

NATURAL HERITAGE CENTERS IN UDHAGAMANDALAM - A STUDY

Dr. J. Muthukumar
Assistant Professor in History, DDE,
Annamalai University.

Udhagamandalam, popularly known as **Ooty** is the largest and the most important hill station in South India.¹ The principal station on the **Nilgiris** is at an elevation of 2286 metres and situated at the centre of the Nilgiri District. It is an extensive valley enclosed on all sides, but the west by a lofty range of hills. As recorded by **Mr. Frederick Price**, the name Ooty or **Ootacamund** was first mentioned in about 1821 A.D. in the **Madras Gazettee**.² However, it seems that **Mr. Sullivan**, the first European to reside there after building his famous **Stone House** which is the nucleus of the government offices and presently occupied by the Government Arts College.³

Over 2300 metres above the sea level, the average mean maximum temperature at Ooty during summer is about 24.2°C with a mean daily minimum range of about 5.1°C. The climate for the greater portion of the year, is decidedly salubrious and the air pure, and bracing.⁴ The hills become covered with luxuriant grass and whole area is pleasant and beautiful with the greenish roof. But the period which attracts the bulk of the people from the plains is in the months of April and May.⁵ Summer and winter festivals are celebrated and exhibitions are conducted every year to attract more number of tourists.⁶

Ooty Lake

In the western side of Ooty, an artificial but very picturesque lake had been formed by throwing a dam across the narrow outlet of the valley. This lake known famously as '**Ooty Lake**'⁷ is a marked feature and adds greatness to its beauty. The great efforts of **Mr. Sullivan** caused this lake to be built in 1823-25 with an area of two square miles with facilities for boating and fishing.⁸ At the Ooty Lake, a **Boat House** is being maintained by the **Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation** (TTDC) to assist the tourists and others to hire row boats, paddle boats,

or motor boats.⁹ The length of the lake is about 2.75 km. and the breadth varies from 100 to 140 metres with an area of over 65 acres.¹⁰

Doddabetta

Doddabetta is situated some 10 km. to the east of Udhagamandalam railway station. The name **Doddabetta** literally means '**big mountain**'¹¹, which is so in reality. To reach the peak, which is 2623 metres above MSL, one has to proceed on the Udhagamandalam - Kothagiri road and then take a diversion to the right. The road to Doddabetta is motorable and at the top is an observatory, from where, one can have a bird's eye view of Udhagamandalam town, Coonoor, Wellington and at a long distance of Coimbatore plains and Mysore Plateau.¹² If the sky is clear, one can have a magnificent panoramic view of the area all round. From the climatic point of view, the Doddabetta range is important so far as it acts as a barrier to the southwest and northeast monsoons. Now a big telescope placed there enables one to see the whole of the district and even beyond.

Government Botanical Garden, Ooty

The earliest garden formed in the Nilgiris was those attached to stone house and south downs which were maintained by Government by employing a comparatively large staff for this purpose. The Government garden was established in 1845¹³ by subscription amongst the European residents for the purpose of supplying themselves with vegetables, at a reasonable cost. The **Marquis of Tweeddale**, who was the then Governor of Madras took personal interest in this scheme and in addition to being a regular subscriber to it, contributed a very liberal donation of Rs.1000 towards its growth.¹⁴In March 1848, **Mr. W.C. Mc. Ivor** was appointed as Superintendent of Government Botanic Garden.¹⁵ In about a decade, **Mr.W.C. Mc. Ivor** who had his training at the **Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew** (London), was able to transform the steep slopes into walks and terraces, lawns and flower beds for growing choice selection of plants. He completed the lay out during the year 1857-1867.¹⁶

The Garden lies in a beautiful ravine adjacent to **Raj Bhavan** in a nook but not far off from the town and is easily accessible to the visitors. It covers an area of 22 hectares ascending the slopes on the hill at an elevation of 2400 to 2500 metres MSL.¹⁷ The garden enjoys a warm temperate climate, with an average rainfall of 140 cm. most of which is received during **southwest monsoon**, with frosty nights from November to February. The maximum and minimum temperatures are 30°C and 2.7°C respectively.¹⁷ The garden is divided into six different sections.

Section I - Low lawns and the new garden

The front section of the garden consists of an entrance, low lawns and the new garden. The entrance of the garden leads into an extensive undulating lush green lawns of **Kikiyu grass** (*PENNISETUM CLANDESTINUM*) which is unrivalled for its springly vigour by any other grass in the hills.¹⁸

Section II - The band stand

The informal and landscape garden forms the entrance merge imperceptibly into the formal fashioned beds laid out in an Italian parterre, surrounding the centrally situated Octagonal band stand. This part of the garden presents always a gorgeous look with several varieties at colourful annuals.¹⁹

Section III - The conservatory and its surroundings

The public conservatory was constructed in 1912 with the object of grouping in an attractive manner, various gorgeously coloured flowering plants, throughout the year.²⁰ Such colourful annual and perennial like cineraria, balsam, gloxinia, coleus etc. find a place in this conservatory. The big garden lies towards the east of this conservatory and forms an adjunct to provide a good site for marsh loving plants such as the weeping willows, hydychums, etc. A new feature added to the section during 1975-76 is the rock and alpine gardens.²¹

Section IV - The fountain terrace and the picnic grounds

This was once a terrace with a fountain, but is now laid out with symmetrical flower beds, designed in the shape of flower bouquet.²² A sunken garden is laid out adjacent to garden area with two fountain and flower beds. The picnic grounds are on the right hand side below the Todamund with tall exotic and indigenous trees of **eugenia montana**, **bucklandia** etc.²³

Section V - The new band and its surroundings

The new band was originally constructed in 1867 to house ferns and orchids, now serves as a summer house with typical formal and symmetrical flower beds edged with box wood surrounding it.²⁴

Section VI - The nurseries

The nurseries which are about 300 feet above the lower lawns, consists of seven glass houses and a series of terraces. Many different species of plants are reared and multiplied here for garden use and for sales. These glass houses are utilised for growing delicate and tender plants.²⁵

The Government Botanical Garden, Ooty had played an important role in the earlier years in introducing many crops into the Nilgiris. Particular mention can be made of the introduction of crops like potato, temperate vegetables and fruits and plantation crops like cinchona and economic trees like eucalyptus and wattle.²⁶ Infact, almost all the crops now grown in the Nilgiris were first tried and experimented in this garden before large scale release to the farmers. After the formation of a separate department of agriculture and the establishment of agricultural research stations for each crop, the work of the government botanic garden, Ooty is confined to the work on ornamental gardening.²⁷

Palaces in Ooty

There are quite a few palaces in Ooty. **Mysore Palace**, **Salar Jung Palace**, **Sorham Palace**, **Kallkot Palace**, **Arranmore Palace** (Jodhpur) and **Vijayanagar Palace** are a few that could be stated here.²⁸

END NOTES

1. **Mukurti Peak** (Folder), (Chennai : Dept. of Tourism, 2002).
2. N. Syamala, **Survey and Research on Folk Music, Dance and Drama of Tamil Nadu**, (Madras : Sangita Natak Sangam, 1962), pp. 81-88.
3. Anthony R. Walker, **The Toda of South India : A New Look**, (Delhi : Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1986), pp. 302-308.
4. R. Baikie, **The Neilgherries, including an account of their Topography, Climate Soil and Production**, (Calcutta : Home Department Press, 1857), pp. 10-13.
5. H.B. Grigg, **Manual of Nilgiri District**, (Madras : Govt. Press, 1880), pp. 1-3.
6. **Annual Magazine, Ooty Government College**, 2000, pp. 1-5.
7. Prakash Chander, **India Past & Present**, (New Delhi : APH Publishing Corporation, 2003), p. 108.
8. **Udhagamandalam** (Folder), (Madras : Dept. of Tourism, 1996).
9. **The Hindu**, 25th May 2006.
10. Frederick Price, **Ootacamund A History Compiled for the Government of Madras**, (Madras : Govt. Press, 1908), pp. 26-29.
11. Paul E. Hockings, **John Sullivan of Ootacamund**, (New Delhi : Golden Jubilee Publications, 1973), pp.863-871.
12. **Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation** (Folder), (Chennai : Dept. of Tourism, 2005).
13. John Ouchrerlony, **Geographical and Statistical Memoir of a Survey of the Neilgherry Mountains**, (Madras : The Law Journal Publishing Co., 1848), pp. 121-123.
14. Murray B. Emeneau, **Ootacamund in the Nilgiris : Some Notes**, (Philadelphia : University of California Publications, 1863), pp. 188-193.
15. **Doddabetta** (Folder), (Chennai : Dept. of Tourism, 2001).
16. **Hand Book on Govt. Botanic Garden Ootacamund and Sim's Park Coonoor**, (Madras : Govt. Press, 1965), pp. 1-3.
17. Frederick Price, **Op.cit.**, pp. 117-121.
18. **Ibid.**, pp. 231-236.
19. S. Krishnamoorthy, **Horticulture and Economic Plants of the Nilgiris**, (Coimbatore : Coimbatore Co-operative Printing Press, 1953), pp. 21-24.
20. William W. Hunter, **Nilgiri Hills**, (London : Trubner and Co., 1886), pp. 309-314.

21. Hans J. Von Lengenke, **The Nilgiris : Weather and Climate of a Mountain Area in South India**, (Wiesbaden : Franz Steiner Publications, 1977), pp. 11-13.
22. C.R. Ranganathan, **Studies in the Ecology of the Shola Grassland Vegetation of the Nilgiri Plateau**, (Calcutta : Botanical Survey of India, 1938), pp. 530-535. Please also see **Indian Forester**, 1938, No. 64, pp. 523-541.
23. W.R. Robertson, **Reports on the Agricultural Conditions, Capabilities and Prospects of the Neilgherry and Coimbatore Districts**, (Madras : Govt. Press, 1881), pp. 57-59.
24. T. Bellie (ed.), **Government Botanical Garden Udhagamandalam**, (Coimbatore : Dept. of Horticulture and Plantation Crops, 2001), p. 8.
25. **Ibid.**, p. 10.
26. M.N. Chandrabose, N.C. Nair (ed.), **Flora of Coimbatore**, (Dehra Dun : Bishen Singh Mahendra Pal Singh, 1987), pp. 58-62.
27. H. Santapau, **India, The Land and the People Common Trees**, (New Delhi : NBT Publications, 1999), pp. 101-110.
28. C.E.C. Fischer, **A Survey of the Flora of the Nilgiris**, (Calcutta : Botanical Survey of India, 1921), pp. 102-107.
29. M. Halayya, **An Encyclopaedic Tourist Guide**, (Udhagamandalam : Co-operative Printing Press, 1989), pp. 328-330.
30. **Ibid.**, p. 5.
31. **Ibid.**, pp. 51-53.
32. J.W. Breeks, **An Account of Primitive Tribes and Monuments**, (Madras : Govt. Press, 1873), pp. 171-173.

