

# MYSORE

Mysore traces an historic legacy, ruled from 12<sup>th</sup> century by the Wadiyars, the Hindu Rajas, who empowered it as the capital of the erstwhile Mysore state with the blessings of their chosen deity- the goddess Chamundi. When Moguls broke their reign, the first Wadiyar rule ended in 1761; however, in 1799 with the death of Tipu Sultan at the hands of the British, the Wadiyar power was restored in full glory and with splendid architectural achievements which face-lifted the cityscape to its modern day splendors.

Today this undaunting town centers on the Palace completed by the twenty-fourth Wadiyar Raja in 1912, the leafy boulevards radiating out from this spacious northern roundabout into the labyrinth of streets and markets, famous for their sandalwood carvings and silk. The palace, now converted to a state run museum, is veiled in a fantasy on Sundays and special events - lit up with no less than 5000 bulbs. In the afternoon I am finger tracing, albeit imaginarily the gentle curves of the well proportioned arches and the crowning dome atop the central tower. On closer gaze the naked bulbs bordering the trims and edges pop out like air blown bits of bubble gum against the monsoon skies. I am a day off, it's a Monday. How I wished to have chanced upon the electric meters whizzing with fairytale bulbs fancying the magnificent palace.

Inside the museum, the polished marble floors inlaid with floral motifs lead through spectacular exhibit of lavishness. Stained glass from Belgium, Bohemian chandeliers, cast iron pillars from Glasgow and a grandiose array of period furniture endorse upon the sensual pleasures the former rulers reveled in. Halfway through, the imposing elephant gate adorns the main entrance to the palace centre. Past gilded colonnades I approach the *Darbar* like hall from where the Wadiyar Raja addressed his audience, seated on a throne made of solid 280 kgs Karnatakan gold.

As the sun sets, I stroll out once again awestruck at the sight of the palace. The windows have come alive in incandescent glow against the cobalt sky. Small street lights dot the pathway leading from the shut gates all around the perimeter. The archaic frame gets complete with a solitary *tonga*-the horse drawn chariot cart, an ancient mode of short transport-its charioteer in desperate pursuit of a customer. I oblige and take a paid ride to the clock tower along the broad boulevard, whose one side is lined obscured in fizz from blazing *tawas* serving the southern staple: Idli-Dosas served on banana leaves. Down along the cart-line is a gastric amalgamation of carts serving Chinese noodles and Chola Bhatara too, to be sweetly topped over with a helping of the famous *Mysore Pak Mithai*

Mysore is misappropriated from 'Mahisur', so called in the tenth century as the buffalo demon Mahishasura was slain by Goddess Durga here. The victory is commemorated annually as Dusshera, for which Mysore is equally famous. The near year end festival celebrated in grand style, progresses in a procession of bejeweled elephants and horses- a spectacle eagerly sought by the peninsular Indians thronging in large numbers.

One may wonder why the distant Srirangapatnam is part of the itinerated day excursion of Mysore city tour. In 1616 the Wadiyar Rajas shifted their capital to Srirangapatnam, 14 kms away from Mysore on an island over the River Cauvery. With the Rajas deposed in 1761, the Srirangapatnam fort was besieged by Haider Ali and his son, Tipu Sultan. In a short span Tipu converted this small Mysore state into a major power centre threatening the British dominance over India. Thus followed the bloody battle of 'Seringapatnam' in which Tipu fought like a true warrior against the overwhelming British soldiers. On 4<sup>th</sup> May 1799 the British excitedly declared 'India is ours' on finding Tipu dead amidst bodies of both sides slaughtered in this historic battle.

Such was Tipu's dreaded aura. Today, the underground dungeons where chained British prisoners were made to stand in neck deep water are grim reminders of his feats.

Believed to having killed a tiger bare handed, his soldiers idolized Tipu as the Tiger of Mysore, which he obsessively embraced decorating himself in finery of royal stripes and other symbols of the tiger. His tomb at Gumbaz, where he was laid to rest next to his father Haider Ali is hand painted on the inside in similar tiger patterns. Tipu's once Summer Palace, the Dariya Daulat Bagh houses an impressive collection of his memorabilia- hand sketches of his invincible enterprise and his advisory. The vibrant battle-field paintings spread over 70 feet along the outer walls of the palace commemorates Tipu Sultan's and Haider Ali's victorious combats.

At the Karnataka Tourism run Mayura Hotel, along the Cauvery, I am re-reading Tipu's history from a small booklet bought outside his mausoleum. Sipping a cold lager, I buy myself into a *teppa* - (Coracle) round wicker hewn basket boat which glides gently over the Cauvery -and step off on an island formed by heaped boulders. I am left in perfect solitude of Mother Nature in her elemental best: vivid greenery against the perfect monsoon skies as the Cauvery gently flows past. Like the awesome Tipu, but rather tipsily I feel as the possessor of this petite island, his sword though substituted by my empty bottle of lager.

Back at Mayura for lunch, I take a recess from history and soon am riding the auto-rickshaw across the width of Srirangapatnam for a rendezvous with birds at the Salim Ali established Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary. It's a weathered skiff this time, busy with ten farers skimming down the tiny islands of Cauvery. I am struck with the crowded birding haunts, a migratory haven for ornithologists. My co-passengers are least eager of the avian flocks- they enquire in Kannada with the oarsman for the possible sighting of the crocodiles. He points at the dark stone like outcrops bobbing in the distant waters. Approaching closer, we silently stare into the unmistakable slits of the eyes. The crocodile acknowledges our jaw dropping gaze with a distinct coldness, as he slithers by. The boat erupts with a frantic aftermath, unsteady voices deliberating on the shocking intimacy of the reptile.

Breathing afresh, we sight a wonderful flock of painted storks on one island. They seem playful in an audible riot. The raucous cause becomes apparent as we round the island. Another large crocodile is basking too close to the storks' nestlings.

Hitching back to Srirangapatnam, the ramparts of Tipu's fort stand silhouetted against the evening clouds. Wishful thinking has its own certain ways. This time the rains refuse to let go of the clouds. I thank my stars. The moon peeps through momentarily; I tip into a *déjà vu*. Up at the Chamundi hills in Mysore, a display in the museum states abashedly 'World drama repeats itself identically every 5000 years; you had visited this place the same way you are doing now exactly 5000 years ago'.

## **Tumescent**

Radha Kund is the bathing place of Radharani and Her most elevated assistants, the *gopis* or cowherd girls. Radha Kund is located on the northern end of Govardhan Hill in the area of Greater Vrajamandala, not far from Vrindavana or Mathura. Sri Rupa Gosvami explains in verses 9 and 10 of his *Sri Upadesamrita* that out of all the places in Vraja, Radha Kund is superior to them all because it is flooded with the ambrosial nectar of Krishna *prema*, ecstatic love of God. Therefore, those who live here are the most

fortunate in the universe. The *Padma Purana* also explains that just as Radharani is most dear to Krishna, Her bathing place of Radha Kund is also dear to Him