

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This chapter outlines the conclusions arrived at from the archaeological investigations in Maldives. There are many existing models which discuss the role of islands as facilitators of trans-oceanic trade, one of the integral characters of urbanism in South Asia. Despite their significance, these land masses have not been studied from an archaeological perspective to identify their geo-political and economic dimensions. It was in this context the present research was undertaken, with Maldives as a case study. Undertaking such investigations on islands with restricted accessibility demanded a non-conventional methodology. This made it imperative to overlook the established methodological framework, by compromising the sampling strategy. This led to redefining a sample unit so as to suit the natural and cultural evolution of the landscape.

Within the aforesaid context, although the studies on Urbanism involve the study of multiple parameters, the present research restricted itself to address the following concerns. The first and foremost concern was to archaeologically identify the nature of the earliest occupants of Maldives. This concern was particularly acute as the archaeological record of the region did not reveal an organic cultural growth either in a single site or in multiple sites that are relatable to each other. The second concern involved the examination of the nature and intensity of influence from the external agencies who understood the resource procurement potentials of Maldives from the very beginning. The third concern involved the formulation of cultural identities of the islanders that emerged from surging exchanges from other regions of South Asia and beyond. Further, this led to identification of tentative nature of the polity of the islanders.

Despite the presence of architectural monuments such as miniature stupas that are devoid of monastic complexes, perhaps reveal the compromises of the religious invaders while encountering the chieftains of different regions who regulated the resource procurement activities. These chieftains may have initially not established permanent settlements but held considerable influence through the establishment of seasonal camps. As and when they became familiar and acclimatized with this ‘tricky landscape’ that offered very selective occupational opportunities, an incipient level of

occupation that suited the landscape emerged gradually. The limited occupational opportunities due to restricted raw material resources did not attract a greater variety of specialists, who could have manufactured materials of industrial nature. A lack of these components are noticeable in the Maldivian archaeology, which compels the researcher to question whether the term ‘urbanism’ as used elsewhere is applicable in its full spirit in Maldives. Therefore, the definition of the term urbanism in the Maldivian context is only applicable to this region and seen with a limited set of parameters. It may also be noted that replicating this model in every atoll also has its own limitations. The model of development of urbanism in Maldives is culturally visible even today, where the people of Maldives exploit the available resources from unhabituated islands by defining it as ‘theirs’ and establishing their authority. This living model would further make one think that it is a continuation of the same that brought urbanism to Maldives from the neighbouring landscape such as Sri Lanka and South India.

The concept of religion for the early inhabitants of Maldives, though archaeologically invisible, may have imbibed a combination of animistic, totemic and shamanic elements, similar to that of the indigenous tribes of Sri Lanka and Southern India. Organised elements of spiritualism may have been brought by the Buddhist communities, who communicated their ideas to the society in the form of miniature *stupas*. The contemporary religious developments of Southern India and Sri Lanka continued to influence Maldives, which are represented by art pieces that draw inspiration from established art traditions in India and Sri Lanka.

Investigations by Litster (2016) brought to light ceramics belonging to the last part of the first millennium BCE and first part of the first millennium CE. Some of the significant artefacts yielded from this region include NBPW (?), RPW, Sassanian Wares and Paddle Impressed Pottery. This information when viewed along with the artefacts collected by the investigator makes it clear that the early Indian Ocean traders used Maldives as one of their transit camps. These transit traders did not carry out much transaction here; hence most of the evidence of their activities is not reflected in Maldivian archaeology. The stray occurrences of artefacts from the Mediterranean and Central Asian regions support the earlier proposition.

In view of the above, it may be suggested that the pre-Islamic phase of Maldives was a transformation from egalitarianism to incipient semi-administrative society through chiefdom. To begin with the movement of the artefacts must have been restricted between different social groups in Maldives prior to the arrival of maritime entrepreneurs. The arrival of maritime entrepreneurs as revealed from the artefact assemblage acted as a stimulant in changing the social scenario of the Maldives.

7.1 FUTURE PROSPECTS

The present research resulted in identifying the possibilities of a multi-disciplinary research approach in understanding the role of islands in the process of urbanisation. The theoretical background and the methodology developed and applied throughout the research have formed a theoretical tool in one hand and a practical schema in the other to carry out a problem oriented research in the field of archaeology in Maldives. The outcomes of the research in the Maldives presented here only contributes to some degree of extent on the origins and nature of urbanism in the region, although it and may be considered as an imperative and fruitful initiative, functioning within a context.

Comprehensive fieldworks are required to at least identify, document and record the site distribution of the macro area before they vanish due to the hasty encroachment of modern urbanization and also owing to the climatic effects. Recording the cultural landscape in the Maldives islands stands as a significant one in the territory of Indian Ocean activities of at least the past two millennia. The cultural relations among the western and eastern part of the Indian Ocean with Sri Lanka is scanty and ample data might be derived from the explicit and systematic field studies carry out in these islands in future.

The archaeological importance of the Maldives islands is conferred and presented in this thesis. The information derived from the research will facilitate and expedite people in the Maldives islands to apprehend the significance of their cultural heritage especially during the scheduling of regional progresses in the area. The information presented in the thesis supplement the archaeological importance of the region.