Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

The field-based investigations, supported with literary, epigraphical and numismatics data, carried out in the entire Vaigai River valley stretching more than 280 km covering more than 45,000 hectares of land surface yielded the existence of the continuous human settlements from middle Palaeolithic times down to the present day. The Vaigai river valley is divided into three major parts as lower, middle and upper based on the geological, geomorphological and eco-settings. The lower, middle and upper valleys are predominantly comprises of alluvial soil, charnockite and granite. This formation led to have different cultural traits. For instance, the middle Vaigai river valley witnessed the first human occupation from the time of middle Palaeolithic and continued its occupation through Microlithic, Iron Age, Early Historic and Historic. The rock art sites also appeared in the mid-zone.

In contrast to the northern part of Tamil Nadu, the region did not yield any appreciable number of Neolithic sites. The excavation of a very few sites also suggests that the human settlements of this region moved from Microlithic to Iron Age by-passing the usual Neolithic and Chalcolithic stages. In the sense, from the time of 30,000 BCE to the emergence of Iron Age in the second millennium BCE, the human development in the zone took longer time. The pre-historic settlements are mainly confined to the middle Vaigai river valley. The reason for such scenario is that during pre-historic times, the upper river valley is studded with thick-wooded forest and the lower valley is plain with alluvial soil. Both the lower and upper river valleys are not conducive for hunter-gatherer community whereas the mid-zone is conducive for their subsistence pattern.
The human settlements in other two zone namely the upper and lower began with Iron Age. There is a marked difference in the Iron Age graves too. The lower plain alluvial zone is dotted with innumerable urn burials devoid of any stone appendage whereas the upper and middle zones reflected with megalithic monuments like cairn circle, menhir, stone circle and dolmen. The identification of more than 265 Iron Age sites in the entire valley suggests that the entire region was occupied around 2\textsuperscript{nd} millennium BCE and later, most of the Iron Age sites were transformed into Early Historic sites.

The rainfall data suggests that the upper valley experienced sufficient rain fall during the months of June-September and the lower valley in the months of October-December. This changing pattern of monsoon might have demanded to have a different crop pattern too. Further, the availability of sufficient rain fall and being a basin area decorated with several rivers and streams in the upper river valley naturally neglected the tank irrigation whereas the middle and particularly the lower river valley depended entirely on tank irrigation fed by the river Vaigai and the surface run-off waters during northeast monsoon. Therefore, majority of the settlements are noticed below the tank or one may say in the command area of a particular tank. Even the territorial divisions like \textit{kula-k\textbar kil} (meaning settlements located below the tank) were appeared in this valley during historical period and this territorial division is peculiar to this river valley.

The lack of excavation of Iron Age sites limited our understanding on the hidden nature of the cultural traits. However, the observations made on the disturbed Iron Age graves and in the habitation cuttings suggest that the cultural interactions between the zones are well established. The availability of black-and-red ware, russet coated ware, carnelian beads, iron objects and other cultural traits like disposal of the dead clearly suggest that certain level of
cultural uniformity emerged within the cultural zones and between the cultural zones. This inter
and intra cultural activities established during Iron Age is well reflected in the Early Historic
period. The observations made in the field and the limited excavations conducted in the valley
indicate that there is no cultural gap between the Iron Age and Early Historic. The Iron Age
people who survived from 2nd millennium BCE to 6-5th century BCE slowly got transformed into
Early Historic.

Our understanding about Early Historic is more comfortable than the previous pre-
historic and proto historic periods due to the availability of large number of archaeological,
epigraphical, numismatic and literary evidences. The material unearthed in the limited
excavations conducted at Āḷakaṅkuḷam, Tērirūvēli, Kōvalaṅpotṭal and large scale on-going
excavation at Kīḷadi near Madurai provided better scope to understand on the nature of human
occupation. The availability of graffiti marks in the Iron Age indicates there is a kind of
communication system prevailed before the advent of Brāhmī writing system. The introduction
of Brāhmī writing system further accelerated the integration of different cultural zones through
effective communicative system. The occurrence of the clan names, village names, language
structure and script in the earliest memorial stone inscriptions (Tamiḻ-Brāhmī) recovered at
Pulimāṅkōmpai and Tātappaṭṭi datable to 4th century BCE clearly suggest that stratified and clan
based society emerged. Besides, nearly 58 cave inscriptions were documented till date in the
study area and it forms as one of the important source materials. The cave inscriptions
particularly the Māṅkuḷam inscriptions points to the emergence of state. The Pāṇḍya king
Ne đuñceḷiyan is found engraved in the inscription along with his various titles. Nearly 99% of
the cave inscriptions with Jain beds are caused to be made by the traders and trade guilds. The
traders of different kinds hailed from different walks of life clearly points to the existence of
extensive internal and external trade. The inscriptional evidences suggest that the trade is probably under the control of Jains. The contemporary primary sources clearly points to the large scale trade in semi-precious stones, conch/shell, pearl, steel and forest products. The availability of large number of punch-marked coins, rouletted ware, Roman coins, Northern Black Polished ware (NBP) and inscribed potsherds of Sri Lankan origin supports the existence of extensive trade networks. The huge brick structures encountered recently at Kāḍi further augment our views on Early Historic settlements. Further excavations and discoveries in the future may add new dimensions to our understandings on Early Historic period.

In general, the Early Historic period is earmarked approximately for a millennium years for the period between 6th century BCE and 3rd century CE. The epigraphical evidences are limited to a few for the period of four hundred years between 4th century CE and 8th century CE. However, the occurrence of habitation mounds suggests that the people have not deserted their settlements rather they continued their habitation at the same place. The Pūlāṅkuṟicci and Porpanakōṭṭai inscriptions datable to circa 4th century CE suggest that there is a marked change in the administration set-up of the region. The new village settlements like brahmadeyam, puram and nallūr were started appearing with the support of the state during the Historical period. There is a marked shift in which the state started giving support to the brāhmanical traditions. The Vēḻvikuḍi copper plate (the earliest copper plate of this region) clearly points to this shift. The emergence of later Pāṇḍyas and their involvement in the developmental activities like creation of tanks, diversion of river channels as observed in Vaigai bed inscription of Chēndan, construction of temples and new establishments such as brahmadeyam and nallur clearly points to the emergence of new social order in the historical period. The village names having the terms like ōmpal, ēri and kuḷam clearly indicate the emergence of new irrigational based subsistence
pattern. The Brāhmī script also totally transformed or evolved as a vatteluttu script. The new type of historical documents like copper plates started appearing in historical period.

The availability of more than 1000 inscriptions in the study area helped to understand the emergence of new administrative units like iru-k-kai, nādu, kūṟram, muṭṭam, kuḷa-k-il and vaḷanādu. The new officialdoms or administrative system started appearing particularly in the Chōḷa-Pāṇḍya viceroy. Several new territorial divisions were created for the administrative convenience. Based on the inscriptions and copper plates nearly 50% of the villages were identified on the ground which indirectly helped to create administrative maps of the historical period. The nature of each territorial divisions could be discerned with the help of epigraphical data and one could see the survival of these administrative units with little or no change till the emergence of Colonial period.

Thus, the field-based study undertaken with support of archaeological, epigraphical, numismatic and literary sources helps to understand the emergence of human settlements in the Vaigai river valley and its transformation through the years. However, the present study is only the beginning of our understanding and it needs further probe. The limited excavations in the study area, the lack of publication of epigraphical data, the restricted use of literary sources and the non-availability of numismatic studies controlled our interpretations to a larger extent. The large scale excavations in different ecological zones, publications of unpublished epigraphical data and the discovery of new inscriptions are the need of day. The integration of all primary sources in a well-defined data base would enhance or strengthen our present study. Let us hope for better future.