



SEE

Revival of the Bandstand culture in Mumbai

(Gp. Capt. Achchyt Kumar)

It was a Sunday evening and I had been invited to a Cultural Programme organised by the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI). The venue for the programme was the Dadar Chowpatty Bandstand. Finding places has never been a challenge for me; as long as I understand the local language, I will always find any place under the sun. Little did I realise as to what I was heading for when the evening finally did arrive. I reside in Dadar (East) while Dadar Chowpatty happens to be in Dadar (West). I have several people staying around my flat who have lived in Mumbai for years but not one could guide me to my destination, taxi drivers were ignorant about the existence of a Dadar Chowpatty Bandstand and even locals close to Dadar Chowpatty were sure that there was a Bandstand in Bandra but not in Dadar. I finally managed to reach the place of performance after contacting the organisers but was left reflecting upon the long lost Mumbai culture which the BCCI had set itself to revive the 'BANDSTAND CULTURE OF MUMBAI'.

So goes the history of the Bandstand culture of Mumbai. A great attraction in the 1850s was the music that was played every evening after sunset on Mumbai Green; a vast fifteen-acre open-space opposite the Town Hall in South Mumbai that later became the smaller Horniman Circle Garden. It was a custom that can be traced to the days when the Governor of Mumbai resided in the Fort, in a building now popularly known as the Old Secretariat. The practice to regale the Government House with music continued till the building was given up in 1860s, when the Elphinstone (now Horniman) Circle and other buildings were built. Till then, a band - consisting of drums and fifes and other instruments played airs, marching from the Town Major, located at the east-end of Hamam Street till the end of the Military Staff buildings. The Brass Band of an Infantry regiment went up and down, promenading the Mumbai Green.

Since the restructuring of the town, following demolition of the Fort Walls, regimental bands also began to play on the new reclamation at Apollo Bunder; where the Yatch Club was completed in 1881, the Taj Mahal Hotel in 1903 and the Gateway of India in 1924. The bands also performed once or twice a week in various Clubs, including the Byculla Club (established in 1833), the Mumbai Gymkhana (established in 1875) and in later decades, the Wellington Club and the Cricket Club of India. Among the regimental bands that played regularly were those of the Marine Battalion, the 1Xth Regiment, the Mumbai Volunteer Rifle, the 113th Infantry, the GIP Railway volunteers, the BB&CI Railways and the Governor's Band. The services of regimental and private bands were engaged and the dates & venue were advertised in daily newspapers. A remarkable bonhomie among the spectators was evident at each recital.

As the Mumbai City Improvement Trust developed new suburban areas north of the island city, bandstands were constructed. These included - the Cooperage Garden, the Girgaum Chowpatty (Kilachand Park), the Victoria Garden at Byculla (now Jijamata Udyan), Sir Pherozshah Mehta Garden (popularly known as the Hanging Garden), the Joseph Baptist Garden on Mazgaon Hill, the King's Circle Garden (now Maheshwari Udyan) at Sion, the Parsi Colony in Dadar and Bandstands in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

The recitals continued for a few years after India's Independence, in 1947. Perhaps one of the finest and most moving performances was held at Apollo Bunder, on February 28, 1948, marking the departure of the British forces from India. The detachment of the First Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry moved out amidst a guard of honour accorded by the troops from the various Indian regiments. The soldiers closed ranks and marched slowly through the Gateway to the tune of 'Auld Land Syne' played by the bands. The Governor read the farewell message and the troops marched down the stairs to their boats.

Music, a symbol of peace and harmony, has always touched the heart and soul of all and sundry. The Century-old Bandstand culture that was once a unique feature in Mumbai, seemed to be among the forgotten antiquities of Mumbai. This fine tradition has now been revived by the Bombay Chamber of Commerce & Industry, as the Chamber wants it to be seen in the right perspective "for continuation of the traditional and cultural legacy of the city". In an age, where the significance of 'music' is restricted to Bollywood, the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry decided to bring out an alternative: a colourful mélange of music

the media was extremely heartening with possibly an article or two appearing every week over the 27 weeks. The response from the general public, too, was overwhelming; more particularly, the older generation was mesmerised with memories from the past while the Police and MCGM Bands played patriotic numbers. The interests of the youth were less addressed during this first session and therefore for the second session held in 2010, the BCCI decided to focus on youth bands.

In 2010, concerted efforts were made to rope in the youth from various colleges. The Facebook of performing artists and

support of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai that maintains these bandstands and have time and again allowed the BCCI to use their Bandstand property for the performances. There has also been unstinted support from the Mumbai Police Commissionerate, the Mumbai Agnishman Dal and the Rangbhumi Prayog Prashikshan Mandal. The Indian Navy, too, came forward to support the initiative, this year. At a formal ceremony held at the penultimate function of the Bandstand Culture, at the Y.B. Chavan auditorium, the Navy's Symphonic Orchestra recreated an environment from the 1800s. Their association, in the true sense, established linkages with the past and helped the revival of bandstand culture. So outstanding was the performance of the Navy Symphonic Orchestra that it definitely deserves a few additional lines about its performance.

The twenty five member Navy Orchestra led by Master Chief Petty Officer Musician I KPN Nath started by playing the 'Glorious' where the two flute players M. Parthapan and P.P. Meite were the forefront performers. The team had P. Saha, S.K.S. Babu, P. Sanjosh, A. Ganguli and C.P. Rao on the clarinets, while S.B. Kalyani, P.M. Dholi and Alok Bor were equal to the occasion on their trombone. Some of the other numbers played by the Navy Orchestra were 'All Star', 'Tattoo', 'Cornfield Rock' and 'Mission Impossible'. However, it was the well known Mahatma Gandhi's preferred tune of 'Vaishnav Jan to' that created a sombre and peaceful environment in the auditorium. Whether it be C. Sijo on the alto sax, Prasoon on the tenor sax, P. Naskar and C.D. Sudhan on the horn, P.B. Rakhelo on the euphonium or P.P. Jaypalan on the bass, each one seemed to have been stirred by the soul of the Mahatma in playing the tune.

The Navy could not have played in Mumbai and remained untouched by the music of Bollywood. It was the old tune of 'Hawa mein udta jaye' that set the audience rocking as M.A. Raj, M.M. Develekar, Dibin Sebastian and Bijju Mohan on the cornet, G.K.D. Pradeep and H. Singh on the percussion, Anu Amby on the Key Board and K. Guite on the Guitar played their parts with distinction. The packed hall could not have asked for more when the Orchestra ended the function with the tune of 'Sare Jahan se Accha'.

The last performance of the year at the Dadar Chowpatty Bandstand was such a success that the programme had to be wound up not because the performances were over or the audience had reduced in number but because the park timings did not permit the programme to be carried beyond. The last function of the Bandstand Culture Revival was set into motion by Ashok Barat, the President Elect of the BCCI, who while welcoming the audience apprised them about the history of the Bandstand Culture of Mumbai. The 'LAMBADA' Band was the first performer for the evening but it was the Pune troupe of 'HIGHWAY 61' which the audience found closest to its heart; may be because they played and sang more Hindi numbers rather than the English Jazz. The curtain to this year's performances came down with the Director General of BCCI, Dr. Atindra Sen, than all those who had made the series of programme a success.

The Revival of the Historical Bandstand Culture in Mumbai is the first ever Public-Private Partnership project which aims at conserving the historical legacy and tradition of the city of Mumbai, while at the same time promoting performing arts and culture of bandstand music. This Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative of the Bombay Chamber is expected to provide a boost to the city's young talent, provide entertainment to citizens of Mumbai and prove to be an added attraction for tourists to Mumbai. However, there is an underlying important lesson that it is to be learnt from the organisation of these functions. The Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry on its own could have never organised such a series of events without the co-operation of so many other local agencies; public or private, hence the lesson; there is so much that can be achieved my cooperation than by competition.



The Navy Orchestra performing at one of the functions of the 'Revival of the Bandstand Culture of Mumbai' organised by the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

by youth bands of Mumbai, through its Bandstand Revival Project. Thousands of young Mumbaiers experienced the old world charm of live music in bandstand performances during 26 weekends in 2007-08 and again during 17 weekends in 2010. Incidentally, in the strictest sense, the BCCI has nothing to do with music. It is conglomerate of corporate more dedicated to awareness, training and advocacy to the government on corporate matters. However, as a part of the Chamber's commitment to the theme of 'Corporate as Citizen', the Bombay Chamber launched the Bandstand Revival Project, in 2007-08. Clearly, and thanks to the untiring efforts of Ms. Kavita Sharma, a Joint Director of the Chamber, the aim, this year, was to extend the project across the city to reach larger sections of the population. Unlike the previous years, when the programme was restricted to performances at the Malabar Hill, this year there were live band performances at four locations, namely, the Malabar Hill (Kamla Nehru Udyan), the Dadar Chowpatty Bandstand (Veer Bajji Prabhu Deshpande & Sant Dyaneshwar Udyan), Bandra (Carter Road Amphitheater) and Nariman Point (Y.B. Chavan Auditorium).

In the year 2007-08, it was the press articles that drew the attention of youth bands and some of them approached the Bombay Chamber to perform. These included 'Something Relevant', 'Rang' and 'The 8th Note'. All the other performances during the year were either by the Police or MCGM (Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai) Bands or were cultural performances from various States in India. The response from

bands were interlinked and the performance schedule was disseminated widely. To start, the Chamber positioned one band over each of the 17 Saturdays. However in view of the overwhelming response from the youth bands that came forward to use the platform, it had to finally accommodate two bands on every Saturday.

The bands for the performance are chosen primarily through the word of mouth and a bit of screening. Once recommended, the BCCI visits the respective Facebook accounts and websites to listen to the albums and original compositions of the band. As per choice, these bands are then scheduled to perform. In addition to this, the Radio Partner of the BCCI, Radio Mirchi 98.3 FM, too, has been conducting contests on their show - Band Banao Jeeturaj Ko Sunao. The winner of the contest performs at the Bandstand platform.

This year, a brand logo was created for the Bandstand Project. The BCCI has also created a Facebook for the project and it has been hyperlinked to the Bombay Chamber's website. Furtados, a local music shop extended its support in not only providing gears for the show but also circulating information brochures and handbills to the musicians and music lovers enrolled with them. The brochures were also kept at various public places including restaurants, cafe joints and some other places frequented by the youth.

This joint endeavour of reviving the Bandstand culture of Mumbai has several other players in its success story. To begin with, the project would not have been possible without the

Wild Life

Conflict resolution is critical in areas close to wildlife sanctuaries as wild animals seldom recognise administrative boundaries.

Recently, we branded a juvenile male tusker — all of eight years — a 'killer', a 'rogue' on the rampage and, had he been a tiger cub instead of an elephant calf, we would even have tagged him a 'man-eater' for tasting the blood of a bank ATM guard whom he crushed to death in Mysore city some days ago.

The tusker and his companion had strayed from the wild and were on the run as panicky and surprised crowds of people chased and stoned them until the forest department staff got into the act. The foresters first tranquillised the wild elephants and, with due regard to their young age, did not condemn the trespassers to a life of drudgery in forest camps. Instead, they transported the elephants back to the wild, but not to their original home and herd, which the duo must have yearned for after their traumatic day out.

The animals were translocated to a new location in a different direction from where they had come. Forest officials maintain that the elephants should have no 'territory problems' as they are always on the move. But, if the 'lost' youngster retraces his steps in a bid to return home, which elephants are known to do, and again gets into human territory, it will be promptly termed as human-elephant conflict.

Had the duo truly been 'rogues' wreaking havoc, as widely reported in the media, the wild elephants should have killed and maimed many more people considering the large crowds they encountered during their Mysore sojourn.

With due regard to the aggrieved families of the ATM guard and others injured, the human victims must have been too close to the traumatised tusker for its comfort, which is why it attacked them, believe wildlife conservationists. Known for their gentle and sensitive nature, wild elephants avoid rather than confront human beings in their natural environment.

The more than two-decade long run of elephant poacher and ivory smuggler Veerappan, vandalising the elephant corridors of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu states, is testimony to the fact that elephants are the true victims unless pushed into conflict. Veerappan ultimately fell, not to 'rogue' elephants in the wild, but to the police bullets.

The mere presence of a wild elephant cannot be termed a conflict situation as animals often peacefully move through human-use areas, explains wildlife scientist T R Shankar Raman of Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), Mysore. Recalling the Mysore incident, he says the half-raised tail of the charging tusker calf and it finally finding refuge in a bush near a lake showed that the runaway animal was in a confused and stressed state and was trying to get away from the crowds.

Awareness drive The lack of awareness among the people about the wild elephants' presence resulted in the melee and the conflict. In the Valparai plantation district of Coimbatore in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, NCF scientists along with local trackers and forest watchers monitoring elephant movement patterns inform the local people about the presence of wild elephants in a particular estate every evening and even scroll it as news on the local cable network. This awareness drive has partly helped in avoiding man-elephant conflict.

Similarly, elephant conservationists across India have asked the government to form emergency response teams among the local communities, he says. Such a team could have pre-empted the Mysore incident by getting into the act as soon as the elephants were spotted or news of their straying out of the wild reached them.

According to a report by another NCF wildlife scientist, M D Madhusudan, in the 19th century, human activity impacted less than a fifth of the planet's land area; a mere two hundred years later, we have brought more than 95 per cent of earth's landmass under our dominion. Trapped between shrunken, degraded habitats and human-occupied landscapes, wide-ranging animals like the Asian elephant have been pushed into conflict with people.

Persecution by affected people and the decline of suitable habitats threaten the long-term survival of

elephants. Understanding the ecological and behavioural adaptations of elephants to altered landscapes and the relationships between elephant activity, spatial configuration of human settlements along movement routes, and the effects of people on elephant behaviour are crucial for resolving conflicts and fostering coexistence.

Conflict resolution is especially critical in areas close to wildlife sanctuaries as wild animals seldom recognise administrative boundaries. The Elephant Task Force headed by Dr Mahesh Rangarajan, in its report submitted to the ministry of environment and forests, has recommended conflict management task forces that will work in prior

identified areas of high conflict. Other recommendations include ex gratia relief for loss of human life not to be less than Rs 3 lakh; considering the persistent and common grievance in some areas that officials are not easily accessible to cultivators and other villagers affected by elephant and other wildlife crop damage, public hearings to be

held at least twice a year at taluka level; expensive electric fences without involving the local community for maintenance to be discouraged; starting 'Regional Gajah Centres' to provide focal points for education and outreach about elephant behaviour, ecology, conservation and the cultures of human-elephant co-existence.

