

IRON AGE CULTURE TAMIL NADU**A. Poongulali**

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The origin, antiquity, and the dispersal of iron technology in the Indian Sub-continent attracted the attention of scholars in the recent past. Mortimer Wheeler and D. H Gordon held the view that the Indian learned the use and preparation of Iron from the Achaemenids around 450 BC. However, the excavations at Hastinapura, Alamgirpur, Ahichchhatra, Noh, and other Painted Grey Ware (PGW) sites pushed the antiquity of iron in north India to c.9th century BC. Chakrabarti identified six early iron using regions in the sub continent: Baluchistan, Northwest, Indo-Gangetic Divide, Upper Gangetic Valley, eastern India, Malwa and Berar in central India and in the regions where megalithic monuments are found in South India Chakrabarti: 1984). Gaur expressed the view of diffusion of iron technology from West Asia. He states that the PGW using people probably acquired their knowledge of iron from West Asia, especially from Iron, on geographical consideration and the use of iron from the Asia Minor region in the first half of the second millennium BC.

Iron, According to Chakrabarti, entered the Indian productive system by 80 BC and the central and southern Indian, with its rich iron ore industrial smelting tradition, seem to show the first evidence of Indian iron (Chakrabarti : 1984: 83). But the evidence on iron obtained from megalithic sites in Deccan, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu Viz.) Naikund (BS: 265: 520+ 100 BC, Habitation mound II, layer 6 Burial no.7, BS93: 545+105 BC), Takalghat (middle phase of megalithic habitation TF783: 615+105 BC & 555+100BC) Bhagimohari (habitation-cum-burial, layer(9) BS 537: 690+100 BC BC BS 536: 750+100BC) (Deo: 1994: 192), Hallur and Kumaranahalli In Karnataka and Veerapuram in Andhra Pradesh and Paiyampalli in Tamilnadu, indicate the diffusion of iron I Deccan, Karnataka and Andhrapradesh around 7th century BC and Paiyampalli and Tamilnadu around 6th century BC.

The Iron Age people, made their appearance during the late phase of the Neolithic culture c.600-500 BC, in the districts of Dharmapuri and North Arcot bordering Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The Iron Age of south India represents a distinctive phase of culture that succeeded the primitive Neolithic culture. The new settlers by their knowledge of mining and metallurgy and their exploitation of rich natural resources enriched the pattern of living in the area of their settlement (Banerjee: 1965: 208). The overlap of Neolithic- Iron age periods witnessed at Paiyampalli in the Tamilnadu has also has also been observed at Hallur (IAR: 1964-65:31-32) in district Dharwar, Bhanhalli (IAR : 1983-84:42-46, IAR: 1985-86) in district Kolar in Karnataka and Hullikal and Pagidigutta in Andhrapradesh (Chakrabarti: 1984: 84) The excavations at Banahlli have provided a clear cut picture about the developmental stages of the transition from Neolithic to iron ended with the beginning of early historical period in the late centuries BC and the early centuries AD. But the practice of erecting memorials. Hero-stone continued longer and even up the mediaeval period (Chakrabarti: 1992:80).

The settlement pattern of Iron Age habitation sites showed the preference of the authors of Iron Age for perennial rivers or their tributaries and in the absence of major river system, they made their settlement near perennial ponds. The Iron Age habitation in Dharmapuri and North Arcot region reveals their concentration along the course of river Pennaiyar and its tributaries. The habitation sites situated near the tributaries of pennaiyar include Guttur, Mallappadi, Togarapalli, Dailmalai, Mullikkadu, and Chandrapuram in Dharmpurai district, Paiyampalli, Kallerimalai, and Chengam in North Arcot district. There is a wild stream running neat the habitation site at Appukkalu. The Iron Age folks at the time of their entry into these regions appear to have followed pastoral economy and moved from place to place. The migration from the point of entry to the interior region probably showed their progress they achieved form village- based economy to the establishment of large towns, where trade, commerce, and industry could have flourished.

The presence of metal artefacts, especially of iron, beside furnace materials and enormous quantity of iron slag in the lowest stratum of the Iron Age settlements indicate the presence of artisane in substantial number in the community. They large number iron tools of offence

The discovery of iron and steel furnaces at Guttur, Kodumanal and other places reveal the existence of a class of artisan with professional skill and expertise within the megalithic community. The twin furnaces exposed at Guttur, iron slag and artefacts found at Paiyampalli and Appukkallu, databale to c.500 BC, and the iron crucible furnace at Kodumanal, c.300BC point to the advanced State of Technical knowledge of the people of this region in iron smelting. This also indicates that the early migrants of Iron Age were not incipient in their knowledge about iron smelting and they might have acquired it somewhere outside Tamil Nadu, on their way before entering Tamil Nadu. The Neolithic-Iron Age overlaps in phase I at Hallur (T.F573: 955-100 BC) and Kumaranahalli (PRL: TL:50:1140-270) in Karnataka and Veerapuram (PRL 728: 920 140 BC and PRL 730: 1200 140 BC) in Andhra Pradesh have been dated to c.1000 BC on the basis of a C-14 date (Deo:1997:193). However, Iron made its appearance in the middle levels of period II at Hallur (Gaur: 1983:79-80).Based on its occurrence in the middle levels of period II at Hallur, the introduction of Iron in productive system in Karnataka region can be safely deduced to around 700 BC. The districts of Coimbatore, Dharmapuri, and North Arcot bordering Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, formed the nuclear zone of Iron Age culture in Tamil Nadu. The Iron Age culture diffused towards the other parts of Tamil Nadu from the point of entry in these regions. The iron age settlements are riverain in nature and they diffused towards the interior of Tamil Nadu through the course of the rivers.

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