

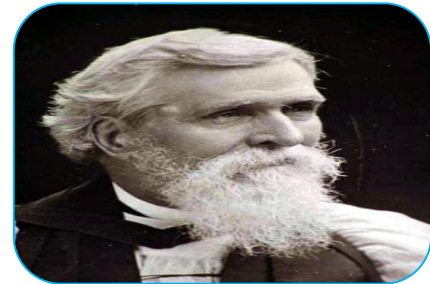


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**MISSIONARY SCHOLAR ROBERT CALDWELL AND HIS CAREER  
CONTRIBUTION TO DRAVIDIAN DISCOURSES****Dr. Mallika Begum****Assistant Professor of History Department of Historical Studies  
J.B.A.S. College for Women Chennai, Tamil Nadu.****ABSTRACT:**

Robert Caldwell was an eminent historian and prominent linguist of the Nineteenth Century who left a great legacy for the enrichment of the Dravidian Studies and Dravidian literature and Dravidian culture and the Dravidian Movement in the modern period. He was one of the few Nineteenth Century missionaries to spend more than half century in Tamil Country. Seventy-eight years after his mortal remains were buried, acknowledgement of Robert Caldwell's contribution to Dravidian literature and culture receive a visible embodiment. He became a symbol of the Dravidian identity and ushered a era of the Dravidian Movement in South India. His immense contribution to the Dravidian Study is much acclaimed in the speeches and writings of the Tamil scholars and politicians hailed from the Dravidian parties. He is still venerated and remembered by the Tamil intellectuals. His works are recently debated much even by the historians like M.S.S. Pandian.

**KEYWORDS:** Caldwell, Idaiyangudi, Tinnevely, Dravidian, Missionary, Tamil.**INTRODUCTION:**

The Christian missionaries who came to south India from the various European countries, had to adopt their services in the language of the natives, since the natives were not familiar with the languages of the Europeans. Likewise the Missionaries, in the beginning were not familiar with the Dravidian languages spoken by the people of South India. <sup>1</sup> Having arrived over to South India, the missionaries acquainted with native languages from the help of the local pandits and started their sermons and services in the newly learnt languages. among the Christian missionaries, Rev. Bishop Dr. Robert Caldwell (1814 - 1891) was an outstanding personality. To the study of Tamil grammar, the contribution of Caldwell was immense. <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> His contributions in the field of Dravidian linguistics and history is noteworthy.

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 to their native place, Scotland. They stayed at Glasgow city. Till the age of sixteen, he was educated by his parents. 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 perform evangelical work and joined the London Mission when he was 20 years old. <sup>5</sup> On the support of the London Mission, he was able to join the Glasgow University leading to get his B.A. degree. When he was a student, the comparative study of languages was a dominant subject

in Europe. It was believed that through the study of language, the culture and history of mankind could be traced out. As an eminent Greek Professor in the comparative study of languages, Sir Daniel Sandford, kindled his students to pursue the study of languages and their orderly changes.<sup>6</sup> As his student Caldwell at his young age determined to contribute in that area and waited for an opportunity in life to fulfil his ambition.

In 1837, when he secured B.A. degree, the Latin Christian Society selected him for evangelical work in India and sent him in a ship to Madras and reached here on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1838.<sup>7</sup> For three years, from 1838 to 1840, he stayed at Madras and devoted himself for his chosen work. He developed his friendship with distinguished Tamil Scholars, prominent educationalists and scholarly Government servants. He studied Tamil for three years. Madras did not suit Caldwell much because of the manner of mission life there. 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.). In 1841, Bishop Spencer, the Bishop of Madras, ordained a Deacon to Caldwell. Then he was granted permission to start his work at Idaiyangudi,<sup>8</sup> (Shepherd's Hamlet) a village near Tiruchendur, where he lived for about fifty years (1841-1891)<sup>9</sup> and he rendered his priceless services among the Shanars who lived in much numbers there. He soon began to establish schools and churches in Idaiyangudi and surrounding villages.<sup>10</sup> For the enhancement of the downtrodden of the area, he devoted fifty years of his life while spreading Christianity. 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 S.P.G. Bishop of erstwhile Tinnevely district of Madras Presidency.<sup>11</sup>

The University of Glasgow honoured him by conferring LLD degree<sup>12</sup> for his book Comparative grammar. For his religious service, the Durham University too honoured him a Doctor of divinity (Honourarias Causa). In 1879, because of his, The Madras University selected Caldwell to deliver the 22<sup>nd</sup> Convocation address in 1879. It was all due to his enormous contribution in education and particularly in the study of Tamil language. In his momentous address, he illustrated the significance of the comparative study of the languages.<sup>13</sup> When he reached old age, Caldwell was unable to bear the summer heat. Hence, he began to spend his days in the Kodaikanal hills and spent devoted much 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 Idaiyangudi and buried in the Church.

## HIS WRITINGS

Due to the orderly study of South India, its people, languages and culture Caldwell was able to succeed in his missionary works in a great way. To translate the prayer book and the Bible into Tamil Caldwell a committee was formed and Caldwell was included as a member of the committee. As a missionary, Caldwell was a versatile personality. He was a religious historian, an archaeologist, a social anthropologist and above all a multi-linguist. 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 (1849)
- (2) A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South- Indian Family of Languages (1856)
- (3) Lectures on the Tinnevely Missions (1857)
- (4) Theosophy of the Hindus (1863)
- (5) Christianity and Hinduism (1874)
- (6) The Languages of India in Their Relation to Missionary Work (1875)
- (7) Observations on the Kudumi (1875)
- (8) An Address delivered to the Graduates Admitted at the Convocation of the Senate of the University of Madras (1879)

(9) On Reserve in communicating Religious Instruction to Non-Christians in Mission Schools in India (1881)

(10) Records of the Early History of the Tinnevely Mission (1881)

(11) A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevely, in the Presidency of Madras, from the Earliest Period to Its Cession to the English Government in A.D. 1801, (1881) .<sup>16</sup>

Besides these works , he was also the author of three books in Tamil, namely, Narkarunai Thyanamalai, Thamarai Thadakam and Bharathakanda Puradhanam. His archaeological excavations at Punnakkayal and Korkai, the places of pre-historic importance enabled Caldwell to write the above said Tamil works.

### HIS LEGACY TO DRAVIDOLOGY

Caldwell was scholar of international reputation. He involved in a collective and comparative analysis of South Indian Languages of Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and a few other languages. In the initial stage, Caldwell attempted to prove the Biblical notion that all languages of the world derived from one common source, later, he changed his view that the languages spoken in South India formed a distinct family and separated from the spoken languages of the other families in India. This was his first doubt and enquiries started for proving this.

As a matter of fact, the European scholars Ellis and Robert Caldwell rediscovered the value of the Tamil language and Dravidian culture. As Tamil revivalists , they postulated an idea that an egalitarian Dravidian society had flourished and was ruined by the inroads of the Aryans.<sup>17</sup> 'A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian (or) South-Indian Family of Languages' is a well acclaimed English work of Caldwell. In this work he systematized Ellis's, 'Dravidian Proof' and he also followed him in championing language , literature and religion of the non-Brahmins but at the same time not endorsing all their religious practices.<sup>18</sup> It is his masterpiece and valuable contribution to the studies in Dravidian philology or the Dravidian Family of Languages. It put an end to the old conception that Tamil language has borrowed words from Sanskrit and asserted that that Tamil is ever independent and never dependent on Sanskrit or other languages. 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>19</sup> Among them Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Tulu were the most developed languages. Before coming to his conclusion, he was efficient in eighteen different languages, analyzed and compared them with Sanskrit and pointed out the differences. His thorough mastery over Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu enabled him to write the comparative Grammar. Mastering these languages enabled him to conclude that there is a unity among these languages, which is entirely different from the Sanskrit family. Hence , he concluded that these languages belonged to the Dravidian family. In his view there is one language i.e., Tamil which had not borrowed any aspect of the grammar of the Aryan languages. It has the capacity to function independently without the aiding words from other languages. Caldwell was much attracted towards peculiar features of the Tamil language which he considered was entirely are different from the Sanskrit language. His findings on Tamil language may be summarized as follows.

1. Of all the Dravidian languages, the most ancient and matured one is Tamil;
2. For all the Dravidian languages, Tamil has the guiding influence;
3. Tamil is the only language which has the capacity to function without depending on Sanskrit, and has separate letters;
4. If Sanskrit loan words are separated we can get pure Tamil;
5. Grammar of Tamil is on a par with other ancient languages of the world;
6. When Compared with other Dravidian Languages Tamil is old and pure;
7. Tamil Grammar is older than Telugu and Kannada, and much more older than Malayalam.<sup>20</sup>

These findings of Caldwell impressed the elite world. Until then, the term 'Dravidian' was unused and unknown. It was revealed to the world by Caldwell He discovered and underscored the earlier usage of the word, Dravidian and its genesis. The term 'Dravidian' is of historic derivation.

Indicating a particular language speaking racial group, it was in usage. The term 'Dravidian' was derived from the Greco-Latin usage of the terms Timili, Tamili, Damili, Dramili and Dravidi.<sup>21</sup> This usage was out of the prevalence due to the fall of the Greco-Romans and the Arabs did not adopt this usage. It was revived again in the racial and linguistic contexts and usages by Caldwell.<sup>22</sup>

His thesis drove out the darkness that surrounded the antiquity of Tamil and its family, broken the hegemony of Sanskrit as it was considered the mother of all world languages, awakened the world of scholars towards Tamil studies and helped to remove all the living misleading notions about the Dravidian family of languages.<sup>23</sup>

Caldwell scientifically analyzed the relations that existed between Sanskrit and the Dravidian group of languages in his insightful work. Without any prejudice, he asserted that Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam imbibed a number of words from Sanskrit. As far as Tamil is concerned he said, that it functions independently. Sanskrit influence is much realized in the functioning of Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam and so these languages could not avoid Sanskrit words. As Tamil has and stature it do not want the support of Sanskrit in anyway. 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>24</sup> According to him, Tamil is the classical and well-matured language. While highlighting the racial differences, he initiated the concept of Dravidian race. As per his findings, the Dravidian languages constitute a family distinct from the Aryans. According to Caldwell, the Dravidians are for more or less 2000 years old. They constituted a big race with unique talents, exclusive religion and they tried to prevent the Aryans and maintained a separate identity. In future the Tamil language would be a predominant language and would surpass all the other languages. Caldwell opted for the entry of the downtrodden members of South India into the fold of the Dravidians, such as the Pariyars, 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>25</sup>

In his magnum opus, thus, Caldwell had constructed a genealogy for the Dravidians and that presentation exposed their well framed languages and glorious culture. By making his legacy, he directed the Dravidians to preserve their enriched languages, culture and civilization from the harmful influence of Brahmins, Brahmanism and Sanskritic culture.

The most powerful message of Caldwell's work was went against the Brahmins, Brahminism and Sanskrit which were alien to the Dravidian people and culture. According to him, the Dravidians must cherish their own language and culture and must attempt to rescue their language and culture from the corrupted and evil designs of Brahminism and Sanskritic influence.<sup>26</sup>

Caldwell's life and work in South India provides the most fitting lens through which it become easy to assess the impact of missions and missionaries on the Dravidian movement. His rare discovery, resurrection and his installation of Tamil on the high pedestal really startled the world of scholarship. Sometimes after, the Tamil world was awakened on the pathways laid by Caldwell and started continued the footsteps of the multi-linguist. The utmost impact of his writings and findings kindled the Tamils from their slumber and they made their dedication to the liberation of Tamil from the domination of any alien dialect. This paved the way for the emergence of the Pure Tamil Movement.

For a long time, the Dravidian consciousness was not realized by the natives. They also did not understand the Dravidian subterfuge which was needful for them. The uniqueness of the term 'Dravidian' was found out by the European Robert Caldwell and so he was hailed as 'Dravidologist'. It was he who opened up the gates of knowledge of Dravidian studies, which, in fact, led to the rediscovery of the Dravidian past.<sup>27</sup> His works exercised much influence in the Tamil society. He openly contested the stand taken by the Sanskrit Pandits who propounded Tamil language is developed from the Sanskrit. He observed that a bulk of the Tamil words are non-Sanskritic nature.<sup>28</sup> His usage of the term 'Dravidian' worked out for the rise of the non-Brahmins who integrated themselves and their ventures ultimately paved the way for the emergence of the Dravidian Movement and Dravidian rule in Tamil Nadu.<sup>29</sup>

For the analysis of the studies of Bishop Caldwell, the core of his heart and profession should be taken into consideration. Indeed, he was a missionary and propagated Christianity in all possible

ways. By doing so, it was said that he created disunity among the Indians. Before the advent of Caldwell, it was proved that the Indian languages and the Indo-European languages are originated from Sanskrit. This theory is accepted by the post Caldwell writers also. Studying the works of Caldwell, there is a possibility to conclude that the attention of the missionaries always on division of the Indian society. It was with a object to create a disunity, the missionaries dedicated themselves for to spread Christianity in India in possible ways.

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