

Maldives Music

The Maldives, being a sea-faring island nation, has since time immemorial been open to different cultural influences. Such influences especially from maritime cultures of countries bordering the Indian Ocean, such as east Africa, southern India, the Arab world, as well as Malaysia and Indonesia are clearly found in the Maldivian music. But centuries of environmental and social effects have created a mix which expresses the life style of Maldivians, their hopes and their aspirations. This type of music is regarded by everyone as a very indigenous element of the true Maldivian culture.

The folk dance and music which we see and hear today are only art of the wider range of music played by the old Maldivians.

Boduberu



Bodu Beru is similar to some of the songs and dances found in east Africa. It is likely that the music was introduced to The Maldives by sailors from the Indian Ocean region. It may be said that Bodu Beru known commonly as "Baburu Lava" (Negroid Song) first made an appearance in The Maldives in the 11th Century AD, or maybe before.

Bodu Beru is performed by about 15 people, including three drummers and a lead singer. They are accompanied by a small bell and an "Onugandu" - a small piece of bamboo with horizontal grooves, from which raspy sounds are produced by scrapping. The songs may be of heroism, romance or satire. The prelude to the song is a slow beat with emphasis on drumming, and dancing. As the song reaches a crescendo, one or two dancers maintain the wild beat with their frantic movements ending in some cases in a trance.

Bodu Beru evolved among the common citizens as an alternative to court music. In the early days, the people gathered together to perform Bodu Beru, and it became widely accepted as the music of the common people. The performing of the music is often referred as "vibrating the island". A notable point about Bodu Beru is its noise and sometimes meaningless lyrics sung. The lyrics do not have a meaning, because it consists of a mixture of local, neighbouring and some African words. Today, meaningful songs written in the local language Dhivehi are sung to the rhythm of Bodu Beru.

Bodu Beru is usually sung after a hard day's work. The location is up to the performers. Today, Bodu Beru is an important item of entertainment at stage shows, celebrations and festivals. The costume of the performers is a sarong and a white short sleeved banian.



Bodu Beru ist die populärste Musik- und Tanzform im Land, die gleichermaßen bei Jung und Alt, Männern und Frauen beliebt ist. Auf nahezu jeder bewohnten Insel gibt es eine Bodu Beru Gruppe und es wird bei allen besonderen Ereignissen und Festivals gespielt. Die Musikinstrumente für Bodu Beru bestehen aus vier Trommeln und verschiedenen Schlagzeugen. Die Trommeln bestehen aus ausgehöhlttem Kokosnussholz und sind an beiden Enden mit Rochenhaut oder Ziegenhaut bespannt. Ein Vorsänger singt die Liedtexte und ein Chor von 10 bis 15 Personen stimmt ein, während sie die Hände im Rhythmus der Trommeln klatschen. Der Rhythmus der Lieder wird immer schneller und endet schließlich in einem rasenden Crescendo.

Sobald der Rhythmus schneller wird, treten Tänzer aus den Gruppen hervor und beginnen sich im Rhythmus zu bewegen. Und je schneller der Schlag der Trommeln wird, desto schneller werden die Sprünge und Bewegungen der Tänzer, so als wären sie in Trance. Zuschauer mischen sich in das Klat-schen und Tanzen und alte Männer werden mit einem Mal wieder jung, nehmen den Rhythmus auf und schnellen in die Arena. Zum wilden Applaus der Menge wirbeln sie im Tanz und schneiden Grimassen und geben so an die Jungen weiter, was sie von ihren Vorfahren gelernt haben. Nach einigen Historikern wurde Bodu Beru zu Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts von Afrikanischen Sklaven im Land eingeführt. Während der Regierungszeit von Mueenuddeen I wurden diese Sklaven in die Freiheit entlassen und auf die Insel Feridhoo im Ari Atoll gesandt. Es wird angenommen, dass Bodu Beru sich von dort aus verbreitet hat und sich zu einer der populärsten Unterhaltungsformen des Landes entwickelte.

Thaara



Fig. 4 — La disposition des exécutants d'un taara comprend deux rangées, qui se font face, de choristes et de danseurs (fati lengu mihun) avec, à une extrémité, trois solistes ou directeurs de chants et chorégraphies (mana dzaha mihun). L'effectif normal des choristes est d'une vingtaine d'exécutants; il est ici réduit à deux hommes, le cliché ayant été pris lors d'une séance d'étude.

Thaara is the Dhivehi word for tambourine. It is performed by about 22 people seated in two parallel rows facing each other. It is a type of music which has a semi religious touch, and is distinct to men only. In Thaara, there is both singing and dancing. The early songs which accompanied Thaara were in Arabic. The songs start with a very slow tempo and gradually increases to reach a crescendo.

The performers wear white sarongs and white shirts with a green scarf tied around their necks.

Thaara was introduced to The Maldives by the Gulf Arabs who came here in the mid 17th century. A type of music similar to Thaara is still practised in the Gulf and in south Arabia.

Thaara was played in the fulfilment of vows, and special times was accompanied by a pseudo act called "Wajid" which is now banned by the government, but the singing and dancing still continue as an entertainment.

1. 2. 3. **Taara**, a term which also designates a circular shaped timbrel with a single head, is a musical form of Moslem inspiration, using timbrels and choral singing. The words of the songs, written out in copy-books, are apologetic odes to the Prophet or the saints. Historians claim that this music was introduced to the Maldives in about the 16th century by a scholar who had spent long periods in Asia. The musical spectacle, which also includes dancing, is presented once a year during the festival called *buras fati*, the eleventh day of the lunar month of the great pilgrimage to Mecca. The religious texts set to music are in an Arabic dialect, some consisting of prayers as well as an apology in honour of the defunct Abdul Qaadir Giilaanii. This religious office always falls into two almost continuous parts *khalifa-baa* and *diaa-hada-baa*. The first part begins with a slow rhythmic mode on the percussion (as if for a procession) called *haru-bii* and continues with a more animated movement which is abruptly cut off a short break introducing the second part. During the first part of the spectacle the two rows of performers (cf. Fig. 4), who remain permanently seated, execute various figures (movements of the torso accompanied by a great variety of ways of holding the timbrel: horizontally, vertically, against the chest, to the right, to the left, etc.).

The second part, too, begins with a slow movement, but this time with a rhythmic mode on the percussion called *zuvaabu* which rises in a crescendo to a finale overflowing with joy and exaltation. Apart from the choreographic gestures mentioned above, the timbrels are struck with tufted drumsticks (*dandī*) and, in the finale, several choristers execute a dance figure standing up and holding a stiletto in their hands. Only a few decades ago certain figures of the dance consisted of striking the temples with the point of the stiletto and drawing a little blood. But as a result of the frequency of accidents during certain

phases of exaltation in this act of contrition, the use of a pointed stiletto was prohibited and it was replaced by a capped stiletto and alternative choreographic gestures.

Band 1 is devoted to the complete version of a *taara* (*nasuuru mina ilaahi*, "victory of God") the religious fervour of which cannot leave one indifferent (Island of Kuḍa-rikilu, southern Maalōsmaḍulu Atoll).

Band 2 is a condensed version of a *taara* in which variations on the theme *asalaama* ("of peace") are developed (Island of Kaasi-duu, northern Maale Atoll).

Finally, band 3 is a short fragment of the finale of a *taara* entitled *siradzul muniiru*, "beneficent clarity" (Island of Kuḍa-rikilu, southern Maalōsmaḍulu Atoll).

Gaa Odi Lava

Gaa Odi Lava is a music and dance which expresses the satisfaction by a group of people on completion of a task involving hard manual work. Some say Gaa Odi Lava was first sung during the reign of Sultan Mohamed Imadudeen I (1620-1648AD). In his effort to defend Male', he wanted to build a break water around the island. For this purpose he divided the work force to various "odi" or vessels, for carrying coral stones from the many reefs. Upon completion of the task, workmen from each "odi" paid a ceremonial visit to the Sultan, singing songs to express their happiness. And hence Gaa (stones) Odi (vessels) was born.

In the time of Sultans, whenever a job ordered by a Sultan was completed, the workers involved would walk to the ground in front of the royal palace, in a special dance called "Dhigu magu negun". In this type of walking, the dancers each carry a special stick and walk in two rows while singing and dancing. Once in front of the palace, the songs gradually increase in tempo until the whole team forms a ring around a special container, still continuing the dance and singing. Inside the container are gifts for the dancers, given by the Sultan. The taking away of the container is called "Dhafi Negun" which is also the motive of dancing and singing. In the olden days, the songs sung in Gaa Odi Lava were in Arabic.

6. **Gaa odi lava** is a musical and choreographic spectacle which might almost be called a classic. It is associated with arduous tasks like diving for blocks of coral (*gaa*) and bringing them up, loading them onto the large boats (*odi*) — now vanished —, transporting them to the town, cleaning out the immense ponds (*veo*) — now filled in as a measure in the combat against malaria — where the population made its ablutions, etc. These collective labours were rewarded by a gift from the sultan : a copper chest (*loo-dafi kolu*) filled with betelnuts or coins. The spectacle consisted of three parts (which one finds reflected in the succession of musical themes) : a march to the palace, a dance around the chest and a dance of happiness and gratitude (Island of Kaaſi-duu, northern Maale Atoll).

Baburu Lava



Fig. 2 — Moment d'une chorégraphie appartenant au genre musical baburu-lava.

4. and 5. **Baburu lava** (*Baburu Kara* is the name for the African continent and *lava* means “a song”) is a piece from the time of the slave trade. The orchestral ensemble consists of at least four double headed drums and several seed-filled rattles. This very popular type of music always begins with a rhythmic formula in the form of a particular drum-roll and is distinctly exuberant in character. (Island of Rasmaa-duu, northern Maalosmaḍulu Atoll).

Langiri

The Original Langiri goes back to the time of Sultan Shamsuddin III who ruled The Maldives in the early 20th century. The youth of that time developed and modified the then popular Thaara to their taste giving the name Langiri.

Langiri is a dance and music played by young men as an evening stage show. To perform Langiri each dancer holds two sticks that are about two feet long. The sticks known as "Langiri Dhandi" are decorated, each having a colourful artificial flower at the head end.

In the dance the performers sit in two rows of twelve or in six and as they sway their bodies waist up and at the same time keep clapping the Langiri Dhandi in different styles. Each dancer will hit six Langiri Dhandi belonging to his three neighbours seated in the front row. There is also a lead singer who sits in the front of their right row. The length of a Langiri show varies but usually it lasts until seven or six songs.

Dhandi Jehun



This dance is attributed to the atolls and the performing style vary from atoll to atoll. The participants are all men and they dance in a single group of about 30 people. The dance which lasts about one hour can be held at day or night, in a street or in a ground, on nay day of celebrations.

In Dhandi Jehun, the songs are "Thaara" songs or "Unbaa" songs and they sung by a lead singer. However, the group too participates in the song, and as they sing, they dance and walk to the beat of

the song. Sometimes drums or tambourines are held by two additional people who would walk behind the group.

In the dance which lasts about an hour, each dancer holds a "Dhandi" (stick) of about three feet long. As he dances, he claps hi "Dhandi", to one belonging to a partner facing him and continue dancing and singing to the beat of the music as well as to the sound generated by the clapping of sticks. The dancers do not have any special dress. However, in any given performance, they will wear a uniformed dress usually it is a sarong, a T-shirt, a white head cloth, a sash around waist and a white under-garment.

Dhandi Jehun is believed to have come form Malik (Minicoy Islands). Is is said there is a similar dance there known as "Malik Dhandi".

Bolimalaafath Neshun



This is a dance performed by women. The dance shows the old tradition of women offering gifts to the sultan, on special occasions such as Eid festival. The gifts, usually shells, are kept in a small vase or box known as the "Kurandi Malaafath". It is kept closed and is intricately decorated from outside. The vase is covered in a piece of colourful silk cloth. The women who carry the case too wear bright coloured local dresses which are fumigated by burning incense.

In the dance there are about 24 people performers. As they dance and sing to the tune of music, they form into small groups of two, three, four or even six, and walk towards the sultan to offer the "Kurandi". The songs usually express their sentiments or are based on national themes. With the change of government from monarchy to a republic in 1968, the tradition of offering gifts to the sultan ceased. But the dance has survived, and today it can be seen on stage shows. Bolimalaafath Neshun is still regarded as the most important of all the dances performed by Maldivian women.

Maafathi Neshun

The movements in Maafathi Neshun are similar to Langiri. But the performers are all women, and they wear national dress. This is a group dance in which women dance in two rows of ten. Each performer has a semi circular string which is about three feet long with artificial flowers attached to it. They hold the strings and dance in different style in small rows or groups of two or three displaying different symbols.

Fathigandu Jehun

Fathigandu Jehun is an evening stage music in which a group of men or a seated single person dance in tune with the songs. To bring out the sound of music two pieces of bamboo stick that are about six inches long are held in each hand of all dancers. The two pieces of sticks on either hand with their outer side touching each other are then clapped together while at the same time the dancers show their skills in twisting their torso in tune with the music and song. There is also a drummer who beats on a tin and at the same time lead the song.

In Fathigandu Jehun the songs are usually epics. The story is narrated in the style of a song and to the beat of the music. A famous Fathigandu song is "Burunee Raivaru" which tells the story of a sultan who went in search of a wife.

Bandiyaa Jehun



Bandiyaa Jehun is performed only by young women. In this performance the dancers mark time to the beat on the metal water pots they carry. In order to produce sufficient sound, the dancers wear metal rings on their fingers. Although there is no definite costume, a uniform dress is worn by the performers which is mostly a long skirt and a blouse, and today it is usually "Dhigu hedhun", a local dress.



Fig. 1 — Disposition de l'orchestre pour un bandiia-dzehun : choristes et danseuses se font face; cette disposition peut faire songer à celle d'un orchestre javanais (gamelan); les paroles des chants sont souvent consignées sur un cahier.

Fig. 3 — Index, médium et annulaire portent une bague métallique de manière à pouvoir modifier, vers les aigus, la tonalité des percussions et, ainsi, les opposer à des percussions à tonalité grave (percussions avec les paumes des mains). La jeune fille porte l'uniforme d'une école d'Etat.



Today, most of the groups use a number of musical instruments including drum and harmonica, and the dance is performed both standing and seated. The costume and music too have undergone considerable transformations so as to keep pace with the changing trends.

2. and 3. **Bandiia dzehun** (a *bandiia* was a receptacle used for carrying fresh water from the well to the kitchen; *dzehun* means “to knock”, “to beat”) is a musical and choreographic spectacle in which only women take part. According to the scholars of the country, this very old type of musical production was connected with work in the fields. Today it takes place twice a year, during the religious festivals (*iidu*). The piece on band 2 is an ancient song performed by adult women, while that on band 3 is a modern composition called “The Bulbul bird — a small song-bird, *Pycnotus jocosus* — flies away”, sung by children. (Island of Kuḍa-rikilu, southern Maalōsmaḍulu Atoll).

Kadhaa Maali



This dance, of which the origin is unknown and dates back a few centuries, survives only in Kulhudhuffushi in south Thiladhunmathi Atoll. The performance is initiated by the beating of a number of drums and a "Kadhaa", an instrument made up of a copper plate and a copper rod.

With the music which is emanated from the beating of the drums and the Kadhaa, a large number of people usually about 30 men, dressed in different postures and costumes, take part in the dance. The costumes depict different types of evil spirits and ghosts. These

evil spirits or ghosts are referred to as "Maali".

The dance is associated with the traditional congregation of the elders of the island who practise a late night walk around the island to ward off the evil spirits believed to be associated with terrible sickness and epidemics prevalent in the island community. The midnight walking usually begins after the late evening prayer, would continue for three consecutive nights and on the third night as to mark the end of the working the island community will engage in different types of music and dancing. This is a prelude to Kadhaamaali which is the final and the major event of the night.

While Kadhaamaali is being performed, people of different trades will come to the venue on a group by group basis bringing along with them their instruments, displaying their skill and craftsmanship in the form of a dance. Once their performance is over they would simply go leaving the Kadhaamaali dancers who would continue dancing until it was all over by about midnight.

At present Kadhaamaali is performed only during festivals. But, even now in times of terrible sickness the dance is still performed after the "three night walking".

Festivals



Maldivians have great national pride. In all festival planning a feeling of family is sensed as women, men, and children share in the preparation of food, decoration, and entertainment programmes. Most celebrations will find a blending of tradition and modern entertainment. Folk dances and music using wooden instruments may be followed by modern jazz or pop music. People from all professions work side by side in a spirit of co-operation for these celebrations.

Besides important religious holidays celebrated following the lunar calendar, traditional celebrations provide a festive atmosphere. Independence Day brings days of festive activities with school and government holidays. Almost every holiday brings out the green and red national flags criss-crossed over main streets and displayed from private homes. Festivals usually have two types of parades: the usual marching of bands and the parade of children smartly groomed for viewing by all neighbours and sundry spectators.

Whether commemorating a marriage or circumcision, the drummers, dancers, and singers keep pace with the rhythm of traditional music. Most celebrations offer an excuse for a feast. Gula (fried fish balls with tuna and coconut), kuli boakiba (spicy fish cakes), foni boakiba (coconut milk and rice pudding), and kiru Sarbat (sweet milk drink) are popular dishes. The special after-dinner treat is made from bileh leaves, foah nuts, and cloves. A festival may also include a tour group of young Maldivian women and

musicians, who provide a special entertainment, Bandiya Jehun: the beating of metallic water pots to the tune of an accompanying song. The island poet may be called upon to recite Raivaru, a traditional form of poetry sung in a slow, even tune which expresses various sentiments.

Maldives People



Little information is available on the ancient people and their way of life. Evidence suggests that The Maldives has been populated and thriving as early as the 4th century BC. It is argued that the earliest settlers migrated from Arabia, eastern Africa and the Indian subcontinent among other places. Today, the Maldivians are a mixed race. An estimate for 1997 estimate puts the total population at 263,189 out of which about 48.5% are women. It is expected that the figure would rise to 288,800 by the year 2000.

The people of the Maldives are its own unique character. They are a small, kindred society unified by common history, the Dhivehi language, and the Islamic faith. Islam has given strength to the society and the faith is taken very seriously. The ties and obligations felt by individuals to their community, to their President, to a whole nation reflects the tradition of strong family ties. Intelligent, as well as devout, the people of The Maldives are tolerant and respectful of each other and of visitors to the country. Maldivians have been able to blend tradition and modernity.

Hardworking, but unhurried, playful and respectful, Maldivians have been able to blend tradition and modernity. All Maldivians have open access to education. All have the opportunity to play significant roles in the economic life of the nation.



Great respect is felt for the head of the national 'family' as well as for the head of each household. The family unit is strong.

A population of little over 200,000 people is spread over the islands with over a quarter of them living in Male', the capital. To foreigners the village people on some islands may seem shy. Curious of outsiders, they prefer to observe newcomers from a distance at first. One soon learns of their hospitality when the island chief provides a cold coconut drink and a healthy snack, usually made of seafood.

Athletic, the Maldivians are either soccer players or soccer fans, natural swimmers and divers, aggressive players in tennis, cricket, or badminton, the young people are encouraged to develop physically as well as intellectually and morally. Friendliness and honesty are taken for granted in The Maldives where old customs and Muslim traditions are respected.



The government is dedicated to improving the life of the people on the islands. Young people are encouraged to strive for higher education. Under government sponsorship young students are given grants to study abroad and they return to The Maldives to give service to the country.

Brilliant young women hold key positions in the government, working tirelessly to serve their country and people. Fishermen unload their silvery haul. Women attired in traditional dress sweep the grounds of a school readying it for a special Independence Day celebration. Five times a day finds a nation expressing religious devotion in prayer at one of the many mosques. Festivals give way to fun-loving, talented men and women singing and dancing.

Religion



Islam is the focus of the Maldivian life in every respect, all being Sunni Muslims. Prayers are conducted five times a day in all mosques on every inhabited island. The golden dome of the Islamic centre dominates the skyline of Male' whether first viewed by air or from water. A result of the commitment of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's government to uphold and strengthen the character of the nation, this imposing mosque was inaugurated in 1984.



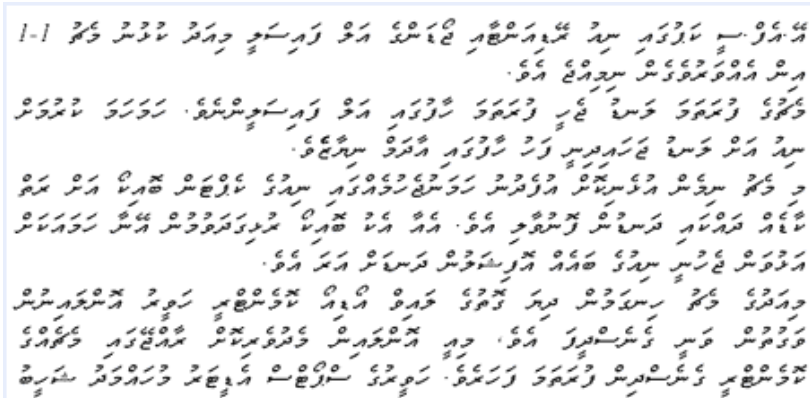
The well planned, comfortable interior of the centre is often utilised for important official occasions in addition to regular meetings. Dark woodcarvings depict the history of the religion and serve as inspiration for spiritual development. For the artist they are a work of beauty. From inside the mosque, worshipers can see both the spiralling communication tower of the Postal building and the graceful minaret of the Islamic Centre. It is a startling contrast of tradition and technology.

The night view of the mosque is breathtaking. In the quite night, visitors may stand at the bottom of the impressive steps, look upwards to what is said to be one of the most beautiful mosques in Asia and find a moment for reflection.

Belonging to the Sunnis, the largest and most traditional Islamic sect, the Maldivians believe that "There is no God but Allah", confident that he is one, supreme and all-powerful. They also believe that "Muhammad" is the messenger of Allah.

All Maldivians believe in an afterlife and a final judgement that decides whether they go to hell or heaven. Only right conduct can assure the latter, which entails keeping to the five pillars of the religion, to repeat the creed "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah", to say prayers five times a day (at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset and after darkness), to give alms to the poor, to make a pilgrimage to Mecca if possible at least once in a lifetime, and to fast during the month of Ramadan.

Language



The language of the Maldivians is Dhivehi and displays much resemblance to several other languages from Sri Lanka, South East Asia, North India. It contains many Arabic, Hindi and English words.

Historically speaking the early people spoke "Elu" a form of ancient Singhalese. The language had gone many transformations and the present day Dhivehi is written from left to right, probably to incorporate many Arabic words. Modern Thaana script was invented in the 16th century following the overthrow of Portuguese. The earliest Dhivehi is inscribed on copper plates known as the "Loamaafaanu". The script is written with letters and vowels separately on top or below the letters, depending on the sound.

Dhivehi is used equivocally in the administration of the country. Until the 1960s, Dhivehi was also the medium of teaching in all schools, but with the need for further education, Dhivehi medium syllabuses changed to English medium teaching. For this reason, English is widely understood, spoken and written by the locals.

Useful Dhivehi phrases

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Hello | Assalaamu Alaikum |
| Yes | Aan |
| No | Noon |
| What is your name? | Kon nameh kiyanee? |
| How are you? | Kihineh? |
| Good | Rangalhu |
| Thank you | Shukuriyaa |
| I am sorry | Ma-aafu kurey |
| Where is it? | Kobaa |
| How much does it cost? | Agu kihaavareh? |
| What time are we leaving? | Aharemen dhanee kon irakun? |
| What time is it? | Gadin kihaa ireh? |
| Where are you going? | Kon thanakah thi dhanee? |
| How long does it take? | Kihaa ireh nagaanee? |
| Goodbye | Dhanee |

The Maldives has been an independent state throughout its known history, except for a brief period of 15 years of Portuguese occupation in the 16th century. The Maldives became a British Protectorate in 1887 and remained so until 26 July 1965. The independent Maldives reverted from a Sultanate to a Republic on 11th November 1968. The first written constitution was proclaimed in 1932.

It seems certain that the islands of Maldives were first settled by Aryan immigrants who are believed to have colonised Sri Lanka at the same time, (around 500 BC). Further migration from South India, as well as Sri Lanka, occurred. The latest archaeological findings suggest the islands were inhabited as early as 1500 BC. Around 947 AD, recorded contact with the outside world began with the first Arab traveller. One can imagine accounts taken home depicting the potential for trade in pearls, spices, coconuts, dried fish, and certainly the abundance of cowry shells. The cowry shells were the accepted currency from Africa to China until the sixteenth century. Together with the description of the exotic paradise islands and expensive natural resources, the news the travellers must have taken home probably resulted in the arrival of more ships bearing traders and other travellers.

The outside world influenced Maldivian life significantly as legends and history reveal. Early traders found Buddhist customs and practices. But the greatest contribution made by the Persian and Arab Travellers was the conversion of the Maldivians to Islam in 1153 AD. Dhivehi (Maldivian language) also underwent a certain conversion as a result of contact with the outside world. Perhaps blending rather than converting better describes the evolution of Dhives Akuru to Thaana, the present-day script. The writing of Thaana is from right to left, unlike Dhives Akuru, probably to accommodate the many Arabic words then in everyday use.



Maldives History - Earliest known history of the Maldives is recorded in these metal tabs known as "loamaafaanu". Earliest known history of the Maldives is recorded in these metal tabs known as "loamaafaanu"

Ruling dynasties gave shape to what has become The Republic of Maldives just as volcanic movement shaped the 1,190 islands and coral reefs which rose above the ocean's surface 100,000 years ago. After the conversion to Islam (by Abul Barakaath Yoosuf Al-Barbary), of the first known king of the Maley Dynasty, rulers in 1153 came to be called sultans. King Koimala was renamed Sultan Mohammed-bin-Abdullah for the last thirteen years of his twenty-five year reign. Recorded in Maldivian history are the names of eighty-four Sultans and Sultanas who belonged to six dynasties. The Maley or Theemuge Dynasty lasted 235 years under the rule of twenty-six different sultans. The Hilali Dynasty ruled next for over a period of 170 years with twenty-nine rulers. During the Hilali period, Sultan Kalhu Mohammed invited the first foreign power to Maldives thus opening diplomatic relations with the world.

Balmy trade winds brought prosperity to this independent country until the sixteenth century when the Portuguese took more than a passing interest. History creates legendary heroes. It is during this time of Portuguese threat that one of the greatest Maldivian heroes, Mohammed Thakurufaan, was born on the island of Utheem in the northern atoll of Thiladhummathi. As young Mohammed grew to manhood, the Portuguese manned a powerful expedition against The Maldives. Captain Andreas Andre, known as Andhiri Andhirin defeated the Sultan Ali VI, last ruler of the Hilali Dynasty. For fifteen years the invaders tried to maintain control over the islands. But The Maldives were scattered over seas that were often as dangerous as attacks by brave Maldivians waging daring warfare against the colonialist's.

Today one can still hear songs and stories, which tell of Mohammed Thakurufaan wiping out the entire Portuguese garrison. The great Mohammed's twelve years of peaceful reign was one of prosperity and reform. He died in 1585 AD, but his Utheemu Dynasty ruled for 127 years with twelve rulers. The winds of war are never even in idyllic islands. They faced a new threat from the Coast of South India. The Raja of Cannanore dispatched a raiding party to attack Male'. The royal palace was destroyed and the Sultan sent into exile; he never returned. Maldivian forces soon repelled the Malabar forces, drove them back, and under the leadership of Ghazi Hassan Izzaddeen, the Huraage Dynasty was founded. The Huraage Dynasty prevailed until 1968 when the Maldives became a Republic. After the Malabar episode, The Maldives established diplomatic relations with Sri Lanka. The two countries formed an alliance that continued throughout Sri Lanka's Dutch and then British colonial periods. A sharp sense for trade and a remarkable ability to keep their own world in tact has allowed the Maldivians to maintain relations with many countries, especially Sri Lanka which still supplies many imported goods. Protection against foreign influences, however, comes from a desire to exist as their fathers had, in a close-knit society; a national 'family' (that is close to Allah). Like the coral reefs that protect the islands, Maldivians maintain a commitment to keep their own world to themselves, to maintain the Maldivian culture and to protect it from the sometimes negative effects of outsiders.

The paved and unpaved streets are symbolic of The Maldives blending tradition and progress to better the lives of its inhabitants. Male' is divided into four traditional wards: Henveyru, Galolhu, Machchangoli, and Maafannu. All manners of goods are brought to Male' from the far flung atolls and imports pass through the capital daily. The Mulee Aage, built in 1913, is the President's official residence located in the centre of the capital. The residence with its intricate white carvings built by Maldivian designers and Sri Lankan architects, is a lovely, graceful complex.

The Friday Mosque or Hukuru Misikiy is a short distance away from the presidential residence. The mosque dates from 1656 and contains wood carvings which give accounts of the conversion of the Maldives to Islam. The surrounding courtyard houses the tombstones of past rulers. The drum shaped Munnaaru, built in 1675, towers over the capital summoning the devout to prayers five times a day. Every Friday, thousands congregate at this mosque to offer prayers. When prayer time is over, the people might make their way to the seafront's busy Marine Drive. Marine Drive's diversity clearly represents the contrast of life in Male'.

While modern, white-washed government offices are situated on this busy street, one can also enjoy the busy activity in late afternoon or early morning at the fish market or stop by local stores which sell assorted goods. Then perhaps a cafe that overlooks the ever-changing sparkling waters of the harbour will offer a quiet rest. In Male', especially on the western ward of Maafannu, tall trees shade the larger residential area of the capital.



The Palace in Utheem where Mohamed Thakurufaanu lived

Maldives Geography



The Maldives is situated in the South West of Sri Lanka, on the equator. The numerous coral reef islands, 1,190 in total, form an archipelago of 26 natural atolls (groups of neighbouring coral islands). These 26

atolls are organised into 19 administrative atolls with the capital island of Male' established as an entity of its own forming the twentieth division. Seen from air, the atolls and the islands form breathtakingly beautiful patterns against the blue depths of the Indian Ocean.

The country stretches 823 km north to south and 130 km east to west. Out of the incredibly large number of islands only 200 islands are inhabited, with 88 islands adapted as exclusive resort islands. The sea forms over 99 percent of the Maldives. Only 0.331 percent, 298 km² (115 square miles), of its 298 km² (34, 750 square miles) is land.

Together with the Lakshadweep formerly called Laccadive Islands (formerly part of the Maldives, and now part of India) to the north and the Chagos Islands to the south, the Maldives form part of a vast submarine mountain range, on the crest of which coral reefs have grown. The Maldivian atolls are a classic example of its kind. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word 'atoll' as "an adoption of the native name "atholhu" applied to the Maldivian Islands, which are typical examples of this structure". Each of these atolls is enclosed by a coral reef cut by several deep, natural channels and a lagoon. The reef structure, peculiar to the Maldives and consisting of a series of circular reefs in a line, is known as 'faru'. Strong currents, swinging round with the monsoon winds, flow among the atolls, though a journey between the atolls is often easy to navigate.

Most of the islands can be walked across in ten minutes; only a few are longer than two kilometres. The longest, Hithadhoo in the Southernmost Addu Atoll is eight kilometres (5-6 miles). Although most other islands are less than a mile long, one feels no sense of brevity as the merging of beaches, crystal waters, and crisp blue skies create an infinite vastness - a natural openness that is rare and a peacefulness that is always welcome.

The usual surface covering of the islands is a six inches deep layer of dark humus composed of a mixture of sand and organic matter accumulated from animal and vegetable matter through the millennia. Sand stone about 2 ft deep is found below, after which it changes to a layer of sand where fresh water can be obtained. Some islands where the natural water table is high, you may find several fresh water lakes. The popular tropical look is finally completed by the green vegetation such as coconut trees towering above dense shrubs and flowering plants.

Rarely being more than six feet above sea level, the coral based islands are protected by atoll reefs. However, they are all susceptible to erosion, especially those lying comparatively close to the windward reefs. Indeed, in 1812 and again in 1955, devastating gales destroyed many northern islands. In 1964 the island in Alifu Atoll "Hagngnaameedhoo" was inundated by high waves, while the capital, Male', was flooded by a severe storm in 1987. If, as some scientists predict, the sea level continues to rise as a result of global warming, then Maldives, with its ancient and unique culture, may all be swept away within fifty years. As a precautionary step the government, with aid from Japan, has undertaken the biggest projects ever in the Maldives - the building of a breakwater on Male's southern reef. With the help of artificial measures, such as the new artificial breakwater and the natural coral reefs the islands have started to enjoy more protection from natural calamities than they have ever done before.



As to the origin of these unique atolls, it still remains a mystery despite years of research. In 1842, after studying other similar atolls in the Pacific and Atlantic, Charles Darwin suggested that they were created when volcanic land rose from the sea and a coral reef grew around its edge. The volcano gradually sank back into the sea leaving the coral reefs to encircle a shallow water-filled lagoon. Islands, then, developed when currents and tides swept coral and other organic debris into sand bars, which eventually, were colonised by plants and trees. When Darwin, continued his studies into the Maldivian Islands, he had to admit that there was something special about the Maldivian islands. Nevertheless he added that his theory of coral island formation was applicable to the Maldives in a general sense, and most scientists

accept his theory. More recently, however, Hans Hass has suggested that over hundreds of thousands of years a platform of coral reefs built up on the submerged mountain chain in the Indian Ocean until they burst through the surface. Porous and unstable, the coral platform sagged in the middle, leaving only a ring of the hardest and highest coral - the rims of the atolls where debris and sand accumulated and vegetation took hold to form islands. Years and years of the sea moving with shell and coral particles around the islands, have grounded the debris into minute grains of sand. It is clear that the tiny specks of land separated by great stretches of water have long been a great puzzle.

Just as the early history of Maldives is obscured in mystery, so is the exact number of islands in the archipelago. The British Admiralty chart lists some 1,100 islands, while a recent government count found 1,196. If sand bars and coral outcrops were included the figure would have been close to 2,000. Obtaining an accurate is further complicated by the fact that islands come and go. Some combine, others split in two and occasionally islets emerge from the coral reefs. A 1955 storm created three new islands in Shaviyani Atoll, while others have slowly eroded. Around 1960, for instance, the fairly large island of Feydhoo Finolhu in Male' Atoll almost vanished through a combination of natural erosion and inhabitants taking away sand. It was later rebuilt.

To compound matters, as yet there is no agreement on what exactly constitutes an island in the archipelago: what, for instance, is the status of a large sand spit? Yet all this is part of the mystique of travelling through The Maldives, where you may come across an island which has no name, is not shown on any map and has no human footprint on its shores. Many more show signs of past settlement, and some desert islands are used regularly by neighbouring islanders for collecting firewood, coconuts, and even cultivation. Also, some islands (like the island of Kuda Bandos, near the capital) are often used as a destination for weekend / holiday breaks.



Education



The traditional system of education that has evolved for centuries composed of three types of institution: Kiyavaage, Makthab, and Madharsaa. Madharsaa usually expanded the curriculum to include more subjects such as literacy skills. This system deserves credit for the high (93% in 1986) literacy rate of The Maldives. Most of the Makthabs teach the young to read and write Dhivehi and Arabic as well as simple arithmetic. Continuous research in upgrading the curriculum goes on. A new national curriculum for primary and middle schools was designed and introduced in 1984. This curriculum incorporate environmental studies, science, Dhivehi language, mathematics, English language, fine arts, physical education and calligraphy.

Due to shortage of qualified teachers there is an ongoing teacher training programme conducted under government auspices. President Gayoom has made improving the educational system a priority. He is dedicated to improving education standards, especially

at primary and secondary levels to meet the increased manpower needs of the country, and to improve teacher training. New schools continue to be constructed and education expands into the health and sanitation fields as well as in most areas of social development.

A number of English medium schools prepare older students as London GCE 'O' level candidates. The Science Education Centre, a government based educational centre, readies students to sit for the London GCE 'A' level examinations. Maintaining an affiliation to a reputed external examination system at secondary level, the Government has most appropriately innovated and introduced a Fisheries Science Programme into the secondary school, the subject having been offered at GCE 'O' level since 1987.

As is common in other developing nations, students must travel abroad for a higher education in college or university. In their continuing efforts to upgrade the educational standards, the Maldives' government maintains education as a priority.

Quellen:

<http://www.themaldives.com/Maldives/Default.htm>

aus: Maldives I (LP). Ocora Radio France 1987:

This is, to the best of our knowledge, the first recording to be made of the music of the Maldives. And this fact alone indicates to what extent this engaging little republic (1) has been regarded as physically and culturally negligible, particularly in comparison with its great neighbours, India and Sri Lanka. Commiseration is hardly called for, however, when one realizes that from the beginning of the Christian era until the end of the 18th century, the Maldives played a fundamental economic role (analogous to that of Switzerland in Europe) throughout the Indian Ocean. This was due to the fact that the two thousand coral islands were the world's largest producer of the money cowry shell (*Cypraea moneta* Linn.) which was in virtually universal use as hard currency from China to Africa. Thus the Maldives were for centuries the meeting place of countries as far apart as Sumatra and Ceylon, Gujarat and Yemen, a country that was courted and fawned upon, but also pirated. The far-reaching brilliance of the light cast in the history of the Maldives explains the extraordinary richness of musical concepts of this tiny country (2). Another remarkable feature is the great originality of the music; it is astonishing how small the influence of the neighbouring countries of India, Indonesia or Ceylon has been. It is also true that this proud people succeeded in preserving its political and economic independence until 1887 when it became a British protectorate.