

THE SEA.....OUR NATURAL HABITAT

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Fishing, which involves the recovery of food from bodies of water, is one of the oldest employments of mankind. Man takes both plants and animals from the sea. Two types of fish are caught: demersal, living at or near the bottom, and pelagic, living in the open sea near the surface. Other aquatic animals that may be the object of commercial fishery include, crustaceans, mollusks, certain mammals, amphibians, many types of worms, coelenterates and sponges.

Fishing, like farming is a form of primary production. Food gathering people first obtained fish and other aquatic products in the shallow water of lakes and along the seashore. Shellfish, which can be gathered easily by hand and large prehistoric shell mounds indicate their importance as food for man.

We, in the Maldives are no exception to this general rule. The early inhabitants of these islands consumed the harvest of the sea. The many heaps of discarded shells we see in many an island of ours and the origin of which we assign to the mythological "Redhin" prove that they consumed these mollusks and left the in-edible part, the shells.

This, indeed, is ample evidence to tell us that our forefathers were fishermen, in the most basic connotation of the word. They gathered their food in the easiest and most convenient way. But, sure enough, they were involved in the extraction of their food from the seas, their natural source of food.

We do not hesitate, today, to assign to ourselves the designation "sons of the sea and daughters of the waves". Indeed we are proud of it. We have reason for this.

Among many primitive communities the sea is seen as hostile and malevolent. But we see it as a source of food and field to be cultivated. We see it as inexhaustible and benevolent. The various evil forces that our distant forefathers visualised as harmful to man they tried to appease. All these are evident in our mythology and folk-tales.

Coming to more recent times we have poetry telling us of the heroic deeds of sailing. The brave and the hardy seafarers accomplishing deeds of high value, and earning the respect and esteem of everyone. This also include the inevitable

human side of it — the amorous life. Many a hero achieved his goal by braving the elements, the most notable of which was the sea.

When we reach the times of our written history, we see the skilful ways in which our sea-bone forces fought bravely and always won the battle, except there treachery played its dirty game. It is with dignity today that we express pride in the forces that defended our islands.

In these environments it is no coincidence of nature that we are more involved with the seas than any other element of nature. It is our natural surrounding and our closest source of food and wealth. There is no denying of this and there is no other source for us. We, indeed, are a product of the waters, to which I am sure every evolutionist will agree. It is also the aorta of our economy.