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gem trade.

GEM TRADE

The entire community of China Fort, especially the group known today, as 'Ceylon Moors', comes down from the first gem merchants their ancestors who settled in the land of gem and gold, the 'Pearl of the Indian Ocean' the better known adage when making reference to Sri Lanka, then Ceylon.

The Gem Industry as a lucrative business is in the hands of the able, much enthusiastic and committed community of businessmen known as "Mukkara" and those other than them occupying the land as inhabitants, call the children of Mukkaras' as "Morokala". The old fashioned gem cut is referred to as 'Mukkarage' cutting.

SOMETHING UNIQUE AND SPECIAL IN CHINA FORT

The merchants involved in gem cutting trade at the China Fort are very successful down the ages not because of their talent shown or manifesting their skill, but it was purely on trust, they had built and confidence they had won throughout the ages. Winning the confidence of their much treasured customers, the mutual understanding, their unabated friendliness were hallmarks of their success.

The traders at this spot are vibrant, brave, efficient and active. They take the risk, face challenges and travel the globe at ease in looking for variety of gem-stones. They travel to India to get the best gem stone 'cat's eye'; to Kenya to fetch 'savorites'; Mozambique to look for 'rubies'; to Tanzania to buy 'chrysobery' and Madagascar to collect 'alexandrie', pink, violet and other types of sapphires.

The persevering, risk-taking and hard-working merchants, do better than the best to ensure China Fort continue to retain their fame as world class trade centre where all types of gems are available for those coming from far and near gem stone of their choice. Apart from selling gemstones to the buyers who come all the way to China

Ibn Bathuta the well - known traveller of yesteryear, who had visited this blessed land of our ancestors in 1344 AD, historians say, was a Berber and one of his narratives he points to women g jewellery involving themselves in the

Fort to fill their heart desire, the traders here unfailing export gem-stones to other countries eagerly looking for gems from China Fort Beruwala, Ceylon.

It is true that the coffers of the treasury are heavily assisted to raise the foreign exchange via money earned by Sri Lankans serving in overseas in addition to what is earned via tourism, tea exports and garments.

But the fact yet unknown is the considerable contribution made in this regard through the earnings of gem trade in earning the much needed foreign exchange to deal with other countries and enrich the treasury to such levels, where the end result is the benefits that galore to the periphery, to those living in the rural, and far away from the city.

The merchants involved in this trade as a habit bring gem-stones from Ratnapura and hand them over to dealers such as a 36 year old M.S.M.Ahzar, an ebullient young man, who has earned name as the one among many who through his hard work and commitment earned the prestigious international status to the China Fort of today.

M.S.M. Rikaz, his brother-partner, and his colleagues bring rough stones direct from countries over seven seas including Madagascar, Tanzania and Mozambique. His father M.S.M Zawahir had set up his own business in 1976 put himself in the trade in buying and selling of gems. Following in the foot-steps of his father, the initiator their family business, Ahzar in the year 2003, established "Ceylon Beauty Gem" his own Company.

In expressing his opinion of the trade he is involved he had this say: "in the past gem merchants moved for greener pastures to Colombo Capital City, seeking success. Their children were sent overseas universities to with the ardent hope and trust that one day their children would come back to practice as lawyers and doctors. Those remained in the China Fort without moving to the urbanized Colombo citadel learnt about variety of gems by experience not by earning degrees conferred by universities or following course in gemology."

Developed over centuries, with passion and experience coming down from generations, the modest, hidden enclave of China Fort turned a thriving centre of Sri Lanka gem cutting and polishing industry and a source very secret yet earning very much needed foreign exchange.

