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Research Article

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A Comparative Study of Monitorial Schools in the West and Indigenous Vernacular Schools in India in the 19th Century

Abstract

The Monitorial system introduced in Europe and the Americas in the 19th century to educate the lower classes was considered to have been based on Indigenous schools in India. Andrew Bell introduced it first in Britain and promoted it as an "authentic Hindoo system." This paper looks at the working of Monitorial school models in the West and compares them with Indigenous schools of 18th and 19th-century India. It also analyses the attempt by the colonial state to introduce the Monitorial system, and its policy towards Indigenous schools throughout the 19th century. Since the Monitorial system was considered to have been modelled on Indigenous vernacular schools, this paper does not discuss the Sanskrit schools (*tols* and *pathsalas*) as well as the Arabic schools (madrasas).

Keywords*:* Andrew Bell, monitorial schools, Madras system, indigenous education in India

Introduction

Andrew Bell—who introduced the Monitorial system in the West—claimed that he saw the workings of an Indigenous school and formulated the Monitorial system or the Madras system for educating poor children. Bell was an Anglican missionary and stayed in Madras during 1787–1796. His nine years in Madras—and the system he formulated there—had a lasting influence on the education of the poor in Europe and the Americas. Bell was in charge of the Male Military Asylum set up by the government at Egmore near Madras for orphans of British and Eurasian soldiers and officers who had died in the Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780–84) against Tipu Sultan (Southey, 1844, pp. 168–70). These children were born to the Hindu and Muslim spouses of British soldiers and officers. Most of these children were not destitute, and their mothers and extended families would have gladly taken care of them as they regularly visited the children housed at the Asylum. The term "spouse" and not "wife" is used here since marriages between Christians and non-Christians were not legally recognised at the time. Most women who married British men did not

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convert and continued to practice Hinduism and Islam (Marshall, 1997; Haws, 1996). Thousands of wills left behind by British men in archives across India prove that they tried their best to financially protect their spouses and children by bequeathing their earnings. This situation changed after the Revolt of 1857 when the mixed population came to be identified as Christian and called Anglo-Indian (Carton, 2005).

One of the inmates in Madras recounted how Bell treated the inmates of the Male Military Asylum. Webbe—we do not have his first name—stayed there during this period, became an assistant to John Malcolm—a Scottish officer in the Madras Army—and continued to do so even after Malcolm became the governor of the Bombay Presidency. Malcolm submitted his testimonial before the British Parliamentary Committee regarding the condition of who were then called Eurasians or East Indians—the mixed population of British and Indian parents. Malcolm supported Bell's School at Egmore and asked Webbe to write down his experiences, which appear as a footnote to Malcolm's testimonial. This is how the voice of a Bell's Egmore School student entered British parliamentary records as a footnote. Webbe's rise in the official hierarchy was a rare phenomenon. Most Eurasian children "were taught the art of printing" and ended up as workers in various printing presses in Madras (Blackburn, 2006, pp. 77–78).

Webbe was expected to support his boss, Malcolm, but he very cleverly wrote of the actual conditions so the higher authorities could understand and possibly intervene:

> The boys had for their meals *tire* (curd) and rice, and in rains (the rainy season) pepper water (*rasam*) and rice or curry and rice. These were served to us in an earthen dish with a pewter or China spoon. …we slept on a mat and on the floor… The boys, I am sure, as it was often my case, could eat twice as much more as what was given for a meal, but a second supply was never allowed (Appendix to the Report, 1832, pp. 397–98)

The above statement shows that the diet of these boys mainly consisted of what impoverished Indians ate at the time, and the quantity of food given was insufficient. It also contradicts Robert Southey's claim that besides rice and pepper water, "the boys were given fish, mutton broth, vegetables and milk, along with better clothing and mattresses" (Southey, 1844, pp. 157–59). Webbe requested to introduce the "use of fork and knife" in the school to suggest that boys should be given more than rice and thin broth. Webbe went on to explain other practices. In the hot and humid weather of Madras—where Indians, even the poor, bathed in local tanks and wells daily and sometimes even twice a day—the boys in the Asylum were:

> marched twice a week in the hot season and once a week in the rainy season to the tank, by an usher, and they bathed by classes. … Clothes were given three times a week to change; these were a coarse pair of trousers and a shirt. Shoes were not allowed, even if parents or friends were desirous of supplying them. We slept on the floor on a country mat, without pillows or covering, except in rains, when a light quilt was given to the boys (Appendix to the Report, 1832, pp. 397–98)

Bell's attempt to popularise and promote the Monitorial school system with the local administration yielded no results. The records on education for the period of 1790s to 1850s show that the government of Madras occasionally paid lip service to his ideas but did not adopt it for Indians (Public Consultations, 1790–1852).

After Bell returned to Britain, he finally convinced British audiences by locating the Monitorial school system in the Hindu tradition. The British attitude towards India in general and towards Hindus in particular enabled Bell to locate his invention in the Hindu tradition. In the 18th century, the East India Company pursued twin policies. First, it prevented missionaries from entering India and defended "the right of the Hindoos to practice their religion" (Sarkar, 2012, pp. 295–320). In 1793, the East India Company defeated the missionaries' efforts to reach India (Kitzan, 1971, p. 458). William Carey (1761–1834), a Baptist missionary, boarded a British ship in 1793 to enter India. When the captain of the ship found out that Carey was a missionary, he and his pregnant wife were offloaded at the Isle of Wight (Laird, 1972, p. 63). A few Catholic and Protestant missionaries working in 18th-century India had entered through the Portuguese colony of Goa and Danish settlements in Serampore and Tranquebar. The East India Company allowed only a few Anglican priests to enter India for the purpose of offering services to British officials. Andrew Bell was one such priest. The Protestant missionaries trained catechists to preach Christianity to the local population and run schools while they supervised the latter (Bellenoit, 2007). Thus, the Monitorial system devised by Bell resembled the one that existed among the missionaries.

Second, the East India Company encouraged its officers to study the Sanskrit language not only for translating the *Dharmasastra*—which was to be used in the newly established courts to settle civil disputes among the Hindus—but also had a fascination for "the Hindoo system of learning" (Cannon, 1977, pp. 183–187; Mukherjee, 1964, p. 37). So, Bell's location of the Monitorial system in the Hindu tradition also had an immediate context as the officials of the East India Company were hostile to missionaries but supported the Hindu tradition. It was imperative for Bell to claim

that he derived the Monitorial system from Hindu schools where this "mode of instruction that from time immemorial has been practised" (Tschurenev, 2008, p. 247). How Bell actually came across this model has been described by his biographer Robert Southey:

> On one of his morning rides to pass by a Malabar school, he observed the children seated on the ground and writing with their fingers in the sand, which had, for the purpose, been strewn before them. He hastened home, repeating to himself Eureka; I have discovered it and gave immediate orders to [the] usher of the lowest classes to teach [him] the alphabet in the same manner, with this difference only from the Malabar mode that the sand was strewn upon a board (Southey, 1844, p. 173)

Regarding the working of an Indigenous school, if Bell had dismounted from his horse and walked in, the Tamil master would have explained to Bell how he taught all boys in the class and occasionally, asked an advanced student to help a weaker one. But Bell used the Hindus to promote what he wanted: "a strict disciplinary regime, with panoptic surveillance on the part of the master" (Tschurenev, 2014, p. 116). Bell explained on the front cover of his book that his experiment "comprising a system alike fitted to reduce the expense of tuition, abridge the labour of the master, and expedite the progress of the scholar; and suggesting a scheme for better administration of the poor laws, by converting schools for the lower orders of the youth into schools of industry" (Bell, 1807, Front Cover). Though he claimed, "my purpose was to make good scholars, good men and good Christians" (Bell, 1807, p. v), yet he was clear:

> It is not proposed that the children of the poor be educated in an expensive manner or even taught to write and to cipher. …and there is a risqué of elevating, by an indiscriminate education, the minds of those doomed to the drudgery of daily labour, above their condition, and thereby rendering them discontented and unhappy in their lot. It may suffice to teach the generality, on an economical plan, to read their Bible and understand the doctrines of our holy religion (Bell, 1807, p. 90)

As to the working of the schools, Bell explained the system:

> The Asylum, like every well-regulated school, is arranged into Forms or Classes. … being promoted or degraded from place to place, or class to class, according to his proficiency.

> Second, each class is paired off into Tutors and Pupils. The Tutor assists his pupil in learning his lessons. … Third, each class has an assistant teacher to keep all busy, to instruct and help tutors in getting their lessons and teaching their pupils, and to hear the class, as soon as prepared, say their lessons. The Superintendent … whose scrutinising eye must pervade the whole machine (Bell, 1807, pp. 1–2)

In the Monitorial system, the teachers were in charge of more than one class:

> Their business is to direct and guide their assistants, inspect their respective classes – the Tutor and the Pupils – and see that all is maintained in good order, strict attention and rigid discipline. [The school maintained] a register of continued idleness, negligence, ill behaviour, and every offence which requires serious investigation and animadversion. … This book is inspected every week, and sentence is inflicted or remitted at the discretion of the superintendent, or schoolmaster (Bell, 1807, pp. 8–13)

It is clear from Bell's writings that Monitorial schools emphasised discipline over the transmission of knowledge. Bell called for "the consolidation of Charity Schools and Schools of Industry" by adopting the Monitorial system (Bell, 1807, p. 91). Around the same time, Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker, experimented with a similar method in his school in London. Lancaster had never seen an Indigenous school in India, yet he formulated a system like the one created by Bell. This shows that the inspiration for the Monitorial system lay within the missionary practices. By the 1810s, all Protestant denominations in England were in favour of this system.

Bell's ideas helped the Anglican Church to "discipline the poor and reinforce societal hierarchies in England" and declared that it was "nothing less than the preservation of the National Religion." On 10 August, 1811, the Anglican Church established the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church. A meeting of Bishops presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury was held on 16 October, 1811 (First Annual Report, 1812, p. 6). It decided to adopt the "Madras System", and they sought Bell's assistance to train masters (First Annual Report, 1812, p. 15). The Society emphasised that "it being of the greatest importance, in the present times, that the children of the poor should be educated in a pious attachment to the principles of Christianity and of our established church" (First Annual Report,

1812, p. 31). Soon, similar measures were adopted in Ireland (Reports from the Select Committee, 1818).

The first Monitorial school was established in 1806 in New York. By 1818, France and Spain had embraced Monitorial schools. The system received royal support everywhere including from the Czar of Russia in 1813 and the King of Sweden in 1822 (Hager, 1959, p. 167). By 1817, missionary societies had set up Lancastrian schools to educate American Indians (Rayman, 1981, p. 498). Latin American countries that had recently become independent from Spain embraced the Monitorial system during 1818–1825. In Britain and European countries, the Monitorial system was meant to discipline poor children; in the US, it was for Native Indians. However, in Latin America, it was meant for all children. The President of Chile sent his two daughters to the Monitorial School (Vera, 2005, p. 665). In Mexico, Monitorial schools also attempted to inculcate civic values in all children (Vera, 1999, p. 316). As historian Marcelo Caruso puts it, the Monitorial system "received an impressive amount of support from Australia to South America and from Siberia to West Africa" and the Monitorial Movement became "an international story" (Caruso, 2007, p. 272).

Discipline and not the transmission of knowledge dominated Monitorial schools. Most literature on this system describes this aspect rather than the importance of transmitting knowledge through the agency of monitors. The teacher's duties were limited to "ceaseless supervision and the preservation of good order" and "extremely strict, military discipline" was the overriding concern. Even closing a book or folding one's hands on the slate were among the actions that were regulated (Landahl, 2019, pp. 196–197). In the United States, Monitorial school children "assembled almost instantly by the blow of a whistle to receive their orders." However, it was not successful:

> Despite the seemingly irresistible lure of a set of free tools presented to any student successfully completing an apprenticeship, runaways from apprenticeships and school became commonplace occurrences. Indian parents frequently refused to return their children, objecting strenuously that the children worked far too hard for long durations and were punished far too severely for even the most minor infractions of school rules (Rayman, 1981, p. 401)

The punishment for children was almost like "a trial by jury" (Vera, 1999, p. 314). Mary Colburn, who witnessed it, wrote:

> The Monitor will know if poor little Johnnie turns his head an inch too far to either side; if Mary smiles at her neighbour, if Daniel drops his pencil; if Sara looks over Nellie's slate; and

> worse than all, if that incorrigible Peter has a surreptitious marble. His gaze will ferret out who, of all the fifty, is poring over the wrong book or who isn't studying at all; whose feet are a little awry; who forgets the edict of perpetual silence and dares to break it; who shows one forbidden boot in the aisle; and who shakes his head as if a threat were in it. But it is all wrong. I do not believe in placing one child in authority over others (Colburn, 1876, p. 152)

The severity of discipline and poor knowledge they conveyed made these schools unpopular, and they started declining and almost disappeared by the 1860s.

Did Monitorial System Exist in Indian Indigenous Vernacular Schools?

The earliest references to the working of Indigenous vernacular schools can be found in the writings of two German Protestant missionaries. On 9 July, 1706, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau arrived in Tranquebar, 285 kilometres from Madras. Ziegenbalg and Plütschau joined an Indigenous Tamil school to learn the Tamil language. They traced the Tamil alphabet on sand with local children. Ziegenbalg mastered the Tamil language and, within two years, produced a Tamil dictionary containing over 20,000 words. Ziegenbalg has extensively recorded his experiences in India, and there is no mention of a Monitorial system or anything resembling it (Liebau, 2003). Ziegenbalg travelled across South India, including Malabar until his return to Europe in 1719. He visited several Indigenous schools and discussed Christianity with students, but this system did not come up in their discussions (Philipps, 1719, pp. 113–120).

The next reference comes from Alexander Johnston (1775–1849), one of the founders of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. He has left behind a very elaborate account of the education system in South India during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Johnston was born in Scotland and was taken to Madras at an early age. He spent his childhood studying Tamil, Telugu, and Hindustani languages with local boys until 1792 when Andrew Bell began implementing the Monitorial system three miles away, at Egmore. From 1802 to 1819 Johnston served in various positions, including as the Chief Justice of Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Johnston has recorded details of Indigenous practices relating to the education of all castes (Public Consultations, 21 August, 1835, Nos. 104–105). There is no mention of a Monitorial system.

The earliest data on vernacular schools was collected by Thomas Best Jervis within two years of the British conquest of western India in 1818. Jervis reported that "in the Hindoo schools, the scholars assist the teacher in the instruction of those children who are less advanced, and who for

this reason are sometimes paired off to ensure a greater facility of communication." It was done "sometimes" and not on a regular basis. Jervis recommended discarding this system and adopting the Lancastrian system, which he argued "is a great improvement on the native system. … obviates the want of moral and systematic instruction." Jervis reported that he had adopted the Lancastrian system with "greatest success and benefit in the schools by the Native School Society in the Southern Concan." Jervis also reported that he set up "an institution for training instructors aged between 18 and 25 in 1820. After the training, the newly established schools would be placed under these instructors" (General Department, 1824, No. 13). This endeavour was unsuccessful; he merged the Native School Society of South Concan with his brother George Jervis's Native School Book Society to form the Native Education Society (Rao, 2020, pp. 100–104). In the Bombay Presidency, over 40 officials collected data on Indigenous schools; except for this solitary reference, no other officer mentioned the Monitorial system's presence (Rao, 2020, pp. 15–18).

In the Madras Presidency during 1822–23 nearly 50 British and Indian officials were involved in the collection of data. There is a single mention of the term monitor by Alexander Duncan Campbell when he states:

> The scholars, according to their number and attainments, are divided into several classes, the lower ones of which are partly under the care of monitors, whilst the higher ones are more immediately under the superintendence of the master, who at the same time has his eye upon the whole school. The number of classes is generally four, and a scholar rises from one to the other according to his capacity and progress (Appendix to the Report, 1832, p. 352)

What did Campbell mean when he wrote, "the lower ones of which are partly under the care of monitors"? Was he suggesting a Monitorial system or occasional help in learning given by an advanced student to a junior one? "Partly under the care of the monitor" means the teacher continued to teach the lower ones too. So, Tschurenev is correct when she states that "Campbell gave his account after the 'Monitorial system' had become popular among education societies in both India and England. … there is no definite evidence to prove that monitors were used to teach classes in South Indian vernacular schools" (2014, p. 110).

Indigenous Schools in India

So, if Indigenous schools in India did not practice the Monitorial system, then what kind of system did they follow? Let us take three essential factors of education: the structure of schools, access, and curriculum. Data on Indigenous schools was collected during 1819–1853. The statistics were

collected over a period of 33 years due to two important reasons. First, the East India Company took a hundred years to acquire territories that constituted about 60% of the total area of India. The second was that it was not a colonial state project to collect data.

Data was collected by individuals for various reasons. After the British acquired western India in 1818—which became the Bombay Presidency—the government sent out officers to districts to collect general statistics like the number of villages, the population. Of 23 such officers, only one collected data on Indigenous schools. Thomas Best Jervis, a statistician, was sent to Ratnagiri district. Thomas and his brother, George were born and raised in India and were fluent in the Marathi language. Both were interested in Indigenous education. George later translated Algebra school textbooks into Marathi, while Thomas was the first to establish government Marathi schools and the first teacher training institution in India in 1820. Jervis collected the data in 1819—within a year of the establishment of the British administration—so these schools were virtually untouched by external influences. Through Jervis, we have the names of teachers, their caste status, and the caste-wise list of students for all 86 schools (General Department, 1824, p. 63).

Data on the remaining 19 districts was collected when the debate between the Governor of Bombay, Mountstuart Elphinstone and Chief Secretary Francis Warden reached an impasse in 1823. Elphinstone insisted that in "the Hindoo society, only Brahmins had access to education" while Warden, who was born and raised in Bombay and fluent in Marathi, persisted that most castes had access to education. So, he ordered data collection for the entire province. The data revealed that over 60–65% of teachers and students were non-Brahmins, and Warden's idea stood vindicated (Rao, 2020, pp. 95–104).

Scottish highlander Thomas Munro was the first to collect comprehensive data in 1822. Munro came to India in 1780 and soon took to defending Indian interests from larger imperial preferences and successfully prevented, besides other things, the introduction of a Bengal-like Zamindari system in South India. Munro was fluent in Tamil and Telugu, had a working knowledge of the Kannada language, and freely mingled with the local population. His three *Education Minutes*—dated 31 December, 1824, *On the employment of natives in the public service* dated 2 July, 1822, and *On the Education of the Natives of India* dated 10 March, 1826—clearly demonstrate that he wanted to encourage education and appoint Indians as judges and to other higher positions to give them a voice in the administration (Arbuthnot, 1881, pp. 319–335). He wanted to do this as "India has no political freedom, no voice in framing laws or imposing taxes" (Rao, 2022, p. 1315).

William Adam, a Sanskrit and Bengali scholar, collected data for Bengal and Bihar in 1838. He offered his services to Governor-General William Bentinck on 5 January, 1835 mentioning "a recent investigation into the state of education in the highlands of Scotland" and suggested a similar one for Bengal. President of the General Committee of Public Instruction, Thomas Babington Macaulay, endorsed it (Board Collections, No. 81570). After Macaulay's departure in 1838, Governor-General Auckland replaced Macaulay's *Education Minute of 1835* with his own *Education Minute of 1839*. In the 1840s, the government closed all schools established by Macaulay and began to support Indigenous vernacular schools financially. During 1850–1853, the government collected data on Indigenous schools in the Northwestern Provinces (UP) and Punjab (Report on Indigenous Education and Vernacular Schools, 1850–52). Since the government was investing money, officers who collected the data made minute observations on these schools. None of them mention the Monitorial system or anything resembling it.

The Structure of Indigenous Schools

The structure and functioning of Indigenous schools could be studied based on the data of thousands of schools collected during the first half of the 19th century. The data can be divided into two parts: tabulated data for 16,000 schools and qualitative descriptions of other schools which give vital information but cannot assist in statistical analysis. This paper considers both sets of data to understand the Indigenous education system.

To begin with, Indigenous schools were private schools. There was no agency—neither the state nor religious authority—controlling them. Indigenous vernacular schools were single-teacher schools and were independent of state support. They were not designed for any specific class, caste, or occupational group. Admission was voluntary; only parents who wanted their children educated sent them to these schools. There were no designated school buildings.

> Of the 86 schools in Ratnagiri district, 28 were held in temples, six in the house of the teacher and the rest in private dwellings, including the sheds of barbers, oil pressers and potters. The village community did not hire the teachers. So, there was no regular income. If the teacher found his income dwindling, he would move elsewhere, the school would close down (Parulekar, 1951, pp. xxi–xxii)

All students were boys; only some Indigenous South Indian and Punjabi schools had a few girls (Public Consultations, 1825, Nos. 17–18; Richey, 1922, p. 279). Except in times of floods and

famines and seasonal illnesses like cholera, the students attended regularly, and the school functioned normally. In Murshidabad district, Adam found that only 18 out of 998 Hindu students were absent, and four were absent among 82 Muslim students. In South Bihar, out of 2,839 Hindu students, only 14 were absent (Adam, 1838/1941, pp. 230–244). The "boys began the school around 6 or 7 years of age, and clever boys completed education in 4 years, those of medium talent six years and the dunces (if any) 8 years. Most boys spent an average of 5 to 7 years in school" (Parulekar, 1951, p. xxxviii).

Indigenous vernacular schools exhibited varying degrees of inclusivity. The schools in the Bombay Presidency had Brahmin, non-Brahmin upper castes (Prabhu, Maratha), artisanal castes (Kumbhar, Kasar, Dhangar), Jews, and Muslim students (General Department, 1824, No. 63). The 84 Gujarati schools in Ahmednagar district had 410 Brahmin, 1,772 upper caste non-Brahmin, 791 artisanal castes, and 68 Muslim boys (General Department, 1825, No. 92). In Marathi, Gujarati, and Kannada Indigenous schools, boys belonging to all castes except Dalit castes studied together. In Bengal, Sunri, Kalu, Chandal, and Pasi (Dalit) teachers taught upper-caste children. William Adam reported, "parents of good caste do not hesitate to send their children to schools conducted by teachers of an inferior caste and even of a different religion. ...this is true of the Chandal, and other low caste teachers enumerated" (Adam, 1838/1941, p. 228).

In the Uppar Bazar village in Natore of Rajshahi district, Naba Kishore Das, a 32-year-old Kaibarta teacher taught all children in the village (Adam, 1838/1941, p. 548). Out of 1,463 Hindu teachers in Bengal, 208 were Brahmin, 1,255 non-Brahmin, 118 were from artisanal castes, and 17 were Dalits. Of 23,058 Hindu students, 5,744 were Brahmin, 4,077 were dominant non-Brahmin castes, 8,875 were artisanal castes, and 1,629 teachers were from Dalit castes (Adam, 1838/1941, pp. 228–247). In the Madras Presidency, 142,369 Hindu students comprised of 30,479 Brahmin, 89,096 non-Brahmin, and 22,794 from All Other Castes (Public Consultations, 1825, Nos. 17–18). The term "All Other Castes" in early 19th-century records denotes castes lower than the Shudra caste in the *varna* hierarchy. The caste data of Indigenous schools show that they catered to both upper caste and other caste boys and had nothing to offer to Monitorial schools—which were especially devised for the lower classes and economically poor children.

A discussion on curriculum further confirms the difference between Monitorial schools and Indigenous schools in India. Indigenous schools in India taught their first-year pupils about "joining vowels to the consonants, forming compound letters, syllables and words… tables of numeration, money, weights and measures, and the correct mode of writing the distinctive names

of persons, castes, and places." In the second year, the pupils learnt "addition, subtraction, multiplication and division." After mastering Arithmetic, they knew "the simplest cases of the mensuration of land and commercial and agricultural accounts, together with the modes of address proper in writing letters to different persons. The boys were further instructed in agricultural and commercial accounts in the final stage."

The students learnt the language through vernacular versions of Indian epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, moral stories via texts like *Panchatantra, Hitopadesa,* and *Amara Kosha,* a text on grammar which was also a dictionary containing the roots of Sanskrit words. These were palm leaf manuscripts. The more advanced pupils wrote popular poetical compositions (Adam, 1838/1941, 1838, pp. 8, 233, 245, 248, & 253). This curriculum was more or less similar across India. In some places, writing and composition were emphasised over accounts; in Gujarat, arithmetic was emphasised, but the overall competency of the pupils remained the same (General Department, 1824, No. 63).

Teachers used official letters that were in the public domain and village accounts to teach advanced students. Students not only had knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic but also could read and explain epics and "cast up accounts and to draw out bills of exchange" (General Department, 1824, No. 63). The quality of education was further endorsed by the British officers of the education department who observed that when these students entered modern schools, they could master "cube root, four books of Euclid, and Algebra up to division" within a year and answer complex questions "with astonishing rapidity" (Report on Indigenous Education, 1850–52, pp. 98–99). In 1853, Frederick John Mouat, a member of the Council of Education of Bengal visited an Indigenous school near Roorkee and reported that "small boys worked out puzzling additions and multiplications of odds and fractional numbers with wonderful quickness and facility" (Richey, 1922, pp. 258–263).

The boys began practising on a sand board which was the only aspect Bell adopted in his Monitorial system. After initial practice on a sand board, the students moved on to "writing boards 18 inches long by nine inches broad [which] were in universal use." They were called *patti* in North India and *halage* in South India and had various names in different languages. They were made of either "wood blackened by charred coconut shells pounded and mixed with water" or by:

> dipping a stiff white cloth in rice starch and drying it and repeating the process several times to stiffen it further. It was then dipped in a solution of charcoal and gum and dried again. It was

then fixed to a wooden board. The chalk used to write on these boards was called *batti* in North India and *balapa* in South India. They were made of white earth called *pindaol* and made by pounding the earth and mixing it up with water, then rolled between hands into proper shape and dried for use (Public Consultations, 17 August 1823, Nos. 32–33; Report on Indigenous Education, 1850–52, pp. 66–67)

In many places, steatite or soapstone sticks were used to write on these boards (Public Consultations, 17 August 1823, Nos. 32–33; Report on Indigenous Education, 1850–52, pp. 66–67).

Indigenous vernacular schools in India provided excellent education. They did not teach weaving, carpentry, or any other skills, so they were not "schools of industry" (Rao, 2020, pp. 27–29). They were also not "disciplining bodies" for lower classes like Monitorial schools. In Indigenous schools, "the bright-eyed little fellows were squatted upon the clay floor, without any order or regularity" (Richey, 1922, pp. 258–263). The punishment enforced by the teacher was strict but was limited to making a student learn his lessons and not control his bodily movement (Parulekar, 1951, p. xxix; Appendix to the Report, 1832, p. 351; Report on Indigenous Education, 1850–52, p. 34).

Efforts to Introduce Monitorial System in India

Just as efforts were made to introduce the Monitorial system in the West, attempts were also made in India. From 1812 to 1855, missionaries and Directors of the East India Company tried separately to introduce it in India. In Madras in January 1812, a Sunday school was established at St. Thomas Mount "to give instruction on the Lancastern plan to half-castes and native children" (Appendix to the Report, 1832, pp. 220–221). The Bombay Education Society established in 1815 introduced the Monitorial system but admitted that "the Master having never seen the Madras system in any good practice is obliged to obtain his information from those who have or from a printed treatise on the subject" (Parulekar, 1955, pp. 3–4). In Bengal, Robert May, a missionary of the London Missionary Society established 36 schools in the Chinsurah district between 1814 and 1816. The schools did very well and many of them maintained 100% attendance (Rao, 2021, p. 168).

May introduced the Monitorial system in 1817 which was continued after his death in 1818 by his successor, J. D. Pearson. From this point the number of students declined rapidly, and schools were

closed. By 1826, only the Chinsurah school with a large number of Eurasian students survived (GCPI, 1826, No. 50/1). The experiences of the missionaries in Bardaman, Serampore, and Calcutta were similar. They blamed Indigenous teachers—whom they had hired and trained as '" pundit-supervisors"—as "lazy and unreliable" (Laird, 1972, pp. 111–113). In 1830, the missionaries translated and published Bell's *Instructions* into Bengali titled *Pathsaler Biboron* (description of a school) to encourage Bengali teachers to adopt the system (Appendix to the Report, 1832, p. 273). However, 20 years later, the missionaries admitted to their failure (Laird, 1972, p. 261). During the second half of the 19th century, even among the missionaries, the system had disappeared.

In 1814, the Court of Directors of the East India Company suggested to the government of India to adopt:

> the mode of instruction that from time immemorial has been practised under these masters [and] has received the highest tribute of praise by its adoption in this country under the direction of the Reverend Dr. Bell. …This venerable and benevolent institution of the Hindoos is represented to have withstood the shock of revolutions, and to its operation is ascribed the general intelligence of the natives as scribes and accountants. We are so strongly persuaded of its great utility that we are desirous you should take early measures to inform yourselves of its present state and that you will report to us the result of your inquiries, affording, in the meantime, the protection of government to the village teachers (Appendix to the Report, 1832, pp. 329–30)

Though a strong supporter of the Monitorial schools in Britain, Governor General Hastings could not find any proof of this system in India. In his *Educational Minute* of 2 October, 1815, he suggested the establishment of "two experimental schools in each district" (Sharp, 1920, p. 27). However, *A Note on the Native Education* compiled by the newly established General Committee of Public Instruction in 1823 contains no information on these two schools.

Once again in 1833 a few orientalists began the discussion on introducing Monitorial schools. Charles Trevelyan reminded the government of an incident when an influential person in Ajmer handed over a large sum of money to Governor General Hastings to establish a modern educational institution. Hastings sent Jabez Carey, son of Baptist missionary William Carey to establish a school on the Lancastrian model. The people were unhappy and sent him back. This made Charles Trevelyan comment, "if ever there was a case to which the asking for bread and

giving a stone is applicable, it is our education policy" (GCPI, 1833, No. 4). In his *Educational Despatch* of 1854, Charles Wood recommended the system again. He used the term "pupil-teacher" for the monitors (Wood's Despatch, 1854, p. 68). The Court of Directors once again wrote to the government of India in 1855 to implement the Monitorial system. The government of India wrote back stating that "pupil-teacher is inapplicable to India, but we still wish that a trial should be made and we hope that expenditure will eventually justify the general introduction of the system" (Public Consultations, 1855, Nos. 59–60).

After this, no more attempts were made. In the second half of the 19th century the students of teacher training institutions called Normal Schools came to be called 'pupil-teachers', as these students took a few classes in practice schools attached to these institutions. This category of pupil-teacher is very different from the Monitorial system.

Colonial State and Indigenous Schools

Though the idea of implementing the Monitorial system in India disappeared by the middle of the 19th century, Indigenous schools thrived under colonial rule. Officials of early education departments appreciated the quality of education given in these schools and called them "the foundation of national education" (RIEC, 1882, p. 56). Two important factors were responsible for incorporating Indigenous schools. First, the British found that the quality of education in Indigenous schools was high, and most language textbooks were also suitable for high schools. As students passing out of Indigenous schools were able to master modern disciplines, these schools could function as modern primary schools. So, the British not only adopted the structure and the teachers but also retained the Indigenous curriculum and textbooks (see Table 1).[1] The only new subject introduced was Geography.

[1] In high schools, new textbooks were adopted for Algebra, Geometry, Physics, and Chemistry while Indigenous books were used to teach the languages.

Table 1

Indigenous and New Textbooks Used in Colonial Primary and High Schools

Hindi	**Gujarati**	**Marathi**	**Kannada**	**Telugu**	**Tamil**
Akshar Dipika	Balmitra	Bal Mitra	Katha Manjari	Niti Sangraham	Katha Manjari
Baran Mala	Kavita Sangraha	Niti Bodh Katha	Panchatantra	Sumato Sataka	Panchatantra by TandavarayaModaliar
Bal Bodh	Karanghelo	Vidur Niti	Nala Charitre	Nala Charitre	Minor Poets
Patra Malika	Mahipatram's Travels in England	Kekavali by Moropant	Jaimini Bharata	Rukmini Kalyanam	Jnana Unerthutal
Bhasha Bhaskar	Aatodaya	Govind Narayan's Books	Rajashekara Vilasa	Adi Parvam	Nannari
Ramayana of Tulsi Das	Narmagadya	Nana Shastri Apte's Book	Kavita Padhati	Pedda Bala Siksha	Balabodagam
Patra Malika	Dalpatram's Poems	Parashuram Shastri's Muktamala	Katha Mala, Katha Saptati	Vigneshwara Dandakam	Nitinerivillakam
Ganit Prakash	Narmadashankar's Nalakhyana	Dadoba's Marathi Grammar	Ganita Shastra	Garudachalam	Tirukural
(A) Dharm Singh ka Vrittant	(A) Hope's Guzerati Reading Series A Hope's Grammar	Krishna Shastri's Anek Vidya	Dasara Padagalu, Padya Sara	Ganita Sastram	Kanitam
(A) Surajpur ki Kahani	Dalpatram's Pingal (prosody)	(A) Aesop's Fables in Marathi	Kannada Bhagavad Gita	(B) Departmental Series of books	(B) Departmental Series of books
(B) Departmental Series of books	(B) Departmental Series of books	(B) Departmental Series of books	(B) Departmental Series of books		

Source: Compiled from Provincial Reports attached to the committee appointed to examine the textbooks in use in Indian schools, 1878

(A) denotes new textbooks written by British officers. (B) denotes Departmental Series of Books. These contained advice to peasants on cleanliness, prevention of seasonal diseases like cholera, and importance of women's education.

The second reason for incorporating indigenous schools was financial. T. B. Macaulay had fixed the salaries of Indian teachers between ₹30–50 a month (GCPIC, 1835, No. 4). The colonial state was unwilling to pay this amount which was in addition to the cost of establishing new schools. So, the government retained the Indigenous curriculum and gave a month's training to existing Indigenous teachers to teach geography, explain maps, maintain attendance registers, and submit annual reports for a monthly salary of ₹5. This was a little lower than the average amount of their earnings in the form of fees in Indigenous schools (Rao, 2020, pp. 26–27). This way, the colonial administration made nearly 70,000 Indigenous schools into government primary schools. Government vernacular primary schools across India—except in Bombay and Punjab provinces—were merely "indigenous schools with attendance registers, maps, and globes" (GCPIC, 1841, No. 65).

The government classified Indigenous schools into four categories: the Stipendiary *Pathsala* where the teacher was paid ₹5 a month; the Rewarded *Pathsala* in which the educational inspector examined the students once a year and rewarded the teachers depending upon examination results; the Registered *Pathsala* where the Indigenous teacher just submitted annual returns for a rupee; and the Indigenous *Pathsala* which "stood aloof from any interaction with the government" (BARE, 1877–78, p. 4). Many teachers of Stipendiary *Pathsalas* whose monthly salary had risen to ₹10 got a government pension (Education Proceedings, 1870, pp. 17–18). By 1882, out of 84,740 government primary schools, almost 70,000 were Indigenous schools adopted by the colonial state (Rao, 2020, pp. 37–39).

From 1845 to 1881, the Bengal Government adopted 48,834 Indigenous schools. Still, there were 3,265 Indigenous schools with 49,238 boys in their original form. In the Central Provinces, of the 1,344 Indigenous schools, 1,261 had been made into government vernacular schools while only 83 remained purely indigenous. In Assam, 1,351 schools received government support while only 497 remained strictly indigenous. The first 12 recommendations of the Indian Education Commission concerned registering Indigenous schools, imparting training to its masters, and

liberal financial grants to these schools (RIEC, 1882, pp. 78–79). In Bombay, Mountstuart Elphinstone insisted that Brahmins alone should be appointed as teachers and since most teachers in Indigenous schools were non-Brahmin, he established a series of new government primary schools with Brahmin teachers teaching the Indigenous curriculum (Rao, 2020, pp. 96–104). In Punjab, since the government changed the medium of instruction from Punjabi to Urdu, it had to establish new schools as Indigenous schoolmasters did not know Urdu (Parliamentary Branch, 1857–58, Nos. 7–11).

Government-supported Indigenous schools were called by various names like Halkabandi Circle, Government Vernacular Schools, Lower Primary Schools, and Government *Pathsalas*, and by the end of the 19th century by a single nomenclature: Government Primary Schools. There was an unbroken continuity between Indigenous schools of the 1840s and primary schools of the 1950s. This was possible because Indigenous schools provided high-quality literacy and numeracy. So, the modern school system in India emerged from the Indigenous school system, whereas no similar examples exist for the Monitorial system. In the West, the Monitorial schools were closed by the middle of the 19th century, and new primary schools were opened.

Conclusions

Archival data clearly shows that Indigenous schools in India did not resemble Monitorial schools promoted by Andrew Bell. The entire system was conceived by Bell who attributed it to the Hindu system of education only to claim legitimacy. Indigenous schools were private initiatives and were not controlled and directed by any authoritative entity like the Church. These schools taught epics and gave excellent competency in arithmetic. This was far removed from the very conception of Monitorial schools which enforced regimental discipline and gave poor students little literacy. Indigenous schools gave quality education enabling students to excel when they joined modern schools. So, the colonial state converted them into government primary schools and used Indigenous textbooks for modern high schools too. Despite pressure from missionaries and directors of the East India Company, British officers in India refused to introduce the Monitorial system.

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