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**MARAIMALAI ADIKAL AND THE EMERGENCE OF TAMIL PURIST MOVEMENT IN THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY****Dr.G.Premkumar**Associate Professor, P.G Department of History  
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**Abstract:** The Tamil purist movement tried to reject the non-Tamil words especially Sanskrit words in writing. Tamil egalitarian ideas were partly rediscovered by nineteenth century Christian missionaries, and they left their impress of the unique antiquity of Tamil language, literature, history and culture. Certain statements by European missionary scholars like Percival, Winslow, Caldwell, Pope and others kindled a sense of pride among Tamils about their heritage. The European missionaries opened up the flood gates of Dravidian studies which in fact led to the rediscovery of the Dravidian past. C.J Beschi, Fr.Henriques, Robert De Nobilli, are the forerunners of the Tamil Purist Movement who started the de-sanskritisation process and extended it to all fields of writing. Before launching the Pure Tamil Movement, Swami Vedachalam had a preparatory period during which he had the benefit of learning and discussing matters with active and eminent native personalities like Prof. Sundaram Pillai, Nallasami Pillai and Prof. Surya Narayanasastri, who were propagating the ideas concerning the antiquity and cultural self-sufficiency of the Dravidians. Following them, in 1916 Swami Vedachalam changed his name into Maraimalai Adikal due to the influence of the writings of both the Missionary and the native scholars. This resulted in the form of a movement, which its founders called as 'Tanittamil movement' in Tamil language which means Pure Tamil Movement or Tamil Purist Movement.

**Keywords:** Tamil Studies of Christian Missionary Scholars, Discovery of Its Glory, Started De-Sanskritisation, Followed by Native Scholars, Maraimalai Adikal Launched Tamil Purist Movement.

**Introduction**

The Tamil purist movement started by Maraimalai Adikal<sup>1</sup>(1876-1950) to rid Tamil writing of the various non-Tamil especially of Sanskrit words, which have gained currency in ordinary usage. Tamil egalitarian ideas were partly rediscovered by nineteenth century Christian missionaries, and they left their impress of the unique antiquity of Tamil language, literature, history and culture of the Natives. It made the natives to realise that their mother tongue was in no way inferior to the North Indian Sanskrit. It widened the scope of the in-depth study of the languages, literatures, history and cultures. Moreover, it asserted the superiority of the Tamil language and stressed that it is free from the influence of any other language. Considering these characteristics of the Tamil language, a few learned scholars came forward to purify Tamil of its alien influence. This resulted in the form of a movement, which its founder called as 'Tanittamil movement' in Tamil language which means 'Pure Tamil Movement'. In this paper an attempt is made to trace the factors which contributed to the emergence of Tamil purist Movement.

**Missionary Writings and its consequences**

Certain statements by European missionary scholars like Percival, Winslow, Caldwell, Pope and others kindled a sense of pride among Tamils about their heritage. The enthusiasm and thrill with which the European savants presented the salient features of Tamil language, literature, antiquities and religion also instilled in these Tamil scholars a notion of uniqueness about their past glory and set them apart from other races and people of India, especially the Brahmin community (broadly identified as Aryans)<sup>2</sup>

Rev.P.Percival was the Professor of Vernacular Literature at Presidency College, Madras during 1860s and collected nearly 5000 proverbs and edited them. Thus, he laid the foundation for linguistic research.<sup>3</sup> Following in his footsteps Winslow, an American born Missionary scholar who settled in Madras and published a Dictionary in 1862. He is well-known to the Tamil world through his Dictionary. In his research work, he said that while all the vernaculars of India had been enriched by Sanskrit, that wonderful language has borrowers from the Dravidian group of which Tamil is the oldest<sup>4</sup>. It also strengthened the ideas of Percival about the glory of the Tamils.

An outstanding scholar among the Christian Missionaries, Bishop Dr. Robert Caldwell (1814-1891) had strained his every nerve to resurrect Tamil from the dustbin. Caldwell is considered in Tamil Nadu as a prophetic scholar, the memory of whom in Tamil Nadu has been very sacred to the Dravidologists. It was he who resurrected and coined the word Dravidian to mean all the South Indian Languages. He studied them deeply to many years so that he could announce to the world authoritatively that the Dravidian languages did not originate from the Aryan family or do not belong to that family that their origins should be discovered somewhere else<sup>5</sup>.