

FROM HUNTING TO HARVESTING.....

"It is a country which is more sea than land. There, all men and rovers of the sea; all women, daughters of the waves."

Few countries in the world could claim an equal status with Maldives in the potential for exploiting the bounties and beauties of the sea. It has been the sea which has shaped our environment, and by virtue of this — our very lives. The influence of the surrounding hydrosphere on the Maldivian is by no means less than the influence the atmosphere has on him.

But are we only lazily basking on the great gift that nature has bestowed on us? Are we only using this gift as a means of survival rather than a means of attaining a higher degree of prosperity and happiness?

Nature has endowed us with vast resources in the seas around us. The Exclusive Economic Zone of the Maldives is immense indeed. But have we found within us the resolve to utilise it to the full? Or are we still at the stage of gathering food as it was at the dawn of human history? Do we intend to be satisfied with the disorganised "hunting culture" which we unknowingly perpetuate among us by stubbornly refusing to advance to the stage of "harvesting"?

Certainly, the seas around us are the only means we have of acquiring prosperity for us and our progeny. The Maldives live on because of the bounties and beauties of the ocean around us. Let us, to begin with, engrave this indisputable fact in our minds and work from there. Let us then formulate a strategy where-by we evolve our own philosophy for development based on this.

Human experience is a pool common to all mankind, where we too have a right to share, both as givers and takers. When we look back into the distance of man's track in the world we see his attempt to domesticate wild cattle and many other animals about the period 6000 to 2000 BC has paid off now. Today, he breeds the off-spring of these in quantities which could not have been possible in the wild. Without the advanced technology in this field, our meat or milk supplies would have been too limited to supply today's hungry world. It was indeed, the pioneering step of domestication that revolutionised the world. The boldness of this step paid off so well, that today, we, the progeny of those pioneers enjoy the fruits of their labour.

Similarly in man's effort to make the fields yield what he desires instead of collect what the lands produced, about the period 9000 to 7000 BC, gave birth to agriculture. That was the most crucial turning point in the entire existence of man on the earth. For it was when he was able to start settlements and homes. This in turn gave birth to civilisation and the intense competition, which today we see as various facets of modern technology and refinements of life. The development of agriculture was an intensification by man of his food extractive process. More food could be obtained from a

given area of land by encouraging plants and animal species found useful, and discouraging others. The transformation of man from a migratory to a sedentary life was the direct result of his ability to domesticate both plants and animals. The resulting increase in food production made a spectacular impact on his development both morally and industrially.

This was, indeed, the melee of the constant battle of man to conquer nature, and shape his own environment as he wished. This is a battle which still goes on.

We, in the Maldives, have been fishermen from time immemorial. Nature has bestowed on us the sea for sustenance. It is our field. It is our farm. It is also our granary. Then, are we at the stage when man did his food gathering and hunting? Are we satisfied with the day's catch and collection?

We see our population increasing many fold within living memory. We claim and substantiate that claim with statistics that our income both as individuals and as a nation is increasing day-by-day. The necessary sequel to such increases will be a greater demand for food supplies. Have we anywhere but the seas around us to look for it? Indeed the sea has been, still is and will ever be the source of all wealth and prosperity for the Maldives.

If so, why do not we utilise it to the maximum by harvesting rather than gathering, by domestication and breeding rather than hunting its resources.

Let me be frank and straight forward now, so that the facts are clear. To me, the Maldives do not lack in wealth. The wealth that is the only hope for mankind as a source of food is doubtless the seas of the world. This is a fact that is universally accepted. After all, what is it that we are after as wealth. It is the material satisfaction that our mortal bodies demand. It is the perishable fulfilment for our ever increasing hunger.

I admit that we have a long way to go before we can fully utilise the vast resources that nature has saved for us. But if we are wise, determined and dedicated there are no barriers that we cannot surmount. Neither an individual nor a nation ever achieved greatness without hard work and sacrifice.

Let us, therefore, be positive and see the realities as they are and work from there. Let us not think of wealth in the context other than they are in our own situation. Only by awakening to the hard facts and formulating relevant plans we can achieve our target. Dreaming and thinking of the others as luckier will only make us lazy and sluggish. Let us not forget that the sea has been, still is the shall always be the source of wealth for the Maldives.

H.A. MANIKU

