

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS OF STUDY**

The present chapter deals with the different methods and techniques adopted in the current research to reconstruct the process of urbanisation and assess the role of Buddhism in the development of urban centres in Maldives Islands. It is evident that there is a lack of research on the role of these islands in the process of urbanisation from the available archaeological data. Few researchers have attempted to investigate the origin of urbanism and the process of urbanisation from the archaeological record of these islands. Islands can also be the subject to cultural interaction and it can be proposed that essential markers like long distance trade and cultural expansions are visible in the archaeological record of Maldives islands. Further, it is argued that they are responsive to detailed historical analysis, which optimises our understanding of the impulse behind the process of urbanisation and the subsequent transformations in the culture in the region.

In order to address the objectives mentioned in Chapter I, various multi-disciplinary methods of study were adopted. The rationale of application of each method of study has been highlighted and discussed individually. The methods of study adopted include survey of existent literature in the field of study, Palaeographical and Epigraphical studies, surface survey methods, and Data analysis of the excavated and explored materials.

#### **3.1 Literature Survey**

The present research involved a survey of existent literature in the field of study. Detailed studies have been carried out in the ancient canonical literature of the islands to trace the historiography of the islands. The information given by such literary evidence are contradictory to each other due to their differing patronage, although, a critical reading of the same allowed for the reconstruction of the role of religion in the contemporary social set up.. During the course of this survey, various publications in the form of monographs, research articles, excavation reports, unpublished dissertations and conference proceedings were consulted at the libraries at The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara; Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune; the National Council for Historical and Linguistic

Research, Maldives; Oriental Research Institute, Vadodara. In addition to focussing upon existent literature on Maldives islands, the literature survey also involved in the study of literature in the allied fields of geology, epigraphy, art history and iconography. This survey focussed upon theoretical literature review in which a review of available literature on origins of Urbanism and the process of Urbanisation were carried out. This enabled the formulation of research problem, an understanding of the shortcomings in the field of study, and theoretical explanations of the phenomenon of Urbanism and Urbanization. An understanding of this facet allowed for the development of methodological framework to address the shortcomings in the previous researches and develop new hypothesis to be tested.

### **3.2 Field Survey**

In order to address the research aims outlined in Chapter 1, excavation reports and research materials associated with the sites excavated were reviewed. To get a better understanding of the distribution of sites, the excavated sites in the north, central and southern Maldives were visited and surveyed. The find spots were recorded with a GPS and a recording system was developed (Table 3.1). The activity area or artefact clusters were defined. An artefact cluster or an activity area was defined as an area that has at least six artefactual remains in 1 m sq. area. This spatial recording was followed by determining the extension of the region in terms of isolated occurrence of artefacts. In continuation to this intra-locality and inter locality similarities between artefact clusters were also recorded. These were done to take precautions in artefact analysis so that the significance of minor variations can be accounted.

Apart from these, an extensive field survey was conducted in the accessible islands in atolls like Haa Alif Atoll, Haa Dhaalu Atoll, Shaviyani Atoll, Noonu Atoll, Raa Atoll, Baa Atoll, Lhaviyani Atoll, Kaafu Atoll, North Ari Atoll, West Ari Atoll, Meemu Atoll, Faafu Atoll, Dhaalu atoll, Thaa Atoll, Laamu Atoll, Gaaf Alif Atoll, Gaafu Dhaalu Atoll, Gnaviyani Atoll and Seenu Atoll. The archaeological remains in the form of ancient mounds locally known as *Havithas* were documented. From the field surveys it was observed almost all parts of the Maldives islands were occupied during the Buddhist period. They provided evidence to understand the spatial and temporal outlines of the earliest occupation of the islands.

<b>1. Name of the locality</b>	
<b>2. Geo-coordinates</b>	
<b>3. Geographical details</b>	
<b>4. Site area (lxb)</b>	
<b>5. Thickness of the archaeological deposit</b>	
<b>6. Artefact details</b>	
<b>7. Details of photographs</b>	
<b>8. Details of sketches</b>	
<b>9. Vegetation details</b>	
<b>10. Animals found</b>	
<b>11. Birds found</b>	
<b>12. Insects found</b>	
<b>13. Tidal activity details</b>	
<b>14. Distance from the coast</b>	
<b>15. Nearest freshwater reservoirs</b>	
<b>16. Relative abundance of artefacts</b>	
<b>17. Nature of surface scatters</b>	
<b>18. Details of structure and features</b>	
<b>19. Signature with date</b>	

**Table 3.1 Field Survey Sheet used for recording sites**

In addition, the National Museum, Male and the National Museum, Sri Lanka were also visited to document the memorial stones in their collections, however, Buddhist statues at the National Museum in Male' were destroyed in 2012 by a mob attack. Since those were documented during the museum visits earlier, analysis of the data could be done.

### **3.3 Sculptural art**

The sculptural art of Maldives islands needs to be discussed and argued within a narrow field of reference. The available specimens of art and architecture of these islands belonged to Buddhist phase and onwards. Each piece of artistic expression of that period has been examined and found to be of Buddhist religious origin. The ancient art of the Maldives is characterised by the stone sculptures of the Buddha, *Buddhapada*, the Bodhisattvas, votive stupas, coral stone reliquaries, architectural fragments, other sculptures and items of ritualistic objects. These art pieces were discovered during the earliest archaeological expeditions during the 1800s till the recent expeditions. The sculptures made out of coral stone are little beyond the human size, but the body proportion and the balance preserved all those sculptures reflect firmness and a strong expression. An iconographic and stylistic analysis of these sculptures was carried out. Through such studies it was observed that the sculptural art and the religion in the region are closely interrelated.

### **3.4 Epigraphic and Palaeographic studies**

Landhoo Island in South Miladhunmadulu Atoll is considered as the earliest inscription discovered from the Maldives islands. The script of this inscription appears to be a version of a southern *Brahmi* script of the Pallava period and can be dated approximately to the sixth century CE. Maldives witnessed a continuous production of written texts since about 1192 CE when a series of copper plate grants known as *Loamafaanus* were issued by Maldivian kings composed during the transition to Islam in the twelfth century CE. These documents clearly suggest that the tradition of literacy dates back to the times when Buddhism was predominant in the islands. The study of the inscriptions from Maldives islands has received prime focus over the years. Hence these inscriptions have been systematically documented and

published as scholarly articles and monographs. These formed the basis of the study of the inscriptions in the present study.

The available archaeological evidence at Maldives suggests that the cultural history of Maldives islands began with the sudden appearance of Buddhist structures and urbanism began here only with the arrival of Buddhist settlers. Evidence of Trade and development of Maldives through the same is available from 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. The archaeological record of Maldives in many ways refutes the understanding of the concept of socio- cultural and political orders, phrased as “Urbanism”. In the present work, previously excavated materials from Maldivian archaeological sites and the material culture recorded from surface finds were considered and the interpretation is done on the basis of archaeological data, hypothesis and theories.