

CORRESPONDENCE.

1. THE LANGUAGE OF SOMÁLI-LAND.

DEAR PROFESSOR RHYS DAVIDS,—Dr. Cust called attention, in the January number of the Journal of this year, to the Somáli grammar and dictionary lately published by the Rev. Frère Evangeliste de Larajasse, and quotes some remarks by the author regarding a supposed resemblance between that language and the Dravidian languages of India. M. de Larajasse writes: “Le langage des peuples Indiens qui parlent le *Concanim*, ou le *Tamil* ou *Tamul*, semble avoir quelque affinité avec la langue Somáli le langage Somáli a de si grandes affinités avec le Tamil, qu’un Madrassien après quelques semaines est capable de comprendre un Somáli.”

Having spent twenty-one years amongst the Dravidians of the South of India, and having acquired a fair colloquial acquaintance with Tamil and Telugu, I was naturally much interested in this question, and examined the Somáli grammar and dictionary in order to trace the resemblances alluded to. I determined first to skim the books rapidly, and, after seeing that this affinity appeared to be a fact, to go carefully into the subject and draw up lists of words which seemed to have a common origin.

But my first superficial survey has given me no encouragement to proceed. I see no likeness whatever, either in words or structure, sufficient to warrant an expenditure of time on a more careful examination.

A few notes may be deemed of use.

There are certain euphonic changes of consonants common to the Somáli and Dravidian languages, e.g., interchange

of *k* and *g* when joined to hard or soft consonants. But this practice is found in almost all languages.

I noticed a plural formation very like the Tamil (*abba* 'father,' *tuka* 'a crow,' have their indefinite plurals *abbayal*, *tukayal*); but the definite plurals (*abbayasha*, *tukayasha*) in Somáli do not resemble any Dravidian forms with which I am acquainted, nor do any other of the plural forms.

The general structure of the Somáli seems to bear no resemblance to Tamil. In affixes and suffixes determining gender of nouns, in the plural-formations (except as above noted), in case-formations, numerals, pronouns, manner of forming relatives, declensions of verbs—in all these I see no affinity whatever. There is one point, indeed, where a diversity exists so striking that it seems to present positive evidence to the contrary. In all the Dravidian languages with which I have come in contact the vowel-sounds *i*, *a*, are severally used to mark things present in time or place, and things past or distant—*Ikkada* (Tel.), *ingké* (Tam.), 'here'; *akkada* (Tel.), *angké* (Tam.), 'there.' *Ippudu* (Tel.), *ippó* (Tam.), 'now'; *appudu* (Tel.), *appó* (Tam.), 'then.' This formation is common, I believe, to all Dravidian dialects, and invariably the vowels are used in the same signification; so that it cannot be imagined that any Dravidian would ever transpose them, or use *a*-forms for things present and *i*-forms for things past or distant. Yet this is precisely what the grammar gives us as the practice in Somáli-land (p. 16). This, I think, may be used as a direct argument against any affinity between Somáli and Tamil.

That Tamils rapidly acquire a power of comprehending a Somáli in daily conversation is not, I think, a matter that need cause much surprise. From early youth the residents of South India are constantly brought into contact with dialects and languages other than that of their own village or town; and their facility for picking up foreign tongues is very remarkable.

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