



A lighthouse beckons

വിളക്കുമാടം ആഹ്വാനിക്കുന്നു

*Let there be bliss upon us, balance in nature, space and skies,
let there be gods in our country, and eco wisdom in our eyes!*

Isolated from India's mainland there exists a world enveloped by secrets of eternity and exhilarating calms. An unimaginable pairing of coral islands and marine bestowed upon mankind by divinity with the sole purpose of renewing his exhausted earthly senses and cleansing his soul. As if in its moments of artistic extravagance, it dropped 'tiny pieces of land', like droplets of emerald and turquoise beads into the sea near us.

Standing tall since 1885 on its southern most isle, a lighthouse renders vital navigational guidance to mariners plying on the high seas. It also gives us bearings of a geological topography across which God has spread these tiny dreamlands. Bright flashes every 15 seconds from its 'metal hallide lamp and optical system' reaching 40+ nautical miles (74 kms), emitted from atop its tall tower beckon us towards a territory of magical islands should we ever choose to embark upon a pilgrimage of ecstasy to renew our existence and celebrate life.

A seasoned traveller and a fervid explorer feels humbled and speechless still from his last encounter with this wonder land. He offers us brief glimpses into some of the pages of his black Moleskine notebook diaries from his archives. It reads (☐ few extracts).

☐ It is daytime. You are in a densely quiet world, only the sounds of your own breathing reminds you of your existence. The aqua silence is drenched in tranquility and wonders. Rejecting law of gravity you are floating through the world of a pre-historic timeline, an alien habitat, pregnant with a thousand mysteries and unknown events. You are moving through a mute '3D' theatre of pristine nature. Its multi coloured performers in different shapes and sizes are surrounding you in a random displays of flawless life (*perhaps the soul and character of our planet was like this before the hands of mankind fiddled with it trying to rearrange things*). These performers are looking at you and mocking, pitying at the irony of circumstances you have created for yourself on mainland with your own follies and greed.

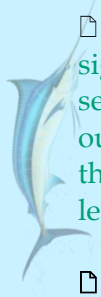
☐ A large shoal of Damselfish goes past you, a few meters away Melon-butterfly fish are pecking at the corals, breathing from a bottle-of-air strapped to your back (scuba - a self contained underwater breathing apparatus), you have descended into another environ. Nearby a pair of Clownfish dodge around in the colourful refuge of a sea-anemone, an Octopus pushes itself away and glides across to another rock. A Moray-eel emerges from its hideout inside the rocky crack, its head moving about in zig-zag motions. Overhead, several pairs of Mantarays gracefully swim past sending invisible sensations over your body, a Hawksbill turtle glides past you towards a cluster of corals.

Seeing yourself in the midst of such astonishing beauty, you begin to wonder about the silliness of human conflicts on mainland

☐ It is night. The tropical sun has set. You now see some performers starting to transform themselves in slow-motions into their luminous avatars, their fluorescent glows defying anything ever imaginable onland. The images of their mysterious night time exhibits get embedded in your mind for ever. You feel insignificant.



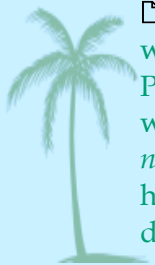
☐ It is daytime. You are on land, horizons of wide panoramas and blue skies meet your sight. All of a sudden a large pod of Bottlenose dolphins slip-out-and-in-out-and-in the sea in synchronised formations. Far behind towards their right, a Sailfish darts vertically out of water, opens her sailfin for a moment and disappears back into the sea. You stand there motionless and spell bound. Ahead of you a Hermit crab scutters across the beach leaving behind a mosaic of tiny footprints. Pod of dolphins appears again, out-in-out-in.



☐ The faint rustle of Palm tree leaves reaches your ears, somewhere a ripe Coconut falls on coral sands with a soft-thud, rest is unruffled and still. Lapping sounds of sea-waves, play lightly in background, they skim the shores and return to the infinities of seas. You are in utter solitude in the mid of Arabian sea not very far from the Equator.



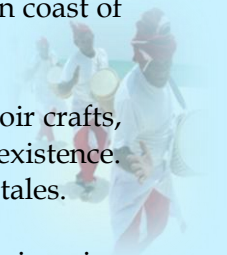
☐ Placing a pair of binoculars to your eyes, you sight a few fishermen's boats returning with their booties of Tuna fish. And while you anchor yourself in soft sands under a tall Palm tree marvelling at the wonder of the moment their boats reach the lagoon. A native woman with two young boys rushes past you, shouting "*Aacchan matsyavumāyi maṭaṇṇunnu, nēākkū acchan varunn.....*" (father is returning with fish, look father is coming.....). Your heart melt, you never want to return to the mainland. Somewhere a Neelakurinji flower drifts about on the beach in light sea breeze. A Pink gastropod seashell washes ashore.



Lakshadweep Islands are an archipelago of nearly 39 islands and islets (12 coral atolls, 3 reefs and 5 submerged banks) scattered in the sea. Only 10 islands are inhabited, rest are not. An uncompromised purity of nature and coral beaches, they offer nearly 132 kms of virgin Indian shorlines untouched and unseen.

Formed over period of several million years by accumulation of coral on sunk volcanic crests on the Chagos-Laccadive ridge (extending apx 2550+ kms northward beneath the surface) in the Indian Ocean), these islands support an enthralling habiat and embrace a diverse wealth of species within 111 ~ 222 nautical miles from the south western coast of Indian peninsula.

Festive rituals and folk dances, tangy coconut cuisines and marine delicacies, coir crafts, boat building and fishing, their tribal communities thrive in a harmonious co-existence. The earliest history of these islands was unwritten. It is clouded in legends and tales.



A flock of Terns hover above. Standing on a pristine shore one almost begins to imagine some sealed-glass-bottle drifting ashore with a message inside - perhaps a message that reads "*Don't look for us, we wish to remain lost for ever in these Incredible Islands - Aameen!*"



- Neel Thakur (Author)