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## MARAIMALAI ADIKAL AND THE EMERGENCE OF TAMIL PURIST MOVEMENT IN THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY

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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>.



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Caldwell is most widely known for his English book viz., A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages, published in 1856. It is a magnum opus, a significant contribution to the studies in Dravidian philology. It tried a halt to the time old theory that Tamil is a derivative from Sanskrit and proved that Tamil is independent and not dependent on Sanskrit or other language. Caldwell was the first scholar to make this startling discovery as a result of his long years of painstaking study and research<sup>6</sup>. To write the Comparative Grammar, he thoroughly mastered Tamil, Malayalam Kannada and Telugu language. This enabled him to conclude that there is a unity among these languages, which is entirely different from the Sanskrit family. He called this group of languages as belonging to Dravidian family. In his view there is only one language, i.e., Tamil which had not borrowed any aspect of the grammar of the Aryan language. It has the capacity to function independently as of now. Some of the peculiarities of Tamil Language which are different from Sanskrit attracted him very much. His findings on Tamil language may be summed up as follows. (i) Of all the Dravidian languages, the most ancient and matured one is Tamil,(ii) Tamil has the guiding power for all the other Dravidian language,(iii) Tamil is the only language which has the capacity to function without depending on Sanskrit and has separate letters,(iv) If words borrowed from Sanskrit are separated we can get pure Tamil,(v) Grammar of Tamil is on a par with other ancient languages of the world.(vi) When compared to with other Dravidian Languages Tamil is older and purer,(vii) Tamil grammar is older than Telugu and Kannada and much more older than Malayalam<sup>7</sup>. These findings impressed by scholarly world. The step-motherly treatment meted out to Tamil by the Aryan scholars of the north began to wane away and it opened the eyes of the Dravidians<sup>8</sup>.

Caldwell's thesis dispelled the darkness that satisfied the antiquity of Tamil and its family and dismantled the hegemony of Sanskritics, that it was the mother of all the world language, awakened the world of scholarship to Tamil studies and helped to remove all the prevalent fallacies about the Dravidian family of languages<sup>9</sup>. In his studies he showed the relations that prevailed between Sanskrit and the Dravidian group of Languages. He without any prejudice made it known that Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam had borrowed lot of words from Sanskrit. As far as Tamil is concerned, he said that it functioned independently. It is very difficult to avoid the impact of Sanskrit on the functioning of Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam, but Tamil has independent standing and requires no support of Sanskrit. In his analysis he first of all spoke about purity of the language. Then he emphasised the ancient glory of Tamil of all the Dravidian languages<sup>10</sup>. According to him Tamil is the classical and well matured language.Caldwell's rare discovery; resurrection and his installation of Tamil on the high pedestal really startled the world of scholarship. But after sometime the Tamil world got awakened to the realities and started to continue the path identified by this great linguist<sup>11</sup>. The immediate consequence of his writings and findings on Tamils was the redemption of Tamil from the hegemony of any alien dialect, hence Tamil purist Movement.

Another very leading Tamil Missionary scholar was G.U Pope (1820-1908). He worked as a Lecturer in Tamil and Telugu at the University of Oxford from 1884 to 1896. He translated Tirukkural, Tiruvacakam and Naladiyar in to English<sup>12</sup>. His translation of the sacred Kural, the first of its kind into English with all its couplets, numbering a total of 1330, is considered as an example of his command of the subject matter in Kural. In it, he made a comparative study of the humanitarian ideas of Kural with Jesus Christ<sup>13</sup>. He was of the strong belief that St. Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ came to Mylapore and propagated the teachings of Christ which according to pope might have influenced Tiruvalluvar, the author of Tirukkural. Though a large number of translations of the Kural in English have appeared, his translation of this universe treatise of no caste, no creed and no religion is still considered the best<sup>14</sup>.

People say that Tirukkural and Naladiyar like the other Tamil works are great legacies of Tamils and they reveal the culture of the people who have to pride this. He is of the view that the Tamils have to shun the imposition of Sanskrit on them. According to him the Saiva Siddhanta was a Dravidian religious development and it represents the non- acceptance of Sanskrit elements in mysticism. It is the pride of the Vedic philosophies particularly their emphasis on life after death. They have a separate literature and their own culture, which in all dimensions was secular. His ideas strengthened the views of Caldwell and revolutionised the minds of the Tamil poets<sup>15</sup>. He had such an unfathomable love for Tamil that before his death in 1908 in England, he expressed his desire that his epitaph should include the phrase," Tamil Manavan" Dr. Caldwell's observations and Dr.G.U Pope's translations of Tamil works into English had electric impact on the nearly awakened Tamils, particularly the Vellala Protagonists of Tamil.

### Conceptualisation of the Dravidian Idea by Prof.Sundaram Pillai

The European missionaries, particularly Dr.Robert Caldwell and Dr. G.U Pope, opened up the flood gates of Dravidian studies which in fact led to the rediscovery of the Dravidian past.The rediscovery of the Dravidian antiquity and history, language and literature culture and thoughts, in turn, led to the Dravidian awakening.Influenced by the missionary zeal and enthusiasm of westerners Professor P. Sudaram Pillai<sup>16</sup> conceptualised the Dravidian idea. He gave the rediscovered idea a shape, inner meaning and the coverage. As an ardent admirer of the Tamil language, its literatures and culture, Prof.Sundaram Pillai rose above the petty linguistic prejudices of South Indian, i.e., the Tamils, Telugs, Kannadigas and Malayalees, and gave them a new common bond of



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union on the geo- physical(regional), racial, linguistic and cultural grounds. The TamizhThai vazhthu(invocation of mother Goddess) of his famous drama Manonmamiyam(1891) reverberates this common bond of union<sup>17</sup>. It makes a clear demarcation of the land of the Dravidians as the South of India being occupied by the race speaking a family of language. The Dravidian home according to him, is, the land comprising the present Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. In these regions live the very ancient races of the Dravidians. Their ancestral Dravidians spoke a language, which according to him, is the sweet Tamil. He further states that the other Dravidian languages such as Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam were born of the womb of mother Tamil. It may be said that these were the late born children of mother Tamil. However, before the birth of these separate languages, the south of India was swayed over by mother Tamil. This is how Prof.Pillai gave a meaning to the Dravidian idea, a bond of union among the Dravidians which, in many ways, helped a conscious awakening of Tamil identity among the lovers of Tamil<sup>18</sup>.

Prof. P. Sundarampillai made the following assertions<sup>19</sup>.

1. Deccan is the distinctive division of the country.
2. Dravidian is pre-eminent among its constituencies.
3. Tamil has universal recognition and fame.
4. Tamil is like to the eternal God.
5. Tamil is the parent of all the Dravidian languages and
6. UnlikeSanskrit (which became extinct) Tamil is living tongue (ever young)

Further, the author compared the works both in Sanskrit and Tamil and asserted that Tamil works are superior in their imagination morality piety, social justice and relevance. For instance, he said that those who knew the Kural well would never accept the laws of Manu, which discriminates between different castes and prescribes differing moral codes and justice. Likewise, he said that those who are captivated by the enthralling Tiruvacagam would not waste their time in chanting the vedas<sup>20</sup>.

During the days of P. Sundaram Pillai, people believed that the Aryan civilisation was superior and Tamil civilisation was inferior. They held that Tamil was impregnated by Sanskrit and all that came out of this was bearing Sanskrit influence. They also held that the Vedamozhi was divine., the Thenmozhi was Sudra in origin. Even the Tamil scholars accepted view in those days without any criticism. But P. Sundaram Pillai dealt the first blow to this view and, through his prayer Goddess Tamil, he proved that Tamil is divine and Tamil literature is moral. He stresses the antiquity and greatness of the language. No doubt, he was mainly responsible for the revival of Dravidian culture and its identity. He led the Tamil revival movement, which reached its full form in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the form of 'Tamil Purist Movement' an off-shoot of the Tamil Revival Movement<sup>21</sup>.

## Meaning of Purity

Pure Tamil means the purification of Tamil of its Sanskrit domination. It otherwise means Tamil of its pristine purity. It was not an attempt to belittle any other language, but to establish the credentials of Senthamizh (chaste Tamil), to ensure Tamil minus Sanskrit. It was also aimed at dispelling some of the wrong notions that prevailed among some of the Sanskrit propagating Brahmins that Tamil could not survive without Sanskrit. Further, it also aimed at launching a move for protecting Tamil of its alien threats. To wrench and wrest Tamil of its alien influence, there arose the need for a movement<sup>22</sup>.

## De-Sanskritisation

In the days of C.J Beschi (1680-1747) the need to preserve Tamil was felt. He criticised excessive Sanskritisation in children's theological literature<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, personal names were de-sanskritised. A wrong impression was created that it all started with Swami Vedachalam calling himself MaraiMalai Adikal<sup>24</sup>. Even in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Fr.Henriques signed his name as Andrikku Pathiriyar<sup>25</sup>. Robert De Nobilli (1577-1656) translated his name in the spoken Tamil usage of the elite of his age in to Thathuva Pothakar<sup>26</sup> and Fr.Beschi called himself Veeramamunivar<sup>27</sup>. In conformity with the literary tradition of that era. Prof. V.S.P Manickam considers Professor Vi.Ko Surya narayana Sastri(1870-1903), a Britain scholar of high repute, who lived in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the forerunner of the Tamil Purist Movement<sup>28</sup>. A person of high learning in Tamil Sanskrit and English, a man of high standing in the scholastic world and though he explicitly acknowledged the contribution of Sanskrit in composing his monumental work in Tamil NatakaIlakkanam, he could not bear with patience the onslaught of a Sanskrit Pandit on Tamil, who belittled the copiousness of Tamil vocabulary, and rose up to maintain the purity of Tamil, perhaps to add more credibility to the observations of Dr. Caldwell. He thereby advocated the independence of Tamil, particularly in his Tamil book. A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or south Indian Family of languages. Prof V S P Manickam observes that the Professor himself in his zeal for pure Tamil, in his last days, changed his Sanskrit name 'Surya Narayana Sastri' in to Tamil name 'Parithimar Kalaigarnar'<sup>29</sup>. Getting inspired by Prof. ParithimarKalsignar's spark, prof, Marai Malai Adikal spearheaded a movement for purifying Tamil of its Sanskrit bias and preserving the pristine purity of Tamil.Thus de-sanskritisation process had extended to all fields of writing. Sanskrit words were



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avoided and, in their stead, new ones coined and old ones re-discovered. The researches of Dr. Caldwell and Dr. Winslow and others had been made full use of as references by the de-Sanskrit's proved the capability of Tamil to stand on its own.

### Early Influences of Marai Malai Adikal

Born on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1876 in Nagapattanam in a staunch, Vellala family, Swami Vedachalam, the brain behind the pure Tamil movement's agenda, learnt Tamil from Narayana Swami Pillai, a learned Tamil scholar from Nagapattanam. He also mastered Sanskrit and English with his own efforts<sup>30</sup>. At the age of nineteen (1895), Swami Vedachalam went to Thiruvananthapuram along with his Tamil mentor Narayana Swami. Pillai, met Prof. Sundaram Pillai, who had also studied under the same Professor. It appeared that Swami Vedachalam made a good impression on P. Sundaram Pillai, who gave him a testimonial recommending him for a post in a college. This testimonial, in fact, helped him get a job in Madras Christian College where he taught Tamil between 1898 and 1911<sup>31</sup>. In 1911 Swami Vedachalam wrote a novel The Letters of Kohilambal and exposed the hypocrisy of Brahmin die-hards<sup>32</sup>.

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 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. It is probable that there were also other influences that shaped Swami Vedachalam's ideas<sup>33</sup>. It is interesting to note that as a young man the Adikal used to contribute to a weekly Dravidamantiri (the Dravidian Minister) published at Nagapattanam. The socio-political connotation of the name of the journal is indeed very obvious<sup>34</sup>. He published his first book in 1898 with the opening lines of Tirukkural. From then, on a stream of varied publications in Tamil and English came out from his prolific pen. In 1902 the Adikal started a monthly journal viz; Gnanacakaram. In the first issue itself he started to trace the origin of Tamil. He gave a lecture in the anniversary at the Madurai Tamil Sangam on 24 May 1904. It attracted the audiences who again invited him for the fourth anniversary of the Sangam. Thereafter he met the Tamizh Thatha U. Ve. Saminatha Iyer on May 26, 1906 in its fifth anniversary. The Tamizh Thatha (grand old man of Tamil) had all appreciation for the efforts of Marai Malai Adikal<sup>35</sup>.

### Emergence of the Tamil Purist Movement

In 1916, while strolling in the garden the Adikal sang one of the famous Arutpas of St Ramalingar. As he completed reciting, he suddenly realised that the word Tekam (Sanskrit 'deha'; body) occurring in the second line had really brought down the literary merit of the poem; he told his daughter that the original Tamil word body 'yakkai' would have been excellent in that place. Continuing his comment on the need for a textual substitution, he is said to have told his daughter that because of the influx of loan words, Tamil language had lost its pristine purity and that many genuine Tamil words have thus been lost to the language and its speakers forever<sup>36</sup>. Then his daughter, being a good student of the father and a great admirer of his literary views, exclaimed, "If so, we should avoid all loan words, let us make an effort"<sup>37</sup>. The father agreed and thus was born the Tamil Purist Movement. In accordance with that decision, both the father and daughter changed their names to Marai Malar Adikal and Neelambikai respectively. Likewise, his journal Gnanacakaram was renamed as Arivukkadal and his institution Samarasa Sanmarga Samajam was redesigned into Pothu Nilai Kazhagam. These developments of course took place over a period of time<sup>38</sup>. However historically speaking we may consider 1916 as the year in which Swami Vedachalam launched the movement.

### Conclusion

The process of Dravidian awakening was not a systematic attempt on the part of the Tamils to purify their language and culture from alien influence. It was the spontaneous outcome of the rediscovery of the greatness of ancient Tamil classics in comparison with the North Indian works. The spontaneity was revealed in the outpourings of those connoisseurs of Tamil Language, literature, history and culture. When the western missionaries and civil servants became increasingly interested in repairing the lost glory of the Tamil in the medieval days and brought out pearls of pride and treasure troves, the native could not remain mere spectators and enjoy the fruits of their labour, coming under the spell of western missionary linguistic and historical research methods, many natives continued to tread on the path already treaded by the foreigners. In their attempt to redeem the past glory of Tamil they had to meet with the challenge of the protagonists of Sanskrit and Aryan culture and establish, the uniqueness, individuality and separate identity of everything Tamil. This Dravidian awakening cumulatively brought into existence the Tamil Purist Movement. It is indeed interesting to speculate on its timing when we recall the fact that the Justice Party<sup>39</sup> officially called at the beginning, South Indian Liberal Federation (SILF), which came into being from 1916 onwards. The organisation announced its birth with the publication of the 'Non-Brahmin Manifesto' and proclaimed its aim to promote and protect the political interests of the non-Brahmin caste Hindus. If nothing else, Swami Vedachalam would appear to have chosen the perfect movement to eliminate Sanskrit, a language identified with Brahmins from the Tamil scene. In other words, as much as the SILF strove to free South Indian socio-political life from Brahmin domination, the Adikal too wanted to free Tamil Language and literature from Sanskrit influence from 1916 onwards. Both these movements were parallel in character.





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