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HISTORICISING NILGIRIS IN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract:

The paper aims to historicising the Nilgiris Region through the ages which includes the Rule of various Rulers in the ancient and medieval period, the arrival of Portuguese, the British East India Company's possession of the Nilgiris, the settlements of Europeans at Ooty, Coonoor, Kothagiri, the dedicated role of John Sullivan for the enhancement of the Nilgiris Regions, the significance of Stone House, separation of Nilgiris Region from the District of Coimbatore, formation of the Nilgiris District, services of S.R Lushington for the promotion of the Nilgiris, Visit of Various Madras Governors to Ooty, the abolition of Zamindar System, the introduction Ryotwari System, the first Commissioner, the first Collector of the Nilgiris District, the spoken languages of the people, the original tribal inhabitants, the location and scenic beauty of the Nilgiris, and about coffee and tea plantations.

KEY WORDS:

ryot, roytwari, zamindar, tribals, sanatorium. Horticulture, bhurty, mands, fasli

LOCATION AND PHYSICAL FEATURES

Nilgiris lies amidst beautiful scenery in Tamil Nadu. The lovely Nilgiris is often called "the Little Switzerland of India".¹ The Nilgiris is also known as the 'Blue Mountains' because of its blue haze which the high mountains present to those gazing at the hills from the plains. Nilgiris is the most hygienic health resort in Tamil Nadu. The Nilgiris form a plateaus (about 56 Kilometers long, 32 Kms broad. It has a general elevation of 2240 m (6500ft)², rising abruptly from the plains except on the North where their base rests upon Wynaad and Mysore uplands at about 2000 - 3000ft.³ The Nilgiris hills mark the meeting point of the Eastern and Western Ghats. The mountain ranges of Penninsular India, the Sahyadri joining its opposite Mukurti Peak, the southern ghats across the Palghat Gap in the South and Eastern Ghats in the North Eastern corner.⁴ The Nilgiris is detached from the main Deccan Plateau by the deep Moyar river valley. Other streams are the Bhavani, Paikara and the Calicut. Two of the highest peaks are Dotabetta; (2637m) and Makurti (2554m).⁵ Nilgiris District is the smallest District in the State of Tamil Nadu, with an area of 75.2 square Kms and with a population of 1,50,000, (1981 census).⁶ The Nilgiris has in its range three hill stations, namely Ootacamund, Coonoor and Kotagiri. It is inhabited by five distinct aboriginal tribes the Todas, the Kotas, the Kurumbas, the Panias and the Irulas of whom the most prominent are the Kotas and the Todas.⁷ It is interesting to study the early history of the Nilgiris, which is called the 'Queen of Hill Stations' because it contributes considerably to the production of tea in South India.⁸

NILGIRIS IN MIDDLE AGES

The name Nilgiris is about 850 years old and the name was given by the inhabitants of the adjoining plains. The oldest inscription that belongs to A.D 930, shows that Wynaad was part of the territories of the well known Ganga Dynasty of Mysore.⁹ The Hoysalas subsequently rose to power and their king captured the Wynaad and also seized the Nilgiris Plateau. In 1310, the Hoysala line was overthrown by the Muslims of Delhi and their king fled. In the early part of the sixteenth century, both the Wynaad and the Nilgiris Plateau came under the famous Hindu kings of Vijayanagar who had repulsed the Delhi Muslims.¹⁰ In 1565, the Vijayanagar Dynasty was overthrown by the united Muslim Kings of Deccan at the historic battle of Talaikotta (one of the great land marks in South Indian history) and its rulers, though they continued to maintain power, became very weak. Their vassals in every direction rose against them and declared themselves independent. In 1610, one of these, vassals, Raja Wodeyar (Udaiyar) of Mysore drove the Vijayanagar General out of Serangapatnam. Thus the Kings of Mysore became the rulers of Wynaad and titular proprietors of the Nilgiris Hills.¹¹ There is no record or definite tradition which now survives about the history of the Mysore Kings in the Wynaad and on the plateau or of the internal history of the district down to the date of the English occupation in 1799.¹²

The Nilgiris area attracted little or no attention from the outside world until the beginning of the Nineteenth Century mainly because of its inhospitable climate, its thick jungles and the difficulties of the passes leading upto the top. Its only inhabitants were poor graziers and cultivators.

BRITISH POSSESSION

The credit for discovering and colonising the Nilgiris goes to the British though they were not the first to venture into this unknown region. This became the possession of the English East India Company in 1799. It was apparently not visited by any Englishmen until 1812 and it contained no European residence until 1819.¹³

ARRIVAL OF PORTUGUESE

Nearly two centuries before the Company obtained it, two Portuguese had made flying visits to it from Malabar but their impressions were not such as to encourage others to follow their example. About 1602, a Portuguese Priest named Jacome Ferreira was sent from Calicut by the first Roman Catholic Bishop of Malabar to Nilgiris to spread the message of God.¹⁴ Ferreira's formal report written at Calicut on his return on the 1st April, 1603 stated that the Todas and Badagas were already settled there at that time and maintained much the same mutual relations as they do, to-day. They evinced no interest in his Mission or in his religion. The Catholics of Malabar apparently took no further interest in the Nilgiris and for nearly two centuries, these hills continued to be an unknown land.¹⁵

FRANCIS BUCHANAN

Dr. Francis Buchanan came on 25th October 1800, under the orders of Marquis of Wellesley (then Governor- General of India) to gauge the prospect of territories annexed by the British. Dr. Buchanan started from Serangapatnam on May 10th, 1800.¹⁶ He had reached Dannayakankottai, a fort on the Bhavanl a little below its junction with the Moyar, apparently the Headquarters of the Revenue Division to which the undiscovered Nilgiris was attached. He did not make much head way in the course of the one day trip. Probably he reached, a point called Arakod, just below the Rangaswamy's Pillar in Kothagiri and returned with some notes and calculations.¹⁷

WILLIAM KEYS AND MACMOHAN

In 1812, William Keys, an Assistant Revenue Surveyor and an apprentice by name, MacMohan were sent out by Carrow, the then Collector of Coimbatore to map out the Nilgiris.¹⁸ They made a casual survey of the hills and such information as they furnished was largely based on hearsay.

J.C. WHISH AND N.W. KINDERSLEY

Six years later in 1818, John Sullivan, the Collector of Coimbatore, sent two of his assistants, J.C. Whish and N.W. Kindersley to the hills to chase a band of tobacco smugglers who had disappeared into the

North-East of Kotercherry. (Now known as Kothagiri).¹⁹ 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 these lovely hills. Some Badagas offered to guide them and they ultimately reached a plateau free from jungle, which according to them was about 8000ft. 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.

JOHN SULLIVAN,

At last, John Sullivan led an expedition in January 1819 and managed to reach the Dimhatti, just north of Kotagiri.²⁰ His visit marked an epoch in the history of the Nilgiris. The party was obviously delighted with the place and one of them wrote a glowing account to the papers describing the cold climate, water freezing in their 'Chattis' at night, scenery of extraordinary grandeur and magnificence.

Sullivan was greatly impressed by what he saw. Hence he came again in May 1819, accompanied by a French naturalist, M. Leschenault De La Tour and Assistant Surgeon Jones.²¹ During the stay of twenty days, Sullivan began the construction of his bungalow, the first European dwelling in the hills at Dimhatti, in which he later resided. The naturalist, who was nearly at death's door in the Plains through illness, rapidly recovered his health in the cool climate.

Sullivan's visit in May 1819 resulted in the survey of the hills and the construction of the first track in the Sirumugai Pass.²² 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.

The site, on which the stone house built was purchased from the Todas living in a Toda village called Wohakamund and the settlement apparently took the name, Ootacamund, from this association.²³

Sullivan applied to the Board of Revenue and he was sanctioned a sum of Rs. 800/- for a survey of the field of the plateau and another sum of Rs.300/for a path. Both the undertakings were entrusted to Lt. Evans Macpherson, who later built the 'Cluny Hall' at Ootacamund.²⁴ The work on the road was started in 1821 and completed in May 1828. It remained as the best route to the hills until the Coonoor Ghat was made in 1830-1832.

Sullivan requested the Government to grant permission to enclose 1900 acres of land which lay idle and fallow and it enabled him to make the experiments in agriculture and horticulture.²⁵ 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 Bishop town, where he tried horticulture. Sullivan was able to cover only a small portion of the huge area.

VALUE OF NILGIRIS

In those days there were no hill stations in India as of today, and those who wanted to recoup their health from the rigours of the plains travelled all the way to the Caps or Mauritius, which were inferior climatically to the Nilgiris. Because of this salubrious climate the Europeans chose this place and settled down here. By June 1820, more than 20 gentlemen had visited the plateau. One lady visited this place and she was Mrs. Sullivan.²⁶ The Madras Government recognised the value of opening up the Nilgiris. In 1821, one of the four routes was opened up and some families took up their temporary abode in the Nilgiris. Among the routes to the Nilgiris, the Eastern or Coimbatore pass was most frequented. The distance between north and south varied at different points from 18 to 27 miles and length from east and west was about 41 miles.²⁷

In September 1822, Sullivan applied for permission to take over 1810 acres of land near Stone House in order to engage in agriculture and horticulture. He employed a Scottish gardener by name Johnstons for his Ooty lands.²⁸ 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 to 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.²⁹

VISIT OF SIR THOMAS MUNROE

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 Bunglow to accommodate invalids. Thus Nilgiris became a Sanatorium.³⁰

STEPHEN RUMBOLD LUSHINTON

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.³¹ 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 Lushinton who did more than any other man to render many advantages to Ootacamund as a Sanatorium.³²

Ooty began to grow fast and in 1830, military commandant Major William Kelso was appointed to run the settlement.³³ Sullivan's dream was thus at last fulfilled and Ootacamund became the Sanatorium of Madras. Differences of opinion arose between him and Kelso regarding the allocation of land for a cantonment.³⁴

Early in 1829, S.R. 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.³⁵ In January 1830, a greater portion of the hills (but excluding the area around Kothagiri) 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.³⁶

SETTLEMENT AT COONOR

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

OOTACAMUND, A MILITARY BAZAAR

On the retirement of S.R. 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 37 fifty-eight Kurumbas, suspected of witch craft, in 1835. The Madras Government wanted to vest in one Officer the powers of Collector, Magistrate and Justice of Peace, but the Government of India said that the necessity for it had not been sufficiently proved. In July 1837, therefore the idea was abandoned and Ootacamund remained a military bazaar, the equivalent in those days of a Cantonment.³⁸

NILGIRIS UNDER COIMBATORE JURISDICTION

Lord Elphinstone became Governor in 1837 and during his rule, the hills first began to be opened up for Coffee Estates.³⁹ 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 to Malabar.

This was however only achieved after 1843, when Marquis of Tweeddale had succeeded Lord Elphinstone as Governor. Marquis remembered for the decision to establish the barracks at Jagathala, later to be known as Wellington.⁴⁰ This decision greatly benefited the social and economic status of the hills. The first geographical and statistical survey was completed in 1847 by Captain J. Ouchterlony. The survey reveals that there were then 76 European houses in the hills and 342 settled Europeans at Nilgiris.⁴¹ The Government Revenue from that part of the hills under the Coimbatore Collectorate was Rs.38,562/-, a little under half of which came from the sale of arrack contracts.⁴²

SEPARATION FROM COIMBATORE

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.⁴³ Ooty and Coonoor grew fast and the population in the hills advanced in numbers. The district became the recognised hot weather residence of the Government. 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.⁴⁴

VISIT OF MARQUIS OF DALHOUSIE

Marquis of Dalhousie visited Ooty in March 1855 and stayed for a while at Walthamstow (now Sutsai Baba's Ashram) and at Kotal Hall at Kotagiri and also at Tuscalam (now Glenview or the headquarters of U.P.A.S.I. at Coonoor). He went from one place to another more than once. He was responsible for the Government to take over the control of the Public Gardens and he abolished the local Committee.⁴⁵

VISIT OF LORD LYTTON

Lord Lytton (1876-1880) paid a visit to the South to witness the devastation caused by the Great Famine of 1876-1877 and visited Ooty on 12th September 1877.⁴⁶ His glowing account of Ooty, in a letter to Lady Lytton, is often quoted: "Having seen Ooty I affirm it to be a paradise. The afternoon was rainy and the road was muddy but such beautiful English rain. such delicious English mud.

SERVICES OF LORD WILLINGTON

Lord Willington as Governor of Madras and later the Viceroy of India, was attracted to Ooty. With Lady Willington, he did a lot to give a boost to this Hill Station and its social life. He was responsible for creating the Assembly Rooms Trust which operates the Assembly Room. Among the other VIP's to visit Ooty was Lord Manhatten.

VISIT OF SIR ARTHUR HOPE AND OTHERS

The last British Governor of Madras, who spent some time in Nilgiris (Ooty), was Sir Arthur Hope.⁴⁷ 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.

MULTI-LANGUAGE PEOPLE

The main language spoken in the Nilgiris is Tamil. The inhabitants of the plateau (Badugas) speak a dialect called 'Badagu', which is a form of Kannada. Malayalam is also spoken in the Gudalur tract. The only sign of Colonial days likely to last for a considerable period is the English language, which is still used freely by the educated sections.

SEPARATE DISTRICT

The Nilgiris now forms 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.

COLONIAL REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

When the British took over, there were different systems of land revenue administration in the Nilgiris plateau, the Wynad and the Oucherlony valley. The Nilgiris Plateau was ceded to the British in 1799 by the Treaty of Seringapatam. The revenue of this plateau at that time is mentioned as 35000 Kantiraya pagodas. First, it formed part of the Dannayankankottai taluk of the Coimbatore district. In January 1830, a major portion of the Nilgiris plateau, (excluding the area round Kotagiri) was transferred to Malabar. After a few years, the area was, however, retransferred to the Coimbatore district. Before the British, there was no proper revenue system in the plateau area. A fixed money rate seems to have been adopted without any relevance to the extent cultivated. This had naturally impoverished the hill people.

The revenue system could not be systematised and improved by the British administrators quickly. Major Mcleod, the then Collector of the Coimbatore district initiated a settlement in December 1799. In the absence of proper accounts, he had to arrange a survey in 1800-01. But, due to the extreme inclemency of the climate, the surveyors did not do anything more than making an estimate of the extent and quality of the land. They fixed just the old rates of assessment, thereby rendering the survey a farce.

CONDITION OF RYOTS

During this period, the ryots enjoyed three peculiar concessions as part of the old revenue system, of the Coimbatore district. First was the bhurty system, which allowed shifting cultivation by the ryot, maintaining a hold on a vast tract of land. A ryot was allowed to hold even ten times the extent of land registered in his patta. He was required to pay tax only for the portion cultivated by him in the year. He had a preferential lien upon all the tracts of land cultivated by him earlier, without any additional payment. He may cultivate any such land in any year and he had to pay only for the extent so cultivated. Such a sweeping right to hold land, coupled with the absence of accurate records, resulted in several unreasonable claims. The local headmen and subordinate revenue officials were able to manipulate the claims, as they pleased. Secondly, ryots were entitled to possess, not exceeding one fifth of their holdings, as fallow at one-fourth of the assessment. This was called ayan grass allowance. Thirdly, the ryots were also granted grazing pattas for inferior land at one-fourth of the usual assessment. They could hold such lands on these terms till they were required for cultivation by themselves or others. But the grazing patta holders had a preferential claim for such land. The efforts of Europeans to start coffee or other estates were greatly impeded by such concessions, which enabled the villagers to lay some claim or other to any land, with the support of other villagers and subordinate revenue officials.

ABOLITION OF BHURTY SYSTEM

The urgency of streamlining the land revenue system was increasingly felt and after protracted correspondence in 1863, Government decided to abolish the bhurty system. The rates of assessment were lowered on an average by 25% in order to compensate the ryots for the withdrawal of the bhurty concession. The Collector reported in May 1864 that the bhurty system had ceased; but, in the absence of proper survey, especially of the holdings of the Badagas, the bhurty system lingered for long afterwards.⁴⁸

PROPRIETARY RIGHT OF THE TODAS

The British who settled in the Nilgiris in the beginning, particularly Sullivan, recognised the absolute proprietary right of the Todas to the plateau. They held, that being the first settlers, the Todas had an indisputable right over the plateau land and that even the Badagas were there as cultivators on the strength of permission given by the Todas. So, several Englishmen bought land from the Todas. Sullivan also bought the site for his 'Stonehouse' only like this. The Government also recognised such transactions in the beginning. In 1828, they ordered that European settlers should pay a compensation to the Todas for the land occupied by them. The amount of such compensation was fixed as sixteen times the annual assessment paid by the Todas. Sullivan was all along so energetic an upholder of the rights of the Todas, that he even viewed that they possessed a janmam right over their land.

The opposite view was that in India the proprietary right over all land rested with the State and that the Todas' right over their land was not absolute. This controversy was ended only in 1843, when the Directors held that what the Todas had was 'nothing more than a prescriptive right to pasture their herds, on payment of a small tax, on Government land.'⁴⁹ It was, however, directed that the settlers should not interfere with the Todas' enjoyment of their mands (hamlets) and religious places.

The European settlers, who bought land from the Todas, were not required to pay any assessment

in the beginning. But from 1828, they had to enter into lease agreements with Government and pay quit rent. The abolition of the bhurty system enabled Government to take steps for better land-use in the district. They introduced the Waste Land Rules of 1863 providing for auction of waste lands. The land which was not privately owned or over which there was no right of exclusive occupancy, was brought under the category of 'waste land'. The pieces of land applied for was surveyed, demarcated and sold⁵⁰ to the highest bidder subject to an upset price to cover the cost of survey and to an annual assessment of Rs.2 per acre of forest land and Rs.1/- for grass. After the introduction of these rules, people were not allowed to obtain a grant of any land by any other means.

A general survey of land began in 1870. Owing to lack of adequate staff, the unhealthiness of the district and the Great Famine of 1876-1878, the work could not be completed before 1880. The survey brought to the fore many cases of bhurty tenure, which were, however, treated liberally and the people were allowed to hold the land cultivated by them.

SETTLEMENT BY BENSON

A Settlement by Benson, I.C.S. (subsequently Sir Ralph Benson) took place in 1881-1884. The conduct of the settlement was limited by several factors. The settlement, however, streamlined the system to a considerable extent. The revenue accounts were revised. All occupied lands and assessment fixed for them were duly registered. Thirty six villages in four nads were defined demarcated for administrative purposes. Village and field maps were prepared. Systematic disposal of the issues relating to applications for land, registration or transfer of pattas, etc., was made possible. For important estates, brief descriptive memoirs were prepared with the help of proprietors. The village establishments were strengthened.

The settlement enabled grant of unallotted lands to those who applied for them for fixed assessment. An extent of 4376 acres was thus allotted to native pattadars. Secondly, the estate owners were provided with grazing land, around their holdings at Rs.2/- per acre. An extent of 4,075 acres was allowed like this. An extent of 24,061 acres was set apart for communal grazing purposes. An extent of 18,366 acres was also identified as available for sale under the Waste Land Rules in auction. The survey and settlement led to the detection and accounting of a number of holdings. This resulted in the increase of 56,890 acres of settled land and Rs.45.813 of assessment. Though the average assessment on land held by natives was only about six annas per acre, the obligations of the ryots were well settled.

J.W. BREEKS, FIRST COMMISSIONER OF THE NILGIRIS DISTRICT

In 1868 the Nilgiris District was altogether separated from the then Coimbatore district and placed under a commissioner and an Assistant Commissioner who had identical, revenue, criminal and civil jurisdiction. J.W. Breeks was the first Commissioner of the Nilgiris district. The Commissioner had the powers of a Collector and Assistant Commissioner became Assistant collector. Oucherterlony Valley and South East Wyanad were added to the Nilgiris in 1873 and 1877 respectively.⁵¹

R. BARLOW, FIRST COLLECTOR OF THE NILGIRIS DISTRICT

Nilgiris became a district in 1882. R. Barlow was the first Collector of the Nilgiris District.⁵² After the Nilgiris became a separate district, and before the Independence only development worth-mentioning from the point of view of Revenue Administration was that the rights of Janmis became well-clarified, thanks to the decision of the High Court.⁵³ The janmis were recognised as absolute owners of the soil.⁵⁴

FREEHOLD LANDS.

Another significant fact about the Nilgiris district is the presence of Freehold lands.⁵⁵ Freehold lands are those held in accordance with the terms of a Government Order of 1859. They are just like ryotwari lands but with no liability to pay any assessment on the lands. They are also lands on which title-deeds were obtained under the Waste Land Rules 1863. These are free from all demand on account of land revenue, in view of the lumpsum payment of 25 years annual assessment.

FAILURE OF ZAMINDAR SYSTEM

The zamindari system was an innovation of the Mohammeden rulers. The zamindars created a number of under-tenures. In the closing years of eighteenth century, wherever there were zamindaris, the British sought to make permanent settlements with them. They also tried to create fresh zamindaris where

there were none. In the Madras Presidency, many local officers were not in favour of such permanent settlements. Hence, despite the pressure from above, permanent settlement did not make much headway here. Only with a few ancient zamindars and families of poligars, such permanent settlement took place and estates were formed.

RYOTWARI SYSTEM.

Col. Read, who was specially deputed by Lord Cornwallis to settle the Baramahal and Salem areas obtained by the British from Tipu, introduced ryotwari system. This involved survey of every holding and assessment based on the productivity of the land. Detailed accounts at village level were prepared. The system, as it was in the beginning, provided for assessments on a permanent basis and permitted the ryot to relinquish his land, if he wanted, before the commencement of a fasli. After Col. Read, Sir Thomas Munroe strongly advocated ryotwari system. Ultimately in 1812, the Court of Directors chose to follow this system in preference to permanent settlement. Several improvements have been made in this system subsequently. Two salient features of this system are that it means a direct contract between the landowner and Government; and that the obligation of the land owner to Government is fixed and known.

The first survey of the Nilgiris district was done by John Ouchterlony in 1847.⁵⁶ The original cadastral survey of the ryotwari villages in the district was conducted during 1883 in Plane Table. Theodolite and Prismatic systems and a revision survey was done only in Gudalur taluk during 1920-1921. The Nilgiris district was divided into four revenue taluks, Udhamandalam, Coonoor, Gudalur and Kothagiris. The first three are older ones which are in existence ever since the formation of the district. The latest addition is Kothagiri.⁵⁷

To conclude, the Nilgiris Region was ruled by various rulers of the Various dynasties in the ancient and medieval periods. As it was the hilly and forest area, the tribal people like Badagas and Todas who were the original inhabitants there. The Europeans when they entered Tamil Nadu they began to recognize the significance of Nilgiris in the context of the cool climate. John Sullivan played a remarkable role to enhance the Nilgiris Region, who attracted the Madras Government to concentrate on the Nilgiris Region. The British gradually began to colonise the Nilgiris District by furnishing proper revenue and local administration. They were responsible for the introduction of tea and coffee plantations in Nilgiris District.

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