

CHAPTER -1

INTRODUCTION

Studies and discussions on Urbanisation typically centre on complex societies associated with continental landmasses and investigate into the movement of people and commodities over large areas. Accordingly, there are very few studies highlighting the role of islands and oceanic trade in the process of Urbanisation, regardless of the fact that islands were strategic locations as well as resource extraction centres during globally significant expansions and urbanisation. In addition, it is seen that the islands may have also acted as entrepôts as seen in the case of Zanzibar, Hong Kong, and Sumatra during different periods of human history. Therefore, it may be proposed that the process of urbanisation and the emergence of urban centres may be visible in the archaeological record of remote islands and are responsive to various analytical studies, which enhances our understanding of the stimulus behind urbanisation and the successive cultural changes in the island societies.

As mentioned above, few studies have been undertaken to investigate the process of urbanisation from the archaeological record of islands. In the aforesaid context, the present research aims towards generating a comprehensive understanding of the origins of urbanism and its nature in Maldives Islands. Maldives was a place of unprecedented intensity of cross-cultural interaction for centuries before the arrival of Islam in 12th century CE. Despite its cultural potentials, the region remains relatively under-explored archaeologically and the impacts of cross-cultural interactions have not served as ‘foci’ of investigation for most archaeological research. Further, the role of religion in the formation and development of urban centres in the region is less explored. Although the Buddhist monumental remains of the various islands in Maldives have been the subject of much attention since their discovery in early 1800s, relatively little attention has been paid in a holistic manner. The reason for the same may be its geographical isolation and regional geo-politics

, which in many ways limited access to the islands unless proper navigational skills are possessed by the neighbouring or distant societies. In contrast to this, the island has witnessed trans-oceanic contacts with its neighbouring or distant

communities for nearly two thousand years, a process that requires a multi-disciplinary investigative approach to deduce its cultural complexity, and phenomena that are explored through this study.

As per the available evidence, the Maldives islands were occupied during an expansion of Buddhism which originally spread from Nepal during the sixth century BCE, moving southwards into Indian mainland and Sri Lanka, and northwards into the higher latitude regions of China (Barnes 1995). The movement and spread of this organised religious school received impetus through royal patronage and mercantile activity from 3rd century BCE. Nevertheless, scientific and systematic studies of archaeological settlements of these islands are afflicted by various problems ranging from inadequate facilities to a scarcity of indigenous archaeologists and experts on ground. This combined with the hostile nature of the land, which is threatened by frequent tidal activities, disturbed its archaeological materials over successive periods. Further, the religious movements of the later periods characterised by active Islamisation of the archipelago also led to the destruction of the Pre-Islamic cultural relics. This led to the recovery of only few archaeological materials; primarily structural remains, very often having a Buddhist affinity.

A review of archaeological investigations here reveals that the primary objectives of excavations undertaken here were mostly to recover artefacts and define them with a view to reconstruct their cultural histories. It is important to note that since these archaeological works were scattered, no well formulated strategies and/ or research designs were designed at understanding the spatial dimensions of the culture. Such constraints in our understanding of the history of the region exist as the foreign archaeologists who work in the region do not try to carry out systematic and long term archaeological surveys due to time constraints. Closely related is the fact that the Maldives islands are scattered and not easily accessible and manageable to the non-locals. Another major difficulty is that these islands are situated in humid tropics. As with other humid tropical regions, the soil is acidic in nature and erosion is very prominent. These resulted in adverse effects in the preservation of archaeological remains, particularly fragile items like bones and wooden objects. Many surviving archaeological sites have mostly thin deposits, which are prone to natural and cultural transformations or activities at a greater degree. .

Whilst highlighting the need for archaeological studies in the region, its role as a facilitator in Indian Ocean Trade, which may have acted as one of the stimulants of the second urbanisation of South Asia, need to be investigated. . Within the aforesaid context, the present thesis investigates into the origin, development, and nature of the Pre-Islamic urbanisation of the Maldives. . It also examines the major theories on urbanisation and their suitability for application in Maldivian context, a region characterized by limited archaeological resources. It also needs to be mentioned that as the archaeological remains of the island are relatively limited, perceiving an independent urban model for the island whilst premature at this point, however, chooses to examine if elements of urbanisation of the neighbouring lands, namely Sri Lanka and Southern India have influenced it.

1.1 Urbanism: an overview

Urbanism is a cultural product in which the interaction between humans and environment played a vital role (Somadeva 2006). Humans are continuously interacting with their adjoining environment spatially and temporally. Urbanisation is fundamentally considered as a process of socio-economic and cultural transformation of an area and people through expansion of non-agricultural activities. The alteration in this respect is also reflected in the man's way of life. Locational, social, economic, and political factors resulted in the makeup of a complex interplay of this process, which bring about a prodigious transformation in the surrounding rural areas socially and economically. Regular increase of population and migration also contributed to this. People move from peripheral regions to core and vice versa in large numbers as the process of urbanisation advances, including the development, for instance, increased levels of industrialisation and/ or other non-agricultural activities (Davis, 1965).

‘The words Urbanism and Urbanisation have distinct meanings that occur in parallel contexts in the various literatures. Urbanism is the state and Urbanisation is the process to achieve that state depending on various factors like production of surplus and its manipulation, social division of labour, the mode of economic exchange and the change of rate of organizational skills. This process is diverse and complex in nature. ‘The systemic interaction between adjacent settlements can also be taken as a criterion’ (Renfrew, 1986) whereas, Cowgill (2004) identifies urbanism as a particular

condition of social development. It is eloquent when compared with pre-urban and post-urban societies, hence, the term urbanism is extremely context specific and represents by multiple variations.

Various other scholars tried to define the concept of urbanism in its wider contexts. These discussions have concentrated on different parameters to outline the process of Urbanism. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed discussion by various scholars in the physical characteristics of Urbanism (for instance, Sjoberg 1960, Childe 1950; Kluckhorn 1960). The very idea of urbanism was discussed in association with the terms, civilisation or city in the early 20th century (Sjoberg 1960). This is because most of the studies were on the walled settlements within the network of settlements like that of Jericho. This is the reason why monumental walls around a nucleated settlement became important criteria (Kenyon 1956). This theory was refuted by Childe and he suggested a number of factors after reviewing societies before the Urban Revolution (Childe 1950). The ten traits he proposed are as follows:

1. 'In point of size the first cities must have been more extensive and more densely populated than any previous settlements.'
2. 'In composition and function the urban population already differed from that of any village ... full-time specialist craftsmen, transport workers, merchants, officials and priests.'
3. 'Each primary producer paid over the tiny surplus he could wring from the soil with his still very limited technical equipment as tithe or tax to an imaginary deity or a divine king who thus concentrated the surplus.'
4. 'Truly monumental public buildings not only distinguish each known city from any village but also symbolise the concentration of the social surplus.'
5. 'But naturally priests, civil and military leaders and officials absorbed a major share of the concentrated surplus and thus formed a "ruling class".'
6. 'Writing.'
7. 'The elaboration of exact and predictive sciences – arithmetic, geometry and astronomy.'
8. 'Conceptualised and sophisticated styles [of art].'
9. 'Regular "foreign" trade over quite long distances.'
10. 'A State organisation based now on residence rather than kinship.' (Childe 1950).

These traits were highly criticised by later scholars. For instance, Clark (1979) described it as a 'laundry list' of attributes and opined that urbanism is a complex system and cannot be defined with those criteria.

The new understanding of the global dissemination of urban cultures that developed from 1960 and onwards has broadened the prevailing views of human cultural progress and influenced the later criticism on Child's ideas. More criteria were added to the concept of urbanism. Influenced by the paradigm of cultural ecology in Archaeology (Park 1916 ; Steward 1955; Butzer 1994) environmental approach in the emergence of cities were propagated by Adams (1968), in which he emphasised on the interaction between human activities and the respective eco systems. According to him, ecological symbiosis played a vital role in retaining the urban characteristics in the cities.

Further conflicts in the conceptual narratives led to different theoretical propositions and reappraisal of the existing ideas and definitions of urbanism. This is because urbanism takes place at different rates in different societies in different time periods. In this context, Wheatley (1971) (c.f. Ucko et.al. 1972) in one of his seminal papers, categorised the whole range of existing ideas of the subject under five broad headings viz; reliance on ideal type constructs which emphasize the behavioural or qualitative aspect of urbanism, formulation of ecological theories, delineation of trait complexes, conceptualization of the city as a center of domination usually on the basis of the size of the urban population.

Urbanism as a social transformation reflects an economic dimension also. Redfield and Singer (1947) framed a theory to illustrate the role of economies which directly influenced the process of urbanism which focused on activities of the economic institution connected with the religious and moral standards. This is highly comparable to the economic redistribution practiced by the traditional societies (Polanyi *et al.* 1957).

Another hypothesis on urbanism was conflict hypothesis proposed by Robert Carneiro (1970). According to this hypothesis complex societies in all parts of the world have been engaged in intensive warfare for the race for resources and the advent of managerial elites. His theory explained how warfare can be responsible for the

mechanism for the emergence of state level societies. This methodology of argumentation was criticized by Hass (1979).

In view of these academically and contextually diverse intellectual ideas and hypotheses it is assumed that the nature of urbanism is challenging to generalize.

1.1.1 Urbanism in the South Asian context

As per our current state of knowledge, the Indus valley is the only urban culture that flourished in South Asia in the second millennium BCE. It concluded in c. 1750 BCE (Agrawal 1984; Lahiri 1990; Possehl 1999; Yasuda 2001). Fairervis and Walter (1979) separated the whole continuum of the Indus valley into 4 major phases for the Indus urbanisms (Allchin 1989; Meadow 1998; Possehl 2001). As this model referred to specific cultural entities, it led to the emergence of large number of terminologies, which made it difficult for investigators to conceive the nature and development of Indus urbanisation. The mid-eighties witnessed bringing out of a process based model for Indus Urbanization by Shaffer (1993), in which the whole transformation within the Indus Cultural sphere was expressed in a conceptualised framework.

The second urbanism in South Asia is represented by the emergence of cities in Ganges valley in the mid first millennium BCE (Chakrabarti 1995; Coningham 1995; Allchin 1995; Erdosy 1995). Two urban centers developed during this period viz: Anuradhapura and Tissamaharama in Sri Lanka. According to scholars the major forces of this second circle of urbanisation in South Asia (cf. Joshi 1973; Chakrabarti 1973; Sharma 1974; Shaffer 1993) were the new iron technology (Erdosy 1995), involvement in the long-distance trade and the well- planned communication system (Allchin 1989) .

Another noteworthy phenomenon of the South Asian urbanism was the development of the cities in the area beyond the south of the *Vindya* Mountains. As influenced by a sequence of internally generated dynamics, during the second century BCE the *Chôla*, *Pāndya* and *Kērala* regions witnessed the emergence of the urbanism. This is as a result of the development of the settlement systems in the fertile alluvial river valleys such as *Periyār*, *Kāveri*, *Tāmraparni* which was further encouraged by the active participation in Indian Ocean maritime activities at the beginning of the first century CE (Champakalakshmi 1996).

Various scholars explained the factors responsible for the physical existence of the urban centres with all its structural phenomenon and features in South Asian context. Early researchers like Stuart Piggot and Mortimer Wheeler provide some formal acquaintance with major urban centres like Mohenjo-daro and Harappa and turned their sights to the west and considered great cities of Mesopotamia as the key source for the origins of urbanism and the state in South Asia (Piggot 1950)

Villages, towns, and secular buildings in ancient India were considered in the following periods and scholars started focusing on the town planning and structural features. Evolution of settlements with regard to their structure or building activities was noticed and it was concluded that there existed structural similarities between the rural and the urban building traditions (Ray 1994)

Various theoretical/ ideological concepts related to the definition and criteria of towns and forces behind the urban emergence were examined by scholars. The major contribution was the detailed discussion on the functional aspects of urbanization like urban economy, urban society, urban culture and urban administration (Thakur 1981).

The existing theories and concepts of urbanism and urbanization have been briefly appraised above to enable the investigator to evaluate contesting propositions and formulate a cogently argued thesis. Among the various propositions, the Role of Theocracy in the development of urban centres as proposed in Sri Lanka (Coningham et.al. 2007) with regard to the interactive network and control between the monasteries and settlements appears more suitable in the Maldivian context. Similarly in the Indian context, Shaw (2003) has argued that inter-visibility between Buddhist sites plays a crucial role, connecting the main ritual locations into a unified whole.

While agreeing to the concept of cities as possibly having been creations, we should distinguish among "pristine" and mature and "planted" cities in a greater extent. These settlements that display a degree of urbaneness previously unknown and unheard of in the local tradition means that occupants have neither a prior model to contend with nor prior experience with the consequences of urbanism (Cowgill 2004).

1.2 Research aims and objectives

This thesis is structured around three broad objectives that are crucial to understand the settlement history of the Maldives, the urbanisation in Maldives islands, and the role of Buddhism in the process of urbanisation.

1) *When did the Urbanisation in Maldives islands occur?*

This objective is vital in the study of remote islands and was scrutinized from the examination of data recovered from the archaeological investigations and excavations carried out since 1800s. Archaeological investigations and investigations in these islands indicate that Buddhism was the predominant religion until the 12th century CE. Radio carbon dates from the ancient settlements in *Kuruhinna Tharagaadu* and *Nilandhoo Foamathi* provide evidence of human occupation by 300 CE. The evidence of well-established Buddhist settlements in various islands, material culture, artefact assemblages, similarities in architecture and linguistics also support South Asian origin particularly with Sri Lanka and India.

2) *How does Maldives Island reflect urbanisation?*

It is very difficult to determine the impetus for prehistoric migrations in the case of Maldives islands as these landmasses are often characterised with poor resources and susceptible environments for human occupation. The Maldives are low-lying carbonate islands with scarce terrestrial sources, including limited arable land. This thesis argues that the Maldives were settled relatively early and participated in Indian Ocean maritime activities with the arrival of Buddhism. Available archaeological evidence suggests that trade and religion are the two mechanisms that gave rise to Urbanisation in Maldives islands. As per the evidence, Maldives witnessed the introduction of two global cultures and religions- Buddhism and Islam. Well-established Buddhist religious centres in the form of stupas and monasteries and the stupa mounds locally known as *Havithhas* are the earliest surviving evidence of settlement in the islands. This evidence points to the fact that a strong polity based on religion was active there especially Buddhism which resulted in the urbanisation of

these islands. The spread and vivacity of Buddhism can be linked with the active Indian Ocean trade in which monks often accompanied traders to regions of South Asia and beyond where trade and Buddhism flourished together.

3) *What is the cultural locale of the islanders?*

Ancient literature like Sangam literature, inscriptions of Narasimhavarman, *Loamafaanu* Copper plates from Maldives and various foreign travel accounts suggest that the contact between Maldives and other parts of South Asia existed from the beginning of the Christian era. Sangam literature, while describing Maldives points to a *Chera* Naval expedition which suggests that by then Maldives had caught the attention of the rulers around the region. Such expeditions are only required to counter an equal political agency either situated within Maldives or exerting political or administrative supremacy on Maldives from elsewhere. Therefore, all these literary evidences show that Maldives did have a place within the cultural interactive spheres of ancient South Asia.

The Buddhist and its related artefact types found from Maldives have Sri Lankan and Indian correlates and show similarities in basic adaptation and differences in raw material due to its regional identity. Stylistic features like congested layout in a small area shows that it is clearly derived from Sri Lanka and Indian mainland as similar architectural complexes can be found in sites like Kantarodai in Northern Sri Lanka which is considered as parallel to Andhra Buddhism (Raghupathy 1987) and Ratnagiri in Orissa (Mikkelsen 2000).

It is expected to formulate an explanation to these above mentioned aims to describe the social change occurring in the ancient settlements during the first centuries of the Christian era. So a research design was constructed in which emphasis was given to the formulation and deduction of the problem, retrieval of data, data analysis and explanation/interpretation.

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

The present work adopts an archaeo-historical approach, taking into consideration both archaeological as well as literary sources.

Chapter-I presents an outline of the structure of the thesis and reviews the significance of the research. It consists of the background in which the study was carried out, theoretical perspective, objectives of the research, overview regarding the concept of Urbanisation, methods and materials used by earlier investigators and will discuss the ideas used in formulating the research problem.

Chapter- II deals with the Physical and Ecological Milieu of the region under study; the Maldives islands, present land use, the regional settlement history from an archaeological point of view with the help of the evidence of explorations and excavations carried out in the island.

Chapter-III deals with the methods adopted for study. It includes literature survey, Surface survey methods, recording methods, data analysis and other strategies adopted for sampling and justification for the selection of methods for analysis. Each method has been dealt individually with explanations.

Chapter-IV includes identification and classification of sites and cultural phases by making use of the analysis of structural remains in Maldives islands, artefacts, ceramics, sculptures, coins and inscriptions. Using all these, efforts are made here to reconstruct a cultural sequence and historical sequence of these islands up to the Islamisation of these islands around 12th century AD.

Chapter-V will discuss the major results and test the validity of the model and its applicability within the context of archaeology of Maldives islands. The propositions derived from this study will further be used to assess the nature of various Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka and Indian mainland to appreciate the level of cross-cultural interaction between these areas and also to situate Maldives islands within the domain of South Asian Archaeology.

Chapter-VI will outline the development of urban centres in Maldives islands based on the available archaeological and historical evidences. This will further evaluate the predictive model and put forward its revised version by incorporating the new finds, thereby highlighting the scope of future research in the field.

Chapter VII will give the conclusion of the thesis.

Organization of these seven chapters collectively provides the structure of the thesis.