



## History

## BISHOP Dr. ROBERT CALDWELL AND REDEFINITION OF DRAVIDA

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**ABSTRACT** Bishop Robert Caldwell, a Christian Missionary came to South India and settled in Idayangudi in the present Tirunelveli District of Tamilnadu State. He did research in the south Indian vernacular languages for conversion purpose and discovered the Dravidian antiquity. His research and writings created a separate identity in India among the Tamils about their language and culture i.e., Dravida /Dravidian. The Dravidian consciousness explored by Caldwell is really an unanticipated legacy to the emergence of Dravidian Movement in the 20th Century Tamilnadu.

**KEYWORDS :** Bishop Dr. Robert Caldwell-South Indian Linguistic Research-redefined Dravida.

The Christian Missionaries, who came to south India from the various European Countries, had to do their services in the language of the natives, since the natives were not conversant with the European languages. In the meantime the Missionaries, to begin with, were not conversant with the Dravidian languages<sup>1</sup> having come over to South India and acquired the speech from the local Pandits and started doing and performing their sermons and services in the newly learnt language. An outstanding person among the Christian Missionaries was Rev Dr. Robert Caldwell (7<sup>th</sup> May 1814 -21<sup>st</sup> August 1891), who had contributed a great deal to the study of Tamil grammar<sup>2</sup>. He was well known to the scholars by his monumental work *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* which was first published in the year 1856<sup>3</sup>. This paper attempts to explore a brief life sketch of Dr.Caldwell and point out his contributions in the field of Dravidian linguistics research and redefine the Dravidian.

Caldwell was born on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1814 in a village in Ireland<sup>4</sup>. Within a few years his parents moved on their native place, Scotland. They stayed at Glasgow city. He was tutored by his parents until he was sixteen. After that, he joined a polytechnic institution in which he studied painting and received a certificate of merit and a prize in the subject. He was not interested in taking up painting as a profession, but wanted to do evangelical work and joined the London Mission when he was 20 years old<sup>5</sup>. With its support, he joined the Glasgow University and took the B.A degree. When he was a student, the comparative study of language, the culture and history of mankind could be discovered. Sir Daniel Sandford, who was a Professor of Greek, was well equipped in the comparative study languages and encouraged his students to take-up the study of languages and their systematic changes<sup>6</sup>. His student Caldwell felt, even at his young age, that he should contribute to that area, if he got an opportunity in life.

In 1837, when he secured B.A degree, the Latin Christian Society selected him for evangelical work in India and sent him in ship to Madras and reached here on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1838<sup>7</sup>. He stayed for three years at Madras from 1838 and prepared himself for the work he had chosen to do. Well known Tamil Scholars, distinguished educationalist and studious Government servants became his friends. He studied Tamil for three years. The style of mission life in Madras did not suit Caldwell much. He was increasingly disenchanted with the London Missionary Society (L.M.S) and its mode of functioning. He left from L.M.S and joined the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G). He was ordained a Deacon by the Bishop of Madras, Bishop Spencer in 1841. Then he was granted permission to work at Idayangudi<sup>8</sup> (Shepherd's Hamlet) a village near Thiruchendur, where he lived for about 50 years (1841-1891)<sup>9</sup> and he commenced work principally among a caste of people known as the Shanars. He soon began to establish Schools and Churches in Idayangudi and surrounding villages<sup>10</sup>. For fifty years he developed his life for the cause of (spreading Christianity on the pretext of) the upliftment of the downtrodden of that region. Caldwell married Eliza on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1844 at Nagercoil. She had a perfect knowledge of colloquial Tamil having acquired valuable training and experience in missionary work; She was an excellent colleague to her husband in all his undertakings. They had two sons and three daughters. In 1877 at Calcutta he was ordained as the SPG Bishop of erstwhile Tinnevely District<sup>11</sup>.

The University of Glasgow honoured him by conferring L. L. D degree<sup>12</sup> for his book *Comparative grammar...* For his religious service, the University too honored him a Doctor of divinity (honouraiascausa). In 1879, because of his contribution to Education and specifically to the study of Tamil Language, Caldwell was selected to deliver the 22<sup>nd</sup> Convocation address by the Madras University. He stressed comparative study of the Languages in his address<sup>13</sup>. When age increased, the resistance to summer heat was less Caldwell began to live in the Kodaikanal hills and spent most of his time in prayers. In 1891, he was attacked by cold and was laid up for a few days. His wife and sons were by his side when he breathed his last on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1881, at the ripe old age of seventy seven<sup>14</sup>. His body with all rituals fitting to a Bishop was brought to Idayangudi and buried in the Church.

**His writings**

Caldwell's systematic study of India, particularly South India, its people, languages and culture helped his mission work a great deal. Caldwell was a member of a committee formed to translate the prayer book and the Bible into Tamil. A missionary by service, Caldwell was a multi-faceted personality. He was not only a linguist, but also an archaeologist, a social anthropologist and religious historian. In every field of his persuasion or choice he made his indelible impress. His writings are wide and varied which are as follows<sup>15</sup>.

1. The Tinnevely Shanars (1850)
2. A Comparative Grammar of Dravidian (or) South Indian Family of Languages (1856)
3. Theosophy of the Hindus (1863)
4. On the Kudumi (1867)
5. The Languages of Indian in their Relation to Missionary work (1875)
6. Journals of Evangelistic work amongst natives of the Higher Castes and Classes (1876, 1877, and 1878)
7. Address at the convocation of the University of Madras (1879)
8. On the Reserve in communicating Religious Instruction to Non-Christians in Mission Schools in India (1881)
9. History of the Tinnevely Mission of the SPCK and SPG (1881)
10. Tinnevely District Manual (1881)
11. A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevely (1881)
12. On the Demonolatry in Southern India (1887)
13. Christianity and Hinduism (1893) (Posthumous publication)

In addition to this, he was the author of three books in Tamil namely Narkarunai Thyanamalai, Thamarai Thadakam and Bharatham Kanda Puradhanam. For writing the above mentioned works Caldwell conducted archaeological excavations at Punnakkayal and Korkai, places of pre-historic importance.

**His redefinition of Dravida**

A scholar of international repute, Dr.Caldwell ventured on a collective comparative study of South Indian Languages- Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Thulu and other languages. Although his main aim in the initial stage was to prove the Biblical conception that all languages of the world originated from one common source, he strengthened the conviction that the languages spoken in South India formed a separate family, distinct from the other families of languages spoken in India. This was his first doubt and enquiries started for proving this.

Caldwell is most widely known for his English book *Viz, A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian (or) South Indian family of languages*. It is a magnum opus, a significant contribution to the studies in Dravidian philology. It cried a halt to the time old theory that Tamil is a derivative from Sanskrit and proved that Tamil is independent and not dependent on Sanskrit or other language. He was the first scholar to make this startling discovery as a result of his long years of painstaking study and research. According to his findings, there were twelve languages belonging to the Dravidian family<sup>16</sup>. Among them Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Thulu were the most cultivated. Before making this discovery, he in fact mastered eighteen different languages, compared them with Sanskrit and noted the differences. To write the comparative Grammar, he thoroughly mastered Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu. Mastering these languages enabled him to conclude that there is a unity among these languages, which has entirely different from the Sanskrit family. He called this group of languages as Dravidian family. In his view there is one language, i.e., Tamil which had not borrowed any aspect of the grammar of the Aryan language. It has the capacity to function independently as of now. Some of the peculiarities of Tamil Languages, which are different from Sanskrit, attracted him very much. His findings on Tamil languages may be summed up as follows.

- (i) Of all the Dravidian languages, the most ancient and matured one is Tamil,
- (ii) Tamil has the guiding power for all the other Dravidian languages;
- (iii) Tamil is the only language which has the capacity to function without depending on Sanskrit, and has separate letters'
- (iv) If Sanskrit loan words are separated we can get pure Tamil;
- (v) Grammar of Tamil is on a par with other ancient languages of the world
- (vi) When compared with other Dravidian Languages Tamil is old and pure;
- (vii) Tamil grammar is older than Telugu and Kannada, and much older than Malayalam<sup>17</sup>.

These research findings of Caldwell impressed the scholarly world. The term Dravidian then was unknown or very correctly unused was unraveled by Caldwell and made known to the world. He discovered and located the earlier usage of this word and its emergence. The term Dravidian is of historic derivation. It was used in the context of a race speaking a particular language group. Being derived from the Graeco-Latin usage of the term Timili, Tamili, Damili, Dramili, Dravidi, it fell out of use after the fall of the Graeco-Romans and the Arabs did not make use of it. It was revived again in the racial and linguistic contest and usages by Caldwell<sup>18</sup>.

His thesis dispelled the darkness that mystified that antiquity of Tamil and its family dismantled the hegemony of Sanskritics, that it was the mother of all languages awakened the world of scholarship to Tamil studies and helped to remove all until the then living fallacies about the Dravidian family of Languages<sup>19</sup>.

In his study, he showed the relations that prevailed between Sanskrit and the Dravidian group of languages. He without any prejudice made it known that Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam had borrowed lot of words from Sanskrit. As far as Tamil is concerned, he said that it functions independently. It is very difficult to avoid the Sanskrit impact on the functioning of Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam, but Tamil has independent standing and required no support of Sanskrit. In his analysis he first of all spoke about the purity of language. Then he divulged the ancient glory of Tamil of all the Dravidian languages<sup>20</sup>. According to him Tamil is the classical and well-matured language. He then spoke about the racial differences and introduced the concept of Dravidian race. As per his findings, the Dravidian languages constitute a family distinct from the Aryans. Caldwell says that the Dravidians are for more or less 2000 years experienced, a big race with special talents, unique-religion, who tried to restrict the Aryans and lived with separate identity. In future the Tamil language shall defeat all the other languages, which like to dominate it<sup>21</sup>. Caldwell argues for the inclusion of the lowest caste members of South India, such as the Parayas, in the same category as the Dravidians by providing both philological as well as ethnological evidences for considering them as descendants from the same original race as the dravidians<sup>22</sup>.

Thus Caldwell in his magnum opus had managed to construct a genealogy for the Dravidian people that presented them, their languages and culture. He not only did this, but also gave the Dravidians a mandate to preserve their languages, civilization and culture from the supposed pernicious influence of Brahmins,

Brahmanism and Sanskritic culture.

The most powerful message of Caldwell's work and the one that had the greatest impact, was that Brahmins. Brahminism and Sanskrit were alien to the Dravidian people and culture and that the Dravidians should not only cherish their own language and culture but also attempt to rescue those aspects of their language and culture that had become corrupted by the supposed evils of Brahmanism and Sanskritic culture<sup>23</sup>.

Caldwell's life and work in South India provides the most fitting lens through which we may glimpse the impact of missions and missionaries on the Dravidian movement. His rare discovery, resurrection and his installation of Tamil on the high pedestal really started the world of scholarship. But after sometimes of silence, the Tamil world got awakened to the realities and started to continue the path treaded by this great linguist. The immediate impact of his writings and findings on Tamils was the redemption of Tamil from the hegemony of any alien dialect (The Pure Tamil Movement).

The Dravidian Consciousness, that was subterfuge for long time, could not be understood by the natives. But its uniqueness was discovered by the European Dravidologist Bishop Dr. Robert Caldwell. It was he who opened to the flood gates of Dravidian studies, which, in fact led to the rediscovery of the Dravidian past. The impact of his studies and research paved the way for the emergence of several social and political parties viz; Dravida Kazhagam, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam etc. in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Tamil Nadu.

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