

CORRESPONDENCE

GLORY OF DIAMONDS IN INDIA

Dr. B.P. Radhakrishna's article "Some thoughts on diamond exploration in India" and "Small scale mining"... in March and April 2006 issues of the Journal of the Geological Society of India (v.67, nos. 3 and 4), deserve attention of everybody in the country. Thought provoking, concise and precise account of his editorials signifying the past glory, present status and future actions required need to be reviewed and adopted by all heads of organizations who are in a position to initiate action for diamond exploration and mining in India.

Yes, diamonds were first discovered and mined in India long back. It was the only country in the entire world producing diamonds till some 200 years ago. All famous historical diamonds are from our country. Now all that glory has vanished gradually and in the world scenario, India has fallen down to an insignificant position.. How did such flourishing industry come to an end?

Many pose the question as to the causes for the drastic and dramatic decline in the Indian diamond mining industry. While several complex historical factors might have played a role, it is tempting to assign a role to "enigmatic geopolitics" in this down fall.

To appreciate the real situation at that time, we may have to go back and understand the historical conditions in the country. Ancient India, well known for its wealth and prosperity was subjected to numerous invasions from outside. The country was conquered and Delhi was made the capital. Most of the diamond mines were in South and Central India which were controlled by several big and small kings. These peace loving rulers were more interested in fine arts, literature, architecture and cultural heritage than developing weapons of war to strengthen their military might for fighting wars or for self defense. In such a situation, having a diamond producing mine is more of a liability than a privilege. Some historians record that all known South Indian diamond mines were forced to close down by rulers due to fear of invasions from militarily more powerful Moghuls and other Delhi rulers. Thus, the world renowned Golconda, the diamond marketing centre of India, similar in many respects to the present-day Antwerp of Belgium slowly lost its luster and significance.

Then came British rulers who had their own colonial vested interests. Kohinoor and many other diamonds were taken away by them to London and could not be

returned even after giving us our independence. W.W. Francis, the English District collector, pointed out an unpalatable and bitter truth. In 1905 in the Gazetteer of Anantapur which was one of the main diamond producing areas of the country, he recorded that to protect the interests of South African diamond mining companies (owned by Britishers), the giant Indian diamond industry of that time was forced to close down by British rulers. Thus, eventually the diamond mining industry shifted from India to South Africa. Political factors have always overshadowed the geological reasoning in the survival or death of any mining venture in any place and time in the world history.

All these are past stories. Nobody is sure of these complex historical reasons. But when the country got independence we could have revived our lost glory giving freedom for mining diamonds and gold to the people. Unfortunately, the country made rules prohibiting any one to dig and pick up diamonds even from his own fields or from back yards of their houses. Mining of diamonds, gold and other precious metals were made as exclusive right of the Government only. The ancient practice of picking up diamonds and selling in the market became a crime. As per the enacted laws a land owner with surface rights could carry out agriculture and build a house on that. A person can't dig and pick up what is below his own land!

Realization has come nearly after half a century of independence that mining of diamonds and precious metals is not the job of government and could be given to the people who could do it. New national liberalised mineral policy was drawn up at Delhi. But the mind set of bureaucrats and government officials in power has not changed much from erstwhile colonial rulers. Government organisations are continuously exploring and repeating exploration activities without achieving the objective of opening up of mines for producing diamonds. Even after a decade of the new mineral policy enacted, nobody was given the right to mine for diamonds till now. The two existing mining leases are still with government departments. Number of requests for mining leases are still pending with the government. Allowing free mining of limestone and iron ore led to rapid growth of cement and steel industry in India. A similar gesture at that time for gold and diamond would have

totally changed the scenario. Instead of thinking of a single large mine, the available number of small deposits which used to be worked by ancients in small groups could have been initiated and encouraged the way it was done in ancient India.

Though our diamond mining industry declined and became a non-entity, the cutting and polishing business of India survived through the ages and still continues to retain a significant and respectable status in the world. Even now about 80% of the world's diamonds mined in other countries reach India for cutting and polishing and re-export. Time has proved that Indian artisans are second to none in the world in entrepreneurship if there is no government interference and undue control.

Now more than 200 kimberlite bodies have been discovered in India. Of these only a few are considered to be diamondiferous which could be mined economically. Discovering kimberlite is a significant first but certainly not a last step in exploration for diamonds. To make any kimberlite economically viable, a thorough systematic

follow-up work is required which many times is not realized by many. Our survey and research organizations concentrate on academically oriented research work often ignoring the application aspects of scientific studies. Another neglected field is the study of diamond bearing alluvial and palaeo-placer horizons which were the homes for famous historical diamonds of the country. A big handicap for the persons investigating diamonds in India is lack of information and communication. The suggested Diamond Club – a website data base cum discussion forum proposal, will help every person involved in the investigation to contribute, share, exchange, information for the overall growth of diamond industry.

The suggestions made by Dr. B. P. Radhakrishna in his editorials deserve our close scrutiny and follow-up action in reviving the glory of our diamond mining industry.

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Announcements

NATIONAL SEMINAR ON GEOLOGY, MINERAL AND WATER RESOURCES OF SIKKIM

Geological Survey of India, Sikkim Unit is organising the above seminar on 11th August 2006 at Gangtok in connection with the silver jubilee of GSI Sikkim Unit. Scientists interested in participating in this seminar may please contact K. K. K. Nair, Director and Convener, Geological Survey of India, Sikkim Unit, Deorali, Gangtok - 737 102. **Phone:** 03592-281994, **Fax:** 03952-281204, **Email:** nair_ngp@hotmail.com, geosikkim@hotmail.com

ADVANCED TRAINING PROGRAMME ON MINERAL DEPOSIT MODELLING

A DST sponsored short term training programme on mineral deposit modelling is scheduled during 12 to 27 September, 2006, at the Department of Geology, University of Jammu, Jammu. For details, please contact Dr. Pankaj K. Srivastava, Course Coordinator, Department of Geology, University of Jammu, Jammu - 180 006, **Phone:** 0191-2472850(R), **Email:** srivastav_pk@rediffmail.com, **Website** www.jammuuniversity.in/announcements.asp