

Bishop Robert Caldwell (1814–1891) was a Colonial Era Evangelist Missionary who used native languages as a tool to proselytize

the Colonised in Southern India. To aid his mission, he nativised Christianity by adopting a teleological approach to re-classify

Indian languages inspired by scientific racial theories that was popular amongst the European intellectuals in the 19th century.

His works revolve around the missionary work in Tinnevely (Thirunelveli) district in Tamil Nadu and it laid the theoretical

foundation for the political and academic 'revivalist' movement that came to dominate Dravidian nationalism in Tamil Nadu and

racial polarisation in Sri Lanka. Robert Caldwell was born at Clady, Northern Ireland, on May 7, 1814 to Scottish parents.

Initially self-taught and religious, young Caldwell graduated from the University of Glasgow and was fascinated by the

comparative study of languages. At 24, Caldwell arrived in Madras on January 8, 1838 as a missionary of the London Missionary

Society and later joined the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Mission (SPG). Caldwell was married in 1844 to Eliza

Mault (1822–99), by whom he had seven children. She was the elder daughter of the veteran Travancore missionary, Reverend Charles

Mault (1791–1858) of the London Missionary Society. For more than forty years, Eliza worked in Travancore and Tirunelveli

proselytising the vulnerable, especially the Tamil women. To further that attempt, Caldwell realised that he had to be proficient

in Tamil to proselyte the masses and he began a systematic study of the language.

He controversially coined the term 'Dravidian languages' and proposed that the South Indian languages of Tamil, Telugu, Kannada,

Malayalam and Tulu formed a separate language family, affirming their antiquity and literary history, and their independence

from Sanskrit and the Indo-Aryan languages. There is no definite philological and linguistic basis for asserting unilaterally

that the name Dravida also forms the origin of the word Tamil. His work was influenced and congruous with the defunct

Aryan-Dravidian race theories proposed by Max Müller the German linguist. He speculated that speakers of the proto-Dravidian

language entered India from the northwest. However, Robert Caldwell's language group theory has come under several criticism,

and that the fundamental tenets of the nascent phase of the Dravidian ideology proposed by Caldwell were essentially linked to

the political and cultural legacies of the British attempt to demilitarise, despiritualise and fragment Tamil society.

Caldwell served as the Bishop of Tirunelveli (along with Bishop Sargent) and did much original research on the history of

Tirunelveli. He studied palm leaf manuscripts and Sangam literature in his search, and made several excavations, finding the

foundations of ancient buildings, sepulchral urns and coins with the fish emblem of the Pandyan Kingdom. This work resulted in

his book A Political and General History of the District of Tinnevely (1881), published by the Government of the Madras

Presidency. Caldwell's mission lasted more than fifty years. The publication of his research into both the languages and the

history of the region, coupled with his position in both Indian and English society, gave stimulus to the radicalisation of the

Non-Brahmin movement. Meanwhile, on difficult ground for evangelism, Caldwell achieved Christian conversion among the lower

castes. He had adopted some of the methods of the Lutheran missionaries of earlier times, having learned German purely in order

to study their practices. In summary, Caldwell the Tamil language scholar, Christian evangelist and champion of the native church,

remains today an important figure in the modern history of South India. The Indian historian Dr M.S.S. Pandian, Visiting Fellow

at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, recently commented that Caldwell's "contribution to both

Christianity in South India and the cultural awakening of the region is unmatched during the last two hundred years".

The Government of India paid a signal honour to Caldwell on 7th May 2010 by issuing a stamp in his name. The background to his

head on the 5 Rupee stamp consists of examples of four of the Dravidian languages of South India – Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam and

Telugu. D.P Sivaram popular Tamil Journalist, proposes that the aims of Caldwell's study was to show that the fundamental tenets

of the nascent phase of the Dravidian ideology were essentially linked to the political and cultural legacies of the British

attempt to 1) demilitarise Tamil martial communities 2) Destabilise the spiritual challenge put forward by the Brahmins which was

obstructive to his missionary work. "Apart from concerns shared with the British Government, the Bishop's hostile attitude towards

the Maravar arose from the bloody violence they unleashed on the Shanar, large numbers of whom were embracing the Protestant faith.

For him, if the idolatry and the Sanskritic culture of the articulate Brahmins was a spiritual threat to the propagation of the

Gospel, the violence and misdeeds of the Maravar against the faithful was a dire physical threat. In his scheme of Tamilian

history, the culture and ethos of the classes through whom the British government and the Anglican Church sought to consolidate

the gains of Tamil society's demilitarization were seen by Caldwell as the true characteristics of the Tamils. The martial

habits of the Maravar and the Sanskritic culture of the Brahmins were alien to the social order and moral ideals of the 'true'

Dravidians." Thus Caldwell's teleology assumed that Tamil revivalism would help

consolidate the Protestant ethic and the

allegiance to English rule among the non-military castes in Tamil society, by giving expression to the moral and religious ideas

which he assumed were immanent in their ancient Dravidian culture and language.

Charles E. Govear, in his book *The Folk Songs of South India*, heaps criticism on Caldwell and exposes some glaring mistakes in

his deductions. Govear, in particular, refutes Caldwell's theory that Tamils are a Turanian people. He says that recent

researches conducted by German writers have proved this theory wrong. He also demonstrates how most of the Tamil words,

which Caldwell, in his book, asserts to be of Scythian origin, had Indo-Aryan roots. He gives the example of the Dravidian

root *pe-* from which the Tamil word *Pey* meaning "devil" is derived, which Caldwell proclaims to be independent of Sanskrit,

and shows how it is related to the Sanskrit *pisacha*.

Even while acknowledging that Sanskrit was never a spoken language and that Brahmins in different parts of India spoke the local

vernacular, Caldwell asserts at another place that all Brahmins descended from the same racial stock which spoke Sanskrit.

Throughout his book *Comparative Study of the South Indian or Dravidian family of Languages*, Caldwell accuses Brahmins of

spreading lies and of not practising what they preach. The most striking criticism however, can be seen in context of its affinity

and reliance on the now defunct Aryan Dravidian racial theories proposed by Max Müller. Kamalika Pieris, a Sinhalese

intellectual, in his article, 'Ethnic conflict and Tamil Separatism,' examines the origin of the conflict and traces it to the

race theories proposed by the missionary-scholars: There developed the notion of an 'Aryan race' consisting of anybody who spoke

an Aryan language, the Dravidian race consisting of anybody who spoke a Dravidian language, and the Jews who spoke neither.

Robert Caldwell had spoken of Dravidian languages in 1856. The Portuguese and the Dutch brought into Sri Lanka the prejudices

available in their countries. Notably the Christian antagonism to Islam and other 'heathen' religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. But the concept of 'race' was introduced to the country during the British period, in the 19th century. The British labelled the Sinhala community as 'Sinhalese race' and 'Tamil race' in 1833 or 1871. 1833 saw the first communal representation in the Legislative Council and 1871 was the year of the first British Census of Ceylon.

But it is the consequence of his theories and thoughts that makes an analysis of his work more relevant in present context. Some

theorists argue that the racial polarization of Sri Lanka began as early as 1856, when Robert Caldwell, in his *A Comparative*

*Grammar of the Dravidian South Indian Family of Languages*, argued that there was 'no direct affinity between the Sinhalese and

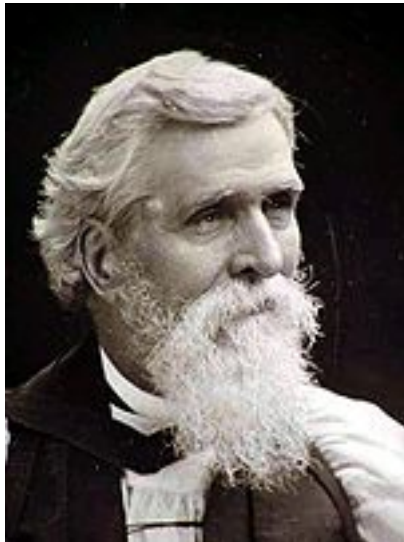
Tamil languages.' Max Müller, meanwhile, weighed in with his *Lectures on the*

Science of Language (1861), in which he declared

that after 'careful and minute comparison' he was led to 'class the idioms spoken in Iceland and Ceylon as cognate dialects of

the Aryan family of languages'. Though contrary views were expressed by other scholars, Muller's Aryan Race Theory was lent

support by a number of prominent European scholars, and the theory therefore held sway.



The history of publishing and printing in Tamil is as interesting and rich as the language itself.

The first book dates back to October 20, 1578. On the eventful day, Portuguese missionary Henrique Henriques (also Anrique Anriquez) published 'Thambiraan Vanakkam' with paper imported from China.

Tamil historian Pulavar S. Raju says the 10x14 cm book had 16 pages of 24 lines each and had the very Tamil font that was then used on palm leaves and stones.

The book was a translation of the Portuguese 'Doctrina Christam,' authored by Francis Xavier. Mr. Raju says the book was published as a result of Father Henriques' efforts to have a prayer book in Tamil.

The book was printed in Kollam using a printing machine imported from Portugal in 1556. "This was the first book to be published in an Indian language," he points out.

That was the age when Vijayanagar Empire King Sriranga Rayar the first (1578-1586), Mysore ruler Raja Woodayar (1578-1617), Madurai ruler Veerappa Nayakar (1572-1595) and Thanjavur's Achuthappa Nayakar (1572-1614) were still using copper plates and stones for disseminating information.

Tamil World only Currency Bank Notes in Printed Tamil Words & Numerical Values !

