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Madras (India) and Boston—A Comparative Study and Analysis

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Madras, the capital of Tamil Nadu, India, is a city, population 2.5 million, on the eastern seacoast of southern Indian. It is the fourth largest city in India and the center of education and culture for this ancient and mysterious nation.

In many ways Madras reminds a visiting American of the city of Boston. Both are thriving seaport towns as important through history as they are today for their shipping and fishing industries. Each has played a significant role in their nation's history and fight for democracy. Both are regarded as the center, or hub, of their countries' educational and cultural resources. Each is referred to as the Athens of its democracy.

This unit will attempt to lead the student through a brief history and background of each great city and then instill a desire on their part to develop parallel comparisons and differences as they pursue the readings suggested.

It is important at the eighth grade level for students to become familiar with the understanding of a foreign culture. Until this point, and with few exceptions, students are taught to relate only to American culture through the study of literature, history, and social studies.

It is essential that meaningful concepts be presented so as to broaden the social horizons of our students. Meaningful activities which relate to intercultural changes and perceptions at this level, are to be developed and nurtured. In this unit the literature and culture of India will be introduced and examined.

This unit will instill a recognition of the important contributions of two great cities of the world. It will examine each as a center of culture and education and compare the two. Recognition of historical and contemporary values of each will present itself as the unit develops. Time should be allowed for the development of ideas concerning contributions each city has made in the everyday lives of its respective students.

As a comparative study unfolds and an analysis develops, the two cultures should present themselves in similar yet different lights in the eyes of the students. Students will recognize the achievements of great Americans from Boston as well as great Indians from Madras.

Individualized learning packets profiling these persons may be developed from use of the bibliography or from a list of resources developed by the teacher.

As each class is an entity unto itself, modifications must be allowed to consider for the levels of each group as well as for interest.

As the unit is adapted to each class and by each instructor, the focus of events will naturally change. It should be recognized that the time spent on this unit is also negotiable by level and by interest. It is suggested that the unit be taught in fifteen sequential steps, broken down naturally by the schedule with which a teacher has to work by. The introductory sessions can be used showing slides or reading suggested stories to motivate the interest level. The main body of the unit should include individual and group projects including group discussion techniques. The latter part of the unit should provide time for students to present their projects to the large group and for the large group to discuss and evaluate these projects. While no actual test is provided within this unit, a suggested culminating activity would be to have each student evaluate the unit in terms of his/her own learning experience.

Another suggested culminating activity would be a field trip to an Indian restaurant. The Taj Mahal on Chapel Street in New Haven would be a logical choice.

Located on the southeastern coast of India, Madras' climate is hot and very dry. Most of the rainfall comes during the Monsoon season from late August into September.

Madras is the home of Madras University, the largest and most prestigious university in India, perhaps in all Asia. It is also the location of the Madras Institute of Technology, rivaled in the world as a technical institute only by a school in Boston of the same initials (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). There are many grammar and high schools in Madras, both private and public. Schools hold many classes out-of-doors and are based on the British Primary System. Schools traditionally have catered mostly to boys, but in recent years the government has begun to encourage girls to stay enrolled past age 12, the previous drop out age for females. The literacy rate in Madras is high compared to most of India but is still far below that of American standards.

Historically, Madras, as we know it, was settled in 1504 by the Portuguese. It became a city about 1639 and received its municipal charter in 1687. Madras was captured by the French in 1746 and given to Britain as part of a treaty in 1749.

Children in Madras schools sing two patriotic songs. "Jana-Jana-Mana" ("Thou Art the Ruler of the Minds of the People") and "Vande Mataram" ("I Bow to Thee Mother"). "Jana-Jana-Mana" is the national anthem.

Hindu is the official language spoken in Madras though English is spoken in the schools and by educated people, businessmen, etc. Tamil is the unofficial or street language. Each village area speaks its own dialect. In India there are over 170 languages and about 700 dialects.

There are many different religions in Madras including Hinduism, Janism, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, and many more. Hinduism is the most popular religion. You may see south Indians wearing different marks on their foreheads. These signify their religious beliefs and are fashionable for both sexes and all ages.

Education of women is being encouraged by the government officially, but being generally a sexist society not too many women are lucky enough to graduate from high school. If they do, you can be sure they are financially well-off.

Members of different religious groups may make themselves outstanding by their mode of dress, but for the

most part people dress in light weight, light colored, loose fitting fabrics. This is due to the hot dry climate.

There are many modern buildings in Madras, but most buildings are old and many quite ancient. Public transportation consists of buses and taxis. The taxis are little three wheelers which zip in and out of traffic at an alarming speed. The traffic consists of pedestrians, a few trucks and buses, a surprising number of cars, many bicycles, and an occasional beast of burden. Since the cow is sacred in India, it is free to roam just about anywhere and ususally does. It is not uncommon to wander into an exclusive department store in the fashionable part of downtown and observe a shopkeeper struggling to push a bull or cow out of his store.

Children in Madras play European style football (soccer); they swim a lot and enjoy parcheesi and backgammon. Basketball is just being introduced and American football and baseball are totally unheard of.

Suggested Activities

1. By using an old Monopoly Game as a model, have your group attempt to make a new game. You may want to call it "Madras." By writing to the American Embassy in New Delhi or by contacting the Chamber of Commerce in Madras (Department of Tourism), you can obtain a street map of Madras. Have your students change the names of the streets in Monopoly to give the board an Indian (Madras) flair. Redesign the monetary system and base it on the *repeat* , or Indian currency.
2. Construct a model of Madras using cardboard to build buildings. Have class decide what important buildings must be in Madras (hospitals, mosques, churches, schools, stores, hotels, etc.). Then have them research transportation, educational system, etc.

Suggested Topics for Research

1. Attitudes toward educating women
2. Religions in Madras
3. Clothing styles
4. Hinduism
5. Significance of the Sacred Cow
6. Indian money system

Stories

Included in the student's reading list are stories which can either be read aloud to your class or stories which

they would find interesting reading for their own pleasure. If enough copies can be obtained, stories can be assigned for homework and used for discussion. Especially good for reading aloud is *Parables and Fables* .

Group Discussion Technique

This is a useful tool for a teacher to use after a large group instruction session.

Split the class into groups of four or five. Their task is to pick a leader, a recorder, a reporter, and a timekeeper. Give them a set amount of time and stick to it exactly. Give them a topic to discuss and a problem to resolve in their groups. The group assignments should be on a rotating basis so that they are not repeated. Allow a few minutes after the discussion so that the reporter can give a summary of the discussion.

Caste System

The caste system usually refers to the groups of society into which the people of India are divided by religious laws. It is over 3,500 years old and is now illegal. Nevertheless, the laws enacted in India to make the caste system illegal are similar to the civil rights laws in our country in that they are commonly ignored by certain groups and regions.

The top of the caste system includes priests and scholars. They are called *Brahmans* and their purpose is supposedly to establish and preserve the ideals of the nation. Their skin color is light.

The rulers and warriors are called the *Kshatriyas* . Artisans and merchants are next; they are *Vaisyas* . Servants and laborers are called *Sudras* . All others who do not fit into any of the categories are the *pariahs* or outcasts or “untouchables.” Any person who committed a serious crime was made a *Chandalas* (criminal) and was treated as a *pariah* . Gandhi, the beloved leader who united India into a common country, called the *pariahs* “harijans” or children of God.

Boston, population 650,000, is the largest city in New England and the capital of Massachusetts. It is a leading seaport consisting of many sheltered harbors and ports. Boston is the leading business, financial, government, and transportation center in New England. Boston is located on the northeast coast of the United States. Its climate is warm in the summertime and cold and rainy in the winter. The weather is just like New Haven as are the architecture and population.

In the Boston area, there are a great many colleges and universities. Every child is required by law to attend school until 16 years of age. Many young men and women go on to college each year. Unlike Madras where very few women attend college, Boston students all have the opportunity to further their education if they are willing to work hard enough.

Boston played a very integral part in the revolution of this country and has a brilliant history of culture and social impact. Boston is referred to as the “Hub.” Both Madras and Boston are often called the Athens of their respective nations. Boston is one of the oldest and most historic American cities. Founded and settled by the British Puritans in 1630, the “Cradle of Liberty,” birthplace of the American Revolution in 1775, has always been synonymous with the ideals of democracy.

As in Madras, however, there exists in this democratic center much poverty, racial unrest, and decaying slums. While in Madras the city is overcrowded with people moving in, Boston is faced with business and people moving to the suburbs.

The center of the city, Boston Commons, is the largest urban park in America. Many famous battles were fought in Boston, and in 1775 the original militia fought for the first time on the Commons.

The citizens of Boston until 1840 were called the Boston Brahmins. They were descendents of the English Puritans who made up most of the population for more than 200 years. Those families produced outstanding business leaders, educators, and writers. The name came from the Brahman caste, the highest cast in India. Members of these families are still prevalent in the Boston area. Since 1840 when immigration laws began to change, so did the population of Boston. Instead of Brahmins, there were Italians, Irish, Irish Catholics, Blacks, Canadians, etc. No longer was Boston totally influenced by white English Puritans. Over the last 140 years, the city has experienced growing pains in adapting to this new population and will continue to do so until there is a time when such matters are resolved.

The following are the behavioral objectives which will be useful in presenting this thirty-part unit. A total of fifteen class lessons are recommended although another teacher may wish to shorten or lengthen this idea.

1. Each student will read at least one book from the reading list.
2. Each student will read four or five more shorter selections relevant to the topic or from the reading list.
3. Each student will keep a log or journal of class notes and personal entries.
4. Each student will make an oral presentation to the class.
5. Each student will participate in or initiate an independent research project relevant to the topic.
6. Each student will write a mini-thesis at the end of the unit telling what he/she has learned from it.

After having completed the assignments, the eighth grade student should be able to:

1. increase reading skills and interest
2. participate in group discussion freely and naturally
3. understand nature of criticism
4. analyze a foreign culture
5. recognize and interpret the contributions of two societies
6. develop and use research skills
7. summarize viewpoints
8. write a journal or log

General guidelines for small group discussion are as follows. The instructor should make a general synopsis in the form of a story to the class. This is for motivation and incentive. Included in this should be the presentation of a problem relevant to a specific reading assignment. After the teacher has specified what the problem is in the large group, small groups are formed and discussion is timed. At the end of this specified time, the group then presents, in turn, its solution to the problem. A large group discussion then follows each presentation.

It is encouraged that students utilize newspapers and magazine articles as resources. There are many relevant articles about India in the *New York Times*. A project might include writing to the University of Madras and asking for a newspaper from Madras or perhaps the name of a school for future pen pal correspondence or just a general list of questions which the University would be able to answer. A similar project can involve Boston.

Students should be encouraged to decorate bulletin boards with collages, charts, or diagrams. Using the overhead projector, one can outline the shape of Madras and Boston for comparison. These diagrams can then be covered with plaster and painted so that a physical map of each city is in the room. By writing to the Indian Consulate in New York or Washington, a list of films can be obtained. Travel agencies, with a little advanced notice, can secure travel posters for both cities.

After students have completed their reading assignments, they may wish to design an original book jacket. For students who are remedial, it is suggested that reading assignments be in groups with the teacher while other students work on projects. Coordinate this into a rotating schedule. Once the assignments are completed, the use of a tape recorder for oral reports may encourage the less gifted writer to express his/her thoughts. You can then help that student write those thoughts in a transcript fashion. Writing and producing original skits can also be fun as well as a meaningful learning experience. Make use of videotape equipment from the central audiovisual department. All of these techniques can be incorporated into a creative, nonthreatening evaluation process designed to encourage the slower learner.

Sample Lesson Plans

Dialogue between two students, one who is representing Boston, as a citizen, and one from Madras.

Suggested assignment. Pretend students are from respective cities. More than two students may be included. Discuss problems associated with each area. Gear all conversation toward this end. Have others observe the conversations and monitor their authenticity. This would be a good way to see how much students have learned about each area. Have students pretend to be in a restaurant in either area, or perhaps even a schoolroom with one student acting as the teacher.

Come in early or have students come in early to help prepare a skit.

Dialogue may be rehearsed or spontaneous depending on skill levels of the group.

Have the entire skit take the form of a play.

Assign two to four students to read the same article or book. If it is a remedial group, read it with them.

Review the book in-depth as a reviewer would do in the media (TV, radio, or print):

Become familiar with the background of the author.

Emphasize the powers of positive criticism.

Prepare questions in advance to stimulate discussion but otherwise let students handle it themselves. Make sure to involve all members in the discussion. If they are puzzled or confused by the material, use examples and experiences from familiar life situations to draw them out.

Summarize the findings of the group as they rate the quality of the author and the skills of the author in presenting relevant materials.

The format could be arranged as if it were a talk show with the students acting as a panel of critics and the teacher acting as the moderator. A make-believe interview with the author would be fun and effective also. The teacher or a student could be the author and positions could be rotated.

These skills learned here would include public speaking, improvement of retention skills, as well as reading development and organizational skills.

Appreciation for literature as a key for helping us in future life situations should be emphasized with the teacher playing a vital role model in this endeavor.

Lesson Plan Two

Group study of *Seven Summers: The Story of an Indian Childhood* .

Procedures

Oral reading and explaining of the tale by the teacher followed by discussion of the story.

Vocabulary Word List

Using the text, have students decide on a correct meaning for each of the following:

- a. Mulim
- b. Hindu
- c. Sri
- d. gopuram
- e. mlechchha
- f. surya-vamsha
- g. chandra-vamsha
- h. agni-kula
- i. apabhramsha
- j. bakshish

(Answers:)

- a. One of two main religions in India.
- b. Most influential religion in India.
- c. Title of religious respect.
- d. Name given to arch in fortress.
- e. A barbarian or outcast.
- f. Sun family.
- g. Moon family.
- h. Fire family.

- i. Language of commoners.
- j. Money usually given to beggars.

Suggested activities to go along with story: Using a dirt surface or box full of dirt, simulate Raja's village. If you use a box and would like to use real plants, line it with a double thickness of plastic (garbage bags will do) stapled to the insides. Next, layer about one inch of crushed stone and fill box with dirt. Have students recreate the boy's village.

Spend a portion of a day teaching class as it would be done in India. A typical Indian classroom as described in the text would consist of rows of students, boys in front, girls in rear, the teacher at the blackboard and all lessons presented in lecture fashion.

Selecting Details

Have students identify their favorite characters and create a "spin-off" story about each. Although specific details may be lacking about a character's life, they may use their imagination to recreate the characters.

Make a chart of *people*, *places* and *things* from the story. As students discover these, have them use a magic marker and fill in the information.

Main idea. What is the story about? The story is about more than just a boy's life in India. What are the other things the author wishes to convey to the reader? A list may be developed through discussion.

Sequence

List several events in the story and have the class put them into correct order. This may be done in small discussion groups and then presented to class with rationale.

Lesson Plan Three: Comprehension Skills

Using several copies of encyclopedias, have each small group use one copy to locate the following information. The information must be written in prose, not outline form. Encourage originality of thought but facts must not be altered.

1. Where is India? Draw a map. Locate the Punjab region. Mark all southern cities in red and all

northern cities in blue.

2. Write a short explanation of the differences between northern and southern India.
3. Where in India would you choose to live? Why? (Be subjective.)
4. Discuss the Muslim religion.
5. Discuss the Hindu religion.
6. Why do you think the cow is a sacred animal in India? Is this good or bad?
7. From your discussions, how would a youngster from Boston feel if he were to attend school in Madras?
8. Would a student from Madras feel comfortable in Boston? Why or why not?

READING LIST

Novels

Anand, Mulkraj. *Untouchable* . Bombay: Bombay Kutab Popular Publishers, 1935.

———. *Two Leaves and a Bud* . Bombay: Bombay Kutab Popular Publishers, 1937.

Desai, Anita. *Voices in the City* . Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1956.

———. *Bye, Bye Blackbird* . Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1956.

Jhabvalla, Ruth Praver. *A Backward Place* . Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1956.

Narayan, R. K. *Gods, Demons and Others* . New York: Viking Press, 1967.

Autobiography

Anand, Mulkraj. *Seven Summers: The Story of an Indian Childhood* . Bombay: Kutab Press, 1940.

Mehta, Ved. *Face to Face* . New York: Little Brown & Co., 1957.

Sehgal, Nayantara. *Prison and Chocolate Cake* . Bombay: Jaico Paperback, 1960.

General

India . 1973 a reference manual. Edited by Publications Division, Government of India, New Delhi, 1973.

Sources of Indian Tradition . DeBarry, William Columbia University Press, New York 1958.

History

The Discovery of India . Nehru, Jawaharlal, Asia House, Bombay, 1962 Publishing.

A Survey of Indian History Panikkar, K.M. Asia Publishing House, Bombay 1966.

One World and India . Toynbee, Arnold Orient Longman Bombay 1960.

Other Resources

Tourist Office

Madras

35 Mount Road

Madras, India

(telephone 86249)

Boston

Boston: A Geographical Portrait . Cozen, Michael P., and Lewis, George K. Ballinger Publishers, Cambridge, 1976. Scholarly.

Boston Adventure . Stafford, Jean. Harbrace, New York, 1967. Paperback lengthy.

Boston Bay Mysteries and Other Tales . Snow, Edward R. Dodd Press, Cambridge, 1977. Good illustrations; excellent for oral reading.

Boston Collects Boston . Hyde, Andrew C. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1973. Paperback with illustrations. Collection of great trivia.

Boston In Color . McBride, Stewart D. Hastings Press, Cambridge, 1977. Illustrated very well. Profiles of city including contemporary issues.

Boston in the Age of J.F.K . Whitehill, Walter M. (Centers of Civilization Ser.: No. 19) University of Oklahoma Press, 1966. An in-depth look at our youngest President's home town.

Boston Red Sox . Berry, Henry. (Baseball's Great Teams Series) MacMillan Press, New York, 1975. Illustrated account of one of America's oldest professional teams.

Boston Ways: High, By and Folk . Weston, George, Jr. Edited by Raymond, Charlotte C. Beacon Press, Boston, 1974. Illustrated and enlightening.

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Conzen and Lewis. *Boston: A Geographical Portrait* . Chicago: Ballinger Publisher, 1976.

A high school text—a bit difficult to read.

James, Henry. *Bostonians* . Chicago: Penguin Paperback, 1974.

Lannoy, Richard. *The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society* . London and Madras: Oxford Press, 1974.

A bit of Indian history, philosophy, and folklore.

McBride, Steward D. *Boston in Color* . Cambridge: Hastings, 1977.

Many illustrations in color.

Moore, Clark D., and Eldredge, D. *India The George School of Reading on Developing Lands* . Chicago: Bantam, 1970.

Ramakrisna, Sri. *Tales and Parables* . Madras: Arma Press, 1971.

Simple stories; easy reading.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "Declaration of Rights." In *Prometheus Unbound* . New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968.

Sinclair, Upton. *Boston (A Novel)* . Long Beach, CA: Long Beach California Press, 1928.

Snow, R., ed. *Boston Bay Mysteries and Other Tales* . New York and Boston: Dodd, 1977.

6th and 7th grade levels; good stories.

Watson, Jane W. *India Celebrates* . London: Garrard, 1974. Illustrated.

Zinkin, Taya. *India* . London: Walker & Co., 1966.

Many fine illustrations.

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