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BRITISH ADMINISTRATORS AND GROWTH OF THE NILGIRIS

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ABSTRACT:

John Sullivan, the Collector of Coimbatore, showed much interest in opening up communication with the Nilgiris on all sides and he aspired to develop it a hill station. Due to his efforts, Nilgiris became a Sanatorium. An innumerable Europeans started coming to the Nilgiris to settle down. Stephen Rumbold Lushington, the Governor of the Madras Presidency rendered many services to Ootacamund to become a good Sanatorium. During the period of Lord Elphinstone, in the hills Coffee Estates were opened. By the Act of 1865, the Nilgiris was separated from Coimbatore and placed under a Commissioner. The first Commissioner was James Wilkinson

Brecks. Indeed, a few buildings left by the colonial rule with the characteristics stamp of the nineteenth century and the British days are being altered or demolished by the march of time and modern requirements

KEYWORDS: characteristics stamp, modern requirements.

INTRODUCTION:

In 1812, William Keys, an Assistant Revenue Surveyor and apprentice by name, MacMohan were sent out by Carrow, the then Collector of Coimbatore to map out the Nilgiris.¹ They made a casual survey of hills and such information as they furnished was largely based on hearsay.

Six years later in 1818, John Sullivan, the Collector of Coimbatore, sent two of his assistants, namely, Whish and NW. Kindersley to the hills to chase a band of tobacco smugglers who had disappeared into the North-East of Kotercherry. (Now known as Kotagiri).² Both were new to the

hill country but managed to catch one of the smugglers who, however, gave them the slip and disappeared into the forest. More out of curiosity than duty, these two men pressed on to explore further into lovely hills. Some Badagas offered to guide them and they ultimately reached a plateau free from jungle, which according to them was about 8000 ft. above sea level. However, they also did not reach the Ooty valley. On their return, they gave a glowing account of this extraordinary hidden hills to Sullivan who, though somewhat impressed, was not fully convinced. Eventually he led an expedition in January 1819 and managed to reach the Dimhatti, just north of Kotagiri.³ His visit marked an epoch in the history of the

Nilgiris.

Sullivan's visit in May 1819 resulted in the survey of the hills and the construction of the first track in the Sirumugai Pass. John Sullivan was the first person to call the attention of the Madras Government to the eligibility of Ootacamund to be a sanatorium. He erected the first house which was built entirely of stones and the area is now known as the 'Stone House Hill'.

Sullivan requested the Government to grant permission to enclose 1900 acres of land which by idle and fallow and it enabled him to make the experiments in agriculture and horticulture,⁴ He applied to the Government that the experiments that he would be undertaking would prove useful to the public and that he could

meet all the expenses. Sullivan's proposal received the approval of the Government and he was able to obtain a land near Bishopdown, where he tried horticulture. Sullivan was able to cover only a small portion of the huge area.

In September 1822, Sullivan applied for permission to take over 500 ballas (1810 acres) of land near Stone House in order to engage in agriculture and horticulture. He employed a Scottish gardener by name Jonstons for his Ooty lands. Between 1822 and 1825, funds were sanctioned for completing the track across the hills to Gudalur and Wynaad and also for opening up the Katur Ghat of the Wynaad from Malabar and improving the route from the top of it to Mysore. Sullivan displayed a great zeal in opening up communication with the Nilgiris on all sides. A Station Committee, consisting of Sullivan, Macpherson and Surgeon Haines was appointed by the Governor Sir. Thomas Munroe to frame a detailed plan for providing accommodation for invalids.⁵

In September 1826, Sir. Thomas Munroe himself visited the hills and he was greatly impressed by the cold climate and the scenic beauty, The Committee, which was appointed by Sir. Thomas Munroe, recommended to the Government to sanction Rs. 10,000 for the purchase of a Bungalow to accommodate invalids. Thus, Nilgiris became a Sanatorium.⁶

More and more Europeans started coming to the Nilgiris to settle down. In 1826, when the Nilgiris was visited by Sir. Thomas Munroe, there were 17 houses occupied by the Europeans.⁷ When the Nilgiris became a Sanatorium, this gave more impetus to the enterprising people to come to the Nilgiris in increasing numbers and year after year, the number of settlers increased steadily. Sir Thomas Munroe was succeeded by Stephen Rumbold Lushington who did more than any other man to render many advantages to Ootacamund as a Sanatorium.⁸

Early in 1829, Lushington went to Ootacamund to see how matters were progressing. It was at this time he purchased Sullivan's other property, Southdown, later to be called Bishopdown, and he started an experimental farm at Ketti,⁹ In January 1830, a greater portion of the hills (but excluding the area around Kotagiri) were transferred to Malabar in the hope of checking more efficiently the tobacco smuggling between Malabar and Coimbatore. The Sispara and Coonoor Ghats as well as Kundha Pass were opened and the two Ghats became the two main routes to the hills.¹⁰

The opening of the Coonoor laid the foundation of the settlement at Coonoor and a death blow to Kotagiri and Dimhatti. Marquis of Dalhousie preferred Kothagiri and he resided there for six months in the principal mansion called 'Koter Hall'. This house was built in 1830 and the station at that time was considered a serious rival to Ootacamund.

On the retirement of Lushington in 1832, Sir Frederick Adam took over. Divided responsibility between Coimbatore and Malabar for the hills proved unsatisfactory and this was forcibly brought home by the failure to bring to justice a group of hill people who massacred fifty- eight Kurumbas, suspected of witch craft, in 1835. Lord Elphinstone became Governor in 1837 and during his rule, the hills first began to be opened for Coffee Estates.¹¹ In 1839, on the insistence of Sullivan, who was now a member of the Council at Madras, it was decided to retransfer the hills territory to Coimbatore, leaving the territory west of the Pykara river and Kundah and Malabar.

By an Act of 1865, the Nilgiris was separated from Coimbatore and placed under a Commissioner and an Assistant who enjoyed Criminal and Civil Jurisdiction. The first Commissioner was James Wilkinson Breeks who died in June 1872 and in whose memory the Breeks Memorial School was founded.

In 1873, Ouchterloney Valley and in 1877, the South West Wynaad were added to the district. Coffee, Tea and Cinchona were planted in large areas.¹² Ooty and Coonoor grew fast and the population in the hills advanced in numbers. A big cream coloured Government House was built at Ooty in 1877 when the Duke of Buckingham was the Governor. Sir Arthur Havelock was responsible for improving the interior of the Government House.¹³

Lord Lytton (1876-1880) paid a visit to the South to witness the devastation caused by the Great Famine (1876-1877) and visited Ooty on 12th September 1877.¹⁴ The last British Governor of Madras, who spent some time in Nilgiris (Ooty), was Sir Arthur Hope.¹⁵ The first India's Governor, after Independence, the Maharaja of Bhavanagar, also visited Ooty and added grace and dignity to its society.

All the Governors since then have been Indians and the transfer of Secretariat to the hills during summer has been discontinued. The visits of the Governors have become shorter. Over the several years that have passed since Independence, vast changes have taken place at the Nilgiris. There are still few buildings left with the characteristics stamp of the nineteenth century and the British days but these are being altered or demolished by the march of time and necessity.

The Nilgiris now form a separate district much to the Pride of Tamil Nadu with its awe and splendour attracting many a guest from all quarters of the world and its climatic conditions favouring many a rare industry such as the Hindustan Photo films, The Needle Industries, the Cordite Factory and the like which rank as one of India's best industries. Amidst these man made industries the natural products thrive all by themselves for the districts well-being and uplift and at its peak ranks the Tea Industry.

To conclude, John Sullivan was mainly responsible for the growth of the Nilgiris because he alone brought the scenic beauty of the Nilgiris to the world. It was because of him, many buildings emerged there, sanatorium was constructed and many Europeans began to settle. Some of the Governors of the Madras Presidency like Thomas Munroe, S.R. Lushington, Lord Elphinstone made the Nilgiris to the height of the glory. They done many things for the growth of the Nilgiris. During their period, many official buildings were emerged and the natural resources were identified and utilized. Horticulture was developed. Tea and coffee plantation were done with utmost attention.

END NOTES

- 1.Thana, Kaku, J., *Plantation in Nilgiris - A Synoptic History*, Glenmorgan: 1969, p.4.
- 2.Interview with Marchant based on the confidential Report in the Police Department.
- 3.*Ibid.*
4. Francis, W., *Gazetteer of the Nilgiris District*, Vol. I, Madras: 1908, p.111.
- 5.Thana, Kaku, J. *op.cit.*, p.5.
- 6.Francis, W., *op.cit.*, p.114 .
7. *Ibid.*
- 8.*Ibid.*, p.115.
- 9.*Ibid.*, p.117.
- 10.Thana, Kaku, J., *op.cit.*, p.6.
- 11.W. Francis, *op.C/t.*, p.120.
- 12.*Ibid.*, p.122.
- 13.Thana, Kaku, J., *op.cit.*, p.8.
14. Francis, W., *op.cit.*, p.132.
15. *Ibid.*