

Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu

by Abdullah Sadiq

Translated from Dhivehi to English by
Fareesha Abdullah and Michael O'Shea

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Inquiries should be made to:
editors@maldivesculture.com

or

Michael O'Shea
PO Box: 810
Belconnen ACT 2616
Australia

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Author's Preface

When I was very young, I used to hear a man's voice singing along with the beat he played on a large empty tin. People said it was the *Raivaru of the Princess of Buruni*. Then, I had no idea what the song was about, and the *raivaru* style didn't appeal to me at all.

Years later, while working at Aaliya School as a Dhivehi language teacher, I happened to see a book belonging to one of my students, Haleema Yusuf of Naifarū. The manuscript was old, written in soot ink on plain white paper and though the author was unknown, its title *The Story of the Princess of Buruni* was enough to convince me I had to read it.

The poetry had been changed into prose with the pious intention of improving it, but the story remained largely undeveloped. Shortly after, I heard this same *raivaru* being sung by the famous Kafa Kuda Thakkaan in a house in Galolhu ward, Malè. As I listened, my heart went through inexplicable feelings. This was no longer just a *raivaru*; it was a fascinatingly beautiful romantic story told in the special *raivaru* form of rhyme and rhythm. I had never seen anything like this in Dhivehi prose.

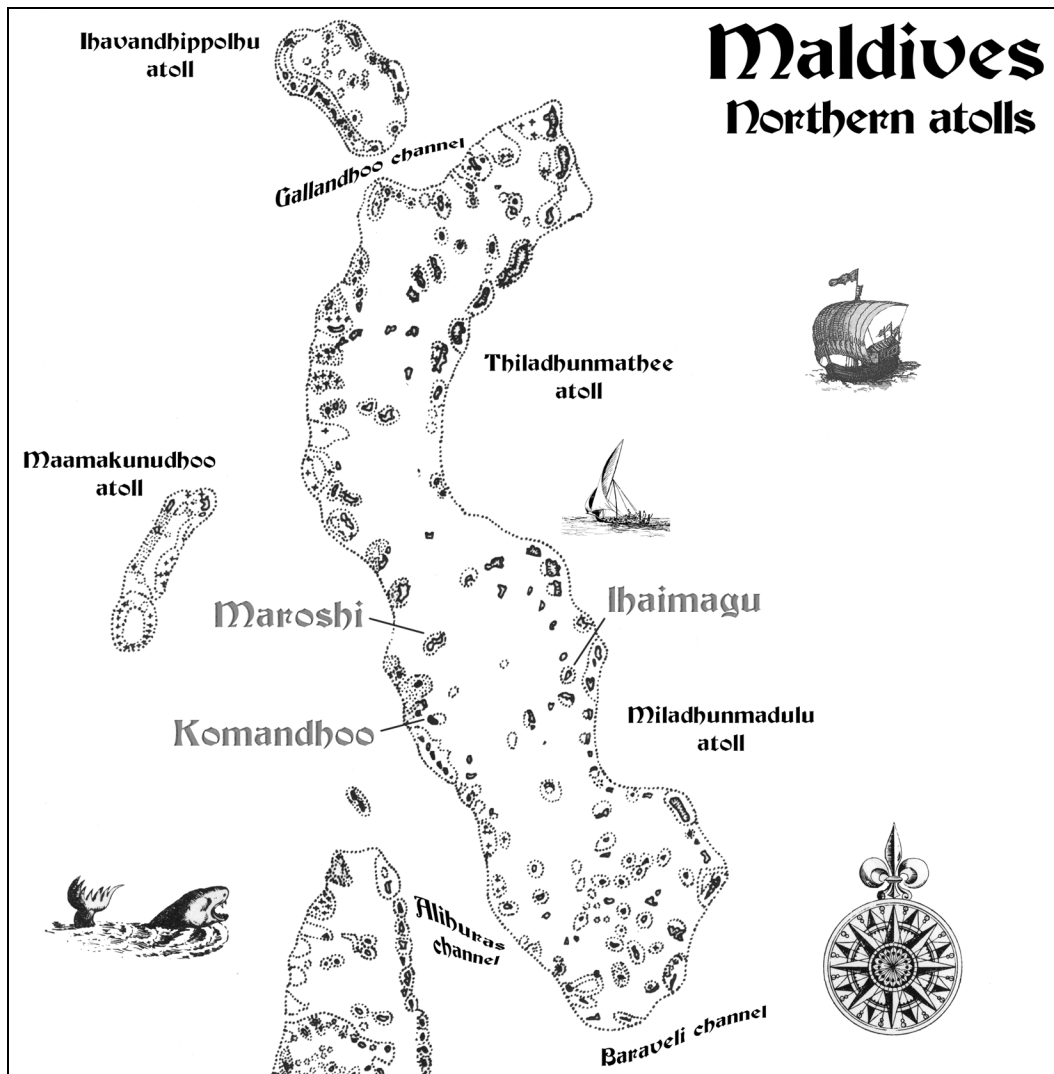
It contained no hint of influence, simile, or metaphor from foreign literature. The story relied solely on the Dhivehi language and customs for inspiration. In short, it was a linguistic picture of atoll life from a much earlier time. Reflecting the close relationship between Maldivians and the sea, the descriptions of fishing and travelling in ocean-going odi were quite sensational, and formed the central part of the story.

The perfect and clear use of Dhivehi language filled me with joy, and at that very moment, listening to the *raivaru*, I decided to write the story in prose that was worthy of such inspiration. Later I mentioned my plans to Sheikh Al-Usthaaz Al-Haajj Mohamed Jameel Didi, and he advised me to first listen to the version of the story told by Moosa Abdul Rahmaan (Dhon Moosabé) of Ihavandhoo, Haa Alif. I went there and spent two weeks with Dhon Moosabé before travelling to the nearby Hoarafushi island where I had heard that Ahmed Thakurufaan sang an even more perfect rendition. Though there were some variations in the singing styles of Moosabé and Thakurufaan, the story was essentially the same, but there were many differences from the version by Kafa Kuda Thakkaan that I had heard in Malè.

These three *raivaru* were the combined inspiration for *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*, though Moosa Abdul Rahmaan's interpretation provided the basic story. I have tried to use plain language in a way that retains the originality of the *raivaru* form.

This work would not have been completed without the kind help of Al-Usthaaz Noon Thaa Hassan Didi, Thakandhoo Alifulhu Katheeb, and Yusuf Fulhu from Sandhubarakage house in Henvairu ward, Malè. Many thanks.

Abdullah Sadiq,
Maldives 1976





Early life of Raaveri Ali

Ali began looking after his old mother when he was very young, earning money climbing coconut palms and collecting toddy. He never stole, never owed anything to anyone, and his mother's gentle manners and thrifty habits ensured they managed well on their small income. The woman's name was Amina and she was the daughter of Black Hassan Mohamed. Amina and her son Ali lived on the island of Maroshi in North Miladhunmadulu atoll.

Raaveri Ali was only twenty when his mother told him she was getting too old to collect firewood to cook toddy into sugar. Amina said it was time for him to get married. Sadly, the young man wandered off to be alone with his thoughts and worries. *Mother and I might be separated if I marry! That must never happen! But I can't ignore her wishes; I must do as she asks.*

At the southern end of the island he met Sakeena, an orphan with no one looking after her. Ali spoke softly and Sakeena agreed to marry him. On the seventh night of the month of Rajab, the wedding date was set for Friday the fourteenth, and only then did Ali tell his mother about his plans. On Thursday night, two witnesses were sent to Sakeena to get her official consent and dowry price for accepting Ali. She had no parents, so at midnight the witnesses went to the island magistrate who gave his permission and solemnised the marriage. Ali returned home and distributed wedding-rice to all his friends and neighbours. Sakeena was brought to the house on Friday morning after ten o'clock. Her mother-in-law gave Sakeena all the keys to the locked places in the house. Ali's wife checked the valuables, rearranging things to her personal satisfaction, and began her new life as the owner of the home.

Ali and Sakeena's work

Two days after the wedding, Sakeena told Amina, 'I don't want you working in the kitchen anymore. As long as I'm well, I'll do everything. All you have to do is bathe twice a day, perform your prayers, and rest.'

Without a word of complaint, Sakeena began gathering firewood and cooking the toddy collected by Ali from thirty-five coconut palms. She prepared

and served three meals every day, and cleaned the entire house. Every evening Ali returned home to find heated water ready for his bath. Sakeena sold a few coconuts and sour sugar from the toddy. Each *laari* multiplied into two, and the house was filled with wealth's comforts.

Inspired by his wife's energy, Ali tied rungs onto another forty palms and Sakeena cooked the extra toddy without a grumble, finding time for all the household chores and other jobs like twisting coir rope from coconut fibre. Ali climbed his seventy-five palms, three times a day. The couple were working very hard, doing everything themselves, even preparing their own leaf wrappings for the peeled coconut flowers.

In the midst of this hard work, Sakeena became pregnant and had a baby boy and now she had the job of caring for him as well. The only extra demand on Ali was for him to greet his baby whenever he entered the house! Within three years, there were three sons, and Ali's old mother cared for them until she caught a fever and died, leaving this world with her fate resting in the generous hands of God.

Sakeena and her husband were now alone.

Another son was born the following year, and after seven years there were seven sons. Ali stayed home to control the growing boys. It was difficult to tell them apart, and Raaveri Ali circumcised them all when the youngest was only four. As they recovered, he bathed them; now they were Moslems. Seven learning boards were made, so the boys could practise writing the Arabic alphabet, and Raaveri Ali found himself with time for little else other than teaching the children consonants and vowels and how to read. Ten years later, his children had completed the Koran so a buffet meal was prepared and the population of Maroshi was invited to celebrate the occasion. After the feast, the men prayed together and Ali's seven children recited the Koran.

Ali now taught his children to read and write their own language. When they had learned enough, he taught them mathematics and navigation skills. Within fifteen days, it was all over. They learnt handicrafts, lacquering, gold and silver work, and how to build houses and boats. They studied weaving, medicine and *fanditha*, and how to sing the Koran. Finally, they were taught the family's toddy trade.

No one in Maroshi could compare with these children. When they sat down to recite the Koran, people gathered and listened in awe at the sound of their eloquent and beautiful voices.

The eldest boy was only fourteen or fifteen when the Maroshi island chief began to worry.

If Raaveri Ali's children continue to advance in this way, this is the end of my family's authority in this island. For sure, if my eyes close in death today, none of my children will have any power. Raaveri Ali will rule. I can't wait for this to happen... it's time to act!

Later, the chief opened an old cane basket of books at his home and searching carefully through each manuscript he finally found the spell he wanted in an ancient brown prayer book. The chief memorised the spell, and could hardly wait to cast it.

The next day he went to the mosque for afternoon prayer, praying on the imam's mat and reciting. He took the mat outside and shook it while concentrating on what he wished to accomplish. Returning the mat, he walked home down the street past Raaveri Ali's house. Stopping at the exact spot where the light from Ali's lamp fell through the door, the chief cleared his throat and spat three times on the edge of the shadow and then continued on his way home.

The following evening, Ali and his seven children performed the late prayer called *ishaa*, ate their dinner and went to bed. Just after midnight, the eldest woke up with a headache. Ali and his wife comforted the crying boy, trying to relieve his pain but nothing worked. The headache became unbearable and within the hour he was dead. Their sorrow was overwhelming but Ali and his wife showed no hint of grief to other people. Immediately after daylight, they performed the appropriate funeral rituals and buried their son.

The next night at the same time, the second eldest son woke up with a headache and died shortly afterwards. All seven children passed away, one after the other. Devastated by the loss of their children, Ali and Sakeena lay in their beds and wept. Ali heard his wife cry out softly, 'Ali, my head hurts.' He went to her bed, put his hand on her hair, and spoke her name three times. There was no response. Looking closely, he saw her eyes weren't moving and her mouth was still. He cried aloud as his wife died in the middle of the night. Who has ever experienced such grief as Ali, and with such shocking suddenness?

But Ali didn't do anything stupid or silly. He kept control of himself. With daylight came the people and funeral activities, and after Sakeena's burial, he returned home and lay on his bed facing the wall. Near afternoon prayer time, Ali got up and walked to the cemetery to visit his wife and children but the moment he saw the graves something snapped in his heart, and he collapsed onto the ground.

It was just before sunset when Ali's eyes opened and he dragged himself onto his feet. He shook the sand from his body and for three days Ali stayed in bed. Then he stumbled back down to the island beach where an *odi* was being prepared for travel. Ali asked where the boat was headed. It was sailing to Komandu island.

'Take me with you, please,' Ali pleaded.

'Of course,' the crew replied.

'Do I have time to go home for my turban?'

'If you hurry.'

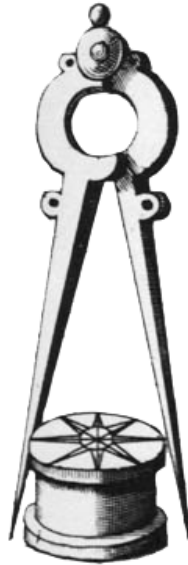
By the time Ali returned, everyone was already on board and he waded through the water towards the vessel. 'Wait and stay dry,' a man shouted from the

boat. He swam back to Ali and carried him on his shoulders to the boat, which set sail immediately. Ali had abandoned all his goods and money, taking only the meagre clothes he wore. As the *odi* approached Komandu, the crew asked, 'Where will we find you, Ali? We'll be leaving soon after we arrive.'

'Don't bother looking for me, I'll stay here.'

Ali climbed out of the boat, wandered slowly up to a low bench and lay down. Exhausted, hungry and filled with despair, he slept.

Back on Maroshi, the island chief waited only a week before he grabbed most of Ali's possessions, telling the people they could have anything else they could find. The chief rejoiced as everything about Raaveri Ali was erased from the island – even his smell.





Raaveri Ali in Komandu

Ali woke up in the afternoon and began looking for the mosque. The *imam* wasn't there, so after his ablutions Ali sat and waited at the entrance. A middle-aged man walked up and washed before entering the mosque and making the call to prayer. When the *salat* began, Ali prayed with him and later followed him out of the mosque.

‘Which island are you from?’

‘I’m from Maroshi. Who are you on this island, brother?’ asked Ali.

‘I’m the island chief. When did you arrive?’

‘This morning... the boat left while I was asleep on the bench at the water’s edge.’

‘And who do you know from around here?’

‘Anyone here who feeds me is my friend, and anyone who speaks truthfully. Anyone who takes care of me is my father.’

‘Won’t you be returning to your own island?’

‘If someone looks after me, I won’t leave this place.’

‘What’s your name?’

‘Ali.’

‘Come with me, Ali.’

The island chief introduced the new arrival to his wife.

‘Sitti, this young man is from another island and he’s very hungry. Bring him some food.’

But Sitti was suspicious. 'There's no food at the moment,' she said.

'Don't be silly, there must be something... bring it now!' her husband ordered.

Sitti went away and returned quickly with smoked tuna, soft coconut, and thick toddy sugar. Ali sat down, ate and carefully drank some water. Then he cleaned the area around the house with a coconut frond broom. It was sunset by the time he had finished collecting and throwing away the rubbish. During his stay at the chief's house, Ali didn't have to be shown how to work. He knew exactly what to do.

Eighteen months later Ali had a serious conversation with the chief.

'Brother, I need a wife. What should I do?'

The chief smiled.

'I'll bear the cost of whatever the usual amount is for a marriage around here. You need the consent of the woman, and the dowry price. Get permission from the parents before going to the magistrate and he'll know what to do from there. Ali, who do you want to marry?'

'I know her first name but it's difficult to identify her because I don't know who she's related to. But I can tell you another way. It's the house at the very southern end of the island where the woman lives alone. There's definitely nobody else there.'

The chief smiled again. 'Yes, I know her. She's related to me. Everything will be fine. Start preparations for the wedding night.'

Ali returned to work while the chief and his wife Sitti made financial arrangements for the ceremonies.

After sunset Ali walked around Komandu but nobody was willing to act as a witness. He returned to the house, distressed and confused, and sat on his wooden bed. With his hand pushed under his chin, and neck lost in his hunched shoulders, Ali stooped like a lonely heron exhausted by the midday sun. Evening prayer was over when the chief noticed him.

'What's up?' inquired the chief. 'Won't the young woman marry you?'

'No, brother. She's willing to marry but the wedding can't happen.'

The chief insisted there was no reason to cancel the wedding and immediately found two people to act as witnesses. 'Here are your witnesses Ali, now get on with the marriage.'

Ali sent them off to get the dowry price. They also asked for parental consent and discovered the prerogative fell to the chief because the girl was his niece. Her name was Amina.

When the witnesses arrived at his house, the chief officially delegated his power to the magistrate who took the necessary information from them. With all legal requirements satisfied, the magistrate read the marriage sermon to Ali and solemnised the union. The witnesses paid the magistrate and then went to Amina's

house to give her the dowry she'd requested plus three marriage dresses. Rice pancakes were ready for the witnesses when they returned to the chief's house and they left for home with their stomachs full.

The following day Ali went to his new wife's house where he mended the broken fences and started cutting rungs for toddy palm ladders. He made two hundred and seventy rungs and even repaired leaks in the roof before finally taking a bath. After applying some oil to his body, he went to the mosque. When prayer was over, Amina had food waiting for him - screw pine soup and tuna sauce. She served him water, first for drinking and then to wash his mouth. When he'd finished, Ali lay down and Amina massaged his legs and back. They talked. Suddenly a voice called from outside, telling Ali that the chief wanted to see him. He hurried off to find that Sitti the chief's wife had also prepared food for him. He went straight into the kitchen, ate and then washed the dishes and returned to the sitting room.

'Why didn't you come for dinner?' asked the chief. 'You should come here twice a day to eat. We shouldn't need to send for you. If you aren't feeling well, we'll visit.'

Ali walked back home where his wife was waiting.

He woke next morning to the call for dawn prayer and attended the mosque. When he returned, Ali packed coir rope and rungs into a bundle and trudged off to the palm grove where he spent the whole day attaching rungs to forty-five coconut palms he'd rented. The following day he began to trim the tops off the flower buds and apply the herb mixture. Three days later the buds were ready to be peeled, wrapped and tied down. After a week Ali attached collecting containers to each prepared flower. Before long, there was more than enough toddy for their own consumption and as the month went on, the flow became immense. Amina collected firewood and cooked the toddy Ali brought home. She prepared three meals a day, swept the house compound and stirred sugar from the boiling sap.

Ali decided to bring more palms into production and he went into the forest and tied sticks on another thirty. Amina worked just as hard and even when she became pregnant, she continued collecting firewood and cooking toddy. The pregnancy advanced from eight months to nine and she said, 'Ali, I can't keep doing all this labour. Please try and find a girl for the house.'

He walked around the island, found twenty-four strong young women to work in the kitchen and then returned to his palms. A week later in the kitchen, Ali noticed twenty-four urns of toddy were sour and had to be discarded. Without comment, he went into the grove and removed the rungs from thirty palms. Even then, the women couldn't cook and stir toddy into sugar from the remaining forty-five. When Ali went into the kitchen again, seven containers of toddy were sour and had to be thrown away. Again he didn't say anything, but later he undid the rungs from another twenty-one palms. Only twenty-four remained.

The young women just managed to stir and cook into sugar the toddy from these twenty-four palms, and they didn't have time to do anything else, not even the washing up.

Early one morning Ali came home as usual from dawn prayer and wrapped himself in his working sarong and folded it into his loincloth. He tucked his bow-knife into the top fold, held the bud-beater in his hand and placed a toddy stick on his shoulders with sixteen containers on each end. As he was walking out of the house, Amina called out softly. She was sitting on the northern bed. Ali came up and she put her head on his chest and began to cry. He asked her what was wrong.

'It's no good going to the toddy palms today,' she cried. 'My stomach is hurting, please hurry and get the midwife.'

Ali brought the woman straight away. She massaged Amina and told Ali to fetch a *fanditha* man.

Ali's eighth son

Ali ran off to get his brother, the island chief, and when the chief went straight inside when he arrived.

'Hey Haleema Fulhu, how are things going here?'

The midwife told the chief all was well, and everything would be fine.

'The water's broken, but there's no movement,' she said.

The chief asked for a bit of water and when it was handed to him, he sat on the main bed and moved his lips twice before blowing on the cup and giving the water to Amina. Immediately after the drink, through the generous mercy of the Almighty, a baby was born with its placenta. The midwife cut the umbilical cord, and did other necessary things. She returned home very happy with the payment she received from Ali. Next day the chief arrived after dawn prayer and took Amina out of the birthing room.

Soon after, Amina said to Ali, 'All these girls around the house... send them away. Do it nicely so they aren't upset.'

Ali called the girls over and asked them how long they had been working. They said it would be a month in three days time. He came out with two bags of money and gave them to Amina. She paid the girls a full month's salary, sixty *rufiyaa* each.

'How many containers of sugar were you able to prepare?' she asked them.

Twenty-two, they replied, so Amina told them they could have the two largest urns and the girls went off happily, laughing and dancing to their houses.

Three days later Ali went to the palms, cut the fermented part of the flowers and put the collecting vessels in place. In less than two days the toddy

began to trickle out again. So Amina began stirring and cooking toddy from twenty-four palms, along with feeding and taking care of the baby and collecting firewood. Within a month, rungs were attached to another twenty-one. Now she stirred and cooked the toddy from forty-five palms, as well as feeding a baby and collecting firewood. Amina also did work around the house, preparing and serving three meals a day without a hint of complaint to Ali. He tied rungs on another thirty palms, raising the total to seventy-five. Amina cooked and stirred all this toddy, looked after the baby, prepared and served the meals and cleaned the house and garden. She also warmed water for Ali's bath.

The child was circumcised at the age of five. When he recovered, his studies began with learning the Arabic alphabet on a small board. Ali was busy with his palms so he couldn't spend much time teaching the boy and he didn't learn to read very well. At the age of eight, Ali's son could recognise consonants and vowels – sometimes he got the syllables right, sometimes wrong. The boy had not been named on the seventh day after his birth, so it was time for a meal to be prepared and all the island people were invited. They ate together, read the prayers and Ali's son was named Hussein.

One day when Hussein was nine, his father went to his palm grove and left the boy at home. Amina was away in the forest collecting firewood, and Hussein went straight to the beach and got aboard a vessel leaving for Malè. The boat sailed off with no one on the *odi* realising he was there.

After a while Amina came home and began looking for her boy. She couldn't find him anywhere and went off crying to the chief's house. 'Oh uncle, I've lost my little boy Hussein!'

'Really!' exclaimed the chief, and his wife Sitti joined them as they all went searching. The chief was worried so the conch was blown to assemble people together. They searched everywhere including the forest and then Ali heard the news. He came straight down from his palms. Whether he jumped or fell isn't known, but he wasn't carrying his bow-knife or the toddy-carrier when he entered the house and demanded to know, 'Where is my child?' Ali beat his chest, threw sand into his own eyes, and fell face down on the ground crying aloud and punching himself.

The chief came to Ali's house when he heard about this. He found his friend dying like a sick rooster and tears came to the old man's eyes. From the time Ali had arrived in Komandu the chief had been his father, mother, brother, sister, and relative. The chief and his wife had no children and they had grown to love Ali as their own. The chief came close and held Ali's hand to soothe him. But he was inconsolable. If the couple held one of his hands, Ali beat himself with the other and it took four men to hold him down. Around four o'clock, weak and exhausted, Ali quietened down and the chief told the men to let him go so they could speak alone. This time Ali listened, and when he was told to stand, he stood. The chief

and his wife led the grieving man was to the bathroom and bathed him. They massaged Ali's body to wash away the dirt and sand.

Ali's wife

Now listen to a small part of Ali's wife's story.

When she couldn't find her boy she returned to the house and lay face down on the front bed. Meanwhile Ali was being bathed, dried and dressed in a sarong and led to the big wooden bed. The chief told his wife to prepare some limejuice, and Dhon Sitti went into the pantry and emerged with a full pitcher. The chief poured out half and gave it to Ali to drink. He took the other portion into Amina, calling out softly to her.

'Little sister, sit up,' he said.

Despite her illness, Amina responded politely and sat up slowly to drink the limejuice. The chief told Sitti to cook some rice soup and she went into the pantry again, emerging a few minutes later to ask Amina, 'Is there any cleaned rice, my child?'

'Yes, it should be in its container.'

Dhon Sitti went back to collect the rice and lock the pantry. Two plates of soup were prepared. The chief mixed the coconut milk and sugar into Ali's bowl, placing it on the big wooden bed. After checking its sweetness, he woke Ali up. Dhon Sitti added milk and sugar to the other bowl of soup and took it to Amina, making her sit up and eat.

When he and his wife had eaten, Ali said to Sitti, 'Isn't there anything left over for you?'

'Yes there is,' said Dhon Sitti, 'and we didn't cook anything at home tonight.'

'Please have some.'

Dhon Sitti prepared two plates of soup for herself and her husband. After eating, she served the water, washed the dishes and chewed some areca nut. By the time the old couple left for home it was very late.

Ali fell asleep immediately and woke just before dawn. He got up slowly and went to the mosque. The sun was rising when he came back home after prayers and Amina had breakfast ready for him. Afterwards Ali decided to go out and check the toddy palms. He also told Amina to serve breakfast to the chief if he came, and if he didn't turn up, then to send someone to fetch him.

Ali searched the kitchen for his special knives but he couldn't find them so he took spare ones and went into the forest. Inspecting the toddy palms and selecting the best twenty-five, Ali removed rungs from all the other palms. Then he started working on the new flower buds, preparing them for toddy collection. Ali

was very sad as he worked. Nothing much else happened. Each day he collected enough toddy for over one and half gallons of coconut palm sugar.

While he was grieving, the *odi* that took his son to Malè returned and Ali wanted to know what happened. The crew said his son hid from them when it was time to leave Malè and the boy stayed behind. Despite this news, Ali recovered from his misery and became motivated again. He increased the number of palms to seventy-five. Amina too began to stir and cook sugar with the same energy as before. Within eight days she was pregnant again and this slowed her down. Eight months later, Ali stopped collecting toddy and undid all the rungs from the palms. They ceased working but there was little financial difficulty. Nobody in Komandu was wealthier than Ali.

Ali's ninth child

Amina began to have labour pains and Ali went to fetch the midwife – the same one they'd used before. The woman agreed to attend and by the time Ali returned, she was already at the house; the bed was made and his wife had been washed. A short while later, Amina was laying on the bed and the midwife told Ali to get the *fanditha* man.

Is there any man in Komandu better than me? thought Ali. *I don't need to find anyone else!*

He stood by the mid-doorway of the house and recited something before kicking the frame with his foot. Then he sat on the front bed with a small glass of water just as Amina gave birth to a baby boy. By the mercy of Almighty God, the baby emerged with its placenta. Dhon Sitti was also in the house and in charge of the girls preparing hot water and food. The midwife did everything she could for a family with a newborn, and then left with her payment. Three days later, Amina was taken outside and Ali himself did the ritual. They bought whatever was needed for the child's naming ceremony and Ali gave instructions to Dhon Sitti, 'Sister, please clean the rice and prepare to cook for the seventh day. Pay and feed all the workers.'

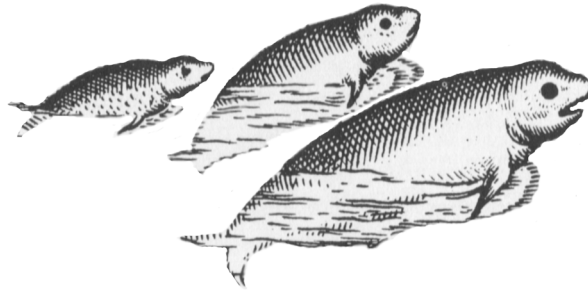
'How much rice shall I clean?' she asked.

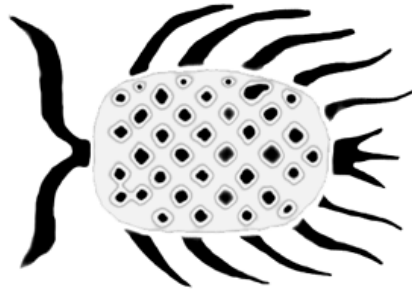
'I don't know, you and my brother can make that decision.'

Dhon Sitti discussed the matter with her husband and cleaned about 50 kilos of rice. The chief told Dhon Sitti to prepare ten portions of food, each with four kilos of rice and a chicken. Amina cooked forty kilos of rice and served the food in ten big trays when the afternoon prayer was over. The chief ordered the conch shell blown and everybody feasted together. Then fire and smoke were brought into the meeting, and praise and prayers were recited for Allah and Muhammad, His Messenger. Then the chief stood and publicly named Ali's son as

Raaveri Moosa. He told Dhon Sitti to distribute the remaining rice – there was no reason to save anything. She gave it all to the workers, making them very happy as they left for home. The chief and his wife returned to their house too.

Ali and Amina devoted their lives to looking after the child and stopped labouring. This meant no more toddy collecting. Instead they began to trade. Ali circumcised his son when he was seven years old and Moosa learnt the Arabic alphabet on a writing board. By the time he was nine years old, he had finished memorising the Koran. Then Moosa learnt reading and writing in Dhivehi, mathematics, navigation, blacksmithing, gold and silver smithing, cloth weaving, lacquer working, carpentry, fishing, medicine, *fanditha* and the art of toddy-making. Moosa was eleven years old when he completed his education.





Moosa goes to Malè

One day the boy said to his father, 'Please send me to Malè.'

'It isn't the right time for you to go there yet.'

But his son wouldn't listen and began to cry, so Ali went to see the captain of an *odi* being prepared for travel and discussed sending Moosa to Malè under the captain's care. Ali supplied enough food for both the boy and the captain. Around midday, the *odi* left and after more than two full days at sea it arrived in the capital. Without anyone noticing, Moosa jumped off the boat just as the Komandu vessel reached the wharf. The crew anchored and secured the *odi* and then realised Moosa had disappeared. They searched but couldn't find him anywhere.

Now hear a part of Moosa's story.

Moosa walked around Malè asking people for the house of his brother, Komandu Raaveri Hussein. Eventually someone pointed out where he lived and when Moosa lifted the fence gate and walked towards the front of the house, he noticed a large dark man leaning against a pillow on the small wooden bed. The man's hair was curly, his face darker than the rest of his body.

'Which island are you from?' he asked the young boy.

'I'm from Komandu, the son of Maroshi Raaveri Ali and his Komandu wife,' Moosa explained.

Hussein's eyes narrowed.

'Come to scrounge off me, because you can't get enough food in the outer islands, eh?'

Hussein went inside the house and stayed out of sight, leaving Moosa standing with his head down until a woman came out.

'Come and have a wash, child,' she said, leading Moosa by his hand to the well where she bathed him. After he finished rubbing himself with oil, she put kohl on his eyes. The woman was his sister-in-law.

'Be obedient and play inside the fence,' she said. Moosa did as he was told and stayed in the yard. He was all by himself until another child came in and they played together for the rest of the day. When it was time for Moosa's bath in the late afternoon, the other child left.

Next morning at seven o'clock after breakfast, Moosa went out to play again and there were two children at the gate. The following day there was an extra child, and each day one more arrived until after forty days there were forty friends to entertain him.

Moosa the teacher

Moosa played with everyone for a while, then he asked, 'By the way, have you finished studying the Koran?'

'We don't do that,' they answered.

'That's no good!' said Moosa. 'Don't you have parents?'

'Yes, we do!'

'Run home and ask your fathers for writing boards and come back here.'

They left straight away and returned in half an hour, holding their boards.

At an auspicious time of the day, Moosa started teaching the Arabic alphabet, spending his free time teaching them consonants, vowels and pronunciation. He devoted himself to their education, and the young ones began to recognise the letters. Moosa wouldn't allow them to go home for meals, so their parents brought food. Two months later, the children had completed the Koran. For his efforts, Moosa received three rupees a day. This was all the children had, and Moosa didn't hide the money away; instead he gave the rupees to his sister-in-law and she loved him as if he were her own child.

Moosa's Friday prayer

One day Moosa told his friends that they should all go to the Friday prayer. When the cannon fired at 10 a.m., the boy went to the kitchen and asked his sister-in-law for permission to go swimming. He wanted to visit Mui Vilu, a lagoon beach in western Malè. At first she wouldn't allow it, but Moosa began to cry and cling to her dress so she had to let him go, on condition that he wasn't late. Immediately the young boy left for Mui Vilu with his forty friends, shutting the gate behind him. They played at the beach and had great fun before returning. While they were washing off the sand and salt at the fresh-water well, they heard the official gunfire for Friday prayer and hurried off to their homes. Moosa handed his wet sarong to his sister-in-law and then he rubbed oil onto his body. Afterwards, she put kohl on his eyes and when the other children arrived again, Moosa was wearing beautiful clothes.

'May I go to Friday prayer today?' he asked.

'You may,' said his sister-in-law, and Moosa went off happily to pray. By the time he reached the mosque, people were already finishing the prayer but

Moosa knew what to do. He hurried to the sheltered well and washed, and entered the mosque with his friends. Moosa recited the *ikamah*, the second part of the call to prayer and began to worship, accompanied by his forty friends. During the first two *raka* he read two *sura* in a loud voice, with proper Koranic inflections. People in the mosque were surprised and fascinated by his pronunciation of letter *laamu* with its long vowel, and his pauses, and by the way he used the *sukun*. Leaving the listeners sitting in awe, Moosa finished praying and went back to the house followed by his friends. He sent them on their way, and his sister-in-law had set the table and was serving lunch as he walked in and sat down.

Moosa meets the king

Just then, Moosa heard the fence gate open and shut, and looked out to see three junior palace guards approaching the house. Standing in the yard they announced, 'The king commands Moosa to come to the palace.' The men walked away, and as they left, Moosa's sister-in-law cried out 'Oh my child!' and fell to the ground. She began to weep and beat her own body with both hands. Moosa had to stop the woman from hurting herself. Meanwhile, two senior palace guards turned up and announced, 'The king has said that Moosa is to come quickly to the palace.' Like the other soldiers, they walked away after delivering the command. Moosa looked up and found his forty friends had returned. He asked them to care for his sister so she didn't hurt herself, and then he reassured her. 'I haven't committed a crime, so don't worry. With no crime there can be no punishment.'

The young boy went to the palace and found the king pacing up and down the verandah. Moosa paid his respects from a distance, and then came up and kissed the king's hand and gave a formal greeting. The king sat on his large chair made of dark timber and told Moosa to sit on a very low stool.

'I want you to be the treasurer,' said the king.

'I'm too young,' replied Moosa, 'and I don't think I have the brains to handle such a huge task.'

'In that case, you can be the chief minister.'

'Master, I don't have enough experience to be the chief minister.'

'Alright then, you can be in charge of the royal mosques in the palace grounds.'

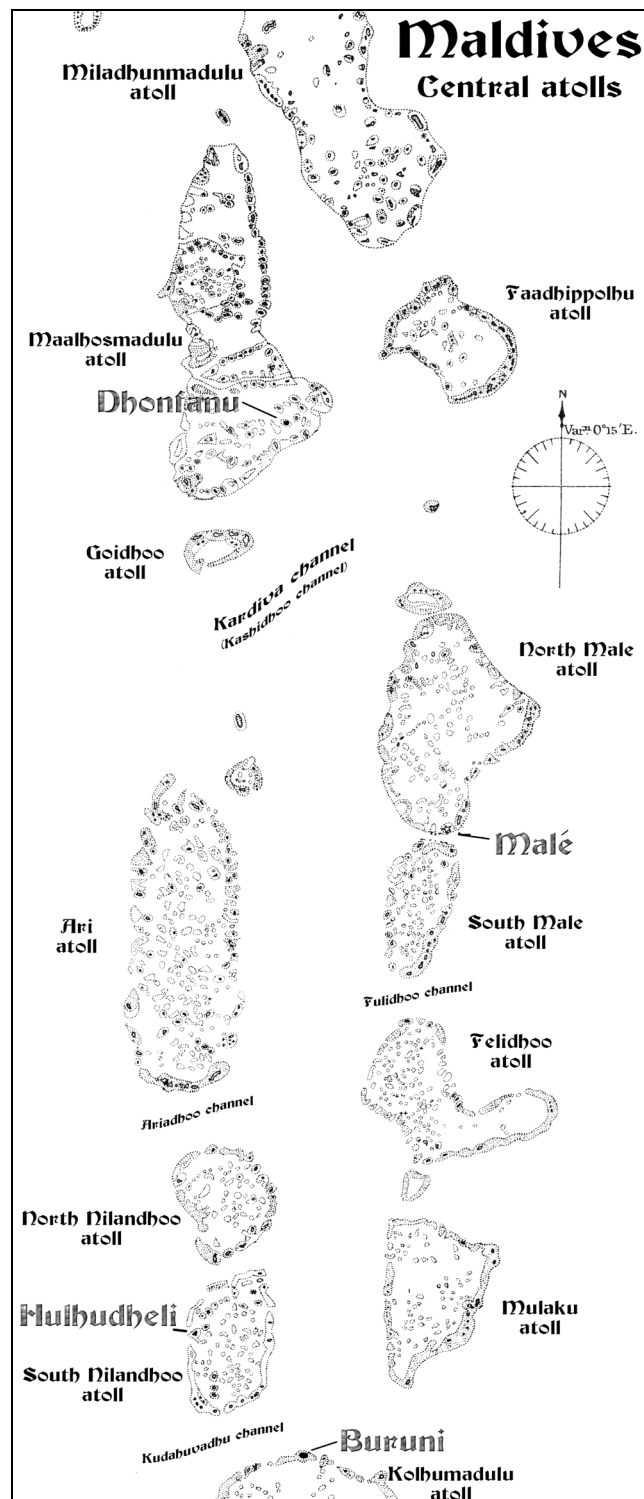
Moosa receives the honourable title of *malin*

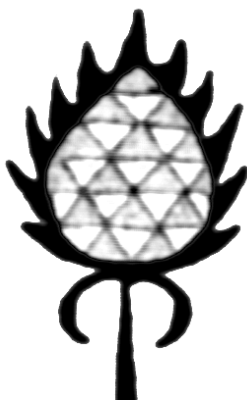
Moosa accepted the offer at once so the king summoned the town crier and ordered him to announce the new *malin* title in the four wards of Malè.

Hussein was in the main room of the house pacing up and down, just like the king, when Moosa returned home. He saw Moosa, patted him on the back and said, 'That's my boy!'

Though he was now a *malin*, Moosa continued to live with his sister-in-law. He never touched a single *laari* of his salary. For four years, he gave all his money to her and only took what she gave him.







Moosa Malin's dream

Four years after he was appointed, Moosa had a dream. It warned him he would be safer living in Dhonfanu island on Maalhosmadulu atoll, rather than in Malè. In Dhonfanu he would find his new wife, claimed the dream. She was the daughter of the island chief.

She is a young beauty with a lovely figure and blushing fair skin. Hurry to that island. You should send a letter on a northbound odi, asking your father to come to Malè. When he arrives, give him the malin position and ask the king to send you to Dhonfanu.

At dawn next day, Moosa obeyed the dream's instructions and sent a letter via an *odi* heading north. He waited and within fifteen days his father came to Malè. Together they went to see the king where Moosa told his master what had happened and handed over the *malin* tasks to his father. After requesting transportation from the government, Moosa sailed to Dhonfanu with some officials. They arrived at the island over two days later. The vessel entered the harbour and the Dhonfanu chief ashore called out to the *odi* and learned that Moosa was aboard. The chief sailed out in a small boat to greet the *malin* and bring him to the island.

Moosa Malin in Dhonfanu

Moosa accompanied the chief to his house and as they sat down in the swing room, he called out to his daughter.

'Dhon Aisa, get a snack ready for Moosa Malin.'

She prepared the food and then bathed, putting on a beautiful dress and preening herself before she emerged and told her father the snack was ready.

'Go and tell Moosa, daughter.'

On her wooden shoes, the girl walked sensuously towards the swing house. She half hid behind the wall and in a soft and attractive voice she asked him to come and have tea. Moosa walked into the house. He and the chief ate and drank together at one table, and then returned to the swing. The officials went in to eat after them. When they finished, these government men went to the side of the house and called out to Dhon Aisa.

‘Moosa has come to this island to marry you, Dhon Aisa. What do you think about that?’

‘I don’t like Moosa Malin at all,’ she insisted.

‘If you married Moosa, you would be allowed to wear the full veil and stay in your house.’

‘Even if I’m allowed all that, he still doesn’t tempt me at all.’

‘If you married Moosa, you’d be allowed to wear shoes of gold with pommels made of fish teeth.’

‘Even if I was permitted to wear such shoes, I couldn’t just pretend to be interested in someone.’

‘If you are married to Moosa Malin, you will be allowed to use a curtained parasol on the street.’

‘Hmmm, then I would be very tempted by Moosa Malin.’

‘Alright, accept the proposal, and give your dowry price.’

Moosa Malin’s wedding

So Dhon Aisa gave her consent and the dowry price was eighty *gun-reals*. The government officials paid her the dowry from their own pockets, and went to the chief to get his consent. Afterwards they put two kilos of rice, a quarter pound of areca nuts, the same amount of tobacco leaf, a bundle of betel leaves and a big *laari* coin into a small gift box and headed towards the magistrate’s house with Moosa. The judge stood up and asked the two witnesses the required questions. He then read out the marriage sermon, and the vows. When the big coin was handed over, the magistrate shook hands with everyone there, and then they went to the chief’s house where Moosa was presented to his new wife. Dhon Aisa offered a pitcher-size glass of water to her new husband, which he drank, leaving a *rufiyaa* coin in the bottom of the glass. Very early the next day, the government vessel returned to Malè while Moosa Malin stayed in Dhonfanu.

Two after the wedding, Dhon Aisa asked, ‘Moosa, don’t you know the customs of these outer islands? According to our tradition, there should be communal wedding rice. If not, stoves will be erected in front of the house!’

‘What’s all this about making stoves in the front yard?’

‘What they do is collect big earthenware containers, urns, fish boiling pots, and all sorts of earthenware pots and pans. Then they go into the bush and get buttress roots from the large screw pines and mount stoves on tripods in front of the house. They use masts and sail poles as firewood. When you wake up in the morning, it’s very embarrassing!’

‘Don’t worry about that,’ said Moosa. ‘I can afford the wedding rice. Today, ask your father to invite people after the afternoon prayer and I’ll distribute food.’

The chief called the people together and Moosa appeared and said, ‘I heard you are going to make stoves because I have married someone from your island without distributing rice. It wasn’t intentional. I didn’t know about your customs! Would you like to eat once, or to eat as much as you like for three days?’

‘We’d rather eat for three days!’

‘In that case, get all the boats ready for tomorrow’s fishing.’

‘How can we catch anything? These days we can’t even find a worm for bait!’

‘Don’t worry about that,’ Moosa assured them. ‘Do what I say and everything will be fine. Very early tomorrow, take your boats and moor at the middle reef. Don’t try to look for baitfish. At dawn, put the nets in the sea, straight into the deep water and then spread them. Pull them in the shape of a big bowl and scoop everything up. There’ll be more than enough baitfish.’

At this time, there was no smell of a fish catch on the atoll, and not the slightest sign of baitfish. To ridicule Moosa for saying such silly things, the fishermen tied their *odi* to the mooring posts in a line. Then they tied sticks to the nets before throwing them into the sea.

As the four sides of the nets rose to the surface there was a *raan-raan* sound. Trying not to lose any baitfish, the fishermen put their feet low in the *odi* for balance. It was a struggle for each group of four men to pour their nets into the boats. They noticed the baitfish were Indian anchovies and *kashafaiy*. The boats that wanted more, hauled up a second load and then all the *odi* sailed off together.

When the fishermen left the protection of the island, they found themselves surrounded by a sea full of fish moving like ripples around a rock. The *odi* caught between four and five hundred fish each, until they couldn’t take any more aboard. It was the biggest type of tuna. The men unloaded their haul ashore, took on more baitfish in the harbour and returned to fishing without even bothering to divide the first catch. Those boats with men who were willing, fit and able, went fishing five or six times; even the lazy, cowardly, careless or aimless fishermen went out two or three times. For three days there was fishing like this, until there were no more tuna in the sea and no baitfish left on the reef.

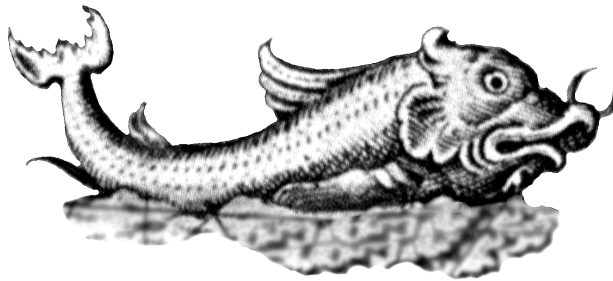
‘Now I have given you wedding rice,’ said Moosa Malin. ‘What you’ve received isn’t worth anything less than that.’

Moosa went to the ocean side of the island at sunset with a small brown paper book. There were people who noticed, but none knew what spell he actually did. Moosa was in Dhonfanu for about six months when one night he had a dream.

Moosa Malin's second dream

This isn't a suitable island for you, said the dream. Go and live in Buruni island on Kolhumadulu atoll.

At daybreak Moosa told his father-in-law he wanted to go to Buruni and visit friends there. The chief prepared a new fishing boat for travel the following day and Moosa and his wife left together. In less than four days, they sailed into Kolhumadulu atoll and anchored at the island.





Moosa Malin in Buruni

Moosa Malin went into Buruni while the others stayed onboard. He met the island chief and together they walked down to the beach. Moosa called out for his wife to come ashore with her luggage and told the crew to go. The couple were taken to the chief's house.

Next day Moosa said to the chief, 'May I have a block of land here?'

The two men walked around the island and the young man asked for a place away from the inhabited area. The chief gave him a block where he wanted, so Moosa borrowed an axe and went into the forest to cut buttress-roots from a screw-pine tree. After observing an auspicious time, Moosa built a hut. He made benches for chairs and beds from the stems of coconut fronds and then brought his wife to her new home.

A week later, he told her, 'I'm going to Malè. I have to get more building materials.'

'You are going away and leaving me in a place with no relatives, mother or father!'

'Don't worry, you will be in the care of the chief.'

Moosa Malin in Malè

Moosa sailed for Malè in an *odi* and reached his destination in about four days. As the vessel anchored in the harbour, he opened his luggage chest and took out a sarong two and a half yards long. He wrapped it around his body with a knot

in the shape of a nautilus shell, and placed a twin sash around his waist. Then Moosa tied a striped handkerchief to his head, adjusted to the right, and dressed in this elegant manner he headed to the king's palace.

'Why have you returned here, Moosa Malin?' the king asked as he walked in.

'I am married now and trying to build a house in Buruni island on Kolhumadulu atoll. I can't do it alone so I came to ask if you will build the house for me.'

The king summoned the treasurer and ordered him to prepare a government vessel.

'Load it with white teak and seasoned timber, carpentry tools, carpenters and food.'

These things were done without delay, and the king was notified when everything was ready.

Within two days the government boat sailed off and the Buruni *odi* left a little later. When the first vessel reached the island, the timber and other things were unloaded and the carpenters and builders started to work. Meals and snacks were served onboard. The house and roof took only fifteen days to complete and around the property they erected a fence with an entrance gate. Their work done, the government men sailed away.

Moosa Malin now began to wonder what he should do for a living. He knew all the different types of work that people did. In his view, the best way to earn a livelihood was toddy tapping, so he tied rungs onto forty-five coconut palms. After a week the palms came into production and he began bringing the toddy home. On each end of his toddy pole he carried twenty containers and he would bring home forty full containers every day. Wealth and comfort soon came to the house and Dhon Aisa found herself pregnant. During the ninth month the couple began to discuss the selection of a midwife.

'Who shall we get from this island? People say the midwife from the south ward is best.'

So Dhon Aisa decided that was the woman she wanted.

The midwife kills the babies

Dhon Aisa began to feel labour pains and Moosa fetched the midwife. She bathed Aisa, put her on the bed and kept her under observation. After three bouts of labour, Aisa gave birth to a baby girl – a perfect beauty. The shine from her forehead lit up the curtained enclosure. Acting quickly, the midwife squeezed the baby's neck and choked her to death. Then she cried out, 'Moosa Malin, my brother! The new-born's soul has risen!'

‘What can we do about it?’ replied the shocked husband. ‘The body belongs to us but the soul belongs to someone else. When required, it is taken away. There is nothing we can do, praise Allah.’

The baby’s body was washed, dressed and buried outside the gate. Over the following years this midwife killed six more of their babies the same way.

Dhon Aisa was pregnant with the seventh child and the time of birth was approaching when she said to her husband, ‘Six babies are dead, and none of their souls have stayed with us. Shall we get a different midwife this time?’

‘We’ll do whatever you think best. I can get any midwife on the island.’

The discussion ended but in the ninth month, Dhon Aisa’s labour pains began.

‘Please go to the north ward midwife this time,’ she pleaded.

When Moosa Malin went to the other midwife and explained that Aisa was in labour, the woman demanded to know where their usual midwife was.

‘She’s around, but none of our six babies have survived. Aisa wants me to bring you this time.’

‘That’s not the right thing to do! That woman’s the best midwife on the island. I’m virtually incapable compared to her! If you use me, there’ll be rivalry between us. I don’t want that. Please go and use her. The babies aren’t dying because of her; it’s up to someone else. Don’t ask me. Go and get her!’

Moosa started begging, ‘Come, just for me.’

‘All right,’ she sighed and relented, ‘Malin my brother go home. I’ll do it.’

With a friend’s help, the midwife gathered a very young green coconut, a cheese fruit plant with a taproot and a tiny leaf from a new palm sprout. On these things she wrote magic words and set off for Moosa Malin’s house. She spread the spell of the young green nut both outside and inside the house, before cracking it on the mid-doorway. The midwife planted the cheese fruit plant where the candlelight fell just outside the house and placed the palm tip beside the bed. Dhon Aisa was bathed and comforted. After three bouts of pain she gave birth. It was yet another beautiful girl and the shine on the baby’s face and forehead brightened the whole house.

Look at this! thought the midwife. *The other midwife from the southern ward must have wickedly killed this woman’s six children! I could never commit murder like that.*

‘Moosa Malin my brother,’ she said, ‘please go outside and kill a feral cat and bring it here.’

Genealogy - Dhon Hiyala

Black Hassan Mohamed

|

Amina

his Maroshi island daughter,
mother unnamed

|

Raaveri Ali

her Maroshi island son,
father unnamed

|

first marries **Sakeena**
(an orphan) in Maroshi island

|

7 children and Sakeena die suddenly from disease

Raaveri Ali then marries **Amina**
(an orphan) in Komandu island

|

Hussein (Ali and Amina's eldest son)
runs away to Malè, aged 9

|

Raaveri Moosa (Ali and Amina's second son)
goes to Malè, aged 11
later known as

Malin Moosa

|

marries **Dhon Aisa**
in Dhonfanu island,
and they move to Buruni island

|

Dhon Hiyala

their daughter,
born in Buruni

Dhon Hiyala lives

A dead cat was a substitute for the new-born baby, and the midwife buried it outside the fence in a small coffin.

'I wonder if you would look after this child, Moosa, without anyone seeing it?' she asked.

'Why not? I'm a carpenter and builder, and here's the timber!'

There was some wood left over from the government supplies used to build his house. He dug a big hole in the bathing area and built an underground room. Moosa then paid the midwife and received her blessing.

'Please madam, don't mention my child as you go about your business,' he begged.

'I probably won't say anything.'

Because she only said 'probably', Moosa gave her a lot of money and asked again, 'Woman, please don't speak about my child.'

Again she answered using the word 'probably', so Moosa gave her a Rangoon bag full of gold equal to her own weight.

'Please don't mention my child,' he implored her.

'I can say with assurance that I will not speak of Moosa Malin's child unless a death sword is only a hair's breadth away from my neck.'

After that promise, she was allowed to go.





A gift from the Black European from Goa

At dawn, Moosa went out to bathe and saw seven sailing ships moored in the harbour. The new arrivals were climbing down into the landing boats. Shaking with fear Moosa crept into a turtle hole and covered himself completely with sand except for his eyes.

The boats approached and he heard shouting, 'Don't be afraid; get up! We are carrying gold nuggets sent by the Black European from Goa for the baby who was born last night.'

Earlier the Black European, son of the black Goan infidel, had a dream that told him an exceptional queen would be born on the island of Buruni in Maldives. He believed the dream and began to send ships to Buruni island laden with gold nuggets every three months. Later, the ships were sent once a year.

Malin walked into the island with the new arrivals. Near the houses, cowry shells were crawling all over the ground and when the gold had been removed from the ships, they were filled with these shells. The seven ships sailed away into the dark clouds of a storm that splintered their rudders. The fleet drifted and hit Lhaimagu island reef, the same night the son of Lhaimagu Hassanbey was born. So the island headmen there decided the seven ships were wrecked on behalf of the newborn boy.

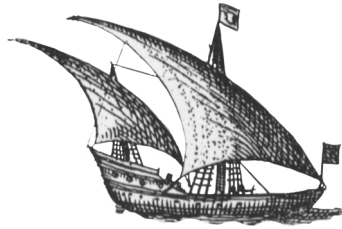
On that same day, another seven sailing ships full of money left the Indian mainland heading for Aden. These ships met a huge storm and were driven onto the reef of Hulhudheli island. That was the night Ali Fulhu was born. The Hulhudheli headmen also said the seven wrecks were for the baby born that night.

Let us return to the story of the Black European.

The first time his ships arrived was the night Dhon Hiyala was born, and the Black European kept returning. Three years later he had another dream, he had just reached Maldives on his way south with nine ships loaded with gold nuggets.

This is a waste of money. Moosa Malin's daughter Dhon Hiyala has died, the dream told him.

Shocked, the Black European jumped out of bed and questioned some Maldivians about the girl. He learnt that Dhon Hiyala was still alive but then he also realised he could never marry her. Losing all desire to trade in the islands, the Black European ordered his ships to turn around and head back to Goa.



Ali Fulhu of Hulhudheli

Black Ahmed was the father of Ali Fulhu, the Hulhudheli baby. Ali seemed to be quite normal as a child. He always listened obediently to his parents even while being breastfed, and he was so naive that he couldn't tell the difference between a hen and a rooster, or between water and fire.

He had been going to the mosque for thirteen years when one morning after dawn prayer as he sat reciting *zikur*, he heard a strange sound from the direction of the *qibla*. He was so frightened that he couldn't bear to sit there any longer and went looking for the source of the noise. Ali searched around the mosque and went into the street, looking up and down the road, but there was no sign of anything except a girl whose hair had been left to grow... her dress was developing contours... her impressive body was lit up by her rosy complexion. As she walked, the stitches stretched in her dress. This was the sound he had heard.

Ali Fulhu returned home where his father was lying on a mat spread across the small bench. The son walked up to the door and spoke respectfully, 'Father, I'm afraid to go to the mosque on my own anymore. Today at morning prayer, I heard a very weird noise coming from the *qibla*. I'm frightened.'

His words made Black Ahmed extremely angry.

‘Such wickedness! You have walked to the mosque alone since you were very young, and now you have grown up and can understand the difference between right and wrong, you say you don’t want to go to the mosque! Just wait and see what I do to you!’

Ahmed grabbed the coconut frond broom and stalked out of the house. Then Ali Fulhu’s mother Dhon Dhaitha (also known as Amina Faanu) said to her husband, ‘Hey Ahmed, haven’t you heard the ancient saying: *Things you do without knowing why, will bring you pain and sorrow?* So think about what your son is saying before you punish him. He’s afraid of going alone. Can’t you send someone from around here to walk with him to the mosque? Anyone will send their child with him in return for food and clothing.’

Ahmed, who was a rich man, knew this was true. So he went around the island checking with people and searching for a kind and obedient boy about Ali’s age. He returned with someone and left the new companion with his fourteen year-old son. They played until midday and Ali said, ‘Let’s go to the mosque.’ The two boys walked together along the mosque street, stopping at the crossroads.

‘If I ask you something, would you tell me the truth?’ said Ali.

‘I won’t lie. You are my master today,’ replied the boy.

‘Don’t let my father and mother know I have talked about this. Friend, who is the girl who often walks along this road here?’

‘You mean the girl with growing hair, a beautiful young body pressing through her dress, and a rosy complexion?’

‘Yes, her.’

‘She’s Hawwa Fulhu from the house of the island chief.’

‘Oh, then I know her too. We used to go to school together. I haven’t seen her for so long... now I remember. My friend, you may have heard that I never had trouble walking to the mosque even when I was very small and couldn’t tell water from fire. Thanks, now you can go home and wait for me there.’

Ali Fulhu went straight to the Hawwa Fulhu’s house without bothering to visit the mosque. The chief was lying on a sofa chair under the northern verandah. He jumped up the moment he saw Ali and said, ‘Please cross the operculum threshold as a friend.’

As Ali entered the house the chief asked him to sit on the sandalwood planks of the fragrant aloe-wood bench.

‘What is the purpose of your visit here?’ he asked.

‘No particular reason... I was trying to catch birds at the beach and on the way home I felt thirsty, so I came here.’

The chief glanced outside and said, ‘Hawwa Fulhu my daughter, bring a nice glass of water for Ali to drink, and get the hookah ready for smoking. Prepare a proper serving of betel leaf and areca nut. I’m going to the mosque. Don’t be unkind to Ali Fulhu.’ With these words, the chief left.

Ali Fulhu and Hawwa Fulhu

Apart from the young couple, there was no one else in the house. Ali sat on a large swing in the middle room of the house, while Hawwa went to the northern verandah with a blue glass and a thick piece of cloth. She filled the glass with filtered water, flavouring it with good quality rosewater from Hyderabad. Hawwa handed it to Ali and after drinking, he touched her fingers as he returned the empty glass. A little later, she brought in the hookah and they sat on the swing smoking, chewing betel leaf, laughing and making jokes.

It was late afternoon by the time Ali left. He checked the sky's four horizons and the ground, and headed home where he climbed on the big bench and opened a large chest. Taking out a floral-print rose scarf he spread it on the bench. Ali removed seven dress lengths of sky-blue fabric with a shine on one side, and folded them into the open scarf. Next he added three rolls of lining material, one pound of cotton wool of various colours, two packs of sewing thread, two cards of sewing needles, two pounds of silver thread, two pounds of golden thread, and two handkerchiefs. All these things were tied into a bundle and he wrapped the whole load again with a black embroidered scarf.

Ali made sure nobody was watching. He checked for people in the carpenters' workshop and toddy kitchens, and searched the tops of the palms for *raaveri* men. Finally Ali looked up and down the road in both directions. Only then did he give the bundle to his friend, asking him to take it to the island chief's house.

After receiving these gifts, the island chief chose an auspicious hour on an auspicious day to begin creating Hawwa Fulhu's first grownup dress with stitching and embroidery around the neckline. When the garment was finished, the chief determined the three most favourable days of that auspicious year and chose one of those days for Hawwa to wear the dress for the first time.

It was the night of Saturday the fourteenth of Rajab month. The moon was rising and Pleiades was in the descendent, Delphinus was in mid-heaven, and celestial asterisms were in lucky positions. With the stars so favourable, Hawwa put on her first dress.

Some of Hulhudheli's learned people said her dressing that Saturday night, when Delphinus was in mid-heaven, meant that good fortune would come dancing towards her. Others dismissed the idea. Though the chief dressed his daughter at an auspicious time, they said, it didn't mean anything and nothing good would happen. The discussion ended there.

Hawwa Fulhu turns her face from Ali

On Sunday evening Ali Fulhu picked and prepared betel leaves, and after sunset prayer he walked around the island wards visiting houses. He brought home nineteen men to act as witnesses. When he flicked a finger against their hard stomach muscles, there was a ‘ting’ sound. After the late prayer, he said to the men, ‘Please go to the chief’s house and get Hawwa Fulhu’s dowry price and consent. Then come back here.’

At Hawwa’s place, the men found her lying on her bed with her back towards them and she wouldn’t turn around. The witnesses approached the girl and spoke, but she wouldn’t reply. When it was near midnight, they said, ‘Young woman, you are very rude and ill-mannered. Ali Fulhu wouldn’t have acted without your agreement, so this is a very ugly thing to do. Old people say, *‘Lost dignity never returns’*. We are leaving.’

‘Wait a little longer,’ pleaded the chief. He made his daughter sit up and lean on him.

‘My child, I am your father who brought you up with endless kindness. Accept my advice and give your dowry price and consent.’ But Hawwa lay down again and turned away. She was like a rock.

When the witnesses returned, they found Ali moving impatiently up and down the street.

‘She won’t give her dowry or consent, even though we begged!’

‘In a matter like this, there should be no need to beg,’ said Ali. ‘That’s a sign of weakness.’

From his pocket Ali gave each man a gold coin to keep them happy, and they went home without thinking about their lost sleep.

The dream that changed Ali Fulhu’s life

After Ali had his dinner and went to sleep that night, he dreamed.

Don’t try to marry someone in your island. Your new bride is on the island of Buruni, in Kolhumadulu atoll. Go there. And you must do it this way... listen carefully.

Build an odi from black coral with milky glass railing, a silver stern and a rudder of pure gold. Make the prow from hard operculum, and use inlaid fish teeth for the crosspieces. The mast must be inlaid with fish teeth too, and the cringle fittings on the edge of the sail should be fashioned from gold. Bring Dhiggaru Hassan to be the master carpenter in charge of construction.

At this point, Ali woke up. He thought the dream’s voice was Satan trying to foil his marriage plans because the building materials the dream ordered him to use were simply unobtainable. He fell back to sleep again, and dream returned.

Don't get too worried about things, it said. Build a pier into the ocean and read the special prayer to the sea. If a holy man appears in the water, ask him for black coral and other things you need. He will provide them.

Ali heard the crow of a rooster and woke up again. It was still dark and he hurried down to the beach near the mosque street. Sitting on the white sand, he pondered over the dream until daybreak. Then he bathed in the sea and went to the mosque, washing at the fresh-water well and doing ritual ablutions before entering the building for dawn prayer. After reciting *zikuru*, *thasbeeh*, *salvaaiy* and *fathibaa*, he left the mosque and on his way home an old woman approached him and said, 'Hey, Ali Fulhu, listen! Hawwa Fulhu has stopped eating, drinking, chewing betel-leaf and bathing. The island chief says to tell Ali Fulhu that his daughter may die. So why don't you get married today?'

'Are you mad?' Ali Fulhu said angrily. 'Someone who wouldn't give her consent, now decides she wants me... I have no intention of marrying that girl.'

Half way down the street, two other women came up and said, 'Look, Ali Fulhu, trees and palms don't make mistakes but human beings do. Hawwa Fulhu asks for forgiveness and wants to marry you tonight.'

'Are you all crazy?' said Ali even more enraged. 'I would rather marry a bat or crow than marry that Hawwa Fulhu from the island chief's house!'

He stalked off, and when he was very close to his house two men came up to him and said, 'Hawwa Fulhu isn't eating, drinking, chewing betel leaf or bathing. The chief is asking you to prepare to marry her this evening.'

Ali Fulhu was furious with the two men, 'No one shall stand in front of me and talk about such things again! Asking me to marry the chief's daughter is like asking me to marry my own mother!'

Ali went into his house and sat on the large bench with his head down. His father asked him what he was thinking about.

'Today when I went to the beach, the kingfishers, crows and herons were eating in their nests,' Ali replied. 'Baitfish were so plentiful they lay washed up on the beach. I saw the fishermen setting off and I yearned to go with them.'

'Son, I don't have a boat,' said Black Ahmed. 'You can go fishing with someone else and see what's goes on.'

'That's not a good idea, my boy,' interrupted his mother Amina Faanu. 'I know what happens if you go fishing on someone else's boat. They row the boat to the shallow reef and look for baitfish. After seeing the fingerlings, they drop anchors at both ends and place the vessel across the current. As the water flows under the boat, the small baitfish will bare their teeth and the big baitfish will stare and start to bite the keel. The captain quickly rolls up three balls of minced fish and throws one into the sea. The moment it hits the water, the fingerlings snap at it and gather round like a growing palm - a solid mass stretching from the surface to the seafloor. Four long poles are tied on the corners of the baitfish net before it goes

into the lagoon and the moment it hits the water, another ball of minced fish goes in. The fingerlings begin to fill the net, until you can't see any part of it, not the rope, the stone, the reef, not even the poles. The depths of the water will be hidden by swarming young fish. 'Widen the top,' says the captain. 'Bring it closer. We don't want to lose any. Widen the net and haul it up!'

'When the four edges of the net begin to surface,' Amina Faanu continued, 'you'll hear the *raan-raan* sound in the net and as it's hauled in, fingerlings are lifted out with the small bait scooper and a wooden bailing bucket until the net is light enough to be tipped into the holds. Then the captain hurries to release the corks from the water inlet valves. One cork from the *maavaiy*, one from the *heyvaiy*, one from the *kolhuvaiy*, one from the mast-prow *vaiy*, and one from *medhuvaiy*. But even then the fingerlings die, turning their bellies up. The captain rushes to remove the rest of the corks in the valves and level the two *fahgan'du*, but the fingerlings will continue to die until he orders the lifting of the *dbefah niboo* and the baitfish finally settle down.

'Once again the net is put into the sea,' said Amina, 'and the boat turns around. The water level in the vessel will be above the mast gap and up to the *dbethaa filaa*. You, my son, will be sitting on the *mathi-malbu* watching the action, and the captain will say to you, 'Hey there, short little black boy! Take this big bailing bucket and start emptying the water from the *heyvaiy*'. To avoid such nasty and insulting comments, you shouldn't go fishing in someone else's boat. Your father doesn't own any vessels, but there are twenty of mine on this island.'

Ali Fulhu decided not to go fishing that day, and instead he said, 'Mother, would you show me your twenty boats?'

They went to the beach and Ali peered into the first boatshed and shook the *odi's* stern piece. The rotten timber broke away from the hull. In a second shed, he shook another stern piece and it fell off too. He tested and broke nineteen *odi* the same way.

The single remaining boat was less than two years old. Ali left it and returned home and said to his parents, 'I've seen all the rotten boats... now, mother, don't get upset. Father, I think we should build a new one.'

Ali Fulhu goes fishing

'Ok son, we'll build a fishing boat,' agreed Black Ahmed.

'To build a boat, first we need a crew of fishermen,' said Ali. 'You must find strong young men; the sort of men whose bodies make a copper 'ting' sound when they're flicked on the stomach. Bring me nineteen hard-boned, strong-blooded young men.'

Black Ahmed went out and checked the island wards, and found eighteen young men of the calibre his son described. Then he added Hulhudheli Captain

Bulhaa Dhonfuthu as the nineteenth man. This man knew the sea and had the intelligence to bring out the best in the crew. All the men met at Black Ahmed's house and he told them, 'I want you to go fishing with my beloved precious son.'

'Brother Black Ahmed, Ali Fulhu can't even drag a skipjack tuna from the sea, so I'm afraid there's no way we can take him fishing,' said the captain. Black Ahmed opened a box and gave each man a handful of gold nuggets.

The captain said that they would go out fishing every day even if Ali caught nothing, and the boy was introduced to the crew.

They all went to sleep after dinner but Ali woke up and opened a book on propitious astrology where he read that if the boat was launched at the time when Leo is in the mid-heavens then the full wealth of the sea will come dancing towards the boat. He closed the book, locked it in the box and went back to sleep.

Well before dawn Ali went into the boatshed and sprinkled some soot. Observing an auspicious hour he wiped the soot brush on the *odi* and then told the crew there to finish applying the dust while he went home. When they had finished painting the *odi*, Ali returned and took an incense burner and added some red-hot coals. Then he broke a piece of ambergris and placed it on the embers.

Boarding the *odi*, he recited praises to the Prophet and prayers for wealth and success. He made a *fanditha* to remove any chance of misfortune on the *odi*, and they pushed and launched it into the sea. The rigging was taken aboard, a coconut wood mast erected and a set of oars put in place. With the main sail loaded, the *odi* was ready for mooring. Ali told the captain to anchor it securely and bring the baitfish mince aboard. Then he went home to get a little more sleep.

Later when the crewmen arrived and the baitfish net was loaded, Ali gave the order to man the oars and the vessel glided away from Hulhudheli. The captain looked at the sea and said, 'I can't believe my eyes! There's a solid mass of baitfish! Drop one anchor on the deep side, and another at the shallow end.'

As soon as the light fell on the water, some fish mince was dissolved into the sea. The fingerlings, large and small, came sniffing around as if they were going to eat the gunwales and outer planks on the deck edge. The small ones glared and stared, and the big ones did the same. Long poles were tied onto the net before it went into the sea. The net stretched out underwater and the four edges tightened as it emerged. The baitfish *raan-raaned* all over the net and the captain scooped the fingerlings into the *odi* until the net could be tipped in and the poles untied.

The net was folded away and the anchors raised at each end of the boat. With the stays tied to the yard and a rhythmic cry of *aadhalhoa-baadhalhoa*, the sail rose to the parral. The side-stays secured, the boom was set and pushed into the clew of the sail. The stay rope ends were gathered and hung from their hooks, and the crew tied down the cords at the base of the sail. Seawater washed along the edge of the boat as it began to push through the water with gathering speed.

They came out of the atoll lagoon into the ocean and noticed a school of fish in the distance where the black terns hovered. When the *odi* reached the fish, Ali Fulhu called out to the captain, 'Throw a single scoop of bait in the sea.'

Straight away the man rolled up his sarong into a g-string and stepped down into the *heyvaiy* hold. He threw some baitfish overboard. Goodness! Tuna began to jump after the fingerlings and towards the *odi*. The captain emptied the *heyvaiy* of bait and moved up into the *maavaiy* hold. He cleaned out the bait in the two *dhippathuva* holds and then he shouted, 'That's the end of our precious baitfish!'

Ali moved afore and found a short fishing rod, then came back to the stern deck.

'Pack the fish neatly,' he shouted, and they arranged the fish as Ali hauled tuna aboard. Later, the crew reorganised the gear at the bow and headed towards the island. Fully laden, the *odi* was soon moored in Hulhudheli harbour with a catch of fifteen hundred fish.

Black Ahmed arrived just as his son landed and said, 'Well, did you manage to drag any fish from the sea?'

'Yes,' his son replied, 'about fifteen hundred of them, as a matter of fact! The *odi* was too small!'

After distributing the tuna, the men went home to eat and when they returned Black Ahmed said, 'If you are taking catches like that, we should bring the carpenters from Dhiggaru to build a proper fishing *odi*.'

So the fishing gear was removed from the boat and they all went home to wash and eat again. Now they intended to sail to Dhiggaru.



Hawwa Fulhu's *fanditha*

When Hawwa heard that Ali was bringing carpenters from Dhiggaru, she vowed to herself, *Allah willing, there'll be no carpenters coming here from that island.*

Meanwhile, Ali prepared for his voyage. The crewmen loaded three hundred kilos of rice, one hundred kilos of rolled rice, six large portions of sugar, three huge servings of dates and six hundred coconuts from the pantry house. They also added two urns of fish sauce and six hundred dried fish. Then Ali had his luggage taken aboard. The nineteen crewmen carried it on their shoulders, suspended from a length of timber. They puffed and panted, resting seven times. When they had finished loading the vessel, the edge of the deck was nearly in the water.

Suddenly, a voice ashore called out for the *odi* not to go.

'Don't listen to that babbling,' said Ali. 'Unfurl the sail and secure the yard and mast. Untie the upper brace rope and the lower brace. Don't listen to what anyone else is saying. Raise the sail up to the parral.'

The square sail braces were brought back towards the lanteen sail and the vessel slid carefully through the reef. Ali Fulhu ordered the gaff attached to the cringles to catch the wind and stop them flapping. An agile young man ran up the deck to adjust the ropes and sails.

Hawwa Fulhu watched the boat leaving and thought, *Look at that! The Hulhudheli thief is trying to make a trip to Dhiggaru, but I know he secretly intends to sail to Buruni island. He won't be going anywhere!*



The first *fanditha*

Hawwa Fulhu walked out onto the beach and etched a fishing boat in the sand with her black coral knife. She also drew a black eel whale and stabbed the knife into the dorsal fin... Oh my God! Suddenly a huge dark eel whale appeared near Ali Fulhu's *odi*!

In despair the crewmen cried out, 'Ali Fulhu, our protector! Look at this! We've lost our mothers and homes now!'

Unruffled, Ali gave the order, 'If you want more speed and a shorter journey, raise the main gaff and mizzen sails.'

When these sails were up, the *odi* moved faster and the giant fish seemed to disappear behind the ship. But a short while later the beast was again slithering through the water towards the boat. Despite the danger, Ali stayed calm and asked for a piece of sharp frond stalk from the ship's awning. Holding it in his hand, he stared at the *odi*'s backwash and into the angry wide-open mouth of the whale. Ali broke the piece of palm stalk into two pieces and at that exact moment, the vicious fish died and sank into the depths.

Thwarted, Hawwa Fulhu went into the woods looking for pandanus. She folded a few leaves together and sewed them with a piece of palm frond fibre. Spreading the whole thing flat, she cut the pandanus into the shape of a rising storm cloud and threaded string through the lower edge, inserting sharp frond slithers. She carried her creation out onto an unstable spur of sand where she drew an *odi* with all its rigging. Then Hawwa placed the storm cloud cut-out on the windward side of the drawing and saying a spell, she blew with her lips and tossed sand up into the air with her feet. Simultaneously she broke the mast on the *odi* drawn in the sand.

As Hawwa watched the horizon, a cloud spread from the north across to the west and towards the south, becoming double-layered and funnelling up into the sky. Two tornadoes dropped from each end of the growing storm and the darkest part of the cloud began to stir ominously. It seemed as if all seven winds were touching the water together.

When the cloud burst, Ali's crewmen called out, 'We are thinking of you, O Gracious Allah! The boat is going to sink! Protect us, Ali!'

The young man smiled. 'Drop the main and gaff sail. Let the *odi* travel with the gale and current. Release the mast into the wind.'

Ali moved to the front of the vessel, telling someone to take control of the rudder. Then he opened a propitious *fanditha* book and did some magic. The cloud split and slid away to the edges of the horizon, leaving the *odi* drifting smoothly. On Ali's orders, all the sails were raised again.

But Hawwa Fulhu was not giving up, and again she traced an *odi* on the sand. She took particular care drawing the third keel plank before stabbing it with her black coral knife.

Back on the boat, the crewmen cried out again, 'Ali Fulhu! The third plank has fallen off!'

'Quick, lower the mainsail,' Ali shouted.

The sail came down and they raised a white cloth distress signal up the mast.

When she saw what had happened, Hawwa went home laughing but even before she got there, a boy ran to the house of Black Ahmed and cried, ‘Ali Fulhu is in the sea! He is swimming in the sea!’

Ahmed and his wife raced to the beach in alarm. Seven boats were launched from the island and they headed out towards the sinking craft.

‘Ali, my precious boy! Quick, get into my *odi*,’ shouted Black Ahmed.

‘Save the crewmen first, father!’

They were all rescued before Ali came aboard and asked his father to tow the *odi*. But Black Ahmed refused to save a boat that had nearly drowned his own son. While the seven vessels sailed back to the island, the *odi* was left to sink to the bottom of the dark sea.

When they landed, the crewmen dried themselves and hurried off to their homes.



Hawwa Fulhu’s insults, and the last *fanditha*

Ali had washed and was on his way to the mosque when Hawwa Fulhu came up and said in an insulting laughing tone, ‘There are a lot of carpenters from Dhiggaru around here, aren’t there! That was a fast trip to Dhiggaru, aye!’

He didn’t reply. Instead Ali went into the mosque and prayed.

On his way home, he stopped to tell Hawwa, ‘I’m going to bring the Dhiggaru carpenters here before afternoon prayers today.’

Ali called out to his father when he got back to the house, ‘Let’s load another Dhiggaru-bound *odi* with three hundred and thirty-six kilos of rice, three large slabs of jaggery sugar and a hundred and forty-four kilos of rolled rice. Don’t forget my luggage either.’

This time, six other boats sailed out of Hulhudheli harbour to travel with Ali’s *odi* to Dhiggaru.

Hawwa was smiling as she thought, *Both Ali Fulhu and I studied at the same house. Our knowledge of fanditha should be about equal. We'll see if that's true.*

Concentrating her thoughts, she etched a dark eel whale on the ground and added yellow fins. Then she stabbed the fins with her black coral knife. Suddenly a yellowfin black eel whale appeared at the rear of Ali's *odi* and moved towards it. The crewmen cried out in despair, 'Ali Fulhu! We are going to lose our houses and mothers again!'

Ali looked up and saw there was no time to waste; the whale was moving fast. He gave his orders, 'Raise the main gaff and topgallant sail if you want speed and a fast journey. And don't forget the jib!'

The *odi* raced ahead as Ali shouted across to the other boats, 'These *fanditha* aren't hurting us much. This time we'll fetch the carpenters! You go on ahead to Dhiggaru!'

The other six *odi* sailed off and soon entered Dhiggaru island's lagoon while Ali went to the front of his boat, removed the prow and began to poke fearlessly at the whale. He raced his vessel before the wind, gaining maximum speed and soon the fish disappeared behind. But a few minutes later, it was back and raging with anger this time. The water churned past both sides of its mouth so fast that the horizon disappeared. With a grin, Ali said to his crew, 'One way or another I'll return with the Dhiggaru carpenters. Hang on to the tiller!'

He went up to the side of the ship and looked down. The fish was there with its mouth open and its head ready to smash the rudder. In a single swift movement, Ali stabbed the prow into the mouth of the monster. He watched gleefully as the beast sank into the bubbling sea with blood spurting from its throat. By now the *odi* was flooded to its top planks, but they had nearly reached Dhiggaru.

Hawwa Fulhu knew what had happened. 'There's nothing more I can do,' she said sadly to herself. 'This time the Dhiggaru carpenters will be brought to Hulhudheli.'



Ali Fulhu in Dhiggaru

Ali sailed into the harbour and the ship's rope was attached to the mooring post. When the anchor dropped, the vessel sat securely.

'Where does this *odi* come from? Who owns it?' asked a voice from on shore.

'We're from Hulhudheli.'

'What is your trip for?'

'Collecting fragments of gold and silver from the islands.'

'There is a boy called Ali Fulhu in Hulhudheli, the son of Wealthy Black Ahmed. Is he well?'

'Ali Fulhu is here on the boat!'

'Ali! Hurry up and come ashore. People will buy your small chopping knives, pocket knives and rings.'

'Is this island one of those five *gema* islands?' (Author's note: the *gema* tradition is the requirement for formally dressed visitors to make a donation to the people of the island.)

'We not sure, but we do have a *gema* tradition here.'

Hmm, well I guess I'll find out, thought Ali as he opened his luggage chest.

He took out a gold-banded sarong two and a half yards long. Wrapping it around his waist, Ali secured the ends with a knot in the shape of a nautilus shell. Then he put on a pair of Egyptian pleated trousers, tied the waist cord and left it hanging. A yellow velvet robe was next, and he tied a sash of two different colours on each side of his waist.

Next, Ali tied a five-striped handkerchief around his head in the *himithi* shape, pleating it into sections two fingers wide. One corner of the handkerchief was made to stick up, and the other hung down. Ali put a string of beads around his neck and under his arms, and slid two gold bangles onto his wrists. Finally, he clipped into place two golden anklets, set with diamond and pearl and various gold coins.

When he was dressed, Ali called out, 'Is master carpenter Hassan well?'

Someone from the beach yelled back that he had died four years ago, but Ali didn't believe it. He climbed onto the shoulders of a man who carried him ashore.

As Ali Fulhu walked into the island, the cats and mice, the crows and chicks, and even the snakes and lizards gathered to discuss his beauty. It was the middle of the northeast monsoon, and there wasn't a single streak of cloud anywhere in the sky. But strangely there were constant flashes of lightning as if it was the season of thundery cloud! In the confusion, astrologers muddled up the zodiacs, and those who had left fish out to dry in the sun, brought it back inside, expecting rain.

But the lightning was really the glittering dress and ornaments that Ali Fulhu wore. By the time he reached the houses, shocked people were gathering at

street corners and crossroads. There were women holding coir-bags full of cowries collected from the reef, and others carrying head baskets of coconut husks collected from swampy beach areas. There were mothers holding toddlers in their arms, and people carrying bundles of firewood, and others lugging water in their pots.

‘Son, please call us ‘mother’ or ‘grandmother’ and bring us good fortune,’ said the older women to the glimmering new visitor.

‘I wish Ali Fulhu was *my* bridegroom,’ said some of the young women.

But the island men were jealous. ‘That Hulhudheli boy looks thin and pot-bellied,’ they mumbled.

‘Insulting Ali Fulhu is like abusing the food and water we prepare with our hands,’ retorted their wives.

Among the crowd some children pleaded with their mother, ‘Please show us Ali Fulhu!’ The woman told them to stop annoying her and the youngsters ran off so fast she had to chase after them. She was only able to get a glimpse of the corner of the handkerchief on Ali’s head, but that was enough for her to be able to live without food for nearly ten years. (In fact, if she lived for seventy years and rejected seven suitors, she still wouldn’t need to eat.)

As he walked, the aroma of Ali Fulhu’s footprints was like sweet yellow tecomia flowers mixed with the scent of saffron and ambergris. Everyone on Dhiggaru, no matter who they were, ran from one end of the street to the other, following Ali until he reached the house of master carpenter Hassan.

When Hassan saw the young man, he shook so much his legs slipped off the ground. The moment he tried to stand, Hassan fell face down in the middle of the yard, splitting his head open at the eyebrow and covering his beard and moustache with sand. When he finally stopped shaking, the carpenter sat up and on top of the small bench he spread out a mat covered in bo-tree leaf designs. He added a few cushions decorated with octopus patterns and formally asked Ali Fulhu to sit down. ‘Please come through the sea-trumpet wood doorway, and sit on this small bench of breadfruit timber. Ali, it isn’t *Ramazan* or *Eid* time right now, so what brings you to this island?’

‘I want you to come to Hulhudheli and build me a fishing *odi*, elder brother.’

‘Sorry, I can’t go at the moment, but I should be available in about five months.’

‘Master carpenter, don’t delay. Come to Hulhudheli now and build the vessel.’

‘Look, I’ll tell you frankly,’ explained Hassan. ‘My roof leaks and there’s no food. My wife and children don’t even have jewellery to wear. That’s why I can’t go.’

Ali ordered the crewmen to unload the ship and bring all the food and his luggage chest to Hassan’s house. After handing over the provisions, Ali opened his personal box and gave the carpenter three hundred rupees and fifty gold coins, and

another two hundred gun-*reals*. To the carpenter's wife and children, Ali presented an elaborately carved long waist chain, a set of golden bangles, a gold necklace, earrings and anklets. He gave them a cone-shaped covering for their hair buns, and *sandhalpur* flowers made of gold to put over the hair bun covers. Finally he presented a ring, set with red precious stone. Hassan's wife aggressively rolled her skirt up into two folds, stood next to Hassan and grabbed his beard. The master carpenter didn't need any more prompting. 'Ok, we'll leave now,' he relented.

On Ali Fulhu's orders, about a hundred and forty-four workers were assembled. Each man was given a necklace, anklets, a set of *bodugoh* bangles, and earrings. This calmed their wives, who had been scrunching up their faces and letting their children hang onto them untended. All the men went aboard to eat the prepared snacks. With the tide retreating, the boat was scraping on the sandy bottom, so the crew tightened the seaward mooring rope. Ali took hold of the rudder and ordered the upper and lower brace ropes released. Chanting *aadhalboa-baadhalboa*, the crew raised the sail up to the parral. Then the yardarm braces were drawn tight and the *odi* moved out of Dhiggaru harbour.

This was a time of unsettled weather at the beginning of the northeast monsoon. There was constant thunder and lightning, and the clouds were a solid mass as rain poured non-stop.

'Furl up the sail, son. We can't travel in this,' advised the old carpenter.

'Hassan, I am taking you to build a fishing *odi* for me,' said Ali ignoring the warning. 'This new vessel must have the same determination and strength I'm showing now.'

'Look boy, some people might be drowned. At least furl up part of the sail!'

'I said I am taking you to build a fishing *odi* for me. You must show the same enthusiasm that I have for the task.'

'Child, I will build an *odi* for you, as you ask. Now furl up the sail. When the wind from one storm passes, another one comes. There's nobody left dry here. In fact there's nothing dry. Most of the time I can hardly breathe!'

The *odi* arrived at Hulhudheli harbour just before afternoon prayer that same day. Ali's mother Amina had warmed twenty copper pots of water with the help of twenty women. Ali tied a rope onto the seaward mooring pole and as the boat swung around to the beach he threw out the landward mooring rope.

'Get the carpenters ashore as soon as you can,' Amina called out from the shore and as they landed, the women took each of the men by their hands and led them to Amina's house and the hot water for their baths. Later, they were given sweet pepper rice pudding at their own special carpenters' dormitory, and there the men slept with red-hot coals under their beds.

The Dhiggaru carpenters in the forest of Hulhudheli

At dawn, the Dhiggaru carpenters went into a swampy part of the forest and chopped out a tulip tree stern-piece for the *odi*.

‘That’s useless timber,’ said Ali when he saw it. ‘The part attached to the plank will dissolve in the sea and crack in the sun. No way should that timber ever be used for a boat.’

The carpenters went back to the mud and brought out sections of sea trumpet and two pieces of country almond timber. Then they cut pieces of softwood, two pieces of Alexander laurel wood, and two pieces of *wadelia calendulacea*. None of this timber was acceptable to Ali, because it dissolved in the sea and cracked in the sun, and all of the useless timber was discarded on the beach. Angry now, the master carpenter started yelling.

‘These people went into the forest at dawn! Not a drop of water has passed between their lips and it’s after midday. There’s no more timber left in the forest! Tell the crew to take us back to Dhiggaru.’

‘Not yet, master carpenter,’ sighed Ali. ‘Please just go to the house and eat.’

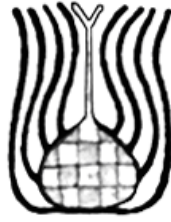
When the men had finished their meal and smoked and chewed betel-leaf, Ali said to Hassan, ‘I am giving you a rest for two months. I’ll pay your wages without any deduction.’

Everyone slept peacefully.

Ali Fulhu’s recitations

While the island was resting, Ali went to the sand-spit and captured forty turtles by turning them over. Then he caught forty hens, and the same number of bush birds. He picked a ripe lemon, took a smear of sticky secretion from underneath a cat’s tail, and collected pandanus and *guettarda* flowers. He took all these things to the ocean-side beach.

After returning home, Ali took some ambergris out of his box and locked it again. Then he gathered up a bundle of white cotton muslin and an incense holder full of glowing coconut-shell coals before walking back alone towards the beach road. He built a platform at the edge of the ocean and spread the muslin over it. Next, he made a bed and sprinkled flowers on top. Dropping ambergris into the incense burner, he began to recite. The waves in the ocean grew bigger and the air filled with noise as lightning flashed.



Ali Fulhu looked out across the sea and there was a man with a white pearly complexion standing beneath the crests of the waves. The man moved towards him and said, 'I have been sent by the ruler of this massive ocean because you made the sea rough and the king is disturbed. I am the senior minister. Please, tell us what you want.'

Ali continued his recitations without answering, while the minister waited in vain for an hour before returning to the depths. Ali continued his magic with even greater intensity. The lightning was so bright, people had to close their eyes.

The thunder became unbearable as waves grew into immense mounds. When they crashed on the reef, it seemed certain Ali's platform would be destroyed.

In the midst of this turmoil, a man of yellow-green complexion emerged from the sea. He was the third-ranked minister. Then came a man with soft pink skin; he was the king of the sea's seventh-ranked minister. Each of them begged Ali to explain what he wanted but he wouldn't utter a word. Eventually the ministers had to return, completely frustrated.

Ali intensified his recitations even more and began to recite the *saadhali baburu*. Thunder boomed as the waves rose huge and full of foam. The land glowed as shafts of lightning crackled and boiled the sea, and the air was filled with balls of fire.

In the tempest across the waves, Ali saw a ship powered by forty-two sails. It dropped anchor near the platform and from its deck a small boat was lowered into the sea. It had gold oarlocks. The grommets were made of diamonds and the oars of emerald. Nineteen young men from the ship climbed down into the boat and drummers, flute players and royal guards joined them. Then the king of the sea descended beneath a royal parasol with a peacock feather fan and three golden flower emblems. A child held the train of his gown.

As the small boat rowed towards the jetty, the drummers began to play the *misuru harubee* tune. Flute and trumpet players accompanied the drums as the small boat rowed up to the jetty. The king got off and spoke directly to Ali Fulhu.

'Why are you summoning the king of the Great Ocean?'

Once again Ali didn't utter a word. The king pushed past the platform and stood by the incense-burner, almost begging.

'What do you want? If it's live cowries, I'll fill Hulhudheli lagoon with them. If you want live fish, I'll give you enough to stink out the whole island!'

Ali Fulhu finally stopped reciting. He stood up respectfully and came close to the king, kissed him and shook his hands. Then Ali said, 'Please forgive and protect me. I couldn't find a stern piece for the *odi* we're building, and I called upon your highness because I need a black coral stern piece from the deep sea, and other help too.'

'All this trouble for such an insignificant problem! I sent three ministers! Why didn't you talk to them? So, what else do you want?'

'I want a tranquil sea when I travel, and Dhon Hiyala, the daughter of Komandu Moosa Malin, as my wife. I'd also like to be king of the Maldivé islands.'

The Great Ocean ruler smiled in amusement, 'Apart from you, there's no one else in this world who'll ever be that woman's husband. You will receive a black coral tree big enough to build an *odi*... and you may sail on the ocean whenever you like. However, as the child of a toddy-tapper, you can never have more than half the Dhivehi monarchy. I have spoken. Now, calm this wild ocean.'

Hearing the king grant almost everything he wished, Ali Fulhu began to recite the appropriate words for peace and tranquillity. The wind became a gentle breeze and serenity returned to the world. Imploring God by using the names *Allah* and *Adam's Allah*, the Ocean king walked towards the small boat with his musicians in front and the military following. The air was filled with the sound of drums, flutes and trumpets as the royal entourage rowed towards the ship and everyone climbed aboard.

Ali Fulhu watched as the ship sailed quickly away and disappeared. The ocean became smooth as paper, and he rolled the flowers neatly into the mat and tucked it under his arm. He took a lemon in his right hand, walked to the end of the platform and with all his strength, Ali threw the fruit out into the sea. The flowers and the mat were thrown into the water as well. Then Ali returned to land and cut the throats of the forty bush birds. There was no blood to be seen, so he cut the throats of the forty turtles and forty hens, but they didn't bleed either. In desperation, Ali took a piece of red silk and tied it around his first finger. He slit the skin and showed the blood to the ocean. Then he removed the muslin, dismantled his platform and discarded the red-hot coals before returning home.



Black Coral tree

That same night, Ali Fulhu dreamed again and saw a huge black coral tree drifting in the wind and sea current, and moving towards the shore near the spot where his platform had been. He went down to the ocean-side beach after the dawn prayer, and there was the tree. Hawwa Fulhu heard about this. She waited until Ali wasn't around and inserted a wooden wedge into the black coral, making it rock-hard.

Later that morning, Ali went to fetch the master carpenter.

'Let's take our axes and go to the ocean beach and cut out the stern,' urged the Hulhudheli lad.

The master carpenter came along with his assistants, taking a one-and-half pound axe and other axes of various sizes.

'Hurry, cut the stern piece,' ordered Ali.

'How can I chop out a section like that? I'm not allowed to hit a black coral tree with an axe. Ali, my precious friend, the moment news reaches Malè that I used an axe on a black coral tree, I'll receive a summons from the Maldivé king. I'll be taken out under the propeller tree and flogged until the skin is torn from my back, and then I'll be exiled to Huvadhu atoll.'

'Don't worry about all that,' said Ali. 'If necessary, I'll go to Malè in your place. They can flog me under that tree and send me to Huvadhu. I'll stay there until the *odi* is finished.'

But Hassan wasn't convinced.

'No, I'm too frightened,' he said. 'I can't touch the black coral tree with an axe.'

Ali was furious. He grabbed heaviest axe and hit the coral with a hard blow. The moment it touched the tree, the tool broke in half. The same thing happened with the two-and-half pound axe.

'This is a piece of black rock!' exclaimed the carpenter.

Hassan bent over and had a close look; there wasn't even a scratch on the surface. It was then Ali noticed the wooden wedge inserted in the coral. He looked up into the sky, observed the star positions and did a *fanditha*. This reversed Hawwa's spell and when the master carpenter hit the black coral tree again with the lightest axe, it cut right through.

'It's like an soft cotton tree from the overseas highlands!'

Hassan cut out two stern pieces, a keel fifteen yards long and trimmed three planks into shape.

'At this rate I'll finish chopping by midday!'

He called in his assistants, and around one hundred and forty-four young men began working in groups to cut out the planks and shape them for the sternpost section. The mast was prepared, and the doweling. The crossbeams were fashioned and the deck planks, a set of oars and oarlocks. After taking everything

they needed to build the *odi*, the remnants of the coral tree was returned to the ocean.

Hassan straightened his back and said, 'There it is, finished by midday as I promised.'

The materials and tools were taken to the boat building shed and the men returned to their homes.



Black coral *odi*

That night when everyone was asleep, Ali got up and checked his book for the most auspicious time to begin assembling the boat. He read that if the keel of the *odi* is laid down when *Delphini* is in the ascendant and *Arcturus Bootes* is in mid-heaven, then the fortunes of the sea would always come dancing towards the *odi*. Ali shut the book and went to sleep.

Waking at dawn, he put red-hot coals into the incense burner, picked out a lump of ambergris and went to the boat shed. He broke the ambergris into two halves and put them in the burner before reciting the *salavaaiy faathibaa*. At an auspicious time, the keel blocks were sunk into the ground, a fifteen-yard keel was laid in position and the stem and sternpost were fastened to both ends. The construction of the *odi* had begun.

Ali asked his mother to prepare a special feast for the laying of the keel. She hitched up her skirts and marched out to fetch nineteen young women. They eventually arrived and sat together on the big bench. Each one of them was given a dress of the same colour, a skirt and a red scarf. They put on their new clothes, tied the red scarves around their necks and began to pick and clean forty-eight kilos of rice. They cooked sweet sticky rice and poured the boiling mass onto the large cooling plate before serving everything onto special oval platters and covering the food with inverted bowls. Decorated lids were placed on top. She marked the plate for the person who was going to say the ceremonial prayers. A piece of cloth was folded in three pleats over each of the servings, and crowned with star decorations made from coconut fronds. Then she placed a gold coin in the middle of each star. The completed platters were wrapped in white muslin and taken to the *odi* shed. As soon as the food arrived and the gold coins distributed, the pudding was served.

Later, Hassan wanted more food.

'Hey Ali Fulhu, where's the required feast for the placement of the first planks?'

Ali mentioned this to his mother and she immediately cooked up ninety-six kilos of sticky rice. The nineteen young women carried it to the building site and the carpenters ate and drank again.

Not long afterwards, the master carpenter smiled mischievously.

'Hey, Ali Fulhu, where's the rice for marking the position of the holds?'

So this time the women cooked one hundred and forty-four kilos of pudding and delivered it to the builders. After they finished eating, the master carpenter still wanted more.

'Hey Ali, where's the food for the placement of the keelson?'

This time, two hundred and forty kilos of rice were cleaned and cooked into pudding. It was left to cool and then put on large serving platters. The nineteen women grunted under the weight as they carried the load of food to the shed. Tears poured from Hawwa Fulhu's eyes when they came back past her house

displaying the gifts they received for their work. Hawwa's head drooped and her chest was soaked with her sobbing.

After all that sticky rice pudding, the master carpenter grinned and said, 'Ali, I have finished the extra fittings for the ship. The mast is set, and the deck planks fitted. Please come and officially take possession of your *odi*. It has black coral gunwales, fitted and secured with dowels. The crosspieces at the prow are inserted and inlaid with fish teeth, and the deck rail is made of milky glass. The oarlocks are fashioned from emerald and there's a white silver stern, with a rudder of pure gold. The prow is made of operculum and the deck planks are black coral.'

Ali Fulhu rushed home and told his father to hurry to the boatshed to formally accept the *odi*.

They both looked closely at the vessel and said, 'Master carpenter, tell us your price.'

'I built this *odi* as a present for you.'

'But work of this calibre should be priced accordingly,' both father and son insisted.

'In that case, give me fifteen hundred pieces of gold.'

Ali fetched two bags of gold from his box at home. Seemingly satisfied, the master carpenter asked him to organise the return of the Dhiggaru carpenters. Ali summoned the one hundred and forty-four carpenters and gave each a roll of white cotton fabric.

Then he asked, 'Hassan will this *odi* sit high in the harbour and ride deep in the open sea? Will it run in the headwind?'

'There'll be no problem in the harbour shallows, and it will be deep-keeled in the ocean, but it won't run in the headwind at all.'

'In that case it is useless,' said Ali. 'Make me an *odi* which runs in the wind.'

'Perhaps it is your bad luck to have such a vessel. Nothing can be done about it. The *odi* was built in a pit. It was difficult to get the shape exactly right. That's why it can't run in the wind.'

Ali took the master carpenter to the storeroom and set up a large set of scales. With a smaller scale he weighed out ounces, quarter pounds, pounds and then twenty-eight pound portions, until a hundredweight of gold nuggets lay in front of them. Hassan went to the boatshed, took a stringless drill and sat near the hole known as *ulalbaku vidbu*. Placing the drill in the hole, he rotated it twice with his hand.

'My boy, I shall now tell you about the characteristics of your new *odi*. It will lean back a bit more than it does on the keel blocks, though it will not be apparent to the human eye. It will ride high in the harbour and deeper in the open sea. And it will speed up in a head wind. No *odi* in the country will sail as fast as this one.'

Ali Fulhu was now happy to sail out of Hulhudheli harbour with the Dhiggaru carpenters, but first he took the forge into the boat shed and melted twenty quarter-pound lumps of gold and made the prow bees, two hooks, two side-

stays, two yardarm hooks, the parral fittings, brace rope hooks, and the gooseneck for the boom. Then Ali and his father returned home, where Ali consulted his book for an auspicious time. He read that if an *odi* is launched when *Delphini* is ascendant and *Bootes* is in midheaven, then good fortune would come dancing towards the vessel. Satisfied, Ali put the book away and went to sleep.

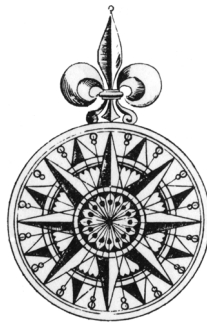
Making the *odi* immovable

Hawwa Fulhu knew that Ali's carpenters had built an excellent *odi*.

He must be stopped from launching that boat, she thought as she opened her magic book, realising she would never be able to marry him if the *odi* was floated successfully at an auspicious moment. *I can't allow this vessel to be launched*.

She put the book back in its locked box and sneaked off to the building shed. After checking no one was around, Hawwa tore a hole in the back wall and looked at the *odi* carefully. Tears began to fall from her eyes as she realised what a wonderful vessel it was. Her head hung, and her chest was soaked with tears again as she walked to the prow of the *odi*, reciting magic words and kicking the front keel block with her foot. The boat became completely immovable.

Pleased with what she had done, Hawwa left the shed and ran home. Soon she was asleep again.



Feeding the whole community

After returning from dawn prayer, Ali Fulhu said to his mother, 'Today you must cook for the whole community and we'll celebrate the launching. Also prepare something for the *odi* prayer ceremony later tonight after the last visit to the mosque.'

Amina Faan gathered all the young Hulhudheli women at her house and they went to work. The food was cooked and left to cool as soon as afternoon prayer ended. The entire population of the island gathered at her house and when they finished eating they received one rupee each. After late night prayer, food was prepared again and platters taken to the vessel where *zikuru* readings were being held. All the Hulhudheli headmen climbed onto the *odi* and recited prayers blessing the boat. They began another *zikuru*, led by the island chief and when morning came, they were still reciting.

Ali arrived to launch the *odi* and the men who helped to lift the vessel were given a thick fold of fabric to put on their shoulders. He placed a red hot coal and a piece of ambergris in the incense burner and climbed onto the boat reciting prayers to Allah and the Prophet, prayers for fortune and blessings, and another final praise to God.

Coming down, he did the ten-knot *fanditha* to drive away any maleficence and then said with a smile, 'Please launch my boat without dropping it and Father, would you take the prow?'

The men pushed the boat until the fabric on their shoulders began to fray from the effort, but the *odi* wouldn't move.

'Father, go to the back end.'

Black Mohamed pushed and pushed but the vessel was stuck. Then Ali noticed the *odi* could only be swayed from side to side and he became suspicious.

'Did that horrible little sneak Hawwa Fulhu come in here today?'

No one had seen her near the *odi* lately, but Ali stalked off angrily into the forest and headed towards the stump of a coconut palm that had been chopped to make the keel blocks. There was Hawwa! She had stabbed a fish knife into the stump and one of her feet was resting on the handle.

'Will you allow me to launch my own *odi*?' said Ali, moving closer to her.

'Say you'll marry me.'

'How can I do that? With my own mouth I have said my feelings towards you are the same as for my natural mother.'

'People still get married after saying such things, don't they? If you want to make offerings and change your mind, I'm prepared to pay the expenses.'

'Have we run out of women on this earth? I will never marry you even if it means I can't launch the boat!'

'In that case the *odi* is as close to the sea as it will ever be!'

'You just watch, Hawwa. I'll get it into the water.'

Ali pushed her away, pulled the knife out of the stump and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. He returned to the shed and asked someone to bring some seawater, which he poured and the spell was broken. The vessel straightened and moved easily as they pushed, sliding it smoothly off the launching blocks and into the sea.

‘Son, that’s a king’s *odi*,’ said Black Ahmed as he watched it floating.

‘No father, it’s only a fishing boat.’

Turning to the others, Ali said, ‘Don’t just stand there staring! Take all the rigging and equipment aboard.’

Meanwhile the people of Hulhudheli were chatting on the beach.

‘The *odi* looks to be leaning a bit to the front,’ they said. ‘More than it was on the keel blocks.’

‘Not possible,’ retorted others, ‘It isn’t leaning at all.’

A few people said that it was leaning more to the back.

Such were the comments as the rigging was brought aboard and the mast erected. The other fittings were installed and before long, the *odi* sat securely in the harbour.

That same afternoon, Ali asked Bulhaa Dhon Futhu to find a suitable mincing fish.

‘You think that’s all we need to go fishing? Where’s the baitfish net?’

‘I didn’t say anything about a net,’ replied Ali. ‘I only asked for a fish. That’s all we need.’

Bulhaa Dhon Futhu didn’t argue. He said he’d get the fish if there was any available in the island.

After sunset prayer Bulhaa went to the beach. Dhon Umar’s boat had just returned with six hundred tuna. Bulhaa looked over the catch and said, ‘Hey, Dhon Dhaitha’s Umar! Give me a mincing fish for Ali’s fancy new *odi*.’

Umar told him to take one from the stack, so Bulhaa bent down and checked all six hundred tails of the catch. When he’d finished, he stood up and said, ‘You don’t have any mincing fish here!’

‘That can’t be!’ replied Umar. ‘There are fish with their jaws dropped, necks broken, one with a broken back, and another with a wilted tail. They’d all be fine for mincing.’

‘That’s true,’ agreed Bulhaa and he took a fish from the pile and gutted and washed it in the sea before walking back along the street to his house. It was so dark that people couldn’t recognise one another. Half way home a young woman approached him and said, ‘Hey old man, what’s in your hand?’

‘You shameless girl!’ replied Bulhaa, ‘I have nothing in my hands.’

He turned towards the beach and walked up the centre of the road. The same girl approached again; calling him ‘old man’ she asked what he had in his hands.

'Nasty girl!' growled the captain. 'Are you stalking me?'

He turned towards the shore, took off his turban and wrapped the fish in it. With the parcel under his arm, he walked along the northern launching ramp road where he met the woman yet again. It was Hawwa Fulhu.

'Hey, old man,' she said. 'What have you got under your arm?'

'Look, you awful girl!' retorted Bulhaa Dhon Futhu, 'Can't you see it's only my turban?'

'That's the lie of a thief, old man! See, there's blood dripping from the fish's lips. Listen to me. That deceptive little Hulhudheli man is trying to make a trip to Buruni while pretending to go fishing.'

This time the old man said nothing. He walked on home, tied the fish's tail with coir string and hung it from his kitchen eaves before going to sleep. Later Hawwa sneaked in quietly, removed the eyeballs from the fish and cast a spell; then she fed the eyes to the rats.

Meanwhile Ali Fulhu had been to the storehouse where he found a roll of cotton, which he wrapped onto spinning rollers and spun. He began by laying out a ten-yard lining for a baitfish net and then made an eight and a half yard net with a black thread. Simultaneously melting and spinning a very fine silver thread, he laid out yet another net of the same size to which he also added threads of gold.

Wasting no time, Ali weighed and melted a further twelve pounds of gold and made a set of bangles with bright spherical designs. He fashioned a necklace from twelve more pounds of the precious metal, and a waist chain of floral designs. Next came earrings shaped like petals and wings, and fastening studs. Then Ali made twelve anklets set with pink diamonds, and a hair bun cover crowned with a *sandhalpur* flower.

He finished just before the roosters began to crow, quickly put everything into a box and carried it on his shoulders to the beach. It was completely dark. Ali set the box on the sand and walked into the sea, untying the *odi's* mooring rope before dragging the vessel into shallow water. He put the box on board and returned to the smithy, fetching the tools and then loading them aboard too, securing everything under the lower deck at the back. His tasks completed, Ali dragged the *odi* back to its previous position and moored the vessel again.

Back home, Ali showered, changed into a dry sarong and decided to play a little trick on the fishermen to get them all awake. When he met one of the men and said, 'Before you go back to bed, tell the captain that Hulhudheli's twenty fishing *odi* are waiting at the baitfish lagoon.'

The young crewman woke up Bulhaa Dhon Futhu who in turn roused his men. The last person he disturbed was Ali Fulhu.

'All the *odi* have left and gone to the lagoon,' said Bulhaa Dhon Futhu. 'If you want to go fishing then it's time to get up.'

Ali stretched himself awake.

‘The baitfish net is on the pantry house verandah, Dhon Futhu. Take it to the beach, I’ll be there soon.’



Going fishing in the *odi*

The captain collected the net, the mince and the food bag. He meandered down the street like a harmless snake. Though his body was conscious, his eyes were asleep. Dhon Futhu staggered into the bushes on one side of the road and then the other, eventually arriving at the beach to find the crewmen already aboard the *odi*.

As soon as the captain climbed in, Ali untied the mooring rope and boarded too.

‘Men,’ he ordered, ‘take hold of the black coral oars and prepare to row.’

The *odi* moved swiftly across to Maadheli island and the captain checked the outer reef.

‘Ali, my boy, the sea is solid with baitfish!’

Meanwhile, on the beach, Hawwa Fulhu was thinking again to herself, *I won’t allow that boat to anchor!* She stepped down to the water’s edge and threw in a piece of coral.

Aboard the *odi* the captain yelled a warning.

‘The seaward anchor is dragging to the windward side, wobbling and slipping down the slope... now it’s dangling under the boat!’

Ali ordered the captain abaft, while he went to the front of the *odi* and joined together ten ropes made of plant fibre and threw the seaward anchor out as far as it would go, shouting, ‘By the command of the Almighty, this anchor will stick into the mud.’

Then he joined five more ropes, attached them to the reef-side anchor and threw it securely onto the coral. Once it was in place, Ali pulled the rope and turned the *odi* so the current passed alongside.

A boy at the bow cried out, ‘Ali, the front anchor is under the keel and dangling again.’

Ali pulled the anchor in and tied two more ropes onto the length. He recited something, blew on the anchor and threw it out as far as he could before dragging in the slack and securing it properly. With the first rays of light, the head of the mincing fish was thrown into the sea. On the bottom the fingerlings stirred, the small ones glaring as the big ones surfaced with their jaws open as if they were going to rip away the gunwales and upper planks. The net was attached to long poles and slid straight down into the sea but the fingerlings went into shock and hid among the corals.

‘Ali! Do something about this evil spell!’ the captain cried.

Ali Fulhu recited some magic words over a small amount of blessed water and sprinkled it on the mincing fish. When a portion was put in the sea, the fingerlings surrounded it, small ones glaring and larger ones with their jaws apart. Again the net was slipped into the water but as before, the fingerlings disappeared among the corals.

Just then, a crew boy called out, 'Hawwa is on the beach throwing stones into the sea.'

'Pull the baitfish net back on board,' Ali ordered. Then he called out to two men known as the 'Ali brothers'.

'Go to the island and bring back three nuts from a red coconut palm.'

'Must we swim across this deep ocean?' the brothers whined but they jumped towards Maadheli reef anyway and swam across to Hulhudheli where they walked over the coral and arrived on the beach near Hawwa Fulhu.

'Why have you two swum across here?' she demanded.

'To get coconuts from a red coconut palm,' they replied.

'Don't let them touch the ground,' she sighed. 'Otherwise, they'll be useless.' Hawwa knew she was fated to lose Ali Fulh even though he entrusted his *fanditha* preparations to a pair of idiots, and she wanted them to do the magic properly.

The two brothers climbed the palm and plucked the nuts. They came down holding them carefully, walked out onto the reef and swam back towards Maadheli.

The last moments of Hawwa Fulhu

On board the *odi*, the coconuts were husked and polished, and taken to the gangway. The Koranic sura *gaburulaudhaa* was written on the first nut, on the second Ali wrote the prayer to God, *ari dhu-aa*. On the third coconut he wrote *khaibaru fanaa*, referring to the story of the destruction of the town of Khaybar by Muhammad. Ali went to the front of the boat, tapping the coconuts first on the prow, then on the crossbeam in front of the mast hole and on the small beam near the prow. The magic in the nuts was released and activated.

Meanwhile Hawwa Fulhu was back at home politely asking her father if he had the requisites for a funeral, 'Have you got any cotton shrouds, camphor and planks?'

'My child, are you going mad?' he protested. 'Stay here and behave yourself.'

But Hawwa went to the seashore, just as Ali Fulhu raised his hand to smash one of the red coconuts. She ran back home and begged her mother, 'Don't we have any cotton shrouds, fragrant aloe-wood and sandalwood?'

Before the answer came, Ali smashed the first nut and Hawwa Fulhu fell to the ground. Her mother and father carried her into the house and laid their daughter on the master bed. Hawwa Fulhu's father did an Addu Hithadhoo spell, and recited and blew into a glass of water before he sprinkled the fluid in her face. Hawwa sat up.

‘Father, are there any cotton balls and muslin, fragrant aloe-wood and sandalwood in this house? Mother, grate and grind the things I need. Father, bring me bathing water.’

‘Please tell us what’s happening,’ cried her parents.

At that moment Ali smashed the second coconut and as it disintegrated, Hawwa’s soul began to move up her body. When it reached her waist Hawwa moaned, ‘Loving mother and father! Please don’t abuse and curse Ali Fulhu, and don’t go begging to him either. As long as my soul and body are intact, he will never catch baitfish, and as long as my coffin is above ground, nothing will change. Once my body is buried in this island, Ali Fulhu will never be able to live in this island again.’

She screamed, ‘Mother! Father! Please let me die in peace. Observe my wake for a year. Mother, if you want to see my soul leaving then move to this side of the bed. And you father, move to the end of the bed.’

As Ali Fulhu smashed the third coconut, both parents shrieked in horror. Hawwa’s soul moved again. She ordered her father to hand her the fish knife, recited something and stabbed the blade into the edge of the bed. The Hulhudheli boy fainted on the deck, and Hawwa breathed deeply. As she died, she was made to recite the *shahaadhajj*.

Afterwards, the pillow beneath Hawwa’s head was removed, her hands were placed one on top of the other just below her chest, then cotton balls were inserted in her nostrils and her feet tied together. Hawwa’s parents wept continuously. A little later, people came in to wash and dress the body. The coffin arrived and cleaning materials and five shrouds were prepared.

‘Those who want to give their last farewells, do it now,’ said the grieving island chief.

One by one, everyone came in and to touch Hawwa’s forehead and hands, and went back outside. Then her face was covered and the body tied in five places for lifting into the coffin. The five ties were removed before Hawwa’s casket closed. A sheet shrouded the coffin on its journey to the graveyard.

Ali lay unconscious on the deck until the captain took a bit of water from an urn, recited a few words and sprinkled it on his face.

‘The curse is broken!’ Ali realised as he sat up.

The baitfish net went into the sea but once again the fingerlings disappeared in shock and fear. ‘That Hawwa isn’t buried yet,’ said one of the crewmen. ‘Her body is still above ground.’

Ali looked towards the island and saw Hawwa’s coffin being carried on men’s shoulders from the house to the mosque. Forty people took part in the funeral prayer before the box was lowered into the grave. First, handfuls of soil were thrown onto the coffin and then it was completely buried with a mound marking the gravesite. Finally, after recitation of the *thalakun* prayer, water was

sprinkled and people returned to the house for the wake feast. Appropriate prayers were read and everyone ate.

Ali Fulhu shouted to the crew, 'Drop the net into the sea!'

'The water's full of fingerlings!' cried the captain. So the crew unrolled and lowered baitfish net, and the four headlines were pulled in. The captured fish began to *raan-raan* and the crew unplugged the valves to let water into the bait holds. Using a scoop, the captain poured the fingerlings into the *odi*.

'Ali my friend, the baitfish are dying in the hold,' he warned.

'If the *odi* is moving well, we can cast the net three more times. Quick, pull out the *faivaku* valve.'

Once again the baitfish net went into the water and the four headlines stretched tight.

'This is testing the strength of the net,' Ali shouted.

It took nineteen men to draw it in, the net straining with a *kuru-kuru* sound.



Ali Fulhu in the fishing ground

When the net was emptied again they hauled the anchor aboard, crying out, '*aadhaloa-baadhalhoa*'. Then the crew grabbed the end of the halyard and raised the sail to the parral. With the halyard secured, the boom was tied to the cringle, and two bottom sail lines attached to the mast. The *odi* sailed out of Maadheli lagoon vibrating so powerfully it was almost shaking itself apart as the water washed over the forestay crossbeam and the back keelson.

'The other *odi* found fish over there near the land!' shouted a crewman.

'I won't be fishing that rubbish on the land-side when my boat sails like this,' scoffed Ali Fulhu. 'Over there's only little tuna, mackerel and rainbow runners. Those things will just gobble up baitfish and slow us down.'

The *odi* ran before the wind leaving Hulhudheli in its wake; the island had already disappeared when Ali called out, 'Look, there's a flock of terns flying high over there and there's an *odi* with them! If this boat keeps on going, the fortunes of the sea will come dancing towards us. Tell me which way the fish are moving.'

'All over the sea the big birds are looking down,' cried the captain. 'The shearwaters are also staring into the sea and diving... Oh my goodness! The birds

are pecking at the tuna's heads, Ali Fulhu! Fish are pressing up underneath the boat and packing around the water brace! They're against the sides too, and there's fish at the wake.'

'Throw baitfish in the sea,' ordered Ali.

The captain moved down to the open deck with two large hand nets. Resting his head on a *kan'du* wood crossbeam, he threw almost a hundred scoops of baitfish into the sea.

'It's like there's a sand dune around this *odi*. The fish seem desperate for bait!' shouted Ali. 'Are you still throwing out baitfish, captain?'

Another hundred scoops of baitfish were hurled into the sea. When the captain raised his head, the fish were around the boat like a school of *thaavalhu*.

'There's not enough bait for all these fish!' Ali called out again. So the captain took a scooping net in each hand and grunting '*aan-boon*' threw out another hundred scoops. The entire sea seemed to be saturated with yellow turmeric. He cleaned out the holds – the *dhiypaiy*, *mavaiy*, *maathilavaiy*, *kolhuvaiy* – and under the afterdeck.

Ali took a small fishing pole, flicked the hook into the sea off the stern and immediately caught a yellowfin tuna four metres long. When the fish flipped overhead, it moved like a mackerel, *korakali* or flying fish and splashed back into the sea.

'You lost the only fish we've caught so far,' complained Bulhaa Dhon Futhu.

'Such is our fate,' said Ali and because of the way he moved his leg, all the fish left the surface in alarm and dived into the depths of the sea. The *odi* turned back towards land just as the wind dropped, leaving them becalmed. Darkness fell and the ocean became as smooth as paper, and a current flowed hard to the south.

'It's going to be so pitch black, we won't notice if our eyes are pecked out and eaten!' moaned Bulhaa Dhon Futhu.

Ali prayed for a fresh breeze and a cloud with two tails rose up and covered the sky. In fear of the storm, the crewmen grumbled about being so far from land.

'Now we'll see how well this *odi* can move,' said Ali.

The moment the wind hit the sail, the mast bent forward straining against its stays. Seawater washed over the forestay crossbeam again, as the vessel shook on all sides. The *odi* broke through sea's surface in a spray of white caps, leaving a fragrant smell of aloe and incense. Yes! It was as if the incense and fragrant aloe-wood were just lying there waiting to be scraped off by hand.

Meanwhile, the boys in charge of bailing cried out a warning.

'The water level in the *odi* isn't dropping!'

So Ali Fulhu ordered the two Ali brothers to go below and help empty the hull. They rolled their sarongs up over their buttocks and went down into the open deck.

‘Keep the *odi* under power!’ they called out. ‘Sail it hard. As long as the boat stays in one piece and the waves only come in one at a time, the water level won’t rise and we’ll be able to bail it off.’

At first it was Huvadhu atoll that disappeared behind them and a short while later they had reached the seas off Galle in Sri Lanka. Not long after, they saw the land of Andaman cannibals. The crewmen were scared and demanded the *odi* turn for home but Ali Fulhu defied them.

‘Be quiet! If you keep babbling, I’ll leave you here with these man-eaters!’ The crewmen began to faint with fear and begged Ali to turn the *odi* around without delay. They checked the star positions.

‘The sun is just beginning its descent from mid-heaven. If we turn around now, wouldn’t we reach Buruni?’

The Ali brothers were ordered to wash the *odi* and replace the valves. They bailed out the water until the boat was completely dry. They even flushed away the drinking water! After they’d finished, the brothers said they needed a drink.

‘Check here then.’

They lifted the lid off the water urn and looked in.

‘There’s nothing to drink here!’

‘Alright,’ said Ali, ‘we’ll find an island with water.’

They went to the bow of the *odi*, and an island appeared off the *maibolidhashun* side.

‘What’s the name of this place?’ demanded Ali.

‘We don’t know, we’ve never come this far before,’ said the brothers.

‘Shall we stop and fetch water then?’

‘If we stop now, we won’t be able to reach Hulhudheli before sunset,’ argued the crewmen.

‘Even if the sun was only a hand-span above the western horizon, we’d reach Hulhudheli in time, as long as we have water,’ said Ali Fulhu.

‘In that case, let’s go ashore and collect some,’ the crewmen urged, but the *odi* was turning before the wind and began to move again.

Kolhumadulu Buruni

‘Dhonfanu Dhon Aisa!’ called Moosa Malin to his wife. ‘I need to go to the toddy palms today.’

He rolled his sarong up over his buttocks and put a hand-scythe into his belt. Holding a flower-mallet in his hand and a toddy pole across his shoulder with sixteen toddy shells hanging at each end, he went off to tend his coconut palms.

Malin climbed the first one and removed the covering-basket that protected the flower from bats and crows. He untied the collecting shell and poured the juice into one of his empty shells. Slicing the end of the coconut flower, Moosa washed

it and re-attached the shell before putting the basket back on. It was time for the next palm. Moosa worked his way through all forty palms and he was up the last one, near the end of the island where it jutted into the sea current. He had just finished putting the basket back on the flower when he glanced out to sea and cried out in shock, 'Oh my God!'

Stunned by the glitter of the *odi*'s fittings, Moosa Malin slipped and fell down onto the ground. He shook the sand off his stomach, put the scythe back in his belt and ran home calling out as he arrived, 'Aisa, get my best sarong and shirt.'

Soon Moosa was ready and waiting, wearing his silk cotton scarf, white shirt, and a beautiful pair of leggings under a long sarong.

Aisa saw how he was dressed and warned, 'I don't want you smelling of coconut palms today, Malin.'

'Don't nag me,' grumbled Moosa as he headed down the street towards the anchored *odi*.

'Why is this royal *odi* travelling around here?' yelled Moosa across the water.

'This isn't a king's *odi*,' came the reply. 'It's a fishing boat from Hulhudheli. We're looking for water.'

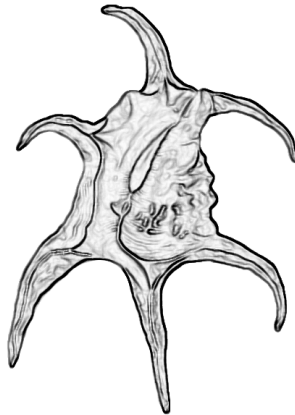
'My boy, there's a friend of mine in Hulhudheli called Black Ahmed. Is he well?'

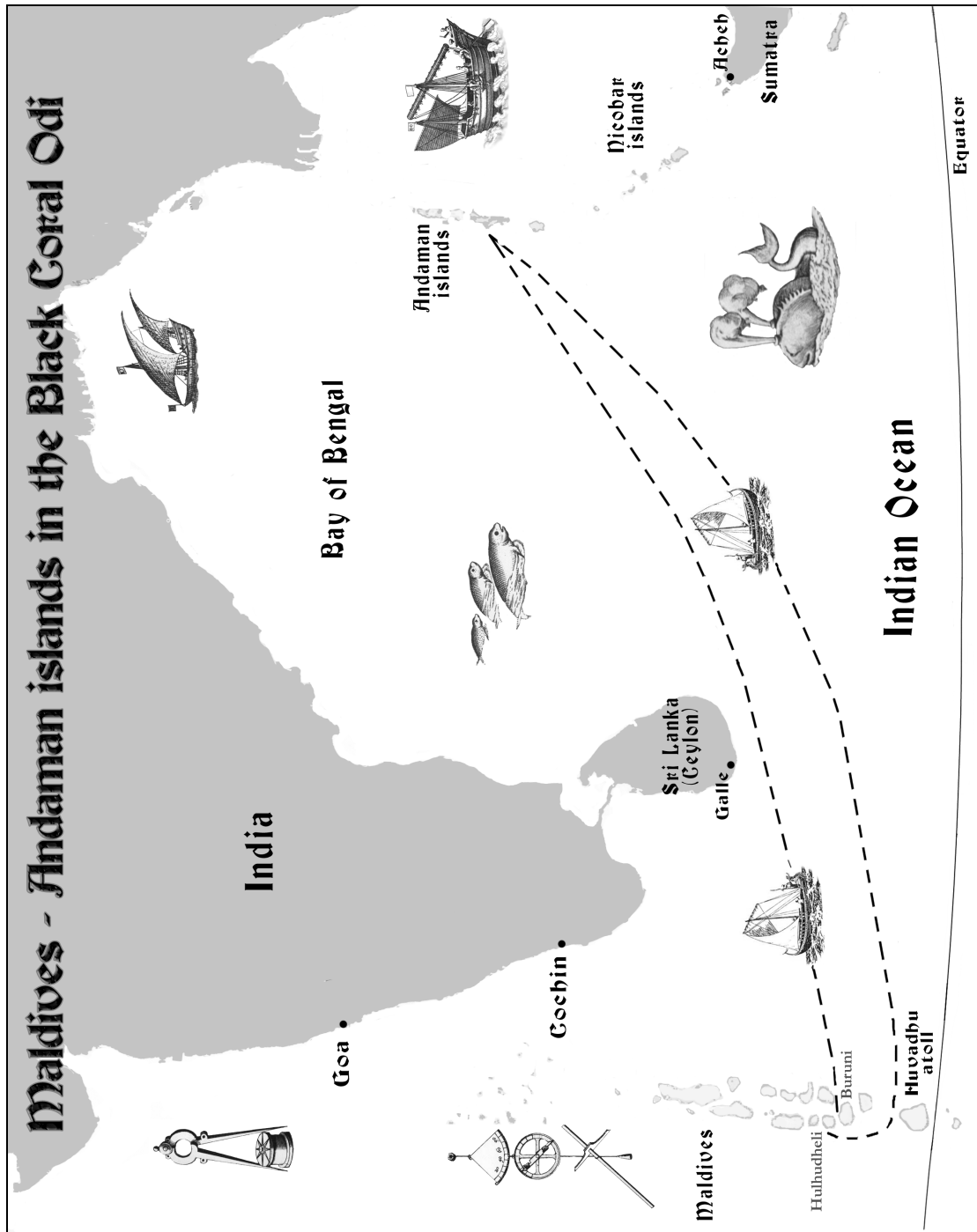
'Yes, he's fine.'

'And his child?'

'You mean Ali Fulhu? He's well... in fact he's on board this *odi*!'

'In that case, hurry up and come ashore.'





Ali opened his personal luggage and put on his silk sarong and black shirt before tying a striped handkerchief on his head. He was almost ready but the captain had become annoyed and started commenting, 'After deceiving us and pretending he was going fishing, Ali Fulhu has come to live in Buruni. Throw him into the harbour!'

Ignoring these angry words Ali disembarked and greeted Moosa as he landed.

'Shall we go to your house?' asked Ali holding his new friend's wrist.

All the women of the island were on the beach to stare at the visitor. They carried their babies, with their toddlers hanging onto their fingers and the older children crying and being dragged along. All the young women wanted to marry Ali. The older women wished he were one of their sons.

The men were jealous and said, 'This Hulhudheli boy seems a bit pot-bellied and thin in the limbs.'

'If you insult Ali we won't feed you or give you even a drop of water to drink,' threatened their wives.

Moosa Malin took Ali home and observed an auspicious time as they crossed the doorway.

'Aisa! Spread the bo-leaf and *thun'du* mats.'

Once inside the house Moosa Malin said, 'I'd like you to stay for three days. There is silver to be smelted here.'

'Malin, the smithy is back on my island,' explained Ali. 'Do you want me to fetch it?'

'Forget that, there's enough silver here for three months' work.'

'Please, allow me to go home and fetch the forge.'

'Don't go. You can stay here for two years if you want.'

'But the crew are starving!'

Immediately Moosa called out, 'Dhon Aisa, prepare some food for about a hundred and forty-four people as fast as you can.' Almost 150 kilos of rice were cooked and served on coconut frond mats. When the crewmen finished eating, Ali spoke to Captain Bulhaa Dhon Futhu.

'Please don't tell my father that I'm staying here in Buruni,' pleaded Ali. 'Tell him that I was fishing from my *odi* and standing on the leeward side of the fishing deck when I caught two yellow fin tuna on the line. Although my arms were strong, my legs were weak and I fell into the sea and a hungry shark among the fish ate me.'

'I'm not telling any lies for you when we reach Hulhudheli!' scoffed the captain.

To get Bulhaa's to agree to his idea, Ali gave him a necklace of twenty chains with matching anklets and earrings, and a large set of bangles. Then he asked Moosa to send the crewmen to Hulhudheli. Moosa organised seven *odi* and

when it was time for departure Ali told Bulhaa, 'If a wake feast is cooked in my honour, make sure you are somehow at the head of the big bench. When the time comes, don't recite the wake prayer. Just move your lips until it's over.'

Not long after leaving Buruni, the seven *odi* arrived together at Hulhudheli. Black Ahmed ran to the beach and noticed Ali wasn't aboard.

'Where's my precious son?' he asked the captain as he came ashore.

'While we were in the middle of a giant school of fish, Ali was standing and fishing on the leeward side of the deck,' explained the captain. 'He caught two yellow fin tuna at the same time and they dragged him into the sea because his legs were too weak. A shark feeding on the fish ate him!'

Black Ahmed fainted and fell to the ground. The captain was aghast. *Astbaghfir Allah!* Bulhaa thought. *I'm almost responsible for this poor man's death!*

'Now, now, there's no use crying,' the captain said. 'Start reciting the funeral prayers.' Black Ahmed staggered onto his feet and stumbled home.

'A shark has eaten our son,' he told Amina Faan. Convulsing, Ali's mother fell to the ground beating her chest with both hands.

'Please, get up and cook for the wake,' pleaded her husband and the shattered woman slowly dragged herself up and began to organise the death feast. Three hundred and thirty-six kilos of rice were winnowed and washed. The women of the island ran everywhere, organising the cooking. When it was ready, the captain said, 'Shall I bring the people who saw your son die?' Black Ahmed nodded and the crewmen came in and sat around the big bench. The captain positioned himself at the head of the bench and after the eating and drinking was over, prayers were recited including the *salavaaiy faathibaa* and prayers for blessings and good fortune.

'Did you people mention my son during the *faathibaa*?' Black Ahmed asked when they finished.

'No they didn't,' remarked Amina.

So the island people were brought back in and fed, and the *faathibaa* was recited again. Then they distributed all the property in the house to the poor.

Meanwhile, back on Buruni, Ali was waiting outside Moosa Malin's house.

'Ali, please cross the mangrove-wood doorstep and enter... sit on the small bench made of sandalwood and fragrant aloe-wood.'

Moosa told him to lean back on a soft cotton pillow from Cochin. As the young man rested, Moosa Malin instructed Aisa to prepare some tasty food for their guest. She went into the kitchen and found a little flour made from Indian arrowroot and rubbed in some tender scraped coconut flesh and jaggery sugar. She cooked it, stirring the mixture constantly until it was ready to be placed on a serving plate and carried into the house to the big bench. Next, water was given to Ali Fulhu and he sat down to eat. He placed a tiny piece of food in his mouth, only

enough to cover the tip of a spoon but the taste made him jump up from the bench.

‘Why don’t you eat?’ asked Moosa in surprise.

‘I’ve never been able to eat stir-cooked scraped coconut,’ explained Ali.

‘That’s a pity,’ said Moosa and he told his wife to prepare some rice. In the kitchen Dhon Aisa carefully picked, washed and cooked long grain white rice in coconut milk. It was placed in a serving dish and presented with more milk, sugar and chilli-fish.

After first being served with water, Ali sat down to eat again, putting a small morsel in his mouth. He went straight to the washing basin, spat it out and washed his hands.

Moosa was getting annoyed with this apparently inferior food.

‘What is the problem?’

‘I couldn’t swallow anything; it must be the stones and husks in the rice.’

Angry now, Moosa Malin went into the kitchen himself and measured out two more cups of long grain rice. He picked, washed and decanted it in a skilled manner and then cooked the rice in ghee, coconut oil, coconut milk, cumin and onion. As well, he made three different curries and then everything was covered and brought to the big bench. Water was served and Ali Fulhu sat down to eat, mixing a bit of rice and curry and placing it in his mouth. He immediately jumped up and, as before, went to the basin, spat out the food and rinsed his hands.

‘Why couldn’t you eat it this time?’ asked Moosa, totally exasperated.

‘There was too much salt. I couldn’t swallow a thing,’ replied Ali.

Moosa didn’t know what to do, so he found his daughter and said, ‘Dhon Hiyala, we have a friend here and we can’t cook anything he’ll eat. Would you please make something for him? This is the first time I have ever had to ask you for anything.’

‘Don’t worry father, you go to the house and I’ll cook,’ she said politely.

When Moosa went off, she darted into the pantry and took two cups of cow-feed rice and without any winnowing, picking or washing she boiled the rice in plain water with two cups of salt. Next to the rice she placed a bowl of fish sauce and then took the food into the middle room. Her maid told Moosa the food was ready and he came to inspect it.

She is an only child, he thought, this is the first time I have asked her to do something, and it’s been done badly. How could anyone eat something like this?

However, since his daughter had prepared it, he decided to treat the food with respect and carried it onto the big bench. When water was served Ali sat down to eat, saying ‘in the name of Allah’ as he put a little bit of it into his mouth. He poured all the fish sauce into the rice, mixing it well and kneading it into three large balls. He ate the portions whole, one after the other. Scraping and licking the plate he said, ‘Moosa Malin, never have I eaten such food before.’ Content, he lay on the small bench to smoke.

Today I'll see what this Hulbudheli Ali Fulhu looks like, thought Dhon Hiyala, and she carefully pulled aside the little curtain from the door and gazed at him. *If Divine Will permits, he will be my husband.*

Later, Ali asked Moosa to gather the toddy tappers of Maroshi island. When they arrived, the men helped Ali pull the black coral *odi* onto land.

'Shall we cover the boat?' suggested Moosa.

Ali built a shelter over the *odi* and returned to the house. Then Moosa had another idea. 'Would you like to build a smithy at Buruni?'

'Just tell me where you want it,' replied Ali.

'Wherever you like.'

So Ali walked through the village and then out through the taro and henna fields and into the woods. Cutting a length of corkwood tree and observing a propitious time, he set the foundation pillar. As soon as it was in place, the island people were unsettled and gathered at Moosa Malin's house to complain.

'This is the wrong time to be setting up foundation pillars,' they said. 'We can see trouble in the future involving a bride for the king.'

Moosa Malin hurried through the taro and henna fields, and across the dolphin burial grounds. When he reached Ali he said, 'People say that setting up the foundation at this time means big trouble about some queen, so remove it right away.'

'Moosa, there won't be any trouble like that,' Ali assured him.

'I'm begging you to take the pillar down for the sake of God!'

Upset, Ali decided to relaunch the black coral *odi* and leave. Moosa panicked when he realised what was happening.

'Ali Fulhu! I touch your feet for the sake of God. Have it your own way. Build the smithy however you like.'

Moosa returned to the centre of the island and told the village people to stop their paranoid blabbering.

'There will be no trouble about a queen around here,' he insisted.

When the people were back in their houses, Ali found Moosa and asked him to summon the Maroshi toddy tappers again. These men were sent into the sea to collect coral stones, cutting and shaping the rocks before lifting them up onto land. The walls of the smithy were laid out and after checking for an auspicious time, the foundation stone went in position. Next the smithy implements were carried in, but left lying on the sand. First, the corkwood poles had to be put in place, and the sides of the house latticed and tied. Fragrant aloe-wood was used for the vertical sides of the doorframe and only then were the smithy tools assembled.

The anvil and hammer came out of their box, and the incense burner was lit for the recitation of *salavaaiy faathibaa*. When an auspicious moment arrived, Ali Fulhu hit his hammer on the anvil.

Dhon Hiyala in the Well Palace

Dhon Hiyala jumped up her bed in the Well Palace and called out to her maid, 'Is there a goldsmith on the island?'

'Are you dreaming, my child? There's no one like that here.'

'Don't lie to me.'

She told the maid to fill her bath with water and while that was being done Hiyala collected ten betel leaves and returned to the house holding a small knife in her thin delicate fingers. Sitting at a table on the southern side of the house, she cut one of the leaves into an almond shape. When Hiyala unfolded the leaf, she decided it wasn't quite right and recut it into the figure of a water-urn. Rejecting this shape too, she sliced it into a bo-leaf design. This didn't work either, so she tried an eel fin and a fish pattern, and finally returned to the original almond design. She decided that was the best.

Hiyala folded the remaining nine leaves and sliced them into beautiful patterns by cutting the edges in a zigzag shape and then drawing flowing lines, crescent and circle designs. She folded the leaves in from both sides and pulled their tips from the bottom into a cone shape. Then she put the leaves aside, cut areca nuts into thin slices and placed them in the leaves. Dhon Hiyala inserted coffee seeds, cloves and a small serving of lime in the shape of a white moth. She added pieces of tobacco sprinkled with rose water, along with a black cutch plant paste placed on the mixture in the shape of a pomegranate seed. Finally, the outer leaves were folded over.

Hiyala put the preparations under her pillow and had a bath before perfuming her body with seven scents and adorning herself with jewellery. Then she asked her maid if the streets were clear. The woman waited and watched as the toddy tappers went to their groves and the fishermen left in their boats. She saw the woodcutters enter the forest and the coconut husk processors leave for their area at the beach. The cowry shell collectors headed for the reef and children went off to play.

'The streets are empty now,' she told Hiyala.

Dhon Hiyala sees the sky

Carrying her nine betel leaf and areca nut packs, Dhon Hiyala crossed the doorstep and went outside the house. This was the first time she had seen the sky in her life, and the bright light was startling. The moment she emerged, all kinds of birds began to glide overhead - albatrosses, roseate terns, *maadhooni*, crab plovers, white birds, whimbrels, turnstones, *bon'dana*, *ilotbi*, *rankotharu*, *feebokaru*, *kula araa fidhana* and herons. There were geese, white crows, kingfishers, and *ehanda aai*

sumuru. Dhon Hiyala began to walk through the woods, across the dolphin burial grounds and henna and reed fields, until she reached Ali's smithy building.

The first day they saw each other

When she found him, Dhon Hiyala spoke to Ali in a very soft voice.

'Shall we go to your house and chew betel and areca nut, and smoke together?'

He didn't answer so she cut off the limed part of the betel and areca preparations, and put it into Ali Fulhu's mouth with her hands. As he chewed, she fed him fine strands of extra tobacco. Ali Fulhu sat quietly, saying nothing.

The first things he noticed were Dhon Hiyala's fair round arms and her thin fingers with their graceful nails. He looked up into her radiant face, staring at her delicate neem leaf eyebrows and dark noddly bird eyes. Overcome by her beauty, Ali fainted, only recovering when Dhon Hiyala sprinkled some water on his face. She smiled and said, 'Is this a problem you've had since childhood?'

'My dear Hiyala, I have been working by the fire all morning without a drop of water. It's afternoon now. I collapsed from lack of food.'

Ali watched as Dhon Hiyala glanced at him again, and this time *she* passed out. He sprinkled some water on her face and when she revived, Ali asked, 'A childhood affliction, Dhon Hiyala?'

'No, it was the sight of your face,' she admitted. 'Shall we go to my house to eat, drink, smoke and chew areca nut?'

'I'm sorry, but I have silver to melt and gold to work. I can't come before sunset.'

Dhon Hiyala handed the rest of the leaf and nut preparations to Ali and said, 'Insist on seeing my arms first before you make me a *bodugob* bangle.'

Then she went back through the taro and henna fields to her home. As soon as she sat on her bed, all the birds flew away.

Dhon Hiyala's stomach is aching

Dhon Hiyala lay down and began to toss and turn with a pain in her stomach. She called out to her maid, 'Bring my mother and father quickly.'

'Moosa Malin, if you want to see the face of your child, come quickly,' warned the servant woman. 'Her soul seems to be leaving her body.' Moosa and his wife ran to the room.

'My child, what's happening?' they cried.

'I have a terrible stomach-ache,' moaned Hiyala.

Her mother told Moosa to fetch the Buruni doctor.

‘Come, we need some *fanditha* treatment for a child with a stomach-ache,’ Moosa explained to the doctor, who asked him to fetch a cup for special sprinkling water.

Moosa found a blue tumbler and filled it with the water. After receiving instructions from the doctor, he covered the tumbler with a piece of white muslin and took it home.

‘She should drink some of this and sprinkle the rest on her stomach,’ Moosa told his wife. ‘With the will of Allah, it can cure the most severe pains.’

Dhon Aisa recited the phrases Moosa brought back from the doctor as she handed the tumbler to Dhon Hiyala.

‘If my stomach pain is relieved, you might catch it, mother. Best to leave the room,’ advised her daughter.

When she was alone, Hiyala poured the water under her bed and called out, ‘Mother! My stomach-ache is even worse than before... Isn’t there a jeweller somewhere on this island?’

‘He’s leaving today,’ mumbled Moosa.

‘If you want to keep me alive, bring him here now,’ cried Hiyala.

‘Go and get the jeweller now, Moosa,’ ordered his wife.

Ali Fulhu’s *fanditha*

Moosa hurried off to Ali’s house and asked him to come quickly to help a sick child.

‘I have a lot of silver to melt and gold work to do. I can’t come just at the drop of a hat!’ replied the lad from Hulhudheli.

Though Hiyala’s father implored him in Allah’s name and even lay begging on the ground, Ali wouldn’t go to the Well Palace during daylight hours. Only when the sun was set did Ali lock the smithy and accompany Moosa Malin. They arrived at Well Palace, Ali observed asterisms in the sky and at an auspicious moment he crossed the main doorstep of the Buruni princess’ house. He sat down on the big bench and asked Moosa Malin to bring some water.

Ali passed the glass under his mouth. There was no mention of Allah or anything religious, just his moving lips. A short while later he returned the water and said, ‘Allah has commanded that no matter how terrible the pain is, it will be cured by this water. Some of this water must be drunk, and the rest sprinkled on her stomach.’

Dhon Aisa took the glass and after she gave instructions to Dhon Hiyala, her daughter warned her again, ‘Mother! Get out of here or you might catch my stomach ache.’

Alone, Hiyala poured water under the bed.

‘The pain is completely gone now!’ she shouted.

Ali said he was returning to his smithy and Moosa decided to tend his palms. He rolled up his sarong, put a hand-scythe into his waist belt and went to the grove. Later, he returned with sweet toddy for his daughter.

Making a set of bangles for Dhon Hiyala

Meanwhile Dhon Hiyala opened the mid-door curtain and wailed, ‘Father, my beautiful round arm is bare.’

‘There’s already a set of *bodugoh* bangles in the house,’ insisted her father.

Dhon Hiyala replied that even if she wore those bangles, her arm would still seem naked, so Moosa told his wife they needed a new set of bangles. He packed up twenty quarter-pound weights of gold nuggets and headed off to the smithy.

‘Moosa Malin, how can I help you?’

‘With a big favour. Will you make me a set of *bodugoh* bangles?’

‘For whom?’

‘A friend’s child in Malè is always asking me for a set,’ lied Moosa. ‘I have to go there soon and I need them now.’

So Ali melted the nuggets, poured the gold into a mould and engraved it with *ken’di* flower designs. He set the stones and gave the bangles a final finish before presenting them to Moosa.

‘Here are the bangles, Hiyala,’ said her father after he ran back home.

She jumped out of bed, opened the mid-door curtain and tried the bangles on, but when she lifted her arms into the air, the jewellery fell down onto her shoulders. Dhon Hiyala was very upset.

‘These bangles would be great for climbing your coconut palms!’

Moosa was so embarrassed that he didn’t know what to do. He grabbed the bangles and hurried back through the fields to the smithy.

‘The bangles are too big.’

‘That was a fast trip to Malè,’ smiled Ali.

‘My daughter wanted them when I got home,’ explained Moosa. ‘She tried them on and they were too big. The girl in Malè is the same size.’

Ali made the bangles smaller and returned them to Moosa.

‘They’ve been adjusted for you, Hiyala,’ said her father when he arrived back home.

But despite all her efforts she couldn’t put them on. They were too small. Now she was furious.

‘These would make perfect rings for mother’s little finger!’

So Moosa returned to the smithy yet again, and told Ali they were too small.

‘Malin,’ said Ali, ‘If you want me to do the bangles again, I must check the woman’s arm.’

‘It’s covered in scabies,’ said Moosa quickly.

‘Just one glance at the arm will do,’ sighed Ali. ‘Then I’ll be able to make them fit properly.’

So Moosa went back to the Well Palace and said to his wife, ‘We have to show our daughter’s arm to someone.’

‘Now my child has to give a public display for the whole island,’ complained Dhon Aisa.

Moosa had an idea. ‘We’ll make a small hole in the mid-partition wall and show Hiyala’s that way.’

He returned to the smithy and asked Ali if he was ready to see an arm infected with scabies. Ali didn’t answer, but locked his smithy and went to Moosa’s house, crossing the doorstep at an auspicious moment. He sat on the big bench and Moosa called out to his wife, ‘Aisa, hurry up and show the girl’s arm.’

Dhon Hiyala complained she was too embarrassed to show her arm to strangers, but Dhon Aisa insisted she put her limb through the mid-partition wall. Relenting, the daughter asked for her mother’s help so Aisa fetched a mother-of-pearl knife and cut her daughter’s sleeve up to the armpit. The arm was placed through the hole but only as far as the wrist.

‘I can’t make bangles just for a hand! I’m going,’ said Ali Fulhu.

Cursing her husband’s family, Dhon Aisa exclaimed, ‘If our daughter has to expose herself like this she’ll never be able to marry the king!’

Pleased with what she was hearing, Dhon Hiyala called out to her maid and ordered her to organise betel leaves for the wedding. It was then the servant woman told the parents about the betel leaves their daughter had already prepared and shared with Ali Fulhu. Dhon Aisa jumped up in shock and pushed Moosa onto the ground. Silently he got up and went out to pick seven bundles of leaves for his daughter. Hiyala then asked her maid to tell Moosa to organise the witnesses. Two brothers were found and they came in and sat on the large bench. Hiyala opened the curtain and said, ‘Brothers, here is my dowry price. From Ali Fulhu, the son of Black Ahmed, I want nine small weights of gold. Go and tell my parents.’

The witnesses opened the gate and said to Moosa, ‘Hiyala has given her dowry price, please give your consent.’ He replied that the responsibility for his consent was in the hands of the magistrate. The witnesses moved on to the smithy house.

‘Why are you here?’ asked Ali.

‘Moosa Malin’s daughter, Dhon Hiyala, has given her dowry conditions for marriage to you, Ali Fulhu.’

With no time to lose, Ali jumped up and opened his box. He put on a pair of pants and a black top, wrapped himself in his sarong and placed a five-striped handkerchief on his head. The three of them walked together to the magistrate’s house where they were welcomed and led into a room where the floor was covered with bo-leaf design mats and pillows decorated with octopus designs. They went to main mat, the most respected place in the house and Ali formally announced, ‘I have come to marry Moosa Malin’s daughter, Dhon Hiyala.’

‘How much is the dowry?’ the magistrate asked the witnesses.

‘It’s nine small weights of gold. When we asked for Moosa’s consent, he made it your responsibility.’

With a recitation of *salavaaiy faathibaa*, the marriage ceremony began. After the sermon, vows were repeated and handshakes completed the ceremony for the men. Ali Fulhu gave a handful of gold to the magistrate who said to the witnesses, ‘Please go to Dhon Hiyala and inform her that this marriage has been solemnised.’

When they arrived at her house, Dhon Hiyala got up and began to cut the wedding betel leaves with her mother-of-pearl knife. First she sliced them into a pinnacle and then into other shapes before finally returning to the original design.

Happy with this, she prepared seven pieces of betel leaf and areca nut, and arranged them in a special tray as the three men entered. Resting on the large bench, the witnesses asked her to serve Ali with a drink of water. Afterwards, Ali dropped a gold coin into the empty cup. The three wedding betel preparations were served and Ali Fulhu was formally presented to his wife.

Ali told the witnesses they could go home, and the newlyweds went to the smithy house and sat on the small bench. The Hulhudheli lad opened his box and took out the waist chain. Large golden earrings lit up Dhon Hiyala’s ears and when she put on the gold tiara it was so heavy her chin sank almost on her chest. Anklets were placed on her feet, and *bodugob* bangles on her arms. Then she was led outside and towards her home. The moment the gate opened, Dhon Aisa began to wail, ‘We’ll never be a part of the royal family now!’

Ali Fulhu approached the house and finally Aisa’s heart began to soften. ‘My new Hulhudheli son-in-law is indeed more beautiful than a king!’ she admitted to her husband.

Next day the island people feasted, and the young couple moved into Moosa and Dhon Aisa’s compound.

Genealogy - Ali Fulhu

Black Mohamed – Amina Faanu

|

their son **Ali Fulhu**
born in Hulhudheli island
5 years after Dhon Hiyala

Genealogy - Lhaimagu Peasant Ali

Aabakuru Hassan
(Hassan the Peasant)

|

Lhaimagu Iron Ali

|

his daughter **Kaddha**
mother unnamed

|

|

Lhaimagu Peasant Ali
their son born in Lhaimagu island,
one night after Dhon Hiyala



The peasant from Lhaimagu

In Miladhunmadulu atoll there is an island called Lhaimagu where people never really grow up. A simple man from this island, Aabakuru Hassan, was also known as Hassan the Peasant. As a youth he lived on thin boney fish and small little pilchers that came in and out of the harbour with the tide. These were the easiest type of fish to catch. At the age of fifteen he felt the urge to marry Kaddha, the daughter of Lhaimagu Iron Ali, and suddenly Peasant Hassan was a wealthy man.

The couple had a son called Ali and when Lhaimagu Ali was an adult, he dreamed there was a beautiful woman in Buruni.

Hurry there Ali, said the dream.

He woke up wondering how he would get to Buruni and as the day went on, Ali formulated a secret plan. When everyone had gone to bed that night, he suddenly began shouting, 'Mother, I've lost my sight!'

Alarmed, the parents brightened the lamp and brought their son into the room. Apparently he couldn't see anything.

'We should send our son to the doctor on Buruni as soon as possible,' said his mother and the parents lay awake worrying for the rest of the night. At dawn they sent messengers in search of crewmen. When enough men had been found, Ali's parents told them to take their son to Buruni and when his blindness was cured, to bring him straight back to Lhaimagu. The crewmen launched an *odi*, set the rigging gear on board, erected the coconut wood mast, prepared the vessel and loaded the luggage.

Next day the *odi* sailed away. They sailed down Miladhunmadulu atoll and entered Baraveli channel, and when they reached Lhaviyani atoll, Lhaimagu Ali was resting in the shade of the sail's shadow as he said, 'My eyes are hurting so much that I can't sit or stand. Sail faster, head downwind towards the island with the big tree.'

The *odi* sailed that way, passing Aligau island and entering the Kaashidhoo big channel. They were halfway through when Lhaimagu Ali said again, 'My eyes hurt so much, captain, I can't sit up or lie down. Sail one degree up from the south.'

They adjusted their course and when they sighted Kaashidhoo island they went downwind into the Kaashidhoo small channel. They sailed past Gaafaru island, through Kagi channel into North Malè atoll and then headed towards the Maahaa shallows. From there they sailed directly south, soon reaching Thulhaagiri and a while later they sighted the two Bandos islands.

When Malè appeared on the horizon, Lhaimagu Ali said yet again, 'My eyes are hurting so much I can't sit up or lie down. Hurry! Raise the red flag up the mast and put the long narrow pennant flag on the crutch pole. Draw the three sails and

fill them with wind, drape the pennant into the water and aim between the two Bandos islands.'

The *odi* reached Dhoonidhoo and the Malè *havaru* began shouting questions, warnings, and threats. The vessel passed close to Malè's main harbour, sailing with the wind between Malè and Funadhoo, and then headed westwards. The Malè harbour master came out to them in his *odi* and shouted, 'Why is this *odi* sailing here, where is it heading?'

'It's taking Ali the Peasant, the son of Lhaimagu Hassan the Peasant, in search of treatment for his blindness.'

'You won't receive any help here in Malè, you'll be beaten to death under the punishment tree!'

'I won't be dying under that tree. When I return I'll bring a grand present for the king or some very valuable information!'

The Lhaimagu *odi* sailed off with its three sails full of wind, while the harbour master's boat was forced to row. He yelled abuse at them as they sailed off to Gerikashigan'du and on through Vaadhoo channel, above Bodugeri and below Hoaligan'du. The *odi* passed above Dhegiruveli, through Benhalu and out through Lhohi channel. Then they sailed across Fulhidhoo channel, turning to leeward below Feeali island and on to Thaa atoll. Finally they arrived at Buruni.

Ali Fulhu was resting when a boy ran up and told him about the new ship anchoring at the area of Buruni harbour known as *Kamana*. Ali took his time getting up, and went to the beach.

'Who owns this *odi*? Where is it going, and why?' he shouted.

'Ali Fulhu! This *odi* carries Lhaimagu Ali the Peasant. He needs your help.'

'Wait here, I'll be back soon.'

Ali returned to the Dhon Hiyala's Well Palace and told her that Lhaimagu Ali the Peasant had arrived.

'What if I bring him here? He could help me prepare the red-hot coals and fetch water for my jewellery work.'

'You shouldn't bring him to Well Palace,' grumbled Dhon Hiyala.

'Why not! He's blind, I think.'

Hiyala sat with her head down for a while and begged softly, 'My precious husband, don't bring this man into our house.'

'But if he's here it will be easier to organise my work. After all he's blind!' Ali argued.

'Do whatever you like then, dear man!' she cried, completely exasperated.

Lhaimagu Ali's trick

Ali Fulhu ran back to the beach and called out for the blind man to come ashore. The Lhaimagu man obeyed and climbed onto a small rowboat with some others, but as it moved away from the *odi*, he shifted to one side and it capsized. Although the depth of Buruni harbour was over a man's height, no one was concerned. Some swam towards the island while others went back to the *odi*.

But the Peasant swam like a blind man towards the shore, then out to the deep sea; for a while he swam south, and then to the north.

'Over here... this way,' shouted Ali Fulhu.

The man must have heard something but he didn't seem to understand he should paddle towards the voice. With all that aimless swimming, he became tired and started to choke on seawater. Ali Fulhu couldn't bear to watch any longer, so he decided to rescue him and dived in. But when he came near, the Peasant took a deep breath, reached up under his rescuer's arms and grabbed him by the neck.

'Let go!' shouted Fulhu, but the Lhaimagu Peasant hung on even harder.

Old people say that even if you are caught under the sail of an overturned and sinking odi, don't let yourself fall into the hands of a blind man, thought Fulhu. So what do you do when a blind man has you in his clutches?

Thinking fast, he let himself sink down into the water until the Lhaimagu Peasant eventually had to release his grip and rise for air.

Fulhu surfaced too, and swam straight to the overturned boat and bailed it out, before pulling Lhaimagu Ali in. Together they paddled into shore. Fulhu led him by his hand as the rescued man pleaded, 'Please don't let me bump into a tree, or fall into a hole!'

They went together towards the house where Dhon Hiyala was sitting on a low bench in the reception area. Ali opened the curtain, 'Lhaimagu Ali has come because he has gone blind. Hiyala, would you put some medicine in his eyes?'

The moment Dhon Hiyala looked out, Lhaimagu Ali stared at her closely. Hiyala instantly pulled the curtain closed, 'Ali Fulhu, are you sure this man's really blind?'

'Yes, Hiyala,' her husband replied. 'Come on, we should treat him.'

Very softly Dhon Hiyala whispered a warning into her husband's ear, 'Ali, you are sharpening a stick here. And you'll receive the nasty end of it.'

He was furious when he heard this. 'Stop talking nonsense! Treat this man and cure him.'

Angry herself now, Dhon Hiyala went to the outer house, crushed some glass and smeared it on the eyes of the Lhaimagu trickster.

'*Astaghufir Allah!*' he cried. 'I can't open my eyes!'

He lay on his stomach on the low bench and cried continuously as he wiped away the paste. Then he lay still. At sunset everyone ate and drank, including the Peasant, and around midnight he secretly got up. Very quietly he went outside,

checked the star positions and did a powerful *fanditha*. Making even less sound Lhaimagu Ali stole back into the house and lay down again on the low bench.

Dhon Hiyala was restless and called out, ‘Ali Fulhu, I’m craving for deep sea fish so much, I can’t get any sleep into my eyes at all.’

Ali went off to raise Moosa Malin and asked him to launch the black coral *odi*.

‘Why do you want to launch the boat, my son?’ asked his mother.

‘My Hiyala is craving for fish... she can’t sleep,’ Ali explained.

‘Malin, hurry and launch the *odi*,’ urged Dhon Aisa.

The Maroshi toddy tappers were roused; they dismantled the shed and launched the *odi*. With the black coral mast placed in position, and the oars organised and the rudder inserted, the crew prepared to leave, and in no time the vessel was gliding out of the harbour.

‘Here’s the baitfish, Ali!’ called out the captain; the poles were tied to the net and it dropped down into the sea.

With a smile, the captain pulled the four net lines tight.

There were *rehi*, *boadhi* and *muguraan* baitfish, all *raan-raaning* in the net. The bait was hauled into the *odi*, and the four poles detached. The crew pulled up the two anchors, and hauled at the end of the halyard chanting *aadhaloa-baadhaloa* as they raised the sail to the top of the mast. The halyard was secured, and the parral beam set up. When the sail lines were secured and the ends brought towards the mast, the sheet was tied to the mast crutch. Then the boom went into the cringle.

Thus the *odi* sailed, its sides trembling with power as the water slipped away beneath it.

Arson in the Toddy Kitchen

Back on the island, the Lhaimagu Peasant got up from his bed and went outside. Dhon Hiyala was washing herself in the bathing area. He stood by the toddy kitchen holding a matchbox and waited until he heard Dhon Hiyala rinsing herself with two scoops of water. Then he lit a fire in the toddy kitchen.

‘*Asthabfir Allah!* Where’s this heat coming from?’ someone cried.

Hiyala ran naked out into the street and the Lhaimagu Peasant looked at her closely with wide-open eyes. Embarrassed, Hiyala raced back inside the house.

‘There’s no reason to run,’ he shouted. ‘You’ve got to talk to me now or I’ll tell everyone in Malè what I just saw.’

The black coral *odi* appeared in the harbour and before long, Ali Fulhu landed and walked to Well Palace. The Lhaimagu man lay on the low bench and

Hiyala was in her bedroom. She told her husband to take the Peasant with him next time he went fishing.

‘That animal nearly burnt down the toddy kitchen today.’

Early in the morning when Ali got up and prepared to go fishing, Hiyala reminded him again to take the Peasant along. So Fulhu woke him up, telling him to hurry and not to forget the baitfish net. In the rush, the Peasant grabbed a dirty dress belonging to Hiyala, wrapped it in a piece of white cloth and ambled towards the *odi*. He walked slowly, waving his hand around to feel his way. As soon as the Peasant reached the shore, he fell into a crabhole and shrieked. Then he was tripped over by a wave.

The disgusted crew pulled him into the boat and he was made to sit at the base of the mast as the *odi* rowed out of Buruni harbour and anchored in the lagoon.

‘Dissolve the head of the mincing fish,’ ordered the captain, and the *rehi*, *boadhi*, and *muguraan* stirred and rose from the bottom as if they wanted to eat the gunwales and top planks of the boat. The captain called out for the net and when the Peasant’s bundle fell open there was Dhon Hiyala’s dress! Furious, Fulhu ordered Lhaimagu Ali tied to the mast. Two other men dived off the boat and swam back to fetch a real net.

After a single casting they had enough baitfish for the whole day so they unplugged two rows of valves from the holds, scooped in the baitfish and headed out to sea. When they reached the tuna, the captain rolled up his sarong, bent over into the *beyvaïy* and threw out the baitfish. *Asthabghfir Allah!* The fish leapt as they ate the bait, but at the same time Lhaimagu Peasant did a powerful *fanditha* and although the fish continued eating the bait, they moved away from the boat.

‘The school of tuna aren’t staying close enough, Ali Fulhu!’ called out a boy.

The boom was detached and tapped three times before being slipped back into the cringle, but still the tuna ate the baitfish and moved on. The mast crutch was removed and three bowls of water poured over it before it was put back and the baitfish thrown out again. Once again the schools of tuna wouldn’t stay near the boat.

‘Ali Fulhu, the Lhaimagu Peasant is making *fanditha*!’ the boy warned.

‘Crewmen, drag that Peasant to the back of the *odi*,’ ordered Fulhu. The Lhaimagu man broke into tears, begging Ali not to hurt him and asking if he could use the baitfish scooping net. Fulhu relented, untied him and gave him the net. The Peasant opened his eyes properly and as he threw out the baitfish; the leaping tuna instantly gobbled them down. When the *beyvaïy* was empty, Ali Fulhu moved up the front to the low deck and began to fish. The Peasant’s job was to organise the catch. Fulhu’s short fishing pole jerked as it released the tuna, the first one hitting the Peasant in the stomach and knocking him into the holds.

‘Was it your father who taught you to unhook skipjack tuna, or your mother?’ complained the Peasant.

A second fish hit him on the chest, and then another crashed into his head. Falling into the open holds again he called out, ‘If you keep hurting me I’ll tell everyone the whole story about your wife Hiyala. When I lit the fire yesterday, she came out of the bathroom and I saw her naked!’

Hearing this, Fulhu angrily threw the fishing pole away and told the crewmen to tie the stupid man to the mast with his hands behind his back.

‘If you hurt me, I’ll tell the story in Malè,’ whined Lhaimagu Ali.

When the black coral *odi* entered Buruni harbour the vengeful Peasant escaped and boarded his own vessel and took off for Malè.

‘I’m going to the capital with that story about your wife!’ shouted Lhaimagu Ali as he headed out to sea.

Despondent, Fulhu walked home slowly. Resting on the bed, he sighed and confided to his wife, ‘Just as you warned, I’ve stabbed my eyes with a palm stake I sharpened myself.’

‘There’s no reason to be sad... it’s a waste of time anyway,’ Hiyala comforted him. ‘Go and bathe, and then we’ll eat straight afterwards.’

The departure and threats of the Lhaimagu Peasant brought the couple close to despair.

Meanwhile the Peasant headed for Malè, leaving Buruni far behind. He passed Fulidhoo and Keyodhoo, went through Lhohi channel and Vaadhoo channel and along Maathila; then up between Galhu Falhu and Feydhoo before turning and cruising past Aarah and along towards Bodu Bandos and up to Thulhaagiri.

The boat turned again and hoisted a red flag up the mast. Twin pennants were placed on the mast crutch and long flag draped into the water. Then the jib and mizzen sails were raised and the boat surged forward. The *odi* sailed between the two Bandos islands and headed for Malè where people were gathering at the jetty.

‘Don’t drop any mooring ropes,’ Lhaimagu Ali warned his crew.

The gaff and jib sails were lowered, and the mizzen and main slackened off. The *odi* cruised gently into the harbour, heading towards the royal wharf. As the bow scraped into the sand, the Peasant jumped onto the beach and went straight to the royal palace.

At the gate he told the guards to tell the king that Lhaimagu Peasant Ali had arrived and one of them went into the upper house.

‘O beloved master, Lhaimagu Peasant Ali has come to the palace with some information for you.’

‘Bring him up,’ commanded the king.

Lhaimagu Ali paid his respects and said, 'Your Majesty, there is a beautiful woman in Buruni island.'

The king turned to the palace guards and ordered them to fetch the chief town crier. He arrived dressed in his official attire, a large sarong and formal handkerchief, and the king told him to announce that Lhaimagu Peasant Ali was now the senior minister. Next, the king ordered the preparation of the royal *odi*. Crewmen hauled the vessel out of its shed, unfurled the mainsail and displayed the palm and octopus emblem and crescent. With the flag raised on the mast crutch, the *odi* was brought alongside the jetty.

The king summoned the royal courtiers and cabinet ministers, and the Peasant, dressed in the large sarong with his sash and handkerchief, stood next to his Highness. With the sound of seven cannon shots from the palace, the ministers boarded the *odi*. New senior minister Ali was at the helm.

The royal vessel sailed through Maathila, past Vaadhoo Channel, across Budugiri and down Hoaligan'du, then through Benhalu and Holhi channel and the *odi* turned to leeward. They sailed by Fulidhoo island into Vaavu atoll and west of Felidhoo island before heading out towards Feeali.

White Crow

At the same time on Buruni, a white crow landed on a king coconut palm where it began to caw constantly. There was no sign of Hiyala. So the bird moved to a pomegranate tree and cried and cawed. When there was still no sign of the woman, it glided down to the doorstep and cried out yet again. The bird warned her the royal *odi* was coming to Buruni.

Dhon Hiyala asked the crow to let her know when the vessel arrived and it flew away. Alarmed, she cried out to her husband in panic, 'Ali Fulhu, the king's *odi* is coming to take me away!'

Ali was very sad to hear this... but what could he do?

'Never divorce me, dear husband. Whatever my fate, I'll never speak to the king. I promise you, Ali Fulhu. Please, whatever happens, don't divorce me.'

'I swear I will never divorce you, my princess,' he assured her. 'No matter what happens.'

A short time later the white crow landed in front of the house. It said the royal *odi* would arrive at Buruni that night.

'There is nothing we can do now, Ali,' said Hiyala in despair. 'Please don't divorce me. I'll never say a word to the king, in fact I'll never even show him my face.'

The royal *odi* arrives at Buruni

With senior minister Ali the Peasant at the rudder, the king's royal *odi* travelled within sight of the atoll until sunset and then it entered the lagoon and anchored. The king and Lhaimagu Ali came ashore straight away without waiting for the mooring to be completed.

The Peasant had forgotten where Hiyala lived, so the two nobles went to the house of the southern ward midwife.

'This is the king of Maldives,' the Peasant informed the midwife. 'Old woman, speak truthfully... is there a particularly beautiful woman on this island?'

'No one special around here,' she replied.

'You get a lot of money from Moosa Malin and that's why you won't tell us. Old woman! If you want to keep your head on your shoulders, speak the truth,' threatened the minister.

'Even if you kill and bury me, it won't change things,' insisted the midwife. 'I don't know of any beautiful woman on this island.'

'Looks like she doesn't know anything, let's go.'

The two noblemen went to the midwife living in the northern ward.

'Wake up old woman. There's a beautiful girl on this island... where is she?' demanded the minister.

'I wouldn't know! Why ask me?' the midwife replied.

'Don't try to lie! Do you know who we are? This is the king of Maldives, and I'm his senior minister.'

'Whoever you are, I can't tell you something I don't know!' she said.

'I'll show you what happens to liars!' The Peasant unsheathed his sword and raised it above her head.

'Tell me the truth or you'll die.'

'Calm down! Put your sword away. A beautiful girl was born to Moosa Malin here. I don't know if she is still alive or not.'

'That's better. Let's find her, Your Excellency.'

Under cover of darkness, the two evil men entered Moosa Malin's property through the back gate. Hiyala was in the prayer house completing her midnight prayers. Rudely, the king threw some of his chewed tobacco through the window into the room. She finished praying, and then Hiyala shouted out in disgust, 'Who is the infidel throwing filthy chewed tobacco in here while I'm speaking to God?'

'He's the king of the thirteen atolls. Call him an infidel and I'll cut out your tongue,' threatened Minister Ali.

'Even if he is a king of many atolls, throwing that sort of thing while someone is praying is not the act of a Muslim!'

The king threw another wad from his mouth.

‘Who’s the infidel throwing this rubbish while I’m praying?’ shouted Dhon Hiyala again. ‘Ali Fulhu, wake up will you?’

Ali heard all this but covered in bed while Dhon Hiyala hurried back to the main house.

Uninvited, the Peasant followed her in.

‘My lady, bring betel leaf and areca nut preparations for the king.’

‘There’s leftover bits of areca slices and betel leaf strips in the tray. You can chew that,’ said Hiyala as she turned towards the inner rooms. The two men grabbed her hands and Dhon Hiyala screamed. Ali Fulhu jumped up and attacked them. He hit both men on the head and they fell stunned to the ground. Hiyala urged Ali to finish them off.

‘They’re in your power now; after this you won’t be able to touch them,’ she warned but instead of following her advice, Ali ran away and hid.

The Peasant opened his eyes and sat up painfully, his voice seething with anger. ‘Tomorrow is the last day in the life of Ali Fulhu. He has thrown pebbles at a hive of stinging bees.’

Uttering threats, both men returned to the *odi*.

Ali Fulhu came out of his hiding place while Dhon Hiyala complained he’d made a terrible mistake.

‘I haven’t done anything wrong,’ argued her husband. ‘Even if he is the king, he shouldn’t touch my wife!’

‘It’s not that,’ said the despairing woman. ‘When these two wicked men were in your hands you didn’t use the opportunity to kill them! Tomorrow they’ll return with the soldiers. You’re only one person. Where will your strength come from? Who will support you? The only man would have been my father, but tomorrow he will take the side of the king. If you had done what I said, we could have got the vessel, its crew and cargo. Now there is nothing for us to do except hide. Even if they catch you and kill you, there’s no way we’ll be separated.’

Hiyala continued talking while her husband wept. She told him to hide in the fields.

‘When you get hungry, go along the ocean road to your work shed. I’ll leave food there.’

They kissed and hugged, and at dawn Ali Fulhu left for the fields.

Ali Fulhu is given to the *havaru*

Next day, all the island people went to the beach as the noblemen came ashore again. Senior minister Lhaimagu Ali was at the front, accompanied by the king. They headed straight for the Well Palace. Dhon Hiyala hid her face in a sausage pillow and wrapped her arms and legs around it. The king entered the room and sat on her bed, but she closed her eyes as tight as she could. He moved closer and put his hand gently on her shoulders.

‘Hiyala, turn around.’

She tightened her arms around the pillow and said nothing. He spoke again.

‘Hiyala, come with me to Malè. I’ll build you a silver jetty.’

There was no reply.

The king became angry, ‘If you don’t start speaking to me I’ll give Ali Fulhu to the soldiers.’

The silence continued.

‘Loyal noblemen!’ announced the king, ‘Hulhudheli Ali Fulhu is all yours... do what you like with him!’

Dhon Hiyala began to sob uncontrollably.

The soldiers ran around in search of their prey, while Ali fled through the woods crying in fear. By midday they still hadn’t found him and he sneaked secretly into his house where Hiyala’s mother Dhon Aisa pleaded, ‘Son, please bow to the king’s will.’

‘Loving mother,’ he whined, ‘I’ll soon be caught by the soldiers.’

He fled down to the shore with the king’s men right behind him. Ali was spared nothing during their assault; they hurt him as much as they could. He recited the *shabaadha* at the top of his voice during the attack, along with all the other holy words he knew.

They lifted the Hulhudheli lad into the air, carried him to the Well Palace and threw him on the ground in front of the king.

‘Divorce the Buruni lady right now!’

‘I will not divorce my wife, your majesty, even if you behead me.’

The king was furious and embarrassed, and handed Ali over to his soldiers again. They enjoyed beating him without having to worry about whether he was maimed or killed and soon Ali lost consciousness. When they’d finished, he was carried back to the house and dropped heavily on the ground again.

‘Bring me Moosa Malin and Dhonfanu Dhon Aisa,’ commanded the king.

He told the parents that if they sent Dhon Hiyala to Malè he would publicly announce that Dhon Aisa was the new ‘Queen mother’. Politely Dhon Aisa replied that as far as she was concerned, Ali Fulhu was superior to the entire kingdom of Maldives. The king punched her.

Next he tried to tempt Moosa.

‘When I return to Malè you’ll get the position of Huvadhu atoll chief. What do you say to that?’

Politely, Moosa Malin replied that he would prefer Ali Fulhu to the taxes of Huvadhu atoll, anytime. The king pushed him roughly away but Moosa said nothing.

Abandoning any pretence of subtlety, the king summoned the magistrate.

‘Marry me to Dhon Hiyala,’ he ordered.

‘Errr... there is someone else’s legal rights involved here. I’m afraid I can’t do that.’

Naturally the king was incensed.

‘Listen magistrate! You want to be given to the soldiers too? Didn’t you see what happened to Ali Fulhu?’

Frightened, the magistrate agreed to solemnise the marriage immediately.

‘Even though there is someone else’s rights involved here, and no set dowry, and no parental consent, I hereby marry you.’

‘Don’t stand there staring,’ said the king. ‘Carry the bed with Hiyala onto the *odi*.’

His orders were carried out quickly and the boat left Buruni harbour with a volley of seven cannon shots.

Dhonfanu Dhon Aisa was crying as she took her son-in-law down to the sea and massaged him with sea sand. He slowly regained consciousness and whispered, ‘Mother, where is Hiyala?’

She told him what had happened and took him home to bed, applying salve for his broken bones. Later she soaked him in the sea again and massaged him with oil. Within two days he was up and smiling.

‘I’m feeling a bit better,’ he told his mother.

Ali ate, drank and went to the beach. All he could do was walk up and down and cry.

Meanwhile the white crow flew off and landed on the yardarm of the royal *odi*. Dhon Hiyala looked up at the top of the mast and said, ‘Crow, go to Buruni without delay. Tell Ali Fulhu to sail through the Vaadhoo channel near Malè.’

As this conversation took place, the king was watching her face. The crow flew off and once again Hiyala kept her head down. What could the king do? He didn’t understand crow language.

When the king’s *odi* arrived near Feeali island, the white crow was already back in Buruni at Ali Fulhu’s feet. After a moment it fluttered over to Ali’s black coral *odi*. And then back to Ali’s feet, before returning again to the moored boat. The crow cawed and cawed continuously but Ali couldn’t understand what it was saying. He grabbed the bird in annoyance and threw it to the ground. The stunned crow lay still for a while, before stubbornly flying back onto the *odi* again. At last

Ali Fulhu understood what he had to do. He quickly prepared his boat and sailed off. The white crow took to the air and headed for Malè too.

When the royal *odi* arrived back at the capital, the Buruni Queen came ashore in grand style. As soon as she entered the palace all the other wives were jealous of her beauty. Most jealous of all was a wide-eyed woman called Queen Bureki.

A few days later the king formally addressed his new wife, who was now known as Queen Amina.

‘Bring me some water please,’ he ordered.

Hiyala served the king with her back towards him.

He asked if she would prepare some food. She ignored him and he had to ask many times before she finally said, ‘I’ll cook the food with my own hands if you hurry to Friday prayer.’

The king was overjoyed. His new queen had spoken to him at last.

That same day, Hiyala was to be taken for her ritual run around Mui Vilu.

The king washed for prayer and after seven cannon shots and the assembly of the royal guards, he left the palace with the royal procession to the Friday mosque. Hiyala immediately began to prepare his meal. After cooking, she found a plate and wrapped it in white cloth. Just then cunning Queen Bureki decided to take Hiyala out for a run on the Mui Vilu sea wall. She had already exercised on previous days at two other beaches called Dhiguthoshi and Lodhikan’du. Wide-eyed Queen Bureki, who insisted all the non-Malè queens must do their beach exercise, had noticed the woman from Buruni floated in the air just above the ground when she ran.

Hiyala was holding the plate with both hands and as she approached the seashore, Queen Bureki pushed her lightly from behind. Hiyala began walking gracefully along the Mui Vilu, just as her former husband’s black coral *odi* came sailing towards the harbour reef channel. She started running across the channel and the deep sea, right up to the *odi*.

Taking her hands Ali Fulhu lifted her aboard then quickly turned the vessel and sailed directly west.

‘Please eat this food, my only true husband,’ said Dhon Hiyala. ‘It was prepared for a king.’

Dhon Hiyala took the rudder as Ali ate. When he finished he threw away the plate, drank some water and came back to the helm.

After Friday prayer the king returned to the palace and the royal guards went home. He called out for Dhon Hiyala and looked around. Alarmed by the silence he started searching around the compound, but couldn’t find her anywhere. The king went into the palace of his youngest wife and questioned her.

‘Your majesty, today Dhon Hiyala got aboard the black coral *odi* and sailed away.’

Meanwhile, the white crow had also been looking everywhere in the royal palace for Dhon Hiyala. Suddenly it flew directly west. The king ordered the royal boat prepared and the young wife said, ‘Keep your eye on that white crow, your highness. It is looking for the black coral *odi*.’

The royal vessel followed the white bird.

Dhon Hiyala couldn’t see the crow although she kept looking in every direction. She prayed for Allah to help her find it and as soon as she lowered her hands from prayer, there in the sky was the bird.

‘Oh Ali Fulhu, I’m so thirsty,’ she complained.

‘How are we going to find water?’ said Ali. ‘There’s no island anywhere around here.’

It wasn’t long before the crow landed on their boat and the princess told it to hurry and find water somewhere ahead.

‘I’m dying of thirst,’ she moaned.

The crow flew off into the horizon and the princess told Ali to head that way. The bird spotted an island rising above the water. It was called Crow island and there they sailed in and hauled their vessel up onto the beach.

‘O loving Ali, I’m exhausted from thirst,’ Dhon Hiyala kept repeating.

The king had seen Fulhu’s vessel and setting his *odi*’s sails into the wind, he headed towards the island. Ali was trying to get water by digging a hole on a rise in the ground just as Hiyala looked up to find the king’s boat bearing down on them.

‘Let’s hurry back onto the *odi*!’ she yelled in fear. ‘Here comes the king!’

Ali was still digging a hole when the royal boat began lowering its sails.

‘Beloved husband! Forget about the water, let’s go.’

The princess prayed, ‘At Allah’s command, may a deadly jellyfish rise here!’

A lethal mass of stinging tentacles surfaced right near their boat.

‘O my loving Ali, please come quickly. The soldiers are nearly here.’

Dhon Hiyala recited *shabaadha* and all the other holy things she knew, and called out one last time to her beloved husband.

Then she jumped onto the centre of the jellyfish. Instantly, she was cut in two. When Ali arrived back with the water, Hiyala was gone. Her severed body lay under the keel of the boat.

He didn’t hesitate, reciting the *shabaadha* and all the other holy things he knew and jumping onto the same terrible creature. His body split in half.

Ali’s legs and Dhon Hiyala’s torso washed up gently against the Crow island shore.

The king climbed aboard the black coral *odi*, lent over the midship railing and saw Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu’s remains. He buried his lost queen in the

island sand and then set sail for Goa with Ali's black coral *odi* in tow. When the king reached Goa, he beached both vessels and decided to live there.



Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu Background and origins

*It would be a greater mistake to reject the use of folklore
than to venture an inadequate interpretation.*¹

Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu has been a popular tale in Maldives for centuries. It is part of a Maldivian oral story-telling tradition of unique imagination and descriptive power. Metaphors and other references from this classic tale can be heard in conversations and seen in writings throughout the atolls. Despite government suppression of many other indigenous elements of their culture, *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* continues to be familiar to many Maldivians because Abdulla Sadiq's rendition of this magical romantic tragedy, first published in 1976, became the education system's primary text for Dhivehi literature.

Sadiq's *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* is a mixture of pious fable, violent sensual magic and pragmatic humane good humour. There was opposition among Maldivian Wahhabi Islamic scholars to the inclusion of *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* in the Maldivian education syllabus because of the *fanditha* and the story's strong female characters. Their criticism held some weight – Islam is actively promoted as the state religion and the President of Maldives is the constitutional religious head of the country. Sadiq seems to have found a compromise by beginning the book with the tragic early life of Raaveri Ali, and placing an emphasis on Islamic rituals associated with marriage and death. Raaveri Moosa's rise to the position of *malin* concludes this didactic part of the story, and then *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* becomes a love story set against a background of powerful magic and evil manifestations of jealousy and revenge.

Fishing, boat building, feasting preparations, and day-to-day religious and magic island customs are described with humour, subtlety and engaging reality. Women characters are plentiful, and they often wittily dominate the men. The worst external threat to the islanders comes from the Malè king and his soldiers, and the tale moves to a tragic finale with little regard for romantic sentiment or pious platitudes.

Raaverin and coconut cultivation

Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu tells the stories of Maldivian *raaveri* families. *Raaverin* means toddy collector, a male occupation of low status. *Raaveri* is the adjectival form of the noun *raaverin*. Clarence Maloney in *People of the Maldivian Islands* says *raaverin* did not plant or fertilise coconut palms, they only harvested and

¹ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, U.S.A., Basic Books Inc. 1984, p. 261.

protected the crop from rats. Maloney also examined the origins of what he described as the Maldivian *raaveri* caste:

The idea that palm tree tappers comprise a low caste is well established in Sri Lanka and in South India – Tiyar caste in Kerala, Nadar or Shanar caste in southern Tamil Nadu – where they traditionally lived in separate hamlets or sections of the village. The Nadar used to be regarded as 'semi-untouchable'. Undoubtedly, the Maldivian tendency for the *raaverin* to comprise a distinct occupational and caste group derived from the mainland many centuries ago. We do not know whether the *raaverin* originated as early settlers or aborigines in the Maldives, or whether they originated as coconut-tappers from the mainland or Sri Lanka – the Tiyar of Kerala have a tradition that their caste came from Sri Lanka.

In the Maldives, the *raaverin* today (1970s) are closest to what might be called a caste. In the past, it is said, 'it was very strict that the child of a *raaverin* should marry a *raaverin*'. In Hithadhoo island, Addu atoll, there is a *raaveri* mosque, which might have been reserved for them inasmuch as, in the main mosque, all ranked persons would sit in rows according to their rank. People say that in the past they would eat not with *raaverin* nor drink after them from the same vessel. And perhaps *raaverin* are the only occupational group in the Maldives now having a special religious day; at that time, they conduct prayers and ceremonies for protection against falling from trees. They collect donations from all the *raaveri* families to meet the cost of this event and, on this occasion, act as a corporate group.

The extent to which *raaverin* comprise a distinct endogamous occupational group is rapidly fading out. One *katibu* (island chief) refused to acknowledge that his island had any *raaveri* people, because it 'has about forty who do *raaveri* work', and sometimes tap coconut trees. The Islamic ideal of equality in ritual has been nibbling away at caste for a long time, and it is principally in the far southern atolls that some caste attributes still remain. But there are still some discriminatory attitudes. A man from Addu, who used to dance in devotion, when asked if *raaverin* would do that, seemed angry at the insult and denied that they could. And among boys playing on a street, if one doesn't know how to play with a top or ride a bicycle, the others are likely to taunt him 'as being a *raaveri*'.²

In his understanding of the *raaverin*, Maloney is influenced by the caste attitudes prevalent in southern India and in Seenu (Addu) atoll where he did much of his research. Judging from the skills Raaveri Ali taught his children, caste occupations were not strictly defined in the world of *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulbu*. Ali's children learn the skills of the smithy and the carpenter, along with the art of toddy collecting. These extra skills were forbidden to the Indian and Sri Lankan

² Clarence Maloney, *People of the Maldivian Islands*, Bombay, Longman 1980, pp. 290-292.

toddy castes. Robert Knox, who was taken prisoner in Sri Lanka in 1660 and confined for twenty years in villages around Kandy, describes the jaggery caste as virtually untouchable but there was no prohibition on buying their produce.³ In the same chapter, Knox also mentions that Sri Lankan goldsmiths were very high caste and they ranked just below the nobles, along with blacksmiths, carpenters and painters.

Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu tells the stories of Maldivians living north of the Huvadhu (One and a Half degree) channel and the characters come only from northern and central Maldives where, as Maloney says, caste attitudes are not as strong as in the south. There is a suggestion of discrimination against *raaveri* siblings in the initial rejection of Ali Fulhu by Hawwa, the Hulhudheli chief's daughter, and the king of the sea says plainly that Ali Fulhu's *raaveri* ancestry precludes him from ever being a sole king of Maldives. However, the king of the sea concedes that Ali could share that exalted position with another.

Geography is the main difficulty for the maintenance of clear caste restrictions in Maldives. The islands are too small to maintain social barriers between families living on the same island, and it is impossible to prevent children mixing and relationships forming, regardless of the wishes of hostile parents. Majid Abdul-Wahhab claims *raaverin* were well respected in Malè in the early twentieth century. His father, a prince of the aristocracy of that time, used to climb the coconut trees with the *raaverin* and learnt their trade. However, in seventeenth century Malè, social prejudice against *raaverin* meant their exclusion, along with other lowly labourers, from membership of the Malè militia, as recorded by Francois Pyrard during his stay in Maldives at the beginning of the seventeenth century:

Slaves cannot enter them (the militia regiments), nor may those whose business is to gather and draw the produce of the coco-tree, nor other sorts of mean labouring men, nor such as know not to read and write, nor those who serve others.⁴

Palm tapping continues in Maldives on a small scale, supplying local demand for non-alcoholic fresh toddy, jaggery sugar and illegal fermented liquor. *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* does not mention this last aspect of toddy production and Maloney, who was researching in Maldives during the time when Sadiq was compiling *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*, noticed strong social sanctions against alcohol consumption.⁵

³ Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of the island Ceylon in the East Indies*, facsimile reprint of the original edition published in London by Richard Chiswell in 1681, New Delhi, Navrang Booksellers and Publishers 1995, p. 69.

⁴ François Pyrard (1570-1621), translated by Albert Grey, assisted by H.C.P. Bell, *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard de Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas, and Brazil*, New York, Burt Franklin 1888, 1937, p. 217.

⁵ Maloney, *op.cit.*, p. 290.

Traditionally, toddy men in Maldives prayed in separate mosques. They were also renowned spreaders of gossip and suppressed news, making their comments and announcements to gleeful (or outraged) listeners from the heights of the palm trees, while pretending to be ignorant of the true meaning of their words if questioned by island authorities. Coconut palm groves were on land adjacent to the settled area of an island or on an uninhabited island nearby. All this land was, and is, owned by the government in the capital Malè but in practice the land was under the control of elite island families who would pay a produce tax to Malè for use of the land. Individual palm trees were marked and numbered for tax and renting purposes. Although palms and their products were subject to taxation, in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* Raaveri Ali and Amina get rich from toddy and jaggery sales, earning enough through hard work and thrift to invest their capital and become general traders. There is no mention of caste restrictions on this change of occupation, and the narrative suggests toddy-tapping and jaggery production are more worthy occupations than trading.

It is likely *raaverin* were treated as a separate group because of their production and use of alcoholic toddy. With its high sucrose content, toddy is easily fermented into an alcoholic beverage. Non-sterile containers provide the necessary yeasts and within six to eight hours, the drink contains between three and six percent alcohol.⁶ If toddy is left to ferment for a few days, it turns to vinegar.

Some *raaverin* families were boisterous, argumentative and grumpy – all indications of alcohol use and the sort of disharmonious behaviour that was not admired among ‘respectable’ islanders. Pyrard mentions that home brew was used in the *Mauloodh* religious ceremonies he witnessed, but *Mauloodh* intoxication was directed and controlled by ritual. Drug use in Maldives has always been widespread. Pyrard claims opium intoxication was endemic when he was in Malè, and among modern Maldivians there is widespread usage of tobacco (legal), alcohol (toddy, blackmarket supplies, perfume), cannabis and opiates, particularly brown sugar heroin, despite severe legal sanctions. Pharmaceutical pills are also ingested for their intoxicating effects. In the past, Maldives exported potent *Datura* to the subcontinent. A strong infusion of *Datura* can be disguised in a mixed drink and induces a prolonged stupor and sleep with vivid pleasant dreams. Once used widely throughout the world as a medicine, this drug had a reputation in Maldives and South Asia as an adulterer’s aid. Wives or husbands could entertain their lovers even in the same room when the other spouse was affected by *Datura*.

The story of Raaveri Ali and his wives and children at the beginning of the book can be seen as a moral tale of the power of perseverance and Islamic ritual etiquette in overcoming the cruelty of jealous fellow islanders and horrors of disease. Sadiq’s *raaveri* families are neither tricksters nor drunkards nor gossipmongers. Ali the toddy collector and his wives Sakeena and Amina are the

⁶ Richard Child, *Coconuts*, London, Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd. 1964, p. 190.

epitome of pious Maldive labourers. Collecting toddy is a physically demanding task, and the method has remained virtually unchanged over the centuries. It is described in the following passage from Sri Lanka, originally published in 1916:

The unopened flower spathe is prepared by slightly bruising it with gentle taps of a small mallet. To prevent it from opening, the spathe is tightly bound round with fibre; often the fibrous bark of the petiole is used, or it may be coir. When the spathe is nearly ready to produce toddy which is after about three weeks, about two or three inches is cut from the end. During the preparation the spathe is gradually bent over, so that by the time the toddy flows, a receptacle can be placed on the end for its collection – in Ceylon an earthenware pot (a 'chatty'). The flow of juice gradually increases; when it is in full flow the tapper usually changes the pot twice daily, at the same time shaving a thin slice from the end of the spathe, tapping slightly with the mallet, and smearing on a mixture of bruised leaves. The latter preparation contains saponin and stimulates the flow...

A skilful tapper can, by careful paring and tapping, keep a spathe going for thirty days or more, and can during this time be bringing a second spathe into production. It is usual in Ceylon to tap palms for eight months of the year and rest for four.⁷

In Sri Lanka, ropes are tied between the tops of the coconut palms and the tappers pass from tree to tree along these ropes, rather than climbing arduously up and down the trunks. This labour-saving system allows the tappers to tend up to one hundred high palms a day. Raaveri Ali's maximum tally of seventy-five palms per day would be near the limit a single man could reach without the assistance of suspended ropes. The average daily yield per palm can be up to 1200ml., with every 100ml. of toddy containing approximately 15gm. of sucrose, along with traces of ash and protein. When toddy is strained and boiled at 240°F., the jaggery sugar yield is between twelve and fifteen percent.⁸

Origins of the *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* story

In a chapter of *The Maldive Islanders – a study of the popular culture of an ancient ocean kingdom* by Xavier Romero-Frias, there is an examination of the possible origins of *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*. He describes the tale as 'arguably the most important epic work in Maldive literature'⁹ and gives an abridged English translation of a version of the story as told by Aishath Naazneen from Gaage

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁹ Xavier Romero-Frias, *The Maldives Islanders – A Study of the Popular Culture of an Ancient Ocean Kingdom*, Spain, Barcelona, Nova Ethnographia Indica 1999, p. 39.

Romero-Frias is the world's leading foreign scholar of Maldive culture; he lived in Maldives for twelve years, 1979-1991, and speaks and writes Dhivehi fluently.

house in the capital Malè. Earlier, Romero-Frias also heard the story narrated by Badia Ibrahimu in Fua Mulak island.

Romero-Frias acknowledges that Abdulla Sadiq's version of *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* has ensured the preservation of the tale, and claims Sadiq's prose form 'has lost much of the rough strength of the original folk poem'. This is probably true but the responsibility may not lie with Sadiq. His published Dhivehi text is sometimes vague and incomplete, the result of its official abridgement for school use. However, Sadiq's version retains strong elements of humour, compassion and magic, and many insights into the complex richness of old Maldivian island customs, traditions and magic.

Aishath Naazneen alerted Romero-Frias to similarities between *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* and the classic Indian fable *Ramayana*, and Romero-Frias argues that there has been a multi-layered development of *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* over perhaps 2,000 years, beginning as a version of the *Ramayana* and then 'subject to local variations (over) many centuries of successive oral transmission, followed by as many centuries of Islamic bowdlerization'. He presents a list of similarities with the *Ramayana* legend:

- An evil king kidnaps a beautiful woman.
- Sita is born from the earth; Dhon Hiyala is kept in an underground room.
- Ali Fulhu is exiled from Hulhudheli; Rama is exiled from his kingdom.
- Hawwa Fulhu's relationship with Ali Fulhu is similar to Surpanakha's with Rama.
- Lhaimagu Ali's description to the king of Dhon Hiyala's beauty, is identical with Surpanakha's description of Sita to the evil king Ravana.
- Ali Fulhu's initial attack on the king shows a heroic bravery reminiscent of Rama.
- Ali Fulhu and Dhon Hiyala's devotion to each other, and the king's 'callous' disregard for the bond of marriage, are strong themes in the *Ramayana*.
- Dhon Hiyala spurns the king's advances, just as Sita rejects Ravana.
- The white crow is reminiscent of Jatayu, the son of Garuda.
- Both Dhon Hiyala and Sita commit suicide to avoid 'shame'.
- Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu are buried and their tomb is enshrined, thus giving them divine status like Rama and Sita.

This list suggests *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* has important narrative and character links with the *Ramayana*. Though these connections are interesting, they are more tenuous and superficial than they initially appear.

The king's kidnapping of Dhon Hiyala is described by Romero-Frias as 'the main plot',¹⁰ but in Sadiq's version of the tale, the abduction occurs very late in the narrative and much of the preceding storyline concerns the lives of Dhon Hiyala's *raaveri* ancestors, the feud between Hawwa and Ali Fulhu, and other social and magical events related to the construction of the black coral *odi* in Hulhudheli

¹⁰ Xavier Romero-Frias, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

island. Despite the paucity of early Maldivian records, they chronicle a number of instances of kings seizing beautiful women for their harems. Romero-Frias translates two examples in his book from François Pyrard's original French record of the reign of King Kalaafaan (1585-1609). In the Dhivehi oral history by Buraara Mohamed Fulhu,¹¹ King Abakuru (1442-1443) hears from the Huvadhu atoll tax collector about a beautiful woman named Rekki Kamana living in Kolhumadulu atoll. The king sends twenty-five soldiers to fetch her.

Occurrences such as these, rather than influences from the *Ramayana*, are a more likely explanation for the story's kidnapping episode.

Immediately after her birth, Dhon Hiyala is hidden by her parents because she is a *faiymini* – a girl of incredible and portentous beauty and therefore valuable because she is certain to be selected for the king's harem. Her parents are well aware that a royal marriage will bring them influence and prestige.

Romero-Frias claims the Maldivian *faiymini* legends 'originated in the figure of Padmini, the lotus-lady of ancient Sanskrit literature', a goddess of ideal beauty:

fair complexion, shiny smooth abundant jet-black hair, oval face, long eyes, straight and fine nose, delicate lips (larger in the Maldivian ideal, like those found in women represented in Maurya and Gupta art), fleshy and soft limbs (not angular and bony), full round breasts (set close and high), three fleshy folds or creases below the ribs, a very thin waist, round large hips, small belly and slightly bulging pubic area among other, mostly more intimate details.¹²

The natives of Buruni, where Dhon Hiyala lives, are unimpressed with the presence of a *faiymini* on their island. They know from experience that when such girls are taken away, great unhappiness and tragedy can result. Dhon Hiyala is more than just a pretty face and desirable body, she also has magical powers e.g. the ability to speak and communicate with crows and run across water. Her suicide can be interpreted as conferring divine status:

In the Dravidian Devi tradition... girls who were killed or driven to commit suicide to escape unwanted attention became objects of worship. After their death, the places where those women were buried or cremated, became holy for the local people.¹³

Hawwa Fulhu is the other dominant female character in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* but unlike the beautiful Devi-like Hiyala, Hawwa's power is based on her knowledge of *fanditha* magic. Considered together, the exploits and importance of the female characters Hiyala and Hawwa suggest that *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* is

¹¹ Buraara Mohamed Fulhu, transcribed by Al-Hajj Ibrahim Ibn Ismail Feeboa, *The Story of Bodu Thakurufaan*, Maldives, Malé, Department of Education 1958-1970, reprinted 2003. Available in Dhivehi only.

¹² Xavier Romero-Frias, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

not a mutant *Ramayana*, but rather it belongs to a particular Maldivian oral tradition that Romero-Frias elsewhere in his book describes as:

certain characteristic... tales reflecting lore of great antiquity, (in which) the purpose of the woman in the main role and the plot of the legend find justification in the display of her powers. Much in the same manner as the stories which form the background of the ancient Dravidian female divinities.¹⁴

Romero-Frias associates Hawwa Fulhu with Surpanakha from the *Ramayana*. In Valmiki's rendition of the *Ramayana*, Surpanakha is the demon sister of king Ravana. Her initial meeting with Rama is an intentionally comic interlude in the Indian story. King Ravana has killed his demon sister's previous husband and Surpanakha is old, 'pot-bellied', and cannibalistic. In lust, she approaches Rama who easily diverts her unwanted attentions onto Lakshmana, his unmarried brother.

Hawwa and Surpanakha have little in common. Surpanakha is a demon, whereas Hawwa is a trained magician. Surpanakha lusts after any man but Hawwa wants only Ali Fulhu, and on her own terms. Surpanakha thinks nothing of killing her rival Sita and craves to drink her blood, whereas Hawwa never threatens Dhon Hiyala in any way. Surpanakha is an evil king's sister. Spoilt and vicious, she constantly harangues her brother for revenge. Hawwa is not related to a king and no brothers are mentioned. Unlike Surpanakha, Hawwa doesn't manipulate others to act as her agents; she takes matters into her own hands and fights Ali Fulhu as an equal during their *fanditha* contests.

In Sadiq's *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*, couples are coy and chaste before marriage even when alone together. This is almost certainly a prudish modern abridgement. Romero-Frias says that traditional Maldivians, in common with other southern Indian matrilineal tribes and castes, did not condemn sexual activity among very young couples, nor was there any concern about female virginity:

The informal recognition of pre-adolescent couples as future marriage partners included licence to indulge in a sexual relationship. When girls reached puberty, at the *libās levvun* ritual they were de facto ushered into full married life with their traditional child partners, without the need of a proper wedding ceremony. This is the reason why traditionally in the Maldives no great importance was attached to the wedding ritual itself. Marriage rites were low-key affairs without relevance to social life.¹⁵

Francois Pyrard makes similar claims:

A man may in his life have had eighty wives and more... In like manner the wives have a vast number of husbands; but, far from that imputed to them

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

of any kind of blame, they are prouder the oftener they change husbands; and when they are courted they tell the number, names, and quality of their former husbands as a high recommendation. Nor are they any less esteemed by their gallants, but rather more; and less is thought of one who is still a virgin than of one who is no longer so, except it be by the king and the great lords. Yet, notwithstanding this common changing, you will find men and women who remain for a long time together, by reason that they love and cherish each other more than all the world.¹⁶

It is reasonable to assume the Malè kings' forced acquisition of beautiful young island women would have been resented by the girls' local lovers and their families. Francois Pyrard claims that among Malè Maldivians of the early seventeenth century:

Adultery, incest, and sodomy are common, notwithstanding the severity of the law and penalties. As for simple lewdness (heterosexual intercourse between couples not married to each other), nothing is more common; they think it no sin, neither wives nor unmarried girls, and make no work about submitting themselves to their male friends.¹⁷

Robert Knox gives details of prevailing sexual customs among young people in the Kandy area of Sri Lanka during the mid-seventeenth century, and family attitudes towards their siblings' behaviour:

Where their houses consist but of one room, the children that are of any years always go and sleep in other houses among their neighbours. Which pleases them better than their own. For so they come to meet with bedfellows, nor does it displease the parents, if young men of good quality as themselves become acquainted with their daughters, but rather like well of it; knowing that their daughters by this means can command the young men to help and assist them in any work or business that they may have occasion to use them in. And they look upon it as so far distant from a disgrace, that they will among their consorts brag of it, that they have the young men thus at their command.¹⁸

In modern Maldives, marriage remains a civil contract, often undertaken to avoid prosecution for illegal unmarried sexual intercourse. Marriage in Maldives is not necessarily a time of happiness and rejoicing. Although large white western-style weddings (without alcohol) have become very popular in modern Maldives, there are also other more perfunctory nuptials. In 1996, the writer witnessed a mass wedding at the Malè courthouse. About 20 young men were present and no women. The men were married *en masse* by a judge in a single short ceremony.

¹⁶ François Pyrard *op.cit.*, p. 155.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁸ Robert Knox, *op.cit.*, p. 91. (spelling modernised)

Messages were sent from the courthouse to the absent female spouses, informing them that they were now married.

Romero-Frias says Ali Fulhu was exiled from Hulhudheli, and associates this event with Rama's exile from his own kingdom, but in Sadiq's *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*, Ali is not exiled. Although he cannot marry any woman in Hulhudheli after Hawwa's death, this misfortune occurs long after a dream that tells Ali his future wife is in Buruni island. His plans to visit Buruni were initially prompted by sexual desire and portent, not island politics. Dream revelations, *bavati*, are a popular motif in Maldivian storytelling and historical records. In Dhivehi, dreams are 'seen' not 'had', the inference being that dreams are real and distinct from the dreamer.

There is little similarity between the characters of Rama and Ali Fulhu. Ali may be a skilled magician but he is ultimately a tragic figure, neither triumphant nor heroic. He is a master goldsmith on land and fearless captain at sea, but when faced with Hiyala's kidnapping his main reaction is one of terror and despair. Dhon Hiyala is the hero of that terrible episode.

One apparently non-Maldivian element in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* is the underground room constructed by Raaveri Moosa Malin to hide Hiyala, his newborn *faiymini* daughter. Romero-Frias says underground rooms are never constructed in Maldives because they cannot be kept dry.¹⁹ However, Majid Abdul-Wahhab says he has seen an underground room inside the old royal palace compound in Malé. It was beneath the building known as Mathige, where the throne room and the sultan's office were situated. The Mathige underground chamber contained a sunken octagonal bathing pool made of stone. There was also another underground room in Malé at Maandooge, Abdul-Wahhab's family house after his mother married. This basement area served as his mother's antechamber and bathroom. Abdul-Wahhab has also seen a partially submerged room at Bodufenvalhuge, his grandfather's house in Malé.²⁰

It is likely that Moosa Malin in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* was referring to a similar underground chamber when he promised to keep Dhon Hiyala hidden. She would have retreated to this secret place whenever visitors arrived, and bathed there rather than using the less private washing area at the rear of her house.

In the *Ramayana*, Sita is not kept underground. King Janaka offers his daughter Sita as a wife to Rama. She is a baby, born of mother earth, and therefore a divine incarnation of the earth as a symbol of yielding femininity. Hiyala's years in an underground room indicate she was kept hidden, and this bears only mild comparison with Sita's metaphorical relationship with the earth.

¹⁹ Xavier Romero-Frias, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

²⁰ Majid Abdul-Wahhab, private communication.

Almost all the evidence Romero-Frias uses to demonstrate the *Ramayana* links, refers to events in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*'s short but dramatic finale. If these incidents are derived from the *Ramayana* then it seems likely they were added to an existing Maldivian story or group of stories. There seems to be little proof in the plot structure of Sadiq's version, based primarily on stories of Dhon Hiyala and her family, to indicate that *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* is a Maldivian adaptation of the *Ramayana*.

Ali Fulhu is the main hero of the story until he knocks out the king and Lhaimagu Ali and then refuses to kill them, despite the urgings of Dhon Hiyala who knows they will order Ali's death in revenge. The focus of action then shifts to Dhon Hiyala. Ali Fulhu's briefly successful rescue of his lover from Malè restores him momentarily to the spotlight but his ship has no water or food supplies – Ali Fulhu has made another fatal mistake. Only the *faiymini* Dhon Hiyala escapes with comment from the narrator. She remains beyond reproach.

The genealogy diagrams included with this translation show how Dhon Hiyala's kinship connections provide the central thread of the narrative and dominate far more than those of any other character. Notably, the births of Ali Fulhu and another important character, Lhaimagu Ali the Peasant are both dated by reference to the time of Dhon Hiyala's birth and, unlike Hiyala's genealogy, their family ancestry is only traced back through two generations.

Women are assertive and intelligent characters in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*, usually smarter and more realistic than the men. The narrator is sometimes disparaging of males. At the beginning of the story, Raaveri Ali may be hardworking and loyal, but it is his wives – Sakeena and then Amina – who accomplish truly herculean tasks, simultaneously boiling huge amounts of toddy into jaggery sugar, maintaining the house, preparing food and bearing children:

In the midst of all this hard work, Sakeena became pregnant and had a baby boy. So she found herself with another job as well. The only new demand on Ali was for him to greet his baby whenever he entered the house!

Buraara Mohamed Fulhu's *The Story of Bodu Thakurufaan*

The narrative structure of *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* has many similarities with an oral history of the same fifteenth and sixteenth century period in Maldives – *The Story of Bodu Thakurufaan* as told by Buraara Mohamed Fulhu.

Both stories are dominated by the construction of a special magical ship, and include detailed sailing instructions for journeys between the atolls. Although *raaverin* have low social status in Maldivian society, in these stories the *raaveri* families are portrayed as pious, loyal, loving and energetic. In *Bodu Thakurufaan*, the remorseless lives of Malè's rulers and warriors are described with humour but little sympathy, and similarly in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* where the king, chief queen, and soldiers are malevolent and threatening.

Both tales are most engaging when describing adventures at sea, warrior duels and other violence on land, and humorous vignettes of married household life. *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* mocks conceited men and women regardless of their official status. The narrator's heroes are hardworking people like fishermen, carpenters, toddy collectors and their wives, not vicious kings and queens and their lackeys.

In Buraara's *Story of Bodu Thakurufaan*, there is a section about the exploits of Three Palm Mohamed, a lazy but clever *raaverin* and *fanditha* man who eventually marries the Huvadhu atoll chief's daughter. Buraara's story also describes the close relationships between Mohamed Thakurufaan's family and *raaverin*. At this time, all Maldivian ships were using coconut frond sails that needed constant renewal. These essential items were made by *raaverin*. Buraara tells of meetings between the Thakurufaan brothers and Maroshi Raaveri Kaleyge²¹ in the same Maroshi island mentioned in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*. There, the production of toddy sugar is described as an ancient tradition:

Maroshi island used to produce toddy sugar as light as rainwater, the lightest sugar in Ari and Maalhosmadulu atolls. The food Maroshi Raaveri Bey served to the brothers contained this rainwater sugar, rice cooked in coconut milk and dried tuna.²²

Maroshi Raaveri Kaleyge agrees to help the Thakurufaans in their quest to bring Islam to the country by sewing into shape the sets of raw woven coconut frond sails brought regularly to Maroshi by another *raaverin*, Dhonakulhi Dhon Raaveri Kaleyge from Dhona Kulhi island. The Thakurufaans need new sails every eight days for their war *odi* called *Kalhu ob Fummi*. After Mohamed Thakurufaan's victory in Malè, Maroshi Raaveri Kaleyge is brought to the capital and, like Raaveri Moosa in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*, he is proclaimed the *malin* of the Friday mosque. Maroshi Raaveri Kaleyge is granted the *malin*'s official residence and seven servants.²³

If Maroshi Raaveri Kaleyge's promotion after Mohamed Thakurufaan's 1573 victory in Malè was the inspiration for the story of Moosa Raaveri's rise to office, then this element of the story has been backdated by many years in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*. Queen Bureki and the king belong to the first half of the sixteenth century in Maldives, before the Portuguese-backed Ahdhiri-Andhirin came to power in 1558. The Goan Maldivian Ahdhiri-Andhirin resembles the Black European from *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*. Regardless of the chaotic chronology, the story's historical references are essentially from the sixteenth century, and references to money refer to currency dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

²¹ Buraara Mohamed Fulhu, *op.cit.*, pp. 374-379.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 376.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

Fanditha and Maldivian Islam

Fanditha is a mixture of folk medicine, charms and black magic based on ancient Maldivian beliefs and superstitions with the addition of Arabic Koranic verses. Islam is backed by government regulation and law, and there is active prohibition of other religions among Maldivians. Maldivians' understanding of Islam and history has been constricted by limited education, censorship of books and the lack of a Dhivehi translation of the Koran. Traditionally, Islamic ceremonies popular among Maldivians emphasised the power of Muhammad in rituals of prayer, intoxication, trance and feasting. Maldivians went on pilgrimages to other islands, praying at the graves of popular saints, visiting secret areas believed to have magic healing powers and staying with their friends. Islamic ceremonies of pilgrimage, prayer, song and feasting maintained social peace and harmony, and fostered respectful and friendly relationships between otherwise separate island communities.

Fanditha thrived as a medicinal and magical art used to cure the sick and aid childbirth, and also for political and social intrigue, courtship and marriage rites, launching new ships, ensuring a good fish catch and finding guilty parties when a crime, usually theft, had been committed. *Fanditha* worked particularly well if people believed in it.

It assumed less benign forms when employed to weaken or kill enemies. In modern Maldives, the practice of *fanditha* is declining and many educated Maldivians consider it a joke but respected *fanditha* men and women are still paid large amounts of money by satisfied clients. A *fanditha* man originally from Vaadhoo island in Gaaf Dhaalu (southern Huvadhu) atoll, who lived in nearby Maathodaa island with his wife from that island, claimed to have earned over Rf20,000 while practising in Seenu (Addu) atoll during 1994-5. In 2001, another *fanditha* man was exiled from the capital island Malé after being found guilty of casting spells to influence the result of an important soccer game.

Maldivian magic dominates the action in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*, and is an integral part of the drama and lives of the characters. In the opening sections of the tale, magic is almost absent and the formal Islamic customs for death and marriage seem didactic and boring. The action becomes more subtle and convincing when the jealous Maroshi island chief uses mosque prayer rituals as part of a *fanditha* spell to curse Raaveri Ali and Sakeena's household and kill the woman and her children. This shocking incident combines the twin themes of disease and jealousy, which have always been dominant in Maldivian island storytelling traditions, according to Romero-Frias.²⁴

Women have minor roles in the Islamic marriage rituals of Sadiq's *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* – female consent is required for marriage and a woman

²⁴ Xavier Romero-Frias, *op.cit.*, pp. 63-68.

personally receives her dowry. When Sakeena marries Raaveri Ali, the most important part of the ceremony occurs when Ali's mother hands over of the keys of the house to her new daughter-in-law. Later in the story, Hawwa Fulhu mentions a ritual that will allow Ali Fulhu to marry her even though he has publicly condemned the idea after her initial rejection of him. 'If you want to make offerings,' says Hawwa, 'and change your mind, I'm prepared to pay the expenses.' This indicates the existence of a non-Islamic propitiation ritual, which includes valuable offerings to an island deity.

Astrology is used constantly in a variety of social situations by the characters in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*. The stars are used to calculate the best time to enter friends' houses (most social gatherings and visits occur in darkness), and the constellations and moon play crucial roles in the timing of constructions and other important matters, such as the occasion of the weaving of Hawwa's first dress (a sign of sexual maturity and adulthood). The time chosen for Hawwa is the fourteenth or middle (full moon) of Rajab – the fourteenth night of the seventh month of the lunar *Hijra* calendar. Seven is considered a lucky number in Maldives, and in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* the weaving date for Hawwa's dress coincides with auspicious star positions – Pleides descending, Delphinus in mid-heaven and fortuitous celestial asterisms. The astrological observations seem to be necessary to confirm the auspiciousness of the *Hijra* dates. Significantly, *Hijra* dates and associated full moons are not mentioned at all in the building of the black coral *odi*. Its keel is laid when Delphini is in the ascendant and Arcturus Bootes is in mid-heaven, and later these same star positions portend an auspicious launching. Pyrard confirms that astrology controlled many important decisions:

The astrologers are consulted at every turn. None would care to engage in any enterprise without previously taking their advice. And not only so they like to know their nativities and have their horoscopes taken, but also when they have to do any building, whether in wood or stone, they must go and inquire of the astrologer at what hour it were better to commence it, that so it may be done under a good constellation; and the same if it be the building of a ship, but with differences proper to the different uses which the vessel may be building for; thus they choose a different day or hour for a ship of war, for a merchantman, and for a fishing-boat. Moreover, when they undertake a voyage or any other enterprise, in like wise it is not without first inquiring of the astrologer what will be the issue of it, and whether the day be good or bad, and the planet favourable or unfavourable; and so, if anything untoward befalls them, they attribute it to the day, and accept it with patience, saying that the will of God has been done.²⁵

²⁵ François Pyrard, *op.cit.*, pp. 186-187.

During the latter part of *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*, Islamic rituals are an ethically neutral ingredient of *fanditha*, harnessing the power of prayer and incantation to a spell regardless of the magician's motivation or intention. In other parts of the story, prayers are treated as innately beneficial, for example when used by men in the long overnight chanting sessions²⁶ before the launching of the new black coral *odi*.

Hawwa Fulhu and Ali Fulhu have been trained in the magic arts on their home island Hulhudheli and they cast a variety of spells during their battle over this fantasy *odi*. The conjuring by Hawwa of storms and vicious fish is described in detail and Ali's invoking of the king of the sea and his ministers is both comic and awesome, and concludes with a blood sacrifice. Ali's ceremony for the king of the sea closely resembles the *baburu kiyevun* – 'a complex process of great solemnity', according to Romero-Frias,²⁷ which is performed at times of crisis involving food shortages or infectious disease and intended to appease the mother goddess Devi. Ali Fulhu performs his ceremony alone on a single night, however an authentic *baburu kiyevun* lasts for ten days and is performed by at least four males. The climax of Ali's spell is the arrival of the king of the sea travelling in the style of the king of Maldives.

Ali treats the final ritual offerings to the sea as annoying details, but Romero-Frias describes these offerings as the climax of an authentic *baburu kiyevun*, when ten days of accumulated flowers are wrapped in white scarves and thrown into the sea:

After certain mantras were recited, at a sign from the leader the men would throw first the limes, then the last flowers, followed by the flowers of the ninth night and, finally, all the flowers of the eight preceding nights, into the sea.

Meanwhile, the *fanditaveriya* would continue reciting magic words and the moment of 'showing blood' (*le dekkun*) had come. Right then one man with a knife would cut the neck of the (red) rooster and let the blood drip into the sea. This was the moment when the spirit would arrive. It seems that often it would be seen as a sudden and abnormal phosphorescence in the waters of the lagoon.

Then the leader would instruct all participants to go ashore walking backwards, with their faces towards the sea. Once on dry land, the *fandita* man would keep reciting magic words and draw circles (*anu*) on the sand around him. He would change place three times, drawing a new circle every time, and the ceremony would conclude when the leader of the ritual would declare: '*Aman vi*', meaning that the spirit was favorably inclined towards

²⁶ See 'Muhammad and Maldivian Islam' section below, p. 112.

²⁷ Xavier Romero-Frias, *op.cit.*, pp. 111-118.

them. Finally some lamps would be lit again and everyone would return home.²⁸

Ali Fulhu's surly attitude towards the king of the sea may seem ill-mannered, but it is in accordance with H. C. P. Bell's observation that 'the worship of the king of the sea is deprecatory'.²⁹ This disparaging attitude towards the king of the sea is also apparent in a more recent tale from Maldives, which describes a charlatan arriving at a new island and pretending to be the king of the sea.³⁰ Since his appearance coincides with good fishing conditions after a long period of scarcity, the naive islanders are convinced that he must be the king of the sea and they supply him with thirty young female virgins from their island. All goes well for the trickster until he is recognised and exposed by a man from his former island. Eventually, the fake king of the sea dies a lonely and miserable death.

In the 1880s, Bell wrote, 'the title of *king*, in place of *god*.. is.. a concession to the monotheistic principles of Islam'.³¹ He claimed the kings of the sea and the winds were worshipped separately, and the king of the winds, *Gharaguginni Rannamari*,³² was popular on land as well:

(every island) has a *siare* (*ziyaaraḥ* – shrine/tomb)... which is a place dedicated to the king of the winds, in a corner of the island remote from the world, where those who have escaped danger come to make offering daily of little boats and ships fashioned on purpose, and filled with perfumes, gums, flowers, and odoriferous woods. The perfumes are set on fire, the little boats are cast upon the sea, and float till they are burned, for they too catch fire, and this, say they, that the king of the winds may accept them.³³

There are no such shrines for the king of the sea. His worship is confined to the sea and when humans are on the water, divine presences are respected:

Likewise they believe in a king of the sea, to whom in like sort they make prayers and ceremonies while on voyages; or when they go a-fishing, they dread above all things to offend the kings of the winds and the sea.³⁴

Clarence Maloney mentions another deity called the *kan'du ranin*, sea queen, but she is not closely associated with the king of the sea although, like the king, she has many followers and lives in the ocean. *Kan'du ranin* is a malevolent deity 'giving people the illusion of things getting enlarged; causes high fever and shivering'.³⁵

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

²⁹ François Pyrard, *op.cit.*, p. 176, nt. 1.

³⁰ Magieduruge Ibrahim Didi, trans. Abdullah Shavi (Xavier Romero-Frias' name in Maldives), 'King of the Sea', in Ali Hussain, ed., *Finiashi – Heard in the Islands*, Maldives, Novelty Publishers 1988, pp. 19-24.

³¹ François Pyrard, *op.cit.*, p. 176, nt. 1.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 178, first nt. (carried over from p. 177).

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-178.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³⁵ Clarence Maloney, *op.cit.*, p. 249.

Muhammad and Maldive Islam

Prophet Muhammad is mentioned twice in *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* – during a fire and smoke invocation to Allah and His messenger at young Moosa's naming ceremony, which closely resembles a *Mauloodh*, and again when Ali Fulhu burns ambergris and prays to Muhammad for a successful fishing voyage.

Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu is set in the hundred years from 1450 to 1550, and Buraara Mohamed Fulhu's version of *The Story of Bodu Mohamed Thakurufaan* claims Mohamed Thakurufaan introduced the *Mauloodh* ceremony in the twenty-year period from 1560 to 1580 after he learnt the practice in Beypore, near Calicut in India. It is likely the *Mauloodh*, which seems to have been originally developed by the Mapilla community on India's Malabar coast, was long popular in Maldives northern atolls before being officially recognised and encouraged during the time of Islamic religious reformation demanded by Mohamed Thakurufaan and his descendants after they conquered Malè.

The *Mauloodh* was a religious meeting celebrating the death of Muhammad on the 12 Rabi-Awwal in *Hijra* year 11. The ceremonies were held on the first, fourth, eighth and twelfth days of this lunar month, and *Mauloodh* remained a very popular custom among Maldive men until its suppression during the twentieth century by the dictators Hassan Fareed and Maumoon Gayyoom.

For a *Mauloodh*, men gather in a dwelling to sing songs of praise for the Prophet and halfway through the ceremony everyone respectfully stands because Muhammad is believed to have entered the room. Francois Pyrard gives a graphic description of a *Mauloodh* from among the several he witnessed four hundred years ago in Malè. They were important occasions, planned a month in advance by festival organisers elected for the purpose. *Mauloodh* was held in each of the four Malè wards and in the palace grounds. As well, there was a sixth *Mauloodh* on the same day held in front of the Friday mosque for the general public. Pyrard says the ceremony was 'diligently observed in all islands' and lasted all night. The king paid for the palace *Mauloodh*, but for the others, money came from the people and everyone was expected to contribute. Wooden houses sixty feet long and forty wide were erected specifically for these *Mauloodh* and the timbers could be used only once. The buildings were decorated 'with cotton or silk cloths of all colours, and of the finest and richest description available'. On the ceilings, 'they stretch pieces of cotton cloth, very white and very fine, and to support them they run cotton cords, dyed black, from side to side at right angles and aslant, so cleverly that the white above seems to be cut into squares and lozenges of exactly the same size; it is very neat'. The sand floor was covered with mats, and the inside of the building was lit very brightly by up to 30 copper lamps. Perfume was burnt outside the building and entered the enclosure through holes in the walls. There were facilities for mouth washing and betel chewing. The building contained no furniture apart from a flower-covered table in the centre, displaying wicker baskets and lacquer vessels of sweets and fruit. No women attended these celebrations, nor did the higher status men, because *Mauloodh* was considered a feast for common

men and beneath the dignity of the elite. However, the chief judge attended, along with the island chiefs and senior mosque officials.

Singing was an important part of the *Mauloodh* ritual. Pyrard says ‘the harmony is good, and the singing far from disagreeable. They call this chanting *zikuru*, and say they are the Psalms of David’. At the height of the ceremony the participants entered a trance state:

On the stroke of midnight everybody with one accord lies down at full length with his face to the ground, and so remains for a space of time. Then of a sudden the chief judge or the island chiefs stand up, and all the rest of them, and set a-leaping upon each other as they were madmen or lunatics, crying at the top of their voices, *Aly alas Mahomedin*, again and again, this lasts for some time. I have inquired of them why they do this, and they asking ‘What?’ and I replying, ‘These mad leapings and dancing,’ they told me they knew nothing of having danced or done any such thing, but only remembered that for a space of time they had been rapt with ecstasy and had been partakers of heaven and the joys of paradise. Sometimes the chief judge remains for an hour or more like the dead; they say then he is transported to heaven, and that it is a mark that he is a righteous man.³⁶

Throughout the night, betel preparations and beverages (probably alcoholic) were distributed by the seniors to lines of men, and when the chanting ceased and prayers had been said, food from the table was distributed by the same senior men. Everyone was sprinkled with perfumed water, and after eating the food, the men returned home to sleep.

Until the 1970s, songs of praise to the Prophet called *salawaaiy fulbu* were sung from the minaret in Malè after the *bangi*, call to prayer. The songs were addressed directly to Muhammad. Two examples of these minaret songs are *assalaatu wassalaamu ala ya noora arshillah* – ‘Prayers and peace be unto you, Oh Light of the Throne of Allah’, and *assalaatu wassalaamu alla ya kbatima rusulillah* – ‘Prayers and peace be unto you, Oh Seal of the Messenger of Allah’. A suppressed Dhivehi term for Muhammad, *kau ithuru kalegefaan*, ‘most divine lord’, attests to the Prophet’s supernatural status, because *kau* is also used in the Dhivehi phrase *ek-kau wantbakan* to mean monotheism or ‘the one-godness’ of Allah.³⁷

Although many Maldivian Islamic scholars opposed these public chants to Muhammad, the practice of singing of praises directly to the Prophet was supported by Maldivian holy men influenced by the Sufi Qadiriyyah sect’s teachings based on the mythologised teachings of the 11th-12th century Hanbalist Sufi Abdul al-Qadir al-Gilani. Gilani (also known as Jilani or Jili) was educated in Baghdad and he became a Sufi under the influence of al-Dabbas. After his death, his tomb in

³⁶ François Pyrard, *op.cit.*, pp. 146-150.

³⁷ Majid Abdul-Wahhab, private communication.

Baghdad became a place of pilgrimage, and he became the patron figure for a charitable and philanthropic Sufi brotherhood. Their activities combined with embellished stories to establish Qadir Gilani as one of the most popular saints in Islam, particularly in India.³⁸ The Qadir brotherhood rituals were colourful with their repetitive movement, prayers and music, and through them, Indian ritual breathing techniques and body movements were introduced into Islam. On the subcontinent during the fifteenth century, the brotherhood flourished in the Deccan region in south-central India.

Buraara says that after the conquest of the Maldives capital, infidel practices like 'going to the toilet without bending their knees and cleaning themselves afterwards without using water'³⁹ continued in forty islands on Miladhunmadulu atoll. The islands were attacked by the Malè militia and awarded to them by Mohamed and Hassan Thakurufaan. Maroshi, Komandu and Lhaimagu are included in the list of infidel islands occupied by the militia.

In modern Islamic Maldives, Muhammad remains particularly revered. Although some Maldivian Wahhabi scholars have tried to place the Koran at the centre of worship, there is no official Dhivehi translation of this book and fluency in Arabic is rare among Maldivians. Hence the Koran remains mysterious and remote. Each year during the fasting month of Ramadan, there is a radio Dhivehi broadcast of the *Biography of Muhammad* written by Hussain Salahuddheen and first published in 1937. A printed version is also available in three attractive and widely circulated volumes. Hence Muhammad, and not the Koran, remains central to many Maldivians' understanding of Islam.

³⁸ John Esposito, chief editor, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, U.K., Oxford University Press 1995, pp. 375-378.

³⁹ Buraara, *op.cit.*, p. 429.

Translating Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu

Fareesha Abdullah, originally from the island of Maathodaa in southern Huvadhu atoll, completed the primary translation from Dhivehi and Arabic into English of *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*. Her Dhivehi teacher at the Science Education Centre in Malè was the author Abdullah Sadiq.

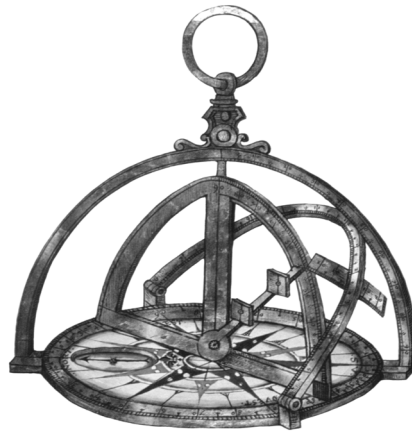
The story is translated with its original section headings and structure unchanged. Some very repetitive phrases (probably useful and entertaining during an oral interpretation of the tale) have been truncated or removed to improve the narrative flow for readers.

Many Maldivians helped with difficult parts of the translation. Special thanks are due to Alan Treloar and Majid Abdul-Wahhab for help with Arabic words, and to Nazeer Jamaal for help with the *fanditha* and betel-preparation sections.

The scholarship of Xavier Romero-Frias and Majid Abdul-Wahhab provided illuminating and indispensable help for the translation and writing of the 'Background and Origins' section, and contributed significantly to my knowledge of *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* and the culture that produced it.

The accuracy of the translation is due to the efforts of Maldivians. Any errors are my responsibility.

Michael O'Shea,
Australia 2004



Further explanations

Black Coral

'Black coral is not a true coral, but a marine organism related to the *Gorgonids*. Instead of calcium carbonate, its skeleton is made of a kind of keratin, the same substance as horns, claws, nails, etc.'⁴⁰ Black corals, *Antipatharia*, 'assume a variety of branched or whip-like growth forms. The name black coral is derived from the colour of the hard inner skeleton. The live colonies are never black when viewed underwater. They are usually brown, whitish, or various shades of yellow. Black coral is sometimes commercially harvested for making jewellery. They can sometimes be seen in only a few metres of depth, but the best quality suitable for cutting and polishing is found in much deeper water, often below 50 metres. The usual size of specimens is 80-180 cm in height'.⁴¹

In Maldives, black coral was collected by fishermen who knew where to cast their anchors and draw up valuable specimens that were often 50-75mm thick. Pyrard says the industry was a royal prerogative when he was in Malè, and the king employed men to harvest it. Black coral collecting is now banned.

A Maldivian story called 'The First Tunas' describes a giant black coral tree at the edge of the world, 'a frightening place' where the currents are strong and water flows over the edge in a massive waterfall.⁴²

Books

Books rot quickly in the humid Maldivian climate and are subject to attack by bugs. Shelves exacerbate the problem. To keep books readable for as long as possible they were packed in boxes or in very loosely woven cane baskets and suspended from the ceiling rafters for maximum ventilation and protection from crawling insects. In *The Story of Bodu Thakurufaan* by Buraara, Mohamed Thakurufaan in the sixteenth century always travels with his *liyaa galan dhaanaa*, writing equipment in a special box. Books were copied for preservation or rewritten from surviving records after fires. For example, the copy of the Thareekh translated by Bell in his *Monograph* had an English 1820 watermark and English 1821 newspaper cuttings used as stuffing in the leather covers.⁴³ The original Thareekh was destroyed in 1752 when the Azhi Raja of Cannanore sacked Malè.

⁴⁰ Xavier Romero-Frias, *op.cit.*, footnote p. 41.

⁴¹ Dr Gerald R. Allen and Roger Steene, *Indo-Pacific Coral Reef Field Guide*, Singapore, Tropical Reef Research 1996, pp. 102, 122-123.

⁴² Xavier Romero-Frias, *op.cit.*, p. 187. The story was told to Romero-Frias by Nihani Riza in 1991 in Malè. (p. 187, nt. 8).

⁴³ Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

Circumcision

In Maldivian society, circumcision is traditionally performed on boys when they reach the age of seven years. It is treated as a time of family celebration and rite of passage into Islam for the young boys who are pampered and spoiled after the ceremony. Care must be taken in the very humid climate to avoid infection of the wound. Pyrard describes circumcision in the early seventeenth century Malé:

All male children are circumcised when they reach the age of seven; and they hold a feast for all comers, which lasts for ten days, according to their means and there is dancing to the music of flutes and tambourines and other rejoicings. There are circumcisers who do this work and nothing else. This is the manner of proceeding: Six or seven hours before the circumcision, the child is bathed in the sea, and kept there until the hour arrives, for they say this causes the penis to shrink, and renders the skin more soft. A shed is constructed on purpose in the yard of each man's house, covered all round with cloths or silk stuffs; the floor is covered with fine white sand. The child is then brought to the shed, where, to prevent him struggling, two or three *mudhim* are stationed, who meanwhile chant the proper verses and prayers. The operator, taking a little white lime, marks all around the penis the line where he has to cut, then draws the foreskin as far as he can and ties it with a little cord, and then performs the operation with a razor used only for that, and very keen and sharp. The boy is tended and doctored by the operator himself, until he is recovered. Meanwhile, the relatives and friends of the parents come to visit him, bringing presents for the operator, who also receives payment from the father. Recovery takes about 15 days, and then the operator takes the circumcised boy to the sea and bathes him, saying prayers and performing ceremonies the while; then he puts into his hand a little palm branch, fixing at the end of it a little piece of white taffetas, cut to a point like a little pennant, and called *dida*, flag... Before a boy is circumcised they say he is innocent, and cannot sin; and indeed, most of them before this time wear no cloth to cover their private parts, for they say that one who cannot sin has no shame; but after circumcision they fail not to cover them. For their daughters, there are no feasts or ceremonies, except that for their circumcision they draw two or three drops of blood when they reach the age of two years. When the children grow up they hold in great respect the man who circumcised them, and call him their master.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Francois Pyrard, *op.cit.*, pp. 128-130.

Coir rope

Maldivian coir rope, made from coconut fibre, was a major export for many centuries, much prized by boat builders throughout the Indian Ocean for its superior quality. Coir was prepared by burying hairy coconut husks in salty swampy ground for several months, and then removing the coarse hair and twisting it by hand into balls of stringy fibre. Women did this laborious work. Ibn Battuta says the coir rope was exported to India, China and Yemen, and was considered better quality than hemp rope. It was used for rigging and to bind ship planks together:

With these ropes the beams of the Indian and Yemenite ships are sewn together, for the Indian Ocean has many rocks. If a ship nailed together with iron nails collides with rocks, it would surely be wrecked; but a ship whose beams are sewn together with ropes is made wet and is not shattered.⁴⁵

Fanditha

See '*Fanditha* and Maldivian Islam' section above, p. 109.

Fishing

Unlike toddy collecting, fishing was not a traditional caste occupation in Maldives according to Francois Pyrard, and he says there were no restrictions on where people were permitted to fish. He describes the customs and method of tuna fishing in Malé:

It is deemed a honourable employment, even the great lords joining, and taking great pleasure in it, as they do here in the chase [hunting in Europe]; but they care not otherwise to profit in the takes. On the contrary, all men of honour and quality, when they go afishing and catch any, send them to their friends or give them to any who come and ask of them, or else they have a quantity cooked with green bananas... and call all their neighbours to come and eat; this they do without other ceremony, by way of merrymaking...

The chief fishery, that of the fish (tuna) in which is the greatest trade, is pursued beyond the reefs and atolls in the deep sea, six or seven leagues out, where that kind of fish always lies. A marvellous quantity of fish are caught there, of seven or eight sorts ... caught in the same manner – that is, by a line of a fathom and a half of thick cotton cord, fixed in a big cane, which is a wood of great strength. The hook at the end is of a different sort from ours. It is not bent, but is longer, and pointed at the end like a needle, without barb or tongue, resembling in all aspects the letter 'h' written in the French running hand. No bait is attached, but the day before, they provide a lot of little fish of the size of a little roach or whitebait, which are found in great abundance on the reefs and shallows; these they keep alive in net-

⁴⁵ Ibn Battuta, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

bags of coconut cord of small meshes and let them drag in the sea at the stern of their barques. When they get out to the deep sea to the fishing ground they cast abroad these little fish, and at the same time put in their line. The big fish, seeing the little fish – a rare sight in the deep sea – rush up in numbers and are caught at the hook, which is whitened and tinned on purpose – for this kind of fish is exceedingly greedy and foolish, so to be taken by a white hook, which it mistakes for a small white fish. They have then only to draw the line into the boat, where the fish drops at once, being hardly hooked; the line speedily put back into the sea, and thus a marvellous quantity is taken, in such a wise that in less than three or four hours their boats are nearly full: and this, be it remarked, while they are going full sail... The catch is cooked in seawater, and then dried in the sun upon trays, and so when dry they keep a long while; wherefore there is great traffic in them, not only in the country, but also throughout the rest of India, where they are in great request.⁴⁶

Ibn Battuta, living in Maldives in the fourteenth century and, for a brief period, appointed as the chief judge in Malè, says Maldivian dried fish were exported to India, China and Yemen.⁴⁷

Pyrard also describes in detail two other main methods of fishing – standing on small rafts at night and using a long line with hooks and bait to catch *rangoo*, and building rock fish kraals, up to 40 yards wide, for the equinoctial tides at appropriate places on the reef and surrounding and trapping up to twelve thousand fish at a time. Pyrard, who travelled around the world, claims that fish in Maldives were more numerous and of greater variety than anywhere else he visited.

Gun-real

The *real*, royal, is a Spanish silver coin originating in Spain during the reign of the king of Castile and Leon, Peter the Cruel (1350-1369). Its silver content was 93%, and it was popular among the world's traders because the standard was not debased over time, remaining relatively constant for hundreds of years. Pyrard mentions that Spanish *real* fetched a high price in Malè in the early seventeenth century due to their high silver content. In 1536, Spain had established a mint in Mexico to convert the silver found there directly into coinage. The new Mexican *real* varied from the original Spanish design, showing a stylised pair of crowned 'pillars of Hercules' (two promontories at the eastern end of the Strait of Gibraltar) extending out of ocean waves on the reverse side. 'This new American design was meant to reveal that new lands extended beyond the confines of Europe and Africa – the Americas – and were the preserve of Spain'.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ François Pyrard, *op.cit.*, pp. 188-190.

⁴⁷ Ibn Battuta, *op.cit.*, p. 198.

⁴⁸ Richard G. Dory, *Encyclopediac Dictionary of Numismatics*, London, Robert Hale 1982, p. 277.

On this new Spanish Mexican coin, the symbolic pillars of Hercules were easily misconstrued as ‘guns’ or cannon. The crown on each pillar also resembled explosions emitted from fired cannon. The presence of the waves, too, would have reinforced Maldivians’ perception of the pillars as ship’s cannon.



Sixteenth century Spanish Mexican *real*

Laari

Maloney says the original *laari* coinage was issued up to about 1600 at Lar, inland from the Persian Gulf. *Laari* were first minted by the Safavid founder of the Persian Shia state, Shah Ismail (1502-1524), from the example of Russian wire money issued from the fourteenth until the eighteenth century.⁴⁹ The long silver *laari* currency appeared in two main types – a straight hair-pin variety popular in western India and the Persian Gulf, and a bent fish-hook shape used in Ceylon. In the mid-seventeenth century, Knox described the Ceylonese *laari*:

There is another sort, which all people by the king’s permission may and do make. The shape is like a fishhook, they stamp what mark or impression on it they please. The silver is fine beyond pieces of eight. For if any suspect the goodness of the plate, it is the custom to burn the money in the fire red hot, and so put it in water; and if it be not then purely white, it is not current money.⁵⁰

The same method of testing a *laari*’s silver purity was used in Maldives, according to Pyrard:

The king coins *laari* only; other pieces of less value he coins not at all; insomuch that for the uses of trade they cut the silver and pay by weight for the value of the goods bought; but this is not done without some loss, for in cutting the *laari* they lose a twelfth part. They take no silver without weighing it and trying it in the fire to prove it; and everybody has weights in his house for this putpose.⁵¹

A hairpin Persian *laari* made from good silver weighed 4.9 gm and was about 43 mm long. Pyrard says, ‘they were of silver wire stamped with Arabic

⁴⁹ Richard G. Doty, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Numismatics*, London, Robert Hale 1982, p. 193.

⁵⁰ Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 97 (98).

⁵¹ Pyrard, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-236.

letters in the middle and bent over'. King Ibrahim Kalaafaan (Mohamed Thakurufaan's son) minted silver *dhigu laari*, long laari, in the hairpin shape while Pyrard was in Malè. Other *dhigu laari* have been found bearing the names of King Mohamed Imaadhudheen I (1620-1648) and his son King Iskander Ibrahim I (1648-1687).⁵²

During the time of *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu* only gold, silver and cowry shells were accepted as money in Maldives. One silver *laari* was worth 12,000 cowries in the early seventeenth century. (Bell and other sources use the term *laarin* instead of *laari*, but in Dhivehi, *laarin* is only used as a sentence connective form, not a noun).

H .C. P. Bell's Maldivian long *laari* specimen appearing as an illustration in Grey's translation of François Pyrard may not have been minted in Maldives. The footnotes in the same book also have an illustration of the Ceylon fishhook *laari*. Both these specimens are likely to be foreign, not made in Maldives. Bell's *Monograph*, (published in 1940 – fifty-three years after Grey's translation of Pyrard), has photographs of verified Maldivian *laari* fashioned in a flattened hairpin shape. In Sri Lanka and India, local rulers minted different *laari* designs.

The name *laari* transferred to the silver coins first issued in Maldives during the reign of Sultan Iskander Ibrahim I. Specimens of these early round coin *laari* are dated 1664/5 and 1675. A 1683 report in East India Company correspondence says these five or six Maldivian *laari* are valued at one *rupee*. The Indian *rupee* had originally been struck in Bengal during the time of Sher Shah (1539-1545).

From 1722, Maldivian *laari* were minted also as copper amalgam coins.

The *rufiyya* (Dhivehi word for *rupee*) was initially equal to 120 *laari* but in the late nineteenth century, according to Bell, one *rufiyya* was worth 100 *laari*. The Maldivian mint, *sikkage*, struck its last coins in 1901/2. Bell writes:

In former days the *Sikkage Kalegefannu*, or 'Mint Master', was a member of the *Kuda Majlis* Council, and had important responsible duties. He was assisted by a dozen underlings for varied duties.

The modus operandi of 'coining' was very simple. Strips of metal, *teli-lo-fagadu*, were first cast (if of copper and brass, from pots and other suitable material), and beaten out to the required size and thickness. From the strips blank discs were next cut out by a stamper, *kiruni-godi*. These discs were then placed between the fixed lower die, *sikka daru tak-godi*, and loose upper die, *sikka mati tak-godi*, and hammered... To the credit of the defunct Maldivian Mint it should be recorded that Mr Allen (*Numismatic Chronicle*, 1912) considers, 'the execution of the ordinary pieces to be quite up to the average of Muhammadan copper coins'.⁵³

⁵² Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁵³ Bell, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.

Malin and Malim

Malin is a title once given to the officially appointed leader of prayers at the royal mosque in Malè.

Malin is easily confused with the word *malim*. In Maldives and in the Indian island of Minicoy island, which has a Dhivehi culture, a *malimi* was an expert sailor and navigator, and in the Tamil language, *malumi* means a ship's pilot, according to Maloney.⁵⁴ His research shows the Maldivian *malim* was skilful and resourceful:

Maldivian *malim* would use the compass, introduced for navigation in the Indian Ocean by the Chinese, only when sailing to the mainland, navigating around their islands by experience. There was an old type of sextant, *fila*, in use before the Europeans came, a sort of long slide rule, and there was also a sort of quadrant, *goidaruwan*. In the 1830s, Captain Moresby saw Maldivians make and repair astrolabes, quadrants and wooden sextants, and they copied from English nautical tables. He noted schools for navigation on some islands.

When detailed English almanacs for navigation became available, pilots (*malimi*) began using them on long trips; they could not read English, but could find the right columns and read the numbers. They measured speed by dropping a knotted string in the water. And they could sail at night by the stars, setting their direction with successive stars appearing at a given point on the horizon. Today (1970s), few sailors in the Maldives can navigate by stars or use the old instruments, for sailing of private trading boats to the mainland has been largely halted by the government monopoly of exports.⁵⁵

Mosques and prayers

The *imam* is the leader of the prayer at the mosque. He stands closest to the *mihrab*, and prays facing the *kibla* with the rest of the congregation. In many individual mosques, probably the most prominent man conducted the service; according to the *hadith* the one with the best knowledge of the Koran, and failing him, the eldest, should officiate. The position of *imam* no longer represents a political office, but each mosque has one. He has to maintain order and is usually in charge of the divine services in the mosque.⁵⁶

The prayer of the *isha* (evening or beginning of the night) is of four *raka*. Here the *fatih* and the Koran are recited in a loud voice. Most Islamic traditions fix the time of *isha* as 'the disappearance of that redness of the sky which follows the

⁵⁴ Clarence Maloney, *op.cit.*, p. 293.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁵⁶ C.E. Bosworth, E. van Danzel, W.P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte, (editors), *The Encyclopedia of Islam Vol:VI*, Leiden, E.J. Brill 1991, pp. 674-675.

setting of the sun, and extending until the end of the first third of the night'.⁵⁷ Technically the call to prayer, *adhan*, (*bangi* in Dhivehi) should be the responsibility of the *mudhim*, while the *imam* leads the prayers inside the mosque. In Maldives, the functions of *mudhim* and *imam* are usually combined.

Salat refers to the entire prayer performance including ritual prostrations.

Ikamah is the prayer: 'God is Great, come unto blessedness, now begins the worship'.⁵⁸

Raka is 'a sequence of utterances and actions performed as part of the act of worship or *salat*, involving utterance of the *takbir* and *fatiba*, then bending of the body from an upright position, *ruku*, and then two prostrations, *sujud*'.⁵⁹

Sura are the 114 independent units of the Koran. Often interpreted as 'chapter', the term *sura* as used in the Koran is best interpreted as 'a unit of revelation'. The first *sura* is exceptional – a short prayer addressed to God, and not considered to be part of the revelation by at least one of Muhammad's closest companions.⁶⁰ The *sura* for midday prayer should be said in a whisper. In *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulhu*, young Moosa says the *sura* in a loud clear voice during his first visit to the Malè mosque, either the story-teller was not aware that it should be said in a whisper or the suggestion may be that Moosa was pretentious.

Pyrard describes the early seventeenth century mosques in Malè, and give details of the beliefs and social expectations that prompted regular attendance:

The mosques are well built of fair worked stone, and well bonded; they have thick walls, and stand in the middle of a large walled square, which is their cemetery...

The main mosque in Malè is square, facing west, for that, they say, is the direction of the tomb of Muhammad. It has three doors, and at the entrance to each, on the outside, there is a large well, descended by steps, the bottom and sides of which are paved and fitted with flat stones, well polished and neat, to accommodate them at their ablutions; and thence to the door is a paved way of the same stone (for all the rest of the close or cemetery is only sand), so that they may not be soiled after bathing, and then they must mount eight or nine steps to the elevation of the temple.

The paved floor of the temple is covered with pretty mats and carpets; and they are careful to keep it neat and clean; none durst even spit or blow his nose there... The superstructure is made of wood, the carpentry of which I much admired, for it could not be better polished or worked... and the whole of the woodwork, outside and in, is put together without nail or bolt of any kind, and yet holds so fast that one could not take it to pieces unless

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 928-929.

⁵⁸ B. Lewis, V.L. Menage, Ch. Pellat, and J. Schacht, (editors), *The Encyclopedia of Islam Vol:III*, Leiden, E.J.Brill 1971, p. 1057.

⁵⁹ C.E. Bosworth, E., and others, *op.cit.*, p. 406.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 885-886.

one knew the artifice. Large slabs, either of stone or wood, are fixed to the walls in diverse places, on which are engraved letters and inscriptions in the Arabic language...

In this mosque are lamps kept burning constantly. These mosques are very numerous in all the inhabited islands, and in some islands one may see as many as nine or ten; but their festival (Friday prayer) is celebrated in one only... and is in consequence greater than the others, the latter being like chapels or oratories for praying in, founded by the devotion of individuals...

Each day of the week they go at daybreak to the temple, and for this they give a reason according to their belief, viz. that the world is flat, and not round, and that there is a wall of copper all around which prevents the world from being submerged by the waters which encompass it; and that the devil, the enemy of the human race, is at hand all night trying to pierce and undermine this work, and when the day breaks he must nearly have worked a hole. By reason whereof all the men of fifteen years of age upwards go at break of day to the mosques to say their prayers, for without prayers the world would perish...

The women never enter the mosques, but remain at home and say their prayers there...

No one is compelled to say prayers. If, however, it were known that a man did not say them at all, no one would eat or associate with him.⁶¹

Most modern Maldivian mosques are all-male affairs, especially in the capital Malé. However, women pray in the island mosques in curtained enclosures on the main prayer floor. Many women also pray at home in special prayer areas.

Names

Maldivian first names are often the same, and rarely distinctive enough for positive identification, even on a small island. People can be further identified by their island of birth, the name of their most prominent parent, the name of the family house and/or their occupation.

Placing the surname at the end of a Maldivian name is a late twentieth century innovation, which has confused many Maldivians.⁶² The Dhivehi word for surname, *vanan*, also means 'nickname'. Many Islamic scholars in Maldives taught that Muhammad the prophet frowned on the use of nicknames and in the minds of Maldivians, surnames are tarred with the same hadithic brush. Similar to other oriental traditions such as the Chinese, the Maldivian surname was positioned before given names. Comparing the names Deng Zhaoping and Guifuku Don Kalo, Deng

⁶¹ Francois Pyard, *op.cit.*, pp. 125-128.

⁶² Majid Abdul-Wahhab, *Kingdom of Isles*, unpublished manuscript 1990s. Most of the information about Maldivian names is transcribed from this source.

and Guifuku are respectively the Chinese and Maldivian surnames. In the Middle Eastern and Western traditions, the surname comes after the given names.

The traditional Maldivian name was made up of two or three components. Examples include Guifuku Don Kalo, Oofindu Kaiydaa Fulu, Maakana Kudatuttu Didi and Dhoondheyri Ali Manikfan. The first component was the surname; the second was the given name or a term of endearment like Tuttu, Kuda (little), Don (fair) or a combination with a given name such as Kuda Hussain or Don Mariyambu. The optional third component indicated rank by birth or association.

Often children would not be named, in the superstitious belief that this would protect them from evil spirits and sickness. In *Dhon Hiyala and Ali Fulbu*, Raaveri Ali delays the naming of Hussein, his eighth son, until the boy's eighth year. Ali's previous seven children died suddenly after the Maroshi island chief's *fanditha*. The survival of Hussein proves the spell is broken, and Ali's ninth son Raaveri Moosa is named only days after birth.

Another protection device was calling Maldivian children something other than their name. Until recently, most people were not commonly known by their birth names. Instead they were called by an alternative name such as Dohuttu, Lahuttu, Tutteedi, Kudamaniku, or Don Goma. The rationale behind this practice was that if the evil spirits did not know a person's real name then the spirits' spells would be ineffective. On occasion children have been called Maraduru (Death-distant) or Rakkalu (Protection), 'reflecting the high frequency of infant mortality and a superstitious, yet ingenious and thoroughly Maldivian solution to the problem.'⁶³

Odi

An *odi* was a large Maldivian-built trading vessel. In modern times the term *odi* is restricted to trading vessels only. The term *dhoani* is now used for fishing boats and for vessels used to transport groups of tourists and local travellers. *Dhoani* carry little cargo. In the past, the term *odi* often included all these types of boats. According to Romero-Frias the term *odi* comes from Malè Dhivehi dialect. The same vessel is called a *vedi* in the Dhivehi dialect of Addu and Fua Mulaku atoll, and *voddāa* in Huvadhu atoll dialect. Formerly, the term *furadde odi*, external or outward bound vessel, was also widespread in the southern atolls:

The *odi* or *vedi* was a somewhat heavy bark-type vessel. It was also called *daturu odi*, travelling vessel, or *bandu odi*, belly vessel. The length of an average *odi* was about 14 metres and it was built entirely of wood. It usually had a main mast and a lesser mast close to the stern. In the north, a different type of two-masted craft called *batteli* was used for the same purpose. These ships had to be made thoroughly ocean worthy to be able to cover safely with a heavy load of cargo, the huge expanse of ocean between the Maldivian atolls (which becomes larger as one goes south) and

⁶³ Majid Abdul-Wahhab, private communication.

the closest coasts. Hence the great skill and technology that went into building these *odi* affected the building of even the smallest fishing boats to such an extent, that crude boats are simply non-existent in the Maldives.⁶⁴

Raaverin

See 'Raaverin and coconut cultivation' section above, p. 97.

Rice and food

Rice, a staple part of the Maldivian diet, was imported usually from Bengal, Sri Lanka and India. Small stones were, and still are, left in the rice by unscrupulous foreign traders to increase the weight, and the grains must be inspected for gravel before cooking to avoid damage to teeth. Even in modern times, Maldivian importers profiteer by buying poor quality rice that must be cleaned of stones and inedible rice grains. Women and girls spread the rice on large flat trays and pick out the stones and unsuitable grains.

Food is valuable in Maldives, especially in the atolls where it can become scarce during the wet season and other periods of bad weather that prevent trading vessels from sailing. Due to the concentration of export/import trading in the capital, food shortages around Malé are rare. On other islands and particularly in many of the outer atolls, food shortages are common.

Sarongs, *mundu*

Owing to the humidity of the Maldives, legs feel hot even when covered by a light cotton sarong, *mundu*. Workmen may fold the sarongs up high, in a fashion reminiscent of the short dress worn by Roman soldiers. Sometimes the sarong is folded even higher so that the cheeks of the buttocks are exposed.

Writing boards

Carpenters who built boats also made writing boards from wood. Chalk was not used on these boards. Instead, wet fine sandy clay was rubbed onto the board and left to dry. Then it was brushed to remove any coarse sand, leaving a smooth white/grey writing surface that would accept a pencil mark. The teacher wrote on the board and students would learn by copying the teacher's words underneath. Washing the board with water erased the writing, and a fresh surface could be applied. Although paper and pens are now readily available, this writer saw a writing board being made for a student in 1996 on Maathodaa island in Gaaf Dhaalu atoll.

⁶⁴ Xavier Romero-Frias, *op.cit.*, p. 12, footnote and text.

Maldivé atoll names

Traditional	Modern
Ihavandhippolhu and North Thiladhunmathee	Haa Alifu
Maamakunudhoo and South Thiladhunmathee	Haa Dhaalu
North Miladhunmadulu	Shaviyani
South Miladhunmadulu	Noonu
North Maalhosmadulu	Raa
South Maalhosmadulu and Goidhoo	Baa
Faadhippolhu	Lhaviyani
Malè atoll	Kaafu
Rasdhoo and Ari	Alifu
Felidhoo	Vaavu
Mulaku	Meemu
North Nilandhoo	Faafu
South Nilandhoo	Dhaalu
Kolhumadulu	Thaa
Haddhunmathee	Laamu
North Huvadhu	Gaaf Alifu

South **Huvadhu**

Gaaf Dhaalu

Fua Mulaku (Foamulah)

Gnaviyani

Addu

Seenu

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