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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 Dravidan. 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, 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 (7th May 1814 -21st August 1891), who had contributed a great deal to the study of Tamil grammar¹. 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 1856². 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 7th May 1814 in a village in Ireland³. Within a few years his parents moved on their native place, Scotland. He 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. 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 changes⁴. 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 8th January 1838⁵. 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 (Shepherd's Hamlet) a village near Thruchiendur, where he lived for about 50 years (1841-1891)⁶ 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 villages⁷. 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 20th 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 appointed as the S.P.G. Bishop of erstwhile Tinnevely District.

The University of Glasgow honoured him by conferring L. L. D. degree for his book *Comparative grammar*.... For his religious service, the University too honored him a Doctor of divinity (honouris causa). In 1879, because of his contribution to Education and specifically to the study of Tamil Language, Caldwell was selected to deliver the 22nd Convocation address by the Madras University. He stressed comparative study of the Languages in his address⁸. 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 28th August 1891, at the ripe old age of seventy seven⁹. 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 follows¹⁰.

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 S.P.C.K and S.P.G (1881)
10. Tinnevely District Manual (1881)
11. A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevely (1881)
12. On the Demonology 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.