



## A lighthouse beckons



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



Standing tall and promising since 1885, on its southern most isle, '**a lighthouse**' renders vital navigational guidance to mariners plying on high seas. It also gives us the bearings of a magical topography, across which the creator has scattered these tiny dreamlands.

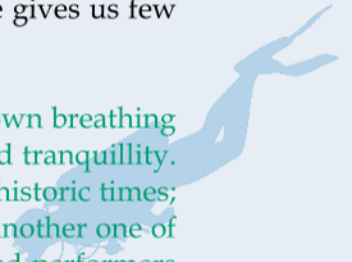
Flashes of the bright light-beam emitting from its metal halide lamp and optical system, every 15 seconds, reach out 40+ nautical miles (74 kms) across the vast sea. They beckon us towards a territory of **islands**, should we ever choose to embark upon a pilgrimage of ecstasy to celebrate our existence and renew our soul.



The author, a fervid explorer and adventurer, feels humbled and speechless still from his last encounter with this fascinating wonderland in the Arabian sea. He gives us few glimpses of his experience from one of the pages of his diary.



**"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 wonder and tranquillity. Liberated from the law of gravity, you are floating through a world of pre-historic times; an alien habitat pregnant with strange events and mysteries. You are just another one of them, moving in a voiceless 3D theatre of pristine nature. Its multi coloured performers of different shapes and sizes are surrounding you in a random displays of flawless life".



*Perhaps the character and soul of our planet was like this, before the hands of mankind began to fiddle with it. These performers are staring at you, pitying you for the irony of circumstances you have created for yourself on the mainland with your follies and greed.*

**"A large shoal of Damsel fish goes past you. Some meters away, the Melon-butterfly fish are busy pecking at the coral. Breathing from a metal bottle-of-air strapped on your back (SCUBA), you have descended into an unknown universe. Near you, a pair of Clownfish plays around in the colourful refuge of a sea-anemone. A small Octopus swiftly glides across and clings to a rock. A lonesome Moray-eel emerges from its hideout in the rocky crack moving its head in zig-zag motions. A few meters above you, several pairs of large Manta-rays swim past causing a rippling sensation across your body. A Hawksbill turtle glides past in front of you and heads towards a cluster of corals".**

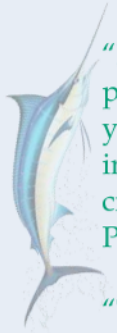


*Seeing yourself in the midst of such astonishing beauty, you immediately begin to wonder about the absurdness of all those human conflicts on the mainland.*



**"It is dark now,** the sun has set on the mainland. You now see some performers starting to transform themselves into their luminous nightly avatars. Their fluorescent shapes are glowing in the darkness of the reef. The sight before you defies anything you could have

ever imagined on the mainland. You are suspended in a surreal enchantment. You have lost the consciousness of reality and time. You feel insignificant”.



“It is daytime. You are on mainland, endless horizon and blue sky meets your eyes. A pod of Bottlenose dolphins suddenly leap out of sea and disappear again. Far towards your right, a huge Sailfish darts out of sea, opens her sailfin for a moment and slips back in. You stand there speechless and spell bound. A few meters ahead of you, a Hermit crab scutters across the pristine beach, leaving behind a mosaic of tiny footprints. The Pod of dolphins leaps out again”.



“The rustle of Palm leaves reaches your ears, it is followed by a dull thud-like sound, somewhere a ripe Coconut has left its tree and dropped on the white sands. The rest is silent. In the background you hear the lapping sounds of gentle sea waves, they skim the shoreline and keep returning to the sea. You are near the equator in the middle of the Arabian sea”.



“Placing a pair of binoculars to your eyes, you see some fishermen boats returning with their catch of Tunas. While you rest yourself in soft sand under a Palm tree marvelling at the charisma of the Islands, the fishing boats enters the lagoon. A native woman rushes past you with two young boys, they hurry towards the boats”.



“Nokku, achan meenumaayi thirichuvarunnu, nokku avan veettilekku thirichuvarunnu (Look, father is returning with fish, look he is returning home)”, you hear the boys shout.

“Your heart melts, you never want to return to the mainland. Somewhere, a Neelakurinji flower drifts 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 ‘Ten’ are inhabited. An absolute miracle of pristine lagoons and coral beaches, these dreamlike Islands offer a nearly 132 kms of a virgin Indian shoreline.

The wonder Islands were formed over several million years by the accumulation of coral over the sunken volcanic crests on the ‘Chagos - Laccadive ridge’ which extends for apx. 2550 kms northwards, beneath the surface of the Indian Ocean. The Islands are located within 111~222 nautical miles from the south western coast of the Indian peninsula and support an enthralling habitat embracing a diverse wealth of species.



Rituals, folk dances, coconut cuisines and marine delicacies, coir crafts, boat building and fishing - their tribal communities co-exist in harmony. The earliest history of these islands was unwritten and has always remained clouded in tales and legends.



“It is late afternoon. A flock of Terns hover above you. Standing there, you almost begin to imagine some sealed glass-bottle drifting ashore with a message inside; perhaps with a message that reads: *Do not look for us, we wish to remain lost in these enchanting Islands. Ameen*”.

- Neel Thakur (Author)