy, three taught Astrology, four taught Tamil, one taught English, and one taught Hindustani music (Dharampal, 2000: p.153). This district-level detail shows a pattern the presidency-wide totals cannot show on their own: general schools made up the large majority, with specialised subject schools forming a much smaller share.

Adam's writing on teacher pay in Bengal is more openly critical than the Madras reports, and it is worth reporting his judgement directly instead of softening it to match the more positive tone found elsewhere in the book. Adam wrote that the teaching he saw "produce[d] chiefly a mechanical effect upon the intellect of their pupils," with little attention given to moral growth or independent thinking (Dharampal, 2000: p.272). This critical view — coming from the same source that elsewhere supports a more positive picture of Indian schooling — is kept here on purpose. It is Adam's own opinion, shaped by his evangelical and reform-minded views, not an independent fact. But it is still evidence, and this paper should not leave it out simply because it complicates a more favourable reading.

13. Economic and Fiscal Foundations

The book's argument — that Indian education rested on a wider system of land and revenue grants — is best judged against the specific numbers the documents give, rather than against Dharampal's broader guess about what share of total revenue was involved. In Bengal and Bihar during the 1770s and 1780s, revenue categories outside the state treasury (Khalsa) included Chakeran Zemin, given to those doing administrative and accounting work, and Bazee Zemin, described in British records as covering "religious and charitable allowances" — a category that covered grants to temples, mosques, dargahs, maths, agraharams, pundits, poets, and doctors, among others. At Hedgelee in Bengal, an official report from 1770 said that almost half the province was held under this free-of-tax arrangement. In some Bengal and Bihar districts, the number of Bazee Zemin holders reached thirty to thirty-six thousand, and in one district around 1780, seventy-two thousand applications were reportedly made to register such holdings (Dharampal, 2000: pp.75–76).

In the Madras Presidency, a similar pattern held before British revenue reforms took effect. As late as 1801, more than 35 percent of farmed land in the Ceded Districts (today's Rayalseema region and Bellary) was recorded as free of revenue — a share that Thomas Munro's administration later cut down to around 5 percent (Dharampal, 2000: p.77). A specific, checkable figure comes from Tanjore: a government record from April 1813 shows yearly payments of Star Pagodas 43,037 to 1,013 temples, and Star Pagodas 5,929 to between 350 and 400 individuals — one Star Pagoda being worth roughly three and a half rupees (Dharampal, 2000: p.77; Annexures G–H). Table 5 brings together the main money-related figures the book provides.

Table 5. Documented revenue-grant evidence

Region / period	Category	Reported figure
Hedgelee, Bengal, 1770	Bazee Zemin ("religious and charitable") land	Almost one-half of the province on free tenure
Bengal/Bihar districts, 1770s–80s	Bazee Zemin holders per district	30,000–36,000
One Bengal district, c.1780	Applications for Bazee Zemin registration	72,000 (H.T. Prinsep)
Ceded Districts, Madras Presidency, 1801	Revenue-free farmed land	Over 35% of total (cut to ~5% under Munro)
Tanjore, April 1813	Payments to 1,013 temples	Star Pagodas 43,037 per year
Tanjore, April 1813	Payments to 350–400 individuals	Star Pagodas 5,929 per year

What these numbers show with reasonable confidence is that a large share of pre-colonial revenue, across widely separated regions, was routinely set aside for religious, charitable, and service purposes, and that this system shrank a lot as British revenue administration spread and centralised. What they do not show, transaction by transaction, is what share of any given grant actually went to education, as opposed to temple worship, charitable feeding, medical care, or other purposes grouped under the same broad heading. Dharampal's own estimate — that a quarter to a third of revenue-paying sources supported the wider "social and cultural infrastructure" that education was part of — is clearly his own conclusion from the overall pattern, not a total the documents themselves add up. This paper reports it as such, not as a settled figure (Dharampal, 2000: p.77).

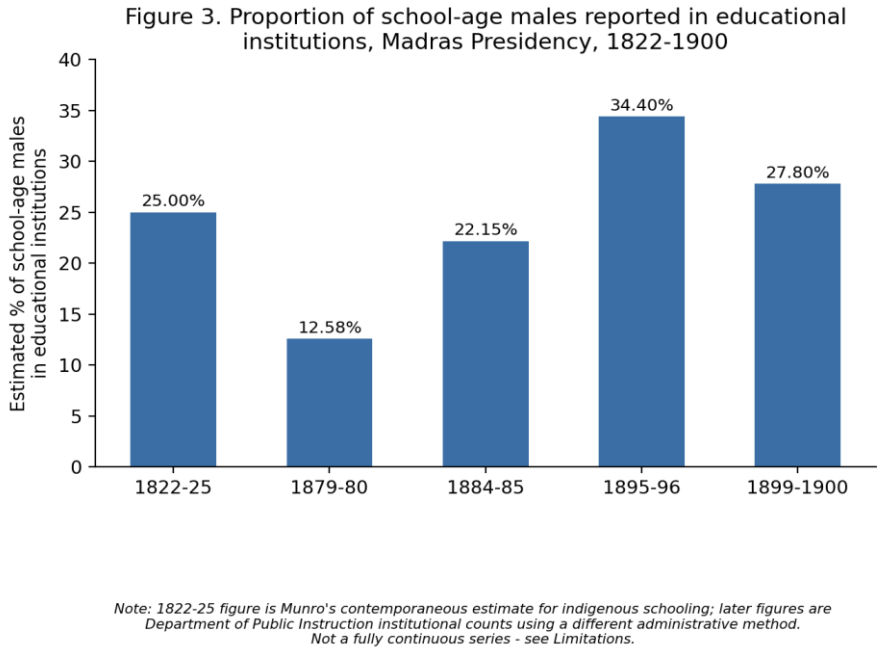
14. Historical Transformation

The book's most direct evidence of change over time within the Madras Presidency comes from comparing Thomas Munro's 1826 assessment of the 1822–25 survey with later Department of Public Instruction figures for the same area. Munro concluded that formal schooling reached "a little more than one-fourth" of boys aged five to ten, rising to about one-third if home

teaching was included (Dharampal, 2000: p.26). Later official figures, shown in Table 6 and Figure 3, tell a different story over time.

Table 6. School-age male enrolment, Madras Presidency, 1822–1900

Period	Basis	Male scholars	Total population	% of school-age males enrolled
1822–25	Munro's estimate, indigenous schooling + home tuition	not directly counted	12,850,941 (1823)	~25 (one-fourth, school-based only)
1879–80	DPI, all institution types	238,960	31,308,872	12.58 (primary only) / 13.74 (all types)
1884–85	DPI, all institution types	379,932	30,868,504	22.15
1895–96	DPI, all institution types	681,174	35,641,828	34.4
1899–1900	DPI, all institution types	733,923	not stated separately	27.8



Taken at face value, this set of figures suggests that enrolment dropped after 1822–25, hit its lowest recorded point in 1879–80, and then recovered through the 1880s and 1890s to a level that, by 1895–96, matched but did not clearly beat Munro's original one-third estimate — a level reached about seventy years after Munro's own calculation. This is the book's central comparison, and the numbers, as reported, do support a pattern of decline followed by partial recovery, rather than a simple story of steady progress under British rule.

That said, there is a real problem with this comparison that should not be brushed aside. The 1822–25 figure comes from the indigenous system's own self-reported attendance, gathered by district collectors from information the schools and communities gave themselves. The later Department of Public Instruction figures come from a different administrative system, counting

a different, colonially organised type of institution. These are not the same measurement taken twice; they are two different measurements of two different systems, connected only by an assumption — that the share of the population of "school-going age" stayed a fixed one-ninth of the total population — which the source applies consistently but never independently checks for either period. This paper reports the comparison because it is the book's own central claim, and because the individual figures behind it are well sourced, but it treats the resulting trend as suggestive rather than as a fully proven time series.

In the Panjab, Leitner's comparison of figures from the time of annexation and from 1882 shows a drop from a lowest estimate of 330,000 students to "little more than" 190,000 (Dharampal, 2000: p.56). This comparison has its own problem: the annexation-era figure is Leitner's own later reconstruction, not a count taken at the time, so the comparison actually measures Leitner's own estimate against his own later survey, rather than two counts taken independently at each point in time.

15. The Gandhi–Hartog Correspondence

The full correspondence between Gandhi and Sir Philip Hartog, printed as Annexure F, grew directly out of Gandhi's speech at Chatham House on 20 October 1931, where he said India was "more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago" and blamed this on British administrators having "scratched the soil" of an existing indigenous system instead of building on it (Dharampal, 2000: pp.345–46). Hartog, who was present at the talk, asked Gandhi where his figures came from. Gandhi pointed to Punjab Administration Reports and to his own earlier writing in Young India. A five-to-six-week exchange of letters followed, ending in a face-to-face meeting, in which Hartog maintained that Gandhi had not backed up his claim with evidence, and that, as far as Hartog could tell, any drop in indigenous schooling was due to neglect rather than deliberate destruction — a difference Hartog saw as important, and one Gandhi, in the recorded exchange, did not accept.

The book also includes Hartog's letters with the historian Edward J. Thompson, who told Hartog he did not think the British had destroyed indigenous schools "out of malice." Thompson called the outcome "inevitable" instead, while also admitting that little had been done for Indian education "until the last dozen years" before he wrote (Dharampal, 2000: pp.63–64). This detail matters because it shows that the disagreement, even among British writers who doubted Gandhi's figures, was not a simple denial that decline had happened — it was a disagreement about why it happened and whether it was deliberate.

This paper does not try to settle the Gandhi–Hartog argument. It treats the letters as evidence of how the Madras, Adam, and Leitner data were read and argued over in the 1930s, not as new evidence about eighteenth- or nineteenth-century schooling itself. It is included here in the book's own terms, because the book treats it as central to its argument, and a review of this material would give an unfair picture of the source if it left out the very dispute the whole book is built around.

16. Critical Discussion

Going back to the six research questions: on school structure (RQ1), the Madras survey gives a genuinely presidency-wide base, but one weakened by uneven district reporting and by Canara's complete refusal to respond. So any presidency-wide total should be treated as a lower estimate, not an exact count. On caste participation (RQ2), the evidence clearly shows that no single ratio describes the whole presidency: majorities of Soodra and other castes in most sampled Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and Oriya districts stand against twice-born majorities or near-majorities in the Telugu districts — a regional difference the survey documents more clearly than it explains.

On girls' education and home teaching (RQ3), this is the thinnest data in the whole book, relative to what would be needed to make a confident general claim: only two districts report home tuition, and only two report clearly higher female enrolment than the rest of the presidency. In both cases, the book itself treats the finding as needing further study rather than as settled fact. On the relationship between school and private teaching (RQ4), the Madras city ratio — home tuition running several times higher than school attendance — is the strongest single piece of evidence in the book that counting schools alone understates how much teaching was actually happening, though this paper stops short of applying that same ratio to any other district.

On the money behind education (RQ5), the evidence clearly shows that a large amount of revenue was set aside outside the state treasury for religious, charitable, and service purposes, and that this practice shrank a great deal under British revenue policy. It does not show, at the level of individual records, what share of any given grant actually reached education specifically, rather than worship, feeding, or medical care grouped under the same broad categories. On change over time (RQ6), the Madras Presidency figures do support a pattern of decline followed by recovery across the nineteenth century, but the 1822–25 and post-1879

numbers come from two different measurement systems, so the comparison should be read as a rough guide rather than as one continuous, fully reliable time series.

Table 7 brings the six research questions and their answers together in one place, along with how confident this review is in each answer, given the strength and completeness of the underlying evidence.

Table 7. Summary of research questions and key findings

Question	Short answer	Confidence
RQ1 — School structure	Presidency-wide base exists, but Canara is missing entirely and two more districts are flagged incomplete	Moderate — best read as a lower-bound count
RQ2 — Caste participation	No single ratio fits the whole presidency; Soodra-and-other-caste majorities in most Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and Oriya districts sampled, twice-born majorities in Telugu districts	High — the regional contrast is clearly and consistently documented
RQ3 — Girls' and home education	Home tuition reported for only 2 of 21 districts; higher female enrolment recorded only in Malabar and the Jeypoor Zamindary	Low — too little data for a general claim
RQ4 — School vs. private/home teaching	In Madras city, home tuition was 4.73 times school attendance, showing school counts alone can understate real teaching activity	Moderate — based on a single well-documented city, not generalised further
RQ5 — Revenue foundations	Large, well-documented revenue grants existed outside the state treasury; the specific share reaching education (versus worship, feeding, medical care) is not itemised	Moderate — aggregate pattern firm, item-level link unproven
RQ6 — Change over time	A decline-then-recovery pattern across 1822–1900 is supported, but the early and late figures come from two different measurement systems	Moderate — indicative trend, not a strictly continuous series

17. Limitations

- The Madras survey leaves out Canara entirely and flags Ganjam and Vizagapatam as incomplete, so presidency-wide totals understate the true numbers by an unknown amount.
- Reporting format differs across districts — taluk-wise in some, district-wise only in others — which limits how precisely sub-district figures can be combined.
- Home and private education data exists for only two of twenty-one Madras districts and cannot be treated as a fixed ratio for the rest of the presidency.
- Adam's often-quoted figure of roughly a hundred thousand village schools in Bengal and Bihar is his own extrapolation from a much smaller directly surveyed sample, and it remains disputed in the very historiography the book cites.
- The comparison between 1822–25 and 1879–1900 bridges two different administrative measurement systems, not one continuous series.

- The book is openly built to support Gandhi's 1931 claim. Its choice and framing of documents, while honest about this purpose, is not a neutral compilation, and because this paper relies on the book as its only source, it inherits this framing to some degree.
- There is no data anywhere in this set of documents on craft or technical apprenticeship. This is a real gap in the source itself, not just an editorial choice by Dharampal.
- Because this paper is limited to one book, no checking has been done against the original archival records (India Office Library, Tamilnadu State Archives) or against independent secondary historical writing. All figures reported here should be understood as what the book itself states, not as independently confirmed archival fact.

18. Research Gaps and Future Directions

Several directions follow naturally from the limits listed above, without this paper making any new claims it is not in a position to make. First, the home-and-private-education finding from Madras city and Malabar would benefit from comparison with any surviving taluk-level records from other districts — Dharampal notes these may exist in the Tamilnadu State Archives, but this paper has not examined them. Second, the regional caste-composition difference found here — sharpest between the Tamil and Telugu districts — calls for an explanation that the survey data alone does not give, whether based on differing local economies, temple administration, or settlement patterns. Third, the coincidence of comparatively high female enrolment in Malabar and the Jeypoor Zamindary, two places at opposite ends of the peninsula, is noted but not explained in the source, and it would repay focused comparative study. Fourth, working out the specific fiscal link between particular revenue grants and particular schools — rather than using the broad categories reported here — would require going back to the original archival registers rather than relying on the summary figures this book provides.

19. Conclusion

The documentary evidence gathered in The Beautiful Tree supports a more mixed and detailed account of Indian education in this period than either a single “golden age” figure or a single decline percentage can capture. The Madras Presidency survey shows large, regionally varied participation by groups outside the twice-born castes; a Bengal and Bihar system whose true

size remains genuinely disputed even within the source's own reporting; and a Panjab comparison pointing to marked decline by the late nineteenth century. Home-based and privately tutored teaching, recorded only partly, seems to have added significantly to school-based teaching wherever it was recorded, meaning that school counts alone understate the total amount of teaching going on, by an extent this evidence cannot fully measure. Revenue grants to temples, individuals, and religious-charitable institutions were large and were cut back substantially under British administration, though the documented evidence does not separate out education's specific share of that revenue. The available evidence does not let us reach a final answer on the exact national scale of Indian education, on the full extent of women's education, or on the exact share of pre-colonial revenue spent on schooling as distinct from related religious and charitable purposes. Within these limits, the documentary material examined here points to a genuinely widespread, socially mixed, and regionally varied system of teaching that shrank, unevenly, over the course of the nineteenth century.

20. References

Dharampal (2000). The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century. Dharampal, Collected Writings, Volume III. Mapusa, Goa: Other India Press. (First edition, Biblia Impex, 1983.)

This paper deliberately relies on a single primary source, as stated in the Methodology section. The secondary works the source itself refers to — including Nurullah and Naik's history of Indian education, Pandit Sundarlal's Bharat men Angreji Raj, and the government's Selections from Educational Records — are mentioned in the discussion above only in the terms the source itself uses to describe them, because this paper has not independently checked their full publication details or read them directly. A separate literature search would be needed before any of these could be cited as independent references in their own right.

Ethics Statement

This paper is a documentary review of a single previously published book. It did not involve human participants, personal data, animals, or primary fieldwork, and therefore did not require clearance from a research ethics committee.

Data Availability Statement

All figures and quotations discussed in this review are drawn from the text, tables, and annexures of Dharampal (2000), The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century. No new data were collected or generated for this review, and no additional data are associated with it beyond what is cited from that source.

Author Contributions

Vipin Bihari Yadav is the sole author of this review and is responsible for its conception, the reading and classification of the source material, the analysis presented, and the writing of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

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