

F. W. Ellis is usually recognized as the one who first proposed the idea of Dravidian language family. For example. Bh. Krishnamurti, The Dravidian languages, Cambridge univ. press, 2003. p. 16-17: "As early as 1816, Francis whyte Ellis, an English civil servant, in his Dissertation on the Telugu language" [...]. His purpose was to show that Tamil, Telugu and Kannada 'form a distinct family of languages' with which 'the sanscrit has, in later times, especially, intermixed, but with which it has no radical connection'. He presented considerable illustrative material, mainly lexical and grammatical, from Telugu, Kannada and Tamil in support of his hypothesis (Krishnamurti 1969b: 311-312). Ellis recognized the Dravidian languages as a family, thirty years after sir william Jones had floated the concept of the language family in his famous lecture to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta, on 2 February 1786."

Susan Okeksiw, "Francis Whyte Ellis: A Brief Review of his work," Adyar Library Bulletin 51 (1987: L. Rocher Festschrift vol.), pp. 267-75.

There is lot of info about Ellis, Hodgson, Calwell in a paper by Thomas Trautmann in M. Deshpande & J. Bronkhorst, Aryan and Non-Aryan in India. In fact, it was Trautmann who told about Ellis to Ed Bryant. May be worth checking to see if it was Hodgson's idea.

Prof. Trautmann sent me his 2 papers about Ellis. One is about (pre) vaccination debates in Madras. It was written as a samvadam between Mariyamman and Danvantri. Unfortunately, the Tamil original may be lost now, but Trautmann uses the English translation from London archives. Second is on the debates about including Telugu in the Dravidian languages, elite pundits' opposition etc., The title is something like "haloo-baloo about Telooogo". Have seen Ellis' poems, "paJcAkkara mAlai" (on namasivaya mantram), there are two long inscriptions in akaval, one in Chennai and another from Dindigul (on his tombstone). They extensively quote tirukkuRaL.

I think it was his Tamil teachers like Saminathan, Muttusamy, Ramachandra Kvirayar who told Ellis that Tamil does not derive from Sanskrit. This must have raised his curiosity against the Calcutta Orientalist scholars and pundits who said every Indian language comes from Sanskrit. Medieval Tamil grammarians, much before Ellis, paid close attention to studying Kannada and Telugu. There is a long tradition comparing and contrasting Tamil and Sanskrit in southern literature.



The first book in Tamil was printed in Kollam, Kerala, on October 20, 1578 by Portuguese missionary Henrique Henriques. Titled 'Thambiran Vanakkam' it was translation of 'Doctrina Christam'. The second book was 'Christiani Vanakkam'. Photo: Special Arrangement.

Tamil Words & Numbers Printed Bank Notes !

