

# THE LEGACY OF THE TAMILS VIS-À-VIS IRON & EARLY CIVILIZATIONS

## (AN ELEMENTARY INTRODUCTION)

**V. Chockalingam**



### **Abstract :**

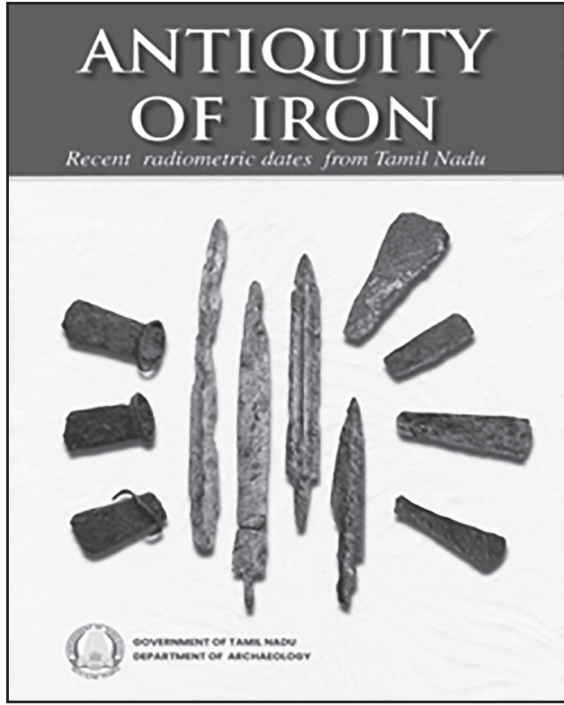
*Recent archaeological excavations in Tamil Nadu have uncovered Iron artifacts in places like Kodumanal, Mayiladumparai, Adichanallur, and Sivagalai. These discoveries challenge the previous claim that the Iron Age began around 1200 BCE in West Africa. The Tamil Nadu government released a research report stating that Iron usage in Tamil Nadu dates back to 3345 BCE (5,370 years ago), proving that Iron was used in the Tamil land long before many other regions of the world.*

*In such a background, this essay affirms that the history of the Indian subcontinent may need to be rewritten. Archaeological findings and genetic studies suggest that the Tamil land played a central role in the development of culture, society, and technology, long before the rise of the Aryan civilization and other ancient cultures in India. This essay also outlines that understanding our past is essential, not as a means of glorification but as a path toward shaping the future.*

### **Introduction:**

Recent archaeological excavations in Tamil Nadu have uncovered Iron artifacts in places like Kodumanal, Kilnamandi, Mayiladumparai, Adichanallur, and Sivagalai. These discoveries challenge the previous claim that the Iron Age began around 1200

BCE in West Africa. On January 23, 2025, the Tamil Nadu government released an unprecedented research report stating that Iron usage in Tamil Nadu dates back to 3345 BCE (5,370 years ago), proving that Iron was used in the Tamil land long before other regions of the world.



**[Fig. 1 – The research publication released by Govt. of Tamil Nadu on the Antiquity of Iron]**

### **Tamils and Iron: A Technological Leap Ahead:**

It was once believed that the Iron Age in the Indian subcontinent began around 1400 BCE, with the Aryans credited for discovering Iron. However, recent studies confirm that the Tamil people were already using advanced Iron extraction techniques long before the Aryans. This establishes that Tamil civilization was technologically advanced in Iron usage.

The idea that the Aryans introduced Iron to India has now been debunked. Tamil people were already using Iron before the Vedic period, suggesting that Tamil civilization predates Aryan influence and had a technological advantage over other cultures, and resonating beyond the Indus Valley Civilization.

### **Technological Development: A Comparison with the Indus Valley**

Beta Carbon Dating suggests that Iron usage in Tamil land predates the Indus Valley Civilization. While the Indus Valley people mainly used copper, the ancient Tamils had already started working with Iron. This shows that technological development in the geographic region of the South Indian Tamil land was ahead of the Indus Valley, which was more dependent on Bronze & copper-based technologies.

In the broader context of technological ages - namely Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age, the Tamil land advanced much faster than the Indus Valley. This suggests that the ancient Tamils were not only innovative but ahead of their time, surpassing the capabilities of many other cultures.

### **Dravidian Tradition: A Shared Heritage**

While the technological differences were notable, the people of the Indus Valley and the Tamil land shared a common Dravidian heritage. Both civilizations spoke Proto-Dravidian, the precursor to the modern Dravidian languages. Over time, these languages evolved into distinct forms, such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Tulu, forming the linguistic backbone of the South Indian subcontinent.

Though they had different technologies and cultures, the people of the Indus Valley and Tamil Nadu were part of the same Dravidian tradition. The later Aryan migration influenced the region, but Dravidian culture rooted in South India, is considered the foundation of ancient Indian civilization.

## A Glimpse into the Past: Kodumanal Sword

Kodumanal, a city in Erode, is famous for its advanced steel production, especially the Wootz steel, which played a crucial role in creating weapons like the Damascus sword. This technological innovation had a lasting impact on metallurgy, influencing sword production globally.

As early as 5300 years ago, the Tamil people were producing high-quality steel. The Wootz steel from Kodumanal was known for its sharpness and quality, a reputation that lasted throughout history, especially during the Chera, Chola and Pandya empires. This technology spread worldwide, influencing regions like Syria and ancient Rome.

### The Silence of BJP Leaders:

Despite the significant discoveries related to Tamil Nadu's ancient Iron tradition, many BJP leaders have remained silent on the subject. The only prominent national leader who has shown interest in Tamil Nadu's Iron Age is the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Mr. Rahul Gandhi from the Indian National Congress. Political discourse often overlooks these important archaeological findings. As the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Mr. M.K. Stalin rightly stated, "The history of the Indian subcontinent must now start from Tamil Nadu" recognizing the region's role in early technological advancements.

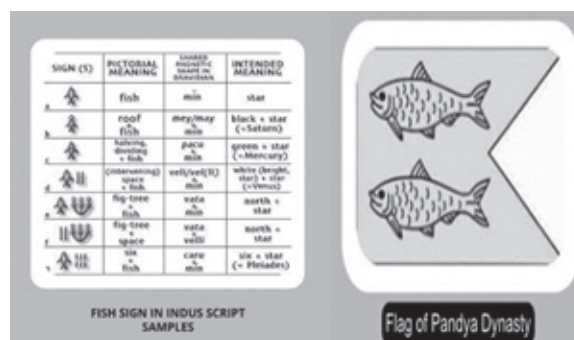
### Out of Africa Theory: Virumandi

Recent archaeological discoveries support the theory that human history in Indian subcontinent might have started in Tamil Nadu. According to the "Out of Africa" theory, humans migrated from Africa to India around 60,000 years ago. A 2008

study by scientist Rm. Pitchappan found that a Tamil man named Virumandi carried the 'M130' genetic marker, supporting this theory. This, along with early Iron usage, positions the ancient Tamil land as a possible cradle for the rise of human civilization in the subcontinent.

### Insights from the Indus Valley Civilization

The Iron Age in the Tamil land not only features advanced technological developments, but also offers intriguing insights into Dravidian tradition, shedding light on the connection between Tamil Nadu and the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC). The IVC script, analysed by the renowned epigraphist Iravatham Mahadevan, features square-shaped symbols that may represent settlements or forts, suggesting early Tamil dynasties might have been part of the broader Indus Valley civilization. Artifacts from the Indus Valley show craft-based professions, and symbols like the fish sign, from the emblem of ancient Tamil kings - the Pandyas and their city layout of Madurai, indicating deep ties between these civilizations. These findings support the idea that ancient Tamil dynasties were integral to the Indus Valley's cultural fabric.



[Fig. 2 – The IVC Fish sign and Emblem of an ancient Tamil kingdom]

The Indus Valley was an urban civilization reflecting Dravidian cultural traditions, while the Vedic culture was centered around village-based pastoralism. Additionally, some Indus Valley seals show animals like the oxen, but no horses - a key difference, as horses arrived later with the Aryans.

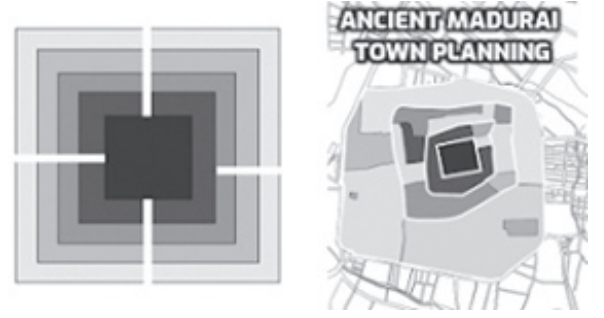
The discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization, considered pre-Aryan and Dravidian, along with the discovery of the Iron Age in Tamil Nadu, allows for a newer understanding of the relationship between Tamil Nadu and IVC. Further research into migrations within India could provide valuable insights into these connections.

In summary, ongoing archaeological research and studies of Sangam literature have the potential to offer valuable insights into both cultures, enhancing our understanding of their interactions and contributions to history.

### **Madurai: The Evolution of a City**

Madurai, an ancient city in Tamil Nadu, holds significant historical and cultural importance. The city's layout, with its concentric square streets, reflects the architectural sophistication found in the square-shaped symbols and settlements of the IVC, further reinforcing the significance of both the Indus Valley and Tamil Nadu in historical narratives. Additionally, according to interpretations of the early Tamil text Paripadal by the scholar Thamizhannal, the Meenakshi Amman temple was likely originally a royal palace for the Pandyas, which later evolved into a temple. This transformation may have occurred after the defeat of Kalabhras by the Pandyas.

Subsequently, the Pandyas ruled from Manalur, located near Keezhadi (close to Madurai).



**(Fig. 3 – Town Planning architecture of ancient Madurai city)**

### **Keezhadi: A Window into Early Tamil Civilization**

Keezhadi, a key archaeological site in Tamil Nadu, provides more evidence of the complexity of ancient Tamil civilization. Excavations have unearthed items such as Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions, pottery, jewelry, and evidence of trade with the ancient Roman Empire. Keezhadi, along with other sites like Adichanallur and Poompuhar, offers a glimpse into the cultural, technological, and industrial practices of the early Dravidian civilization.



**(Fig. 4 – Some excavations from the Keezhadi archaeological site)**



## Conclusion:

Ongoing research sheds more light on Tamil Nadu's role in shaping human civilization. It is becoming increasingly clear that the history of the Indian subcontinent may need to be rewritten. Archaeological findings and genetic studies suggest that Tamil Nadu played a central role in the development of culture, society, and technology, long before the rise of the Aryans and other ancient cultures in India.

Understanding our past is essential, not as a means of glorification but as a path toward shaping the future. As we continue to uncover the historical truths hidden in Tamil Nadu's soil, we must appreciate the depth and richness of our heritage and recognize its significant contributions to human progress.

## References:

1. A Harappa Site in South India - <https://swarajyamag.com/culture/there-is-no-real-connection-with-harappa-a-ground-report-from-keeladi-madurai>
2. A Tale of Wootz Steel - <https://www.ias.ac.in/article/fulltext/reso/011/06/0067-0077>
3. Agastya Legend and the Indus Civilization - <https://web.archive.org/web/20110728142006/http://www.ulakaththamizh.org/JOTSpdf/030024037.pdf>
4. Alexander wanted Steel from Tamil Nadu - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAJWp34Xs5c>
5. Ancient High-carbon Steel from Tamil Nadu - [https://asc.iitgn.ac.in/assets/publications/research\\_papers/High\\_Carbon\\_Steel\\_S\\_TN\\_Current\\_Science\\_2021.pdf](https://asc.iitgn.ac.in/assets/publications/research_papers/High_Carbon_Steel_S_TN_Current_Science_2021.pdf)
6. Antiquity of Iron - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wlgQHHdq0VEFctrM6gAzpPNfeyrY0Yqi/view?pli=1>
7. Development of Iron and Steel Technology in India - [https://cahc.jainuniversity.ac.in/assets/ijhs/Vol17\\_2\\_3\\_HCBhardwaj.pdf](https://cahc.jainuniversity.ac.in/assets/ijhs/Vol17_2_3_HCBhardwaj.pdf)
8. Harappa like Site Surfaces in Tamil Nadu - <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/Harappa-like-site-surfaces-in-Tamil-Nadu/articleshow/52495353.cms?from=mdr>
9. Keezhadi - 2,600 Year Legacy of Civilisation - <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2024/Mar/29/keezhadis-2600-year-legacy-of-civilisation>
10. Keezhadi Museum - <https://keeladimuseum.tn.gov.in>
11. Kodumanal - Archaeology Department - [http://www.tamilvu.org/tdb/titles\\_cont/inscription/html/kotumanal\\_akalayvu.htm](http://www.tamilvu.org/tdb/titles_cont/inscription/html/kotumanal_akalayvu.htm)
12. Kodumanal - The City that Clothed Rome - <https://www.thehindu.com/society/history-and-culture/kodumanal-the-city-that-clothed-rome/article28097245.ece>
13. Meluhha and Agastya: Alpha and Omega of the Indus Script - [https://www.harappa.com/sites/default/files/pdf/meluhha\\_and\\_agastya\\_2009.pdf](https://www.harappa.com/sites/default/files/pdf/meluhha_and_agastya_2009.pdf)
14. New Study Connects Tamil Nadu with Indus Valley Civilisation - <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/>

- new-study-connects-tamil-nadu-with-indus-valley-civilisation/story-ESlR55vEIZQPvq2Q0jXeVP.html
15. Tamils Knew Use of Iron 4000 Years Ago - <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/tamils-knew-use-of-iron-4000-years-ago-archaeological-findings-show-1107771.html>
  16. Technology of Iron and Steel in Tamil Nadu - [https://insa.nic.in/writereaddata/UpLoadedFiles/IJHS/Vol34\\_4\\_1\\_BSasisakaran.pdf](https://insa.nic.in/writereaddata/UpLoadedFiles/IJHS/Vol34_4_1_BSasisakaran.pdf)
  17. The Revealing Tales of the Ancient Tamil Nadu Vessels - <https://researchmatters.in/news/revealing-ales-ancient-tamil-nadu-vessels>
  18. Wootz Steel before European Industrial Revolution - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9z7xlroMCZw>
  19. Wootz Steel Story Presentation - <https://www.toppr.com/ask/content/story/amp/story-of-wootz-steel-87488/>

20. “Out of Africa” Theory in Tamil Nadu - <https://www.telegraphindia.com/entertainment/the-first-indians/cid/591562>

#### **About the Author:**

*V. Chockalingam is a writer and thinker from Madurai known for his intellectual curiosity. He holds degrees in Electronics Engineering and Business Management. He has a deep passion for reading and discussing topics such as politics, science, religion, history, and cinema. His motto in life is “Thinking, Exploring, sharing” and that reflects his commitment to continuous learning and sharing knowledge. In July 2020, during the pandemic, he started his blog (chocksvlog.blogspot.com) which led to 191 blog posts and the publication of several books, including ‘Dravida Mannil Aariyargalin Panpaattu Padaiyeduppu’, ‘Thanthai Periyar Or Arimugam’, ‘Aanaiyangalum Varalarum’, ‘Ayodhya Vazhakku’, and ‘Panguchanthai Mosadikal’. These works focus on providing valuable insights into various important topics.*

