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978-0-521-05276-4 - The Politics of South India 1920-1937

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THE POLITICS OF SOUTH INDIA

1920 – 1937

CHRISTOPHER JOHN BAKER

Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON · NEW YORK · MELBOURNE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-05276-4 - The Politics of South India 1920-1937
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521207553

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First published 1976
This digitally printed version 2008

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Baker, Christopher John, 1948–

The politics of South India, 1920–1937.

(Cambridge South Asian studies; 17)

Bibliography: p. 339

Includes index.

1. Madras (Presidency)—Politics and government.

I.Title.II.Series.

DS485.M28B34 320.9'54'82035 75–2716

ISBN 978-0-521-20755-3 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-05276-4 paperback

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978-0-521-05276-4 - The Politics of South India 1920-1937

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PREFACE

This is a study in the modern political history of India. It sets out to examine political changes in the Madras Presidency, the southernmost province of British India, at a crucial period in its recent history. In the years between the two world wars south India witnessed two political movements that have coloured its subsequent history; firstly a division of political forces along lines of caste and secondly the growth of nationalist organisation to a dominant position in provincial affairs. At the same time, the Madras Presidency, along with the other provinces of British India, had its first experience of many political institutions and practices such as large important legislatures, powerful local authorities, elections and election campaigns, political parties and ministerial office. In 1937, Indian politicians took this experience with them when they took over the entire government of the provinces for the only, brief spell of fully responsible government before the coming of independence ten years later. The experience of the inter-war years played a vital part in moulding political parties and political leadership.

Published works on India's modern history have concentrated heavily on the nationalist movement and on the all-India level of politics. There have been few forays into the provinces and into those areas of political life which were not closely bound up with the struggle for national freedom. The south has been conspicuously neglected, largely because it did not figure so consistently or so spectacularly in the nationalist saga as did other regions of India. M. Venkatarangaiya has compiled documents on the nationalist movement in Andhra, he and V. Venkata Rao have given excellent accounts of the history of local government, K. V. Narayana Rao has followed the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh, Robert Hardgrave has described the changing fortunes of a single community, both he and Eugene Irschick have traced the genealogy of the more recent politics of Tamilnad and there have been several important biographies of political figures. It is no reflection on the scholarship of these works to note that they leave large tracts of territory un-

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touched – so large indeed that this work cannot aim to be anything more than another voyage of discovery.

The events of the period are reasonably well known. The non-Brahman or Justice party, which emerged in 1916 to oppose Brahman domination of both the public services and political associations in the Madras Presidency, was awarded in 1921 the first ministerships under the new 'dyarchy' constitution and retained control over the ministry for all but a few months of the dyarchy period. In that time the party leaders formulated measures to improve the position of non-Brahmans in the public services and in other matters, while other party members equipped the non-Brahman movement with a set of social and political ideas. In the same period the south contributed to each of the different phases of the nationalist movement – to Gandhi's ascendancy in 1920, to the Non-co-operation campaign in 1921–2, to the Swarajists' attempt to invade and wreck the dyarchy constitution in 1923–7, and to the Civil Disobedience agitation in 1930–3. In general, however, south India was looked on as a backwater of Congress politics. Although Madras had shared with Bombay and Bengal in the foundation and in the early years of the Indian National Congress, the initiative had soon passed to the other presidencies and with the arrival of other provinces in Congress politics in the 1910s and 1920s Madras was pushed still further into the background. In 1937, however, Madras belied all generalisations that she was consumed with provincial and communal conflicts to the neglect of nationalism; in the first elections under the new constitution granting responsible government in the provinces the Congress in Madras swept to the most striking victory in any province, and annihilated the Justice party in the process.

In many ways these events in the south followed a pattern common to India as a whole. Political movements purporting to protect the interests of a particular caste, sect or community appeared in many different parts of India in the early twentieth century, and the ascendancy of the Congress in the 1930s was an all-India phenomenon. On closer examination, however, events in the south reveal certain oddities. To begin with, the victory in 1937 was not the only occasion on which the Congress in Madras had seemed to act out of character; in 1916 it had been a spate of political organisation in Madras that had helped to drag the Congress out of the deepest depression in its thirty-year history, and before that in 1887 it had been Madras that had staged one of the most successful of the early Congress sessions, even though in the intervening periods Madras had seemed to be

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fairly barren ground for the anxious patriot. The history of nationalism in the south has a waywardness all of its own. Similarly, both the emergence of the Justice party in the 1910s and then its eclipse in the 1930s were sudden and unexpected. Many politicians and government officials were still perplexed by the phenomenon of the Justice party long after it had firmly established itself, and both Congressmen and government officials were astonished by the conclusiveness of its defeat in 1937. Moreover, while movements which claimed to protect a minority were a common feature of the new politics of India in this period of councils, ministers, and electorates, it was unusual, if not paradoxical, to find a movement which claimed to defend a majority – a majority which included up to 98 per cent of the population and almost all the men of wealth and influence in local society. Clearly any straightforward explanation in terms of political movements and political ideas will not manage to unravel the complexities of this period.

This study sets out to examine the special character of political events in the southern province not by concentrating on any specific movement or institution, but by attempting to fit together the different pieces of the jig-saw of provincial affairs. The chief concern is with the province and thus with the obvious elements of provincial politics – the provincial government and legislatures, the provincial branch of the Congress and other provincial parties. However, in order to illuminate the narrative of events at the provincial level, it will be necessary to stray outside these narrow confines – on the one hand, into the affairs of the localities which constituted the province, and on the other hand into the affairs of the nation and the empire within which the province lay. The politics of both the wider world and of the worlds within impinged greatly on the political life of the province in this period. The Madras Presidency was a corner of Britain's empire, and many of the political and constitutional adjustments in the province were shaped by the changing position of Britain and the empire as a whole. The Madras Presidency was also a growing participant in a world economy, and was thus prey to economic influences that originated beyond its control. The Madras Presidency also formed part of a 'New India' and her politicians were drawn into allegiance with their counterparts in other parts of the nation. As for the localities, changes in communications and changes in administration which the former had facilitated had knitted them more tightly together as the fabric of a province than ever before. Provincial politics in this period were subject to many different pressures both from within and without.

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In order to attempt such a broad view, many things will have to be left out. It will not, for instance, be possible to do justice to the great variety of the province and the great differences in the history of the different regions. From the beginning it has been necessary to neglect the areas at the periphery of the province in order to concentrate more effectively on the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking heartland. There is therefore no consideration of affairs in the part of the province which lay on the west coast. The languages, peoples, culture and geography of this area differed very sharply from those of the rest of the province, and its history both before and after the interlude of British rule had more in common with other parts of the west coast than with the rest of Madras Presidency. More particularly, since the concern is chiefly with the affairs of the province, the history of the locality, and the history of nation and empire, are dealt with briefly. The perspective on locality, nation and empire moreover, differs greatly from the perspective that would be expected of a specific study of such matters. Thus there is little consideration of the internal history of the all-India Congress and only a brief survey of changes in imperial policy. Similarly, there is little analysis of matters which would loom large in a local study – considerations of kinship, status and ritual, for instance, which undoubtedly played a large role in the ordering of local society, fade into a background when viewed from a vantage point of the province.

In other words, the tasks of selection and reduction which confront any historian have had here to be carried out with some ruthlessness, particularly since south Indian society in the early twentieth century was experiencing change in many different respects. Urbanisation, the growth of foreign trade, changes in the price structure and capital markets were transforming the economy; new institutions and new opportunities were making rapid changes to the style and purpose of politics; while adjustments to these and other novelties wrought changes in many aspects of society and culture. The purpose of this work is not to document such changes and to describe the interrelations between them, but to discover what factors played a part in the unfolding of political events and to examine the course of political development.

The story of course is far from simple and it will not yield to simple explanation. Two factors, however, loom large in the account, and those are administrative and economic change.

The later years of the Raj saw the creation of a novel form of state in south India, as the different fragments of a highly diverse region

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were drawn together more firmly than ever before. This development demanded new political institutions, new leadership and new forms of political organisation, and since the moving force was the fiat of government it was not surprising that many of the new phenomena were built around the ideas of government and the unities that government had created. This administrative integration in south India forms the background for the study of politics in the 1920s in chapters 1 and 2. The 1930s, as seen in chapters 3 and 4, witnessed a new direction in government policy as the British started to disentangle themselves from the details of government and administration and in doing so opened up new tracts of country to intrepid politicians.

Yet this study does not in any way set out to argue that administrative reform conjured up out of the mind of the Raj dictated the course of the region's modern history, or indeed that this was the tale of an energetic government imposing its will on a passive society. Government policy was not decided in a vacuum but was shaped to meet changing conditions and changing problems; in other words, government was often forced into actions even though the lines of force were generally indirect.

This was hardly surprising given the context and circumstances of imperial rule. The slim resources of the Raj were barely adequate to provide more than a skeleton for government, leaving others to furnish the skeleton with more solid matter. Madras remained a peaceful province – 'benighted' and dull according to British officers, backward and hopeless according to Indian nationalists – well into the twentieth century. This was not because government ruled with a firm hand but because for the most part it left a stable and well-ordered society to its own devices. The precariousness of government and its dependence on other leaders of society was thrown into sharp relief after 1930 when economic change began to undermine the stable foundations of Madras society; cracks began to appear in the edifice of government and in the gentlemanly façade of Madras politics. Through these cracks sprouted many new movements and organisations and the middle years of the decade saw the hitherto stunted growth of the Congress burst suddenly into bloom.

There are many people to thank for their assistance during the making of this book. I am indebted to the Hayter Foundation, the SSRC Modern Indian History Project at Cambridge and Queens' College for financial aid, and to the Committee of Management of the Centre

Cambridge University Press

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of South Asian Studies, Cambridge for including this book in their series. For access to books and records and for much courteous help I am grateful to the directors, librarians and staff of the India Office Library and Records, the Madras Record Office (Tamilnadu Archives), the State Archives Hyderabad, the National Archives of India, the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, the Centre of South Asian Studies Cambridge, the libraries of Cambridge, Madras, Andhra and Osmania Universities, the Sapru House library in Delhi, the Adyar and Connemara libraries in Madras, and especially the library of *The Hindu* newspaper in Madras. I profited greatly from conversations with K. V. Gopalaswamy, Sir Christopher Masterman, R. T. Parthasarathy, Mariadas Ruthnaswamy, P. S. T. Sayee, R. Sunderraj and R. Jayakumar. I am indebted to several friends and colleagues who helped in many different ways during research and writing, in particular to John and Karen Leonard, Susan Lewandowski, Pat Baker, Carolyn Elliott, Bob Church, Pandit K. J. Vethamuthu who struggled to teach me Tamil, A. Bapuji Chowdary who laboured to translate Telugu, B. Kesavanarayana, Jim Manor and B. N. Janarthanan Mudaliar, and to colleagues at some time in Cambridge including Chris Bayly, Jack Gallagher, Gordon Johnson, Peter Musgrave, Rajat and Ratna Ray, Eric Stokes, Tom Tomlinson and especially Anil Seal, without whom many things would not have been possible.

Finally my greatest debt is to David Washbrook with whom I have enjoyed close co-operation throughout research and writing. His book *Madras politics, 1870-1920* is published simultaneously with this one. While we have maintained a useful exchange of ideas and information about south India during research, our two works differ in many fundamental aspects. To begin with David Washbrook is concerned with the period before 1920, while I concentrate on the years after that date. Moreover, this chronological division has brought about great differences in style and approach. The nature of government and the style of politics in south India changed markedly in the period 1916-21, and our two works reflect this change. David Washbrook analyses in great depth the society and government of south India in the period from 1880 to 1920 and deploys that analysis to explain the complex events which transformed the face of politics during and immediately after the first world war. In parts of this study, I have to delve back into the earlier period and into the descriptions and analyses which have been made in much more detail by David Washbrook; yet primarily I am concerned with institutions which did not exist (or at least exist in the same form)

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in the earlier period and with a narrative of events in a provincial arena of politics which had had only a shadowy existence before the 1910s.

CHRISTOPHER JOHN BAKER

Cambridge
December 1974

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NOTES ON REFERENCES, TRANSLITERATION & ABBREVIATIONS

1. GOVERNMENT RECORDS

All Government of India files are prefixed: GOI. The reference shows: department and where necessary branch; file number; date.

All Government of Madras files begin with 'G.O.' meaning Government Order. The reference shows: number of Government Order; (department and where necessary branch); date.

All references to government records end with an abbreviation (see below) describing where the file is deposited.

In most cases of references to Government of Madras files, the file as a whole is cited rather than a particular document in it. Most of these files are small and are specifically concerned with one incident or decision, and the account given in the text here is based on an evaluation of the different documents – petitions, newscuttings, official reports, Secretariat notes – in the file. Only in special cases does the reference cite an individual document.

Certain Government of Madras files dated after 1920 and relating to the area of the old Madras Presidency which now falls in the state of Andhra Pradesh are being moved from the Madras Record Office to the State Archives in Hyderabad. The references given here describe where the file was when viewed in 1970–1, and while the bulk of the transfer had then been completed some of the files shown here as being in Madras may by the time of publication have found their way to Hyderabad.

2. GOVERNMENT ANNUAL REPORTS

Certain annual reports are cited in a contracted form:

Settlement Report (annual)

Report on the Settlement of the Land Revenue in the Districts of the Madras Presidency

Police Report (annual)

Report on the Administration of the Police in the Madras Presidency

Forest Report (annual)

Report on the Working of the Forest Department of the Madras Presidency

Abkari Report (annual)

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Notes on references, transliteration, abbreviations

Report on the Administration of the Abkari Department of the Madras Presidency

The titles of these and other annual reports differed slightly from year to year; the forms given here and in the bibliography were the most common.

3. NEWSPAPERS

All references to *The Hindu* are to the daily edition, unless shown as *Hindu(w)* which denotes the weekly edition. Unless the text or footnote refers to a particular part of the paper such as the letters page or editorials, the reference is to the columns of provincial and local news.

4. ABBREVIATIONS

(a) Departments and branches etc.

L	Local
M	Municipal
LSG	Local Self-Government
Misc	Miscellaneous
FR August (2)	Fortnightly Report of the Madras Government for the second half of August

(b) Archives

IOL	India Office Library and Records, London
MRO	Madras Record Office (Tamilnadu Archives)
NAI	National Archives of India, New Delhi
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi
SAH	State Archives, Hyderabad
SAS	Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge

(c) Other

AICC	All-India Congress Committee
MLCP	Madras Legislative Council Proceedings
NNR	Madras Native Newspaper Reports (see Bibliography)

5. TRANSLITERATION

Tamil and Telugu words and names in the text are not transliterated but are given in anglicised form. In the footnotes and the bibliography, Tamil and Telugu titles (but not authors' names) are transliterated, the former according to the system employed in the *Tamil Lexicon* published by Madras University, and the latter according to the Library of Congress system. There are no diacritical marks on transliterated words in the footnotes.

6. PROPER NAMES

There is no system used in the spelling of proper names in the text other than an attempt to copy the forms common in the period under study. Towns,

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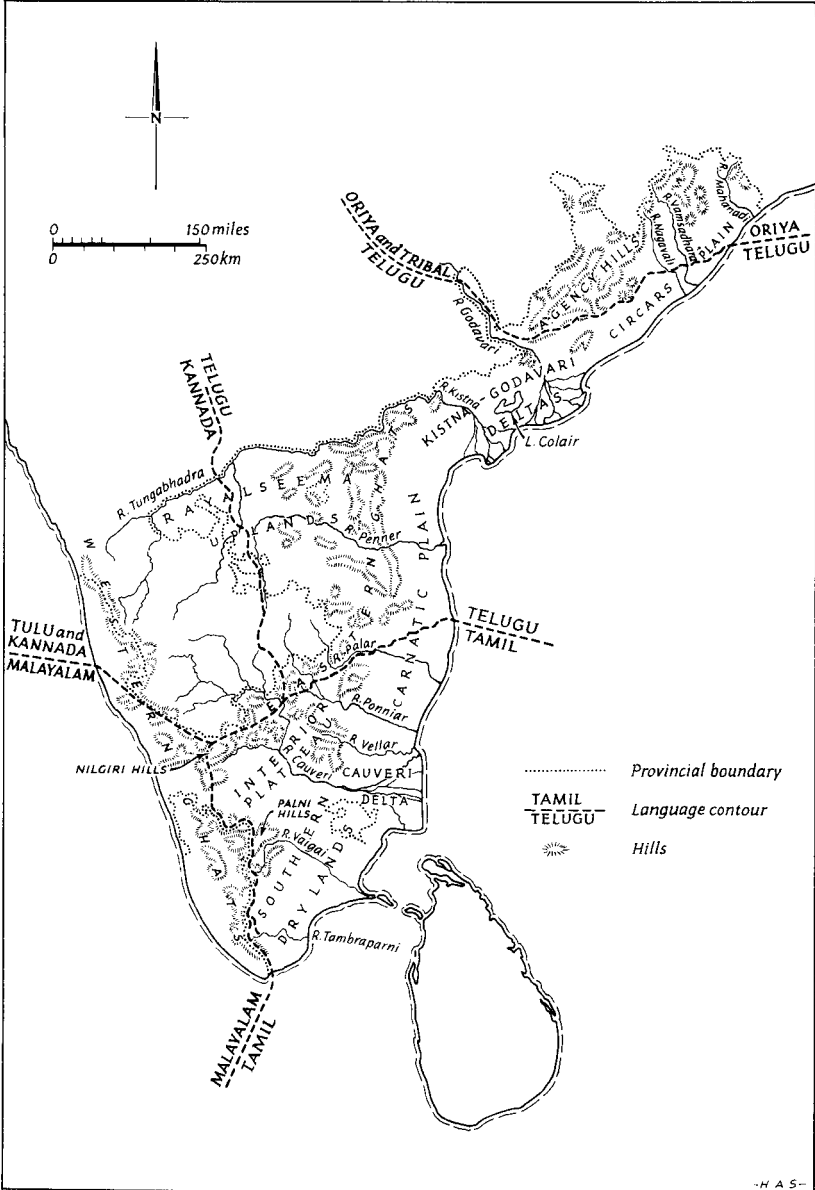
Notes on references, transliteration, abbreviations

districts and other geographical place-names are spelt in accordance with the forms used by the Madras Government in the *Census of India 1921* and the survey maps published in the 1920s. Personal names are spelt in the forms commonly used in the period, as far as possible in the forms used by the persons themselves. Where there is any doubt over a particular name, the simplest form is used. Thus, for instance, 'Iyer' is generally used in preference to the many other possible forms such as 'Aiyer', 'Aiyar', 'Ayyar'. The honorific '-ar' at the end of Tamil names has been omitted (thus 'Rajagopalachari' rather than 'Rajagopalachariar') except in the case of names which never appeared without it (for instance 'raja Annamalai Chettiar').

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

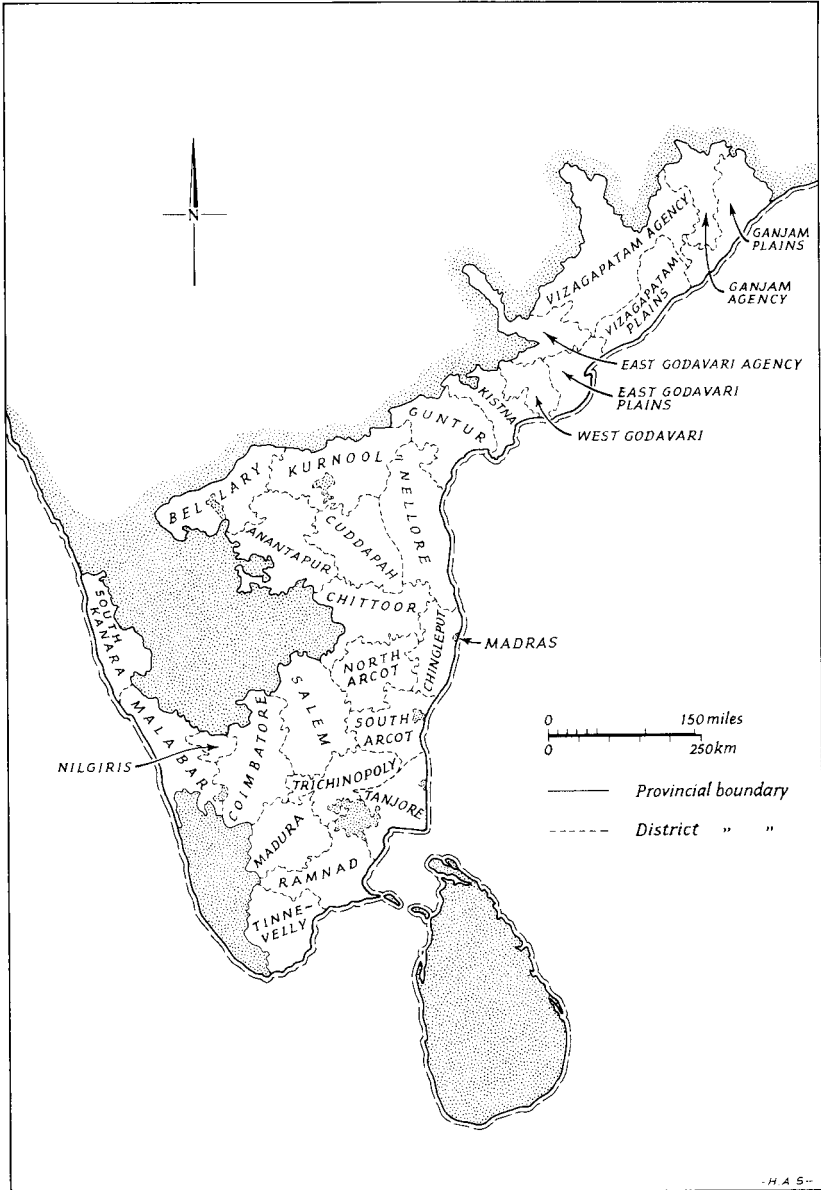
The bibliography includes a number of works – particularly biographies and political tracts – which are not specifically cited in the footnotes but which have provided important background material for this study.

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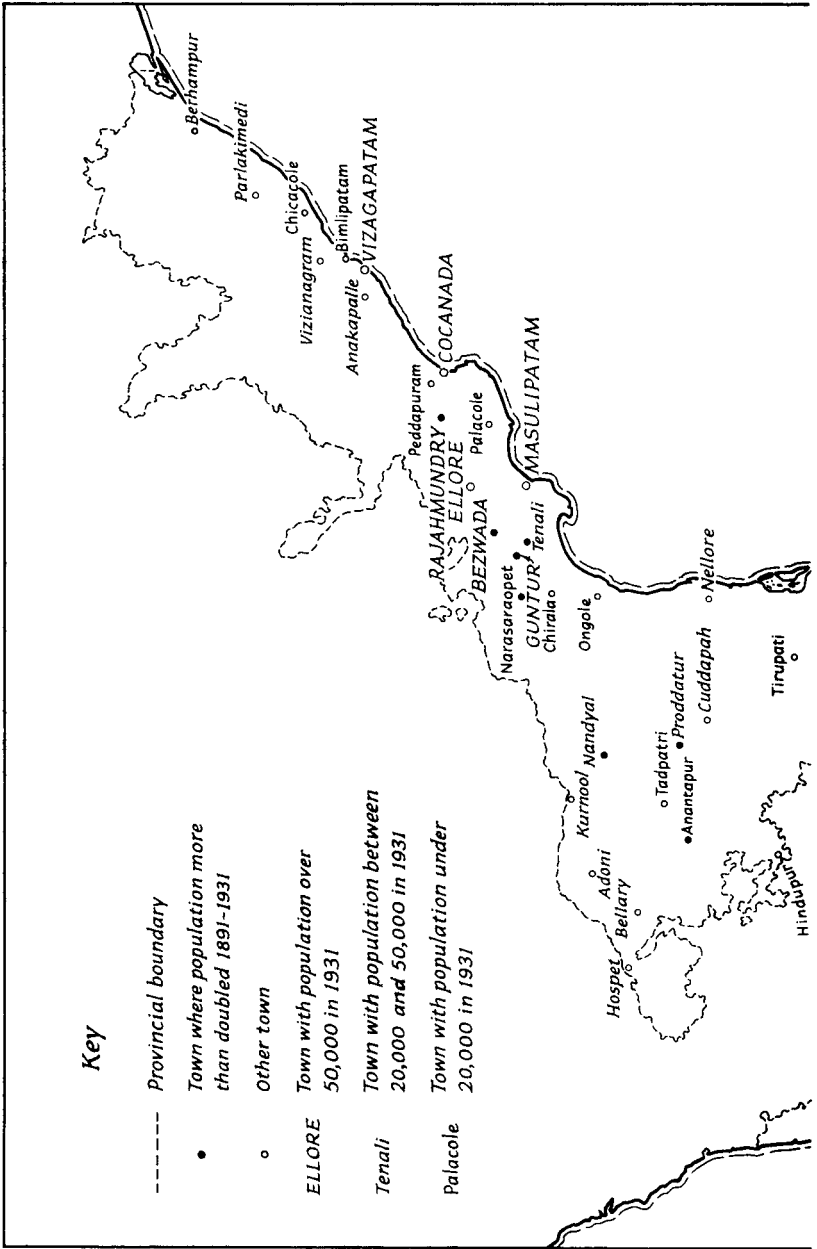


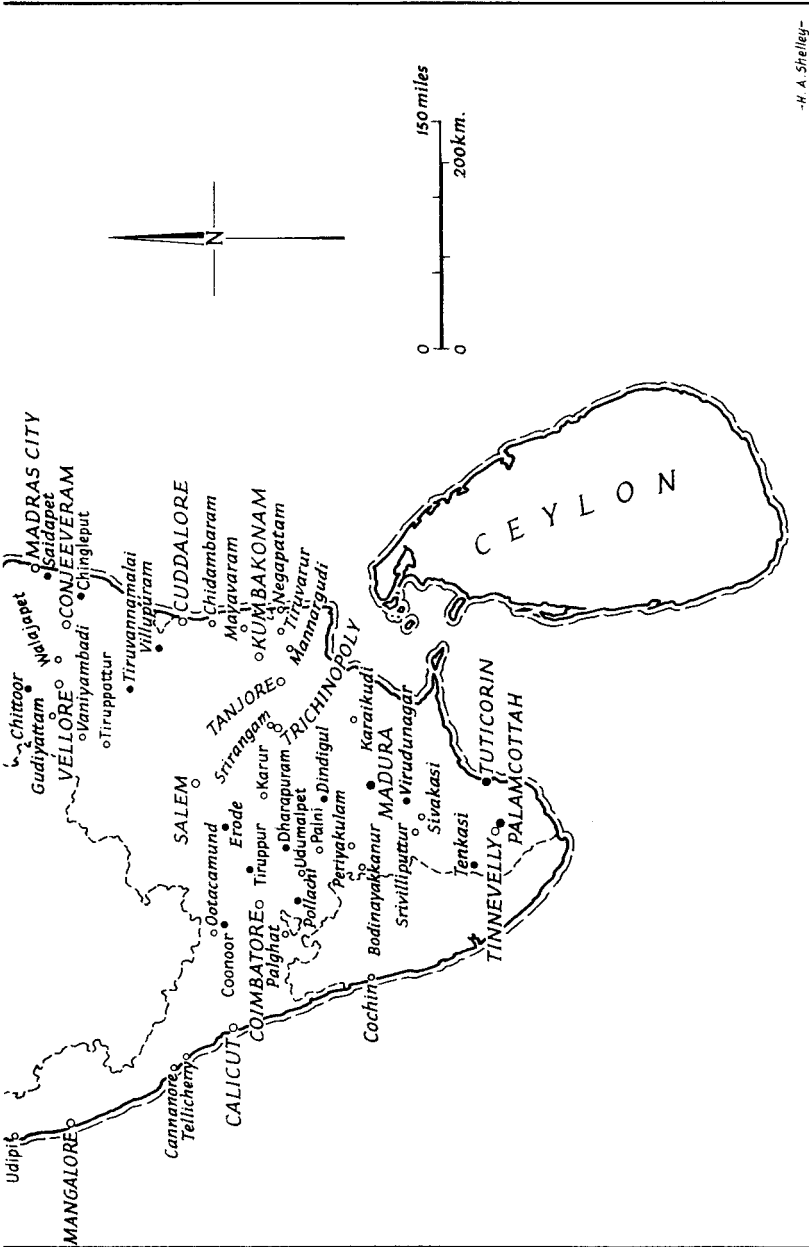
MAP I. Madras Presidency—natural features, regions and languages

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MAP 2. Madras Presidency—districts





MAP 3. Madras Presidency—municipal towns