

CHAPTER VIIEPILOGUESir John Malcolm - As a successor of Elphinstone

In 1827 Sir John Malcolm succeeded Elphinstone as a Governor of Bombay. In their personalities the two men were very different. Elphinstone was an intellectual disposition, shy and reserved in manner and aristocratic in breeding, Malcolm was more extroverted, bluff and hearty in manner and of humbler origins. But their Indian experience had been similar. Malcolm himself heartily approved of Elphinstone's policies.

Much is being written, especially by the British about the principles and policies followed by the British in India during the early nineteenth century. Their occupation and continued exploitation of India is sought to be extenuated by the plea of Utilitarianism. Mr. Stokes in his 'English Utilitarians and India' seeks to show how English liberalism in its untroubled dawn was represented in India by Elphinstone, Munro and Malcolm. English liberalism of the nineteenth century consisted of a mixture of Evangelism,

free trade and philosophical radicalism. They also favoured the admission of Indians to the higher posts in the civil service and a broad based educational system. It is, therefore obvious that British Imperialism in India was made up of diverse and contradictory elements.

Sir John Malcolm was the Governor of Bombay from November 1827 to 1830. During that period he was mostly occupied with the affairs of the Indian States under the control of the Government of Bombay. The important subject dealt by Malcolm was the participation of Indians in the administrative and judicial services. By Regulation of 1st January 1830, Malcolm had extended the jurisdiction of the Indian Judges to all original suits. His attempt, however, to introduce Indians into the Juries failed. In the field of education he believed in the progressive adoption of education for the Indians both in the knowledge of English as well as the English institutions. As yet, however, he was not willing to give up support of the Vernacular education.¹

From these actions of the British it will be clearly seen that the ultimate aim of Imperialism, and the di power were never really forgotten. For a short time

utilitarianism gave a moral justification for the British dominion over India.

Malcolm shared Elphinstone's feelings, and proposed that he should be allowed in addition to announce that no relatives of a sati would be eligible for government service and that any near relative already in government service would be dismissed. But instead of a Regulation specifically prohibiting sati he proposed merely to repeal that part of the 1827 Regulation which declared that 'assisting at any rites of self-immolation, as directed by the religious law of the person performing such immolation, shall not subject anyone to the penalty of much'.² Malcolm was no more anxious to make changes in Bhil policy than in sati policy. The measures of conciliation began during the later years of Elphinstone's government were continued with success.

The Government had even declared that they would have liked to see the ryotwari system established throughout Bhuruch. Malcolm, However, approved of the bhagdari system as much as Elphinstone had done. When he visited Gujarat in 1830 he was particularly impressed with

the prosperity of Bhuruch, 'the appearance of the people was favourable and their large well-built tiled houses denoted a degree of comfort and subsistence which is rarely witnessed among an Indian peasantry even when they enjoy prosperity and good government'.³

Malcolm's government, however, suggested that the court had an exaggerated idea of the power of these headmen. The former indiscriminate authority of the Patels, they claimed, had been abolished. In particular the rents payable by the ryots were recorded in the village accountant's books.⁴

Malcolm had considered Elphinstone his successor in Bombay, but had never thought of his friend preceeding him there. In a letter to his brother, he gave expression to his just resentment: 'I trust I shall never prove false to my character as a soldier; but I was never less disposed to die for my good superiors in England. No man can have more merit than Elphinstone, but I stood on ground that should have defended my fair and encouraged views of honourable ambition from suppression by any man'.⁵ However, Malcolm's ambition was ultimately fulfilled when he was selected in 1828 to succeed Elphinstone as the Governor of Bombay.

Malcolm took charge on November 1, 1828, and after a brief administration retired from his long official life on December 5th 1830.

Munro and Elphinstone - A synthesis of attitudes:

The two greatest provincial Governors in India during the early years of the nineteenth century was Sir Thomas Munro and Elphinstone. The careers and thought of these two men are especially illuminating in a study of the evolution and application of British attitudes towards India. Munro arrived in India in 1780 and after a long career in military and administrative affairs, ended his life as the Governor of Madras from 1820 to 1827. Elphinstone, arrived in India in 1795, on the threshold of Lord Wellesley's imperialism, and after a brilliant career in diplomatic and political affairs, served as Governor of Bombay from 1819 to 1827. They were not only contemporaries in their respective administrations as Governors, but they were close friends and associates, shared many similar views, and influenced one another. Their special significance lay in the way in which they understood and reflected the events and attitudes of this momentous period in British rule. They were not ordinary soldiers and officials reacting to India.

Their ideas, policies, and actions emerge as a dynamic synthesis of those various British attitudes which were forming and interacting in the British mind.

After 1813, when Munro and Elphinstone reached the highest administrative posts in India, their central concern increasingly became that of introducing improvements into India. In their early work they had shown their respect for the Indian constitution, and while this respect never ended, they were impelled to propose and introduce changes into the structure of Indian society.

British attitudes were strongly infused with projects to improve India, and rather diverse proposals emanated from the British public. Among the missionary groups, a conversion to christianity was both the means and the end in the task of India's improvement. To imperial minded Anglo-Indian officials, the establishment of incorruptible British officials and enlightened British institutions was the main responsibility. To the utilitarian liberals a series of rapid reforms, based on a rational consideration of utility and directed to a transformation of the social and this improvement was the responsibility of Indians,

through a process of organic growth, not to be tampered with by analysis, theory and British legislation.

In comparison to all the above conceptions of improvement, except that of conservatives, Munro and Elphinstone had a rather complex approach to the problem. Improvement was not so simple as to be made into a formula. At first glance, Elphinstone appeared to be far more of an intellectual than Munro. He read widely, possessed an exceptional library in India and took a particular interest in the writings of the utilitarians.

In establishing British administration in Bombay Presidency, Elphinstone would have liked to have introduced a programme solidly based on utilitarianism. But something less abstract was advisable, and he had to keep innovations at a minimum in order to conciliate the people.

He blocked the efforts of the Bombay Presidency to assume the administration of the Presidency and introduced a programme of innovations. Then Elphinstone instructed his subordinates to utilise existing village community which was probably not compatible with a very good form of government. He tried to preserve Indian judicial institutions, especially

the Panchayats, the Indian type jury. He was not especially favourable to the ryotwari system of revenue, for he was something of an aristocrat, but he insisted on the maintenance of existing peasant rights in the land.⁶

Elphinstone was rather modest in appraising the success of this administration. In the administration of justice, for example, Elphinstone found that the British provided greater certainty and less severity, but at the same time the British-administered system was more dilatory and less vigilant, because the British had a fetish about individual rights and were more likely to acquite criminals than Indians were. He could not recommend any other project except the spread of books in Indian languages, and he wanted none of these to be translations of christian tracts.⁷

As Governors of Madras and Bombay, Munro and Elphinstone reached the last phase of their attitudes toward the improvement of India. India's future as both Governors envisioned it, was that of an independent, modernized nation. In 1824, when Munro summed up his philosophy of Indian Government, he designated as the goal of his work some future age in which

Indians would have abandoned most of their superstitions and prejudices and became sufficiently enlightened to frame a regular government for themselves and to conduct it and preserve it.⁸ Elphinstone had the same vision. He expected the people, as he wrote Munro, to be ready for a considerable share in government in a half-century. He expected that honour and ambition would spur them to seek a control of their government.

In the evolution of India to an independent state, both Munro and Elphinstone expected Indians to acquire political and moral qualities like those of the West.⁹ Elphinstone was quite critical of certain Indian habits and customs. He cited, the ills of early marriages, the burden of an excessive population on the land, the custom of Indians squandering a lifetimes savings on a marriage or a funeral ceremony, the hopelessness of peasants in the clutches of money-lenders, most significantly, the absence of that courageous public spirit which alone could make good laws beneficial to that country. Munro usually avoided any explicit criticism of the moral and political qualities of Indians, and he would insist that Britons should be prejudiced in favour of the Indians rather than the reverse. But when

he wrote that Britain ought to be expelled altogether from India its government did nothing more than continue the people in their debased condition, he implied the extence defects which needed improvement. He hoped that Indians would acquire more orderly habits, show increased industry, and obtain a taste for the comforts of life. He spoke in terms of a moral improvement which would raise the minds of the people would be able to govern themselves and design measures for their own improvement. In brief, Munro and Elphinstone impelled westernization of the way of life, the enjoyment of liberty, and the practice of constitutional government as the ultimate goals of India's transformation. Of course, they advised caution. The choice and limiting of westernization lay with the people themselves. The government, on the one hand, had to provide the opportunity for the exercise of self-government and social responsibility. The people, on the other hand, had to utilize the opportunities before any improvements could succeed.

In analysing India's future development, Munro and Elphinstone did not expect or advise the immediate end of British rule.¹⁰ Munro thought that India should be viewed as a permanent British possession until the Indians reached a

high state of improvement. Elphinstone was also certain about the end of British rule, but he was not altogether sanguine that it would come at the end of the process of improvement.

Munro and Elphinstone were characteristically cautious toward the propagation of Christianity in India. Elphinstone's opinion of the religion of the Hindus was not favourable. Still Elphinstone did not approve of the seal of the Christian missionaries and of interference in Indian religions.

They had to facilitate Indian religious ceremonies, sanction long-established religious practices, and administer religious foundations.¹¹ Toward certain religious practices, like sati, Munro and Elphinstone were equally cautious. They might hope for the eventual abandonment of the practice, they argued that the practice was not required by Hindu law or sanctioned in Hindu theology, but they would allow officials only the function of discauding widows from burning themselves. The abolition of the practice, they believed, would have to come from Indians themselves, and for the stability of British rule and the prospects of the end of sati, the British would have to avoid an outright abolition of sati.

Munro and Elphinstone gave the greatest attention to the development of Indian education as the chief means by which Britain may enlighten Indians and prepare them for their future political role.¹²

Initially, in considering education, both Munro and Elphinstone emphasized preserving the existing educational system. They expected that peaceful conditions would foster education and that innovations might cause uneasiness. This reluctance to innovate, however, had to be soon abandoned. As the two governors began investigating the general state of learning and the impact of the British conquest on Indian education, they found that many schools had declined and ceased to function and that India's traditional higher education was rapidly disintegrating. In view of the condition of education and the attitudes of Britons and Indians, Munro and Elphinstone proceeded with extensive programmes of change. Elphinstone outlined his programme in 1824 and Munro shortly afterwards. These were similar programmes. Though Elphinstone tended to be speculative and far reaching a Munro to be immediate and practical, both suggested what in time would mean a decisive transition from traditional to western-style education.

The attitudes of Munro and Elphinstone in this task of improving India remained a rather unique synthesis of the currents of the time. They possessed the modesty of the conservatives in not supporting that they could do everything at once, the conservative appreciation for Indian culture, and the conservative emphasis on improvement coming from the whole Indian Society. They were prepared, on the other hand, to introduce liberal reforms and western learning when the time was ready. Beginning with the preservation of the country's institutions, they introduced revenue reforms, education and the opportunity of Indians to participate in their own government. They envisioned the future independence of India as a consequence of these reforms. Perhaps they accepted the idea that British rule would end eventually because it seemed so distant, but they did not flinch from measures which would lead to this end.

Elphinstone - AN Appraisal

Elphinstone spent as many years in retirement in England as he spent in the service of the Company. But his days of active service were over. He was never again tempted to accept another colonial assignment. He refused the Governorship

of Canada, the Governor-Generalship of India and the Bath with a seat in the Privy Council. But in his retirement he was not forgotten. In his old age he was the tried adviser of Presidents of the Board of Control. His wide Indian experience and knowledge, both of the country and people, were of invaluable service to Anglo-Indian statemen.¹³

Elphinstone, indeed, was always occupied with his numerous public duties or in maintaining the intercourse of private life with that urbanity and engaging friendliness with which he was so peculiarly distinguished. Sir Colebrooke quotes Mr. Warden's opinion on Elphinstone's attitude towards his friends in the midst of many striking excellencies, that which placed him far above all the greatmen I have heard of was his forgetfulness of self and thoughtfulness of others'. This was supported by various instances by Mr. Warden of his selfless behaviour on several occasions towards his friends. Mr. Warden also said that of all the goodmen of business he knew, Elphinstone was the best. It was the Country with which he listened to those who conversed with him, to that unassuming and engaging manner with which he communicated his vast and copious stores of knowledge, and the bright example of his literary excellence that can be ascribed his important work of the general diffusion of a love of learning under his government. He was a highly talented individual of commanding

abilities and his vast learning eminently contributed to adorn his richly cultivated mind. This was the feeling of all those who came in contact with him. Seldom had any man, who filled such important public offices, achieved so great an amount of public good.

It was said privately that he was a little of a Bohemian. He was accused of defying social conventions. He was also known to shock the superficial common place moralities of common minds. He was a man of sound opinions. Living in the early victorian era conventions were the soul of society and Elphinstone by those standards might have been a rebel. Sir Edward West was typical of his age and found Elphinstone's informal ways shocking. He was first in rank among the guests invited to the party at the Government House and Elphinstone would leave the table in the company of any individual who chanced to be next to him at the dinning table. The ladies of questionable character were after all not so wicked, Elphinstone may have felt, as the society of the day said they were. Though willing to take a charitable view of the failings of others he was a stern task master with his personal short comings.¹⁴

He never sinned in the name of political expediency. He revolted against the devious paths of diplomatic necessity. He was a stranger to lies even to attain political aims. He loved his country and is ranked with the early empire builders, but even among them he stands in deep contrast as a man who was always conscious of the means, no matter how noble the end. He began his career in the intelligence department ferreting out information of value to the promotion of British interest in India. His knowledge of the people and languages was of masses value.

Elphinstone's work as an administrator, the task was stupendous. No one man could be burdened with such a responsibility. If he were he would be found wanting. No one dared question his industry and devotion to work. His entire career in India stands in testimony. He would stand in the highest respect for sincerity. Hundred of letters from his pen warned the collectors of the evils of over-assessment and the necessity of treating the ryots well. But what could a handful of Englishmen do to control an army of inferior native officials who, to pander to the most oppressive ways of coming by revenue. It was true that the revenue demand was pitched far too high and that it was not in keeping with the ryots ability to pay. And when this was brought

home to Elphinstone, he immediately set about to put matters right. That he and his colleagues were mislead and did not judge the situation a right there is not the least doubt. But the reprecussions of their acts lay in the future and they can not be blamed for not being prophets.

But no man need be judged by his success. What matters are his intentions. Elphinstone wished well and was extremely anxious to introduce a western approach to all avenues of administration. He was highly appreciative of indigenous institutions and did his best to preserve them. He admired vernacular learning and was anxious to patronise it. At the same time he introduced western sciences for which the study of English was necessary. This did not blind him to the importance of the study of Sanskrit and the Hindu shastras. The study of India's ancient culture began with him and a number of his co-workers in various fields. On returning home he was to devote quite some of his time in writing a history of India that will be ever regarded as a standard work on that period of time.

Elphinstone's lasting contribution was to educating the natives. He was persuaded that mental and moral improvement

were indispensable for securing the real prosperity of the country. Education, therefore, appeared to him the most safe and efficient means for improving the people's mind and eventually qualifying them to participate in governing their own country. Elphinstone, therefore, encouraged with the most liberal support the establishment and exertions of the Native Education Society. If instead of the lopsided system of education, concentrating on western lines, Elphinstone's wiser policy of keeping the vernaculars alive were adopted, England would have left the Indian masses within reach of their indigenous system of education which would have developed a higher percentage of educated Indians. The credit goes to him for the competition and publication of grammars and dictionaries in Marathi and Gujarati and the publication of several other important works in native languages. The contempt that developed later for native language was a distrust disservice to the cause of education in India. It was the outcome of ignorance of the wealth of oriental learning by later administrators.

He kept away from public life for a long time. What really filled most of his friends with surprise was that he had lived so long considering his indifferent health all

his life. So little was he known to the public on his death that it was feared that he would pass off unrecorded and his great services forgotten. It was practically the end of nineteenth century when Sir Edward Copebrooke wrote his biography and revived his memory. He had already become a part of Indian History. But it was as a diplomat and statesman that he was remembered. The real Elphinstone, since the days of Sir Colebrooke, needed a fresh introduction, not the soldier and diplomat but the man. Because it is as a man he ought to be remembered. Though the man and his task are closely interwoven, it is Elphinstone the man who towers above all his earthly achievements. Here was a man who placed morality in all things, including politics, as the law of life. To Elphinstone it was not only a principle but a way of life.

A man of extraordinary ability, keen emotions for the good in life, great love of learning and nature, one of the finest Englishmen that came to India. A diplomat with a sense of honour and devotion to duty rarely found among any race of man. He belonged to that group of British statesmen who embodied the best traditions of their race. He stands in deep contrast to a generation of Englishmen who came to India after Nutiny. The servants of the Company revelled in

greed, and it is heartening to find a man of the same race who thought so nobly and in whose makeup all that is finest in human nature so brimful. Elphinstone is a unique personality in Anglo-Indian History.

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