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MADRAS RECORD OFFICE

GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS

Revenue DEPARTMENT

G.O. No. / B.P. No.	1369	Press / Mis.

Dated 17.9.1875 196 .

Not to be folded or roughly handled

No. 133. Read the following Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, dated 16th August 1875, No. 2,301 :—

Read the following letter from R. DAVIDSON, Esq., Acting Collector of Ganjam, to H. E. STOKES, Esq., Acting Secretary to the Board of Revenue, dated Sonnapore, 5th July 1875, No. 1,472.

WITH my letter, dated 2nd April last, No. 726, I had the honor to forward you samples of oyster and mussel shells procured from the Sonnapore River.

2. I have now the satisfaction of informing you that I have ascertained, beyond all shadow of doubt, that there are pearl-producing mussels in the Sonnapore river.

3. From inquiries which I have from time to time made, I felt nearly certain that pearls were to be procured here, but, like my predecessors, I was unable to obtain specimens or such other reliable proof of their existence as would enable me to report authoritatively on the subject.

4. The matter was kept so close a secret by those interested that it was not until the 25th ultimo that I procured specimens through my Salt Deputy Collector Dharma Row, to whom I am much indebted for the trouble he took, and who was on duty at the Surla salt-pans situated about three miles distant from Sonnapore as the crow flies.

5. With much tact and difficulty he succeeded in purchasing for Rupees 6 the forty-eight pearls, marked A, and which I now forward. Some of them are minute seeds it is true, but others are of fair size, and, I have reason to believe, are of considerable intrinsic value. The largest could, I believe, be sold here for Rupees 15.

6. When the Assistant Superintendent of Sea Customs here discovered the direction the wind had taken, he trimmed his sails accordingly, and, making a virtue of necessity, he submitted to me, on the 17th ultimo, a full report on the subject of pearl-diving, gave me a list of the divers, and, in his zeal for Government interests, offered suggestions for turning the discovery to the best account.

7. Among other things he proposed that the monopoly to fish for pearls should be sold at public auction to the highest bidder, and this of itself created consternation among the divers.

8. I was quite prepared, therefore, to find, on my arrival here on the 1st instant, that a combination had been formed among the fishermen to thwart, and, if possible, defeat the object which they shrewdly suspected I had in view of trying to ascertain, by personal inspection, what the true merits of the case were.

9. An aged patriarch went the length of absolutely forbidding the divers to accompany me, and it was amusing to watch the devices resorted to by the divers to mislead us by taking us to the wrong places, diving badly, bringing up anything they could lay their hands on below but the right thing, &c.

10. Finding that they were merely wasting time and energy without in the least shaking our determination to bring the matter to a definite issue, they reluctantly abandoned their false position, and, setting to work in earnest, commenced bringing up large clumps of the ordinary edible oysters with a few mussels adhering to them.

11. Owing to the unnecessary delay which had occurred, it was quite dark before Dharma Row and I got back, with our canoe-load of oysters and mussels, to the Sea Custom Office. I had them carefully secured for the night, and next morning we commenced the exciting operation of minutely scrutinizing the opening the mussels, of which there were in all about 400. The result was that the two small pearls, marked B, and which are herewith forwarded, were discovered.

12. Satisfied with this result, I resumed operations on the 2nd with twenty divers and procured about 1,600 mussels, which yielded the two good pearls and six seeds herewith forwarded and marked C.

13. I also forward nine mussel-shells, including those separately marked, in which the large pearl referred to in the preceding paragraph was found, and beg to invite the attention of the Board to the pearl-like excrescences in them.

14. The result of these experiments has affirmatively settled the hitherto doubtful question whether or not pearls were obtainable from this river, and has demonstrated that it is from mussels, and not from oysters as we had all along been led to suppose that pearls are to be derived.

15. I will now proceed to explain briefly the method adopted by the divers in procuring pearls, and will then describe the locality and offer a few remarks.

16. Sonnapore is a small fishing village situated near the mouth of a river to which it gives its name, and which is about twelve miles south of Gopaulpore.

17. For some miles up the river there are large beds of the ordinary edible oysters, which find a ready market at Berhampore and elsewhere.

18. Mixed up with the ordinary oysters and adhering most tenaciously to their beds are the bright green mussels from which the pearls are procured.

19. I had five canoes, with four divers in each, at work, and the place where we were most successful is situated about two miles from the mouth of the river and about half a mile beyond the Custom-house.

20. Each diver brought with him a long bamboo pole which he drove with all his might into the oyster bed at a depth of from ten to twelve feet of water according to the state of the tide.

21. He then dived to the bottom, and, holding on to, or keeping near, the bamboo, broke off as large a mass of oysters as he could conveniently bring to the surface in one hand, and with the other hand he helped himself up the bamboo. Any mussels that were found adhering to the block of oysters were secured, and the oysters were returned to the water, as thousands of them have already from time to time been examined in vain.

22. I was amazed at the dexterity and rapidity with which the divers opened the mussels with knives made for the purpose; and the expert manner in which they ran their thumbs over the molluscs, detecting in an instant without fail the most minute seed pearl not larger perhaps than a pin's head, leaves no room for doubting that long practice has made them perfect in this particular branch of what has hitherto been to them a highly lucrative employment.

23. I have not succeeded in procuring any of the large pearls which are now known to have been obtained and sold here not long ago, but I think those which I have the honor to forward are of sufficient merit to warrant the prosecution of

Proceedings of the Madras Government, Revenue Department,
17*th September* 1875.

further inquiries into a subject which, if taken in hand and properly treated, may eventually become a fruitful source of revenue.

24. I feel highly interested in the matter, and am very desirous that a professional diver with apparatus should be placed at my disposal for a short time, in order that the true nature and extent of these oyster and mussel beds may be accurately ascertained and reported on.

25. I request also you will do me the kindness to have the pearls now sent inspected and furnish me with a copy of the report that may be obtained regarding them, and I shall be glad to be furnished with any information which you may be able to communicate or procure regarding the culture of pearl oysters or mussels, their removal to other localities for the purpose of propagation, &c.

26. If the pearls are of value, I see no reason why extensive mussel-beds should not be established in the Gopaulpore and Nowpada backwaters, the Chilka Lake, and elsewhere, where they could be strictly preserved at a small outlay; and, should Government decide upon trying the experiment, I need hardly say I will use my best endeavours to ensure its success.

27. Sixteen rupees have been expended in the purchase of pearls and in diving operations, for which I have the honor to request sanction.

Enclosure No. 1.—Tin case containing mussel shells and pearls.

The Collector's report and the mussel shells and pearls which accompanied it will be submitted to Government.

2. The Board have had the pearls examined by two pearl merchants who state that they are of a very inferior quality and of the description termed "rejected pearls" by the trade. They value the big discolored pearl at Rupees 1-8-0, and consider the whole sample not worth more than Rupees 7. They also state that the shells do not resemble those from which pearls are obtained in Ceylon, and that they have never heard of the existence of pearl oysters in Ganjam. The Board doubt whether, under these circumstances, it would be worth while to send up a professional diver from Tinnevelly. The Collector will be furnished with a file of reports on the pearl banks near Tuticorin.

3. The sanction of Government is requested for the expenditure incurred, *viz.*, Rupees 16.

(A true Copy and Extract.)

(Signed) C. A. GALTON,
Acting Sub-Secretary.

No. 134. Order thereon, 17th September 1875, No. 1,369.

Miscellaneous.

The shells will be sent to the Curator of the Government Museum, Madras.

2. Sanction is accorded for the expenditure of Rs. 16.

3. The Government agree with the Board that the enterprise need not be embarked in by the State.

4. The Collector will not interfere with the local industry, such as it is, at present.

(True Extract.)

(Signed) A. MACGREGOR,
Acting Secretary to Government.

To the Curator of the Government Museum.
„ the Board of Revenue.
„ the Accountant-General.

Exd. A. Grubert.

Govt. of Madras.

REVENUE.

To

THE CURATOR OF THE GOVERNMENT MUSEUM,

&c., &c. &c.

Dated September, 17*th*.

Recd.

Encl.

G. O., 17*th September* 1875, *No.* 1,369.

SEPTEMBER.

Nos. 133-134.

Mussel Shells and Pearls from the Sonnapore River in the Ganjam District.—Ordering the — to be sent to the Curator of the Government Museum, Madras; sanctioning the expenditure of Rs. 16 incurred on account of them; concurring with the Board that the enterprise of sending up a professional diver from Tinnevelly need not be embarked in by the State; and directing the Collector not to interfere with the local industry at present.

No. 2,301.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF REVENUE, dated 16th August 1875.

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3. The sanction of Government is requested for the expenditure incurred, *viz*, Rupees 16.

(A true Copy and Extract.)

Acting Sub-Secretary.

To the Acting Secretary to Government, Revenue Department,
with tin case containing mussel shells and ~~papers~~ pearls.
,, the Ating Collector of Ganjam, with a file of papers on Tuticorin Pearl Banks.

Exd. A. Grubert.

1875.

Board of Revenue,

MADRAS.

PROCEEDINGS, 16TH AUGUST 1875, No. 2,301.

Received 1st September

AUGUST.

No. 2,301.

Mussel shells and pearls—procured from Sonnapore River in Ganjam District, and Collector's report thereon, submitted to Government with remarks, and sanction requested for the expenditure of Rupees 16 incurred in obtaining them. File of reports on Pearl Banks near Tuticorin forwarded to Collector.