

Spectrum statescan

Dark, dingy dungeons of Srirangapatna

TRAVEL British officer Colonel Bailey, who served as a prisoner of war in Tipu's time, breathed his last in 1782. The dungeons in Srirangapatna were named after him. Today, it is an important spot to visit for anyone interested in the history of Mysore and the valour of its ruler Tipu Sultan, writes Hema Narayanan

Think of Srirangapatna and one cannot but think of the great ruler of Mysore, Tipu Sultan. Simply because of his valour, talent and the way he fought the British. Known as the Tiger of Mysore, he was the de facto ruler of the Mysore kingdom for a long time. Srirangapatna had the privilege of witnessing the great courage of Tipu Sultan during the late 1700s. Though a small town, 19 kilometers from Mysore, it was the chosen capital of Mysore. Several structures were constructed here too by Tipu Sultan. This town, an island on the River Cauvery, has endless number of stories of historical significance. One such story is that of the dungeons of Colonel Bailey. Even before the narration of the story, I was fixated with its name and was curious to know what the place was all about. Dungeon is sort of morbid and one imagines this to be a place where prisoners are put to much suffering in dark and dreary cells. As the story unfolded, it was becoming clear this was actually true. It was not out of turn in those times for

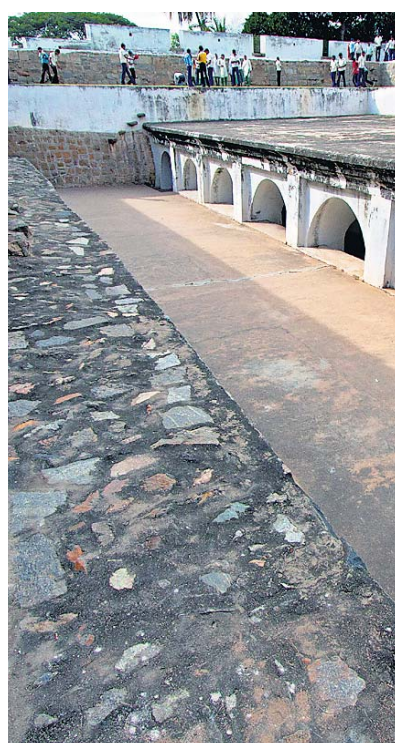
the British to hold Indian officers and locals as prisoners of wars. But it certainly was big news when the British were held prisoners. Tipu Sultan was one such valiant fighter who had the courage to hold highly ranked British officers captive. In order to have a defined place for housing captured prisoners, Tipu built these dungeons resembling a fortress.

As history has it, Tipu Sultan was destined to struggle against all odds, more so, as the British had established their supremacy by then. Also the British had successfully conspired with the Nizam and Marathas, to try and overcome the formidable hurdle in South India - Mysore. But Tipu, the ruler of Mysore, true to his prowess put up a strong and gallant fight against the superior forces, each time.

The second Anglo-Mysore war Not only was Tipu a great warrior, but so was his father Hyder Ali. So when the British had captured the French-controlled port of Mahe in 1779, Hyder Ali was agitated, mainly because this was a place that Tipu had placed under his pro-



REMAINS OF TIPU'S ERA
Stone slabs to chain prisoners.
PHOTO: RAGHAVENDRA K S
(Below) Entrance to Bailey's dungeons. (PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR)



tection with the help of some troops. So, Hyder Ali retaliated by launching the invasion of the Carnatic where he intended to drive the British out. Tipu Sultan led this campaign with 10,000 odd men and many guns, to intercept Colonel Bailey, who was heading the other troop.

This Anglo-Mysore War, also called the Battle of Pollilur was fought in September 1780. Tipu decisively won over Colonel Bailey and his troops. Several Europeans were captured alive while more than 3,800 sepoys suffered casualties. Tipu brought many men from the troops and Colonel Bailey to the dungeon as POWs. Later, Tipu also brought Captain Baird and Rulay, Colonel Brithwhite Sampson, Frazer and Lindsay as prisoners to this dungeon in a year or two.

The dungeons!

It was hard to see anything inside the dungeon; it was eerie, yet the way the dungeon was built was appealing. It had several arches and it seemed as if the arches greeted me to explore it. Cleanly maintained till date, one can easily imagine prisoners being held here with chaos around. As anyone would imagine, the dungeons were

built underground - and one had to climb down a few steps to enter. Built of brick and mortar, this fortress had relatively smaller measurements of 30.5m x 12.2m. The presence of many arches provided the dungeons with sufficient light to come in. And to me, Tipu had not compromised on the style of the architecture even here. The arches were symmetric, had the shape of a masjid's tomb, bulbous on the side and converging at the ceiling, at least so prisoners could stand up tall.

Inside the dungeons that are on a lifted platform near the fort wall, there were several shoulder height stone slabs fixed on the East, West and Northern walls. These slabs had holes in them and acted as hooks, to which the captives were chained.

Why Bailey's dungeon?

Serving as a prisoner of war, Colonel Bailey breathed his last in 1782 AD. The dungeons were named after him as 'Colonel Bailey's Dungeons' and it has remained so, ever since. Even as we walked through the arches, I saw a large cannon in the centre of the dungeon. There is no dearth of the theories that explain its presence here. But one that I have heard often is

the one in which the cannon rolled back or fell through the roof while Tipu was waging war with the British during the military blockage at Srirangapatna. The cannon came piercing the ceiling, leaving a large hole that can be seen even today. Made of solid wrought iron, weighing perhaps a ton, I wondered how soldiers of those days handled such heavy machinery! As I walked out after clicking many photographs, I noticed that some children had come in perhaps on a field trip to see the dungeons. These hyperactive children chatted away but still had their eyes transfixed to the hooks and the arches - absorbing the surroundings at length. One is sure that they had their imagination triggered by this important slice of history, when brave Tipu fought the British.

How to get there...

Distance: 19 km from Mysore, 125 km from Bangalore

Transport: Well connected by road and rail. Buses ply from Mysore and Bangalore at regular intervals. You can even drive down to the town

Accommodation: Many hotels and resorts are available.

MISCELLANY



AFFECTING LIVELIHOODS Bamboo artisans in Uttara Kannada face many problems including non-availability of raw material. PHOTO BY THE AUTHORS

What's troubling bamboo artisans?

A few decades ago, Indian households used a lot of products and kitchenware made of bamboo. Traditional items made of bamboo have slowly started to disappear from households pushing the livelihoods of the artisans to risk. Artisans are also facing problems such as non availability of raw material, lack of market and proper price etc.

Bamboo artisans in two pockets near Malagi village, Mundagod taluk, Uttara Kannada are facing similar problems and their livelihoods are at risk. These artisans use very few tools - locally made knives and *koradus* (wooden pieces). Some of them are skilled in colouring bamboo. The present skill level of the artisans is limited to the production of traditional products used in kitchens. However, eight artisans from the village have attended a training workshop in the production of gift items such as pen stands, bed lamps, hair clips and other fancy products. But the market for these products is at urban centres. Also, the financial situation of these artisans does not allow them to invest money in the production of gift items.

Availability of bamboo

The artisans are facing the shortage/ non availability of good quality bamboo poles. They need *shame* (*Dendrocalamus* species) variety of bamboo for the production of fancy goods. According to the artisans, bamboo of this variety is soft and the plant has long nodes compared to other varieties. The artisans have to travel 50 to 60 km to procure this bamboo available in the private lands of farm-

ers in and around Sirsi taluk. Each pole would cost Rs 40 to 50 including transport charges. Even to purchase the *shame* bamboo from private farmers, an artisan has to obtain a permit from the Forest Department.

Though bamboo is available with the Forest Department, it is generally sold in large quantities. The artisans are not in a position to invest huge amounts of money as a single payment. Also, the Forest Department supplies a mix of all varieties.

Workspace: Most artisans don't have a proper workspace, where they can all work together. A common workspace becomes important, especially during the rainy season and summer.

Machinery: They do not have any machinery for cutting and other work related to the production of bamboo items.

Market: There is no local market for the products. Artisans have to travel on cycles or local transports for the sale of items in faraway places like Sirsi, Hubli, Soudatti, Belgaum, etc. There is need to organise these artisans into a society to take care of sustained marketing, providing financial assistance, ensuring continuous supply of raw materials and regular training and upgradation of skills.

The annual income of more than 50 per cent of families is between Rs, 12000 and 15000. There are about 130 families residing in two villages near Malagi. The BAIF Institute for Rural Development, an NGO engaged in the implementation of various rural development activities in the district has conducted a detailed household survey at the request of NABARD, Uttara Kannada district and submitted a report on the condition of bamboo artisans in the region.

M N Kulkarni & V S Bhat

Schooling children of urban slums

TRANSFORMING LIVES Bangalore's Christel House offers good-quality education along with two wholesome meals, uniforms, books and transportation, all free of cost for children from underprivileged backgrounds, writes Aruna Chandaraju

Seventeen-year-old Zakir Hussain strides up to us when he is beckoned to by Mini Elias, Head, Development, Christel House. His manner and expression ooze self-confidence and positivity.

Not surprising considering that he is a star student of his school Christel House, Bangalore, and has been selected to attend the annual Culver Academy leadership training programme at Indianapolis in USA. He has already attended three such camps in a row.

What did you learn there, we ask. He replies, "I learned effective communication and also leadership skills. Besides we were given training in a host of other life-skills by various experts in their fields including personnel from the US Navy. I learnt boating and also received second prize in the sailing competition," he says, the pride and happiness shining through his voice.

But what is surprising is the great leap forward that his life has taken. Like all other students of this school at Bagalur in Bangalore, Zakir hails from an urban slum and had little or no prospects before he came here. For Zakir and hundreds like him, Christel House India is the boon which has transformed their lives in the most amazing and positive way, through one of the most effective tools of change - good education.

The Christel House was founded in 1998 by Christel DeHaan (co-founder of RCI), with a mission to help children break the cycle of poverty,

and become self-sufficient, constructive members of society. The means providing impoverished children with education, nutrition, health care and a nurturing environment and by empowering their families through outreach services, we are told. In effect, it is a holistic approach. Raju Shahani, Managing Director, Christel House India, explains, "Our institution is unique because it is perhaps the only NGO in India that completes a full cycle. We take children at age five in kindergarten, see them through 12 years of school, help them with vocational courses or university degree and then help them find jobs. The other unique thing is that founder Christel DeHaan has undertaken to pay in perpetuity general and administrative expenses."

There are several learning centres - in Venezuela, Mexico, South Africa, Indianapolis, and two in India which are at Bangalore, and Lavasa in Pune. The Bangalore school launched in 2001, now has 916 children, including boys and girls. Located on a large seven-acre, well-landscaped campus with modern facilities including computer labs, well-equipped library, music room, clean dining-room, art room, spacious classrooms and play areas, it is the oasis in the lives of these underprivileged children.

Low dropout rate

Most children and their parents too seem to realise this, accounting for



POSITIVE CHANGE Students at Bangalore's Christel House are empowered to face life's many challenges. PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR



the very low dropout rate (less than two per cent). After all, the children are receiving free, good-quality education along with two wholesome meals (breakfast and lunch), uniforms, books and transportation which are also all free of cost.

Further, if there is a bright and hard-working child who passes out of Class 12 with good marks but cannot afford college fees, Christel House also arranges to subsidise his or her higher education. Promising students also receive assistance in job placement.

To involve the parents and increase their awareness of their children's progress, all parents are committed to come in five days every year to the school and do voluntary work in the garden or laundry, etc.

Christel House has various criteria for admission. The parents' monthly income should be less than Rs 3,500 per month. Preference is given to single parents. Gender equality is maintained. The decision is taken by an admission committee comprising the teachers, social workers, volunteer representatives and the Christel House management. Complete surveys and verification are done of the poverty levels in background checks. The children

should also belong to areas within an 18-km radius of the school.

The big challenge for teachers in this institution is that there is no reinforcing environment at home for these children who all belong to urban slums. So, once they return from this positive environment, they return to a place which is least conducive to study and development of good social skills.

A challenge for teachers

Explains Director, Education, Jaya George, who functions as the principal, "Most of them are first-generation learners because their parents are either illiterate or school-dropouts. So, communicating with the parents is difficult when there is an issue to be discussed. Moreover, this also means we cannot count on parents to supervise the children's study or homework. In fact, since these children are from slums, there is lack of parental pressure or peer pressure, the two factors that motivate the average child, to study at home."

This means extra pressure on teachers. They have to constantly encourage and counsel the children to study at home and hold on to the good habits taught in school. The teachers often put in extra effort. For example, many students currently in Class 10 who have a board exam coming up, and are unlikely to study at home, are asked to stay back in school till 7 pm for supervised study at the school itself by the teachers.

It is all paying off. The first batch of students who completed the Class 10 Board Exams (SSLC) in 2009 had 100 per cent pass results. Other students have also been shining, making animation films, documentary films, winning prizes in sports and cultural activities, etc.