CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The area of the present state of Gujarat composed of the mainland of Gujarat and the peninsulas of modern Saurashtra and Kutch was not called Gujarat in ancient times, nor did it form one political unit. Gujarat was governed by various autonomous and independent Kings, Sultans, Nawabs and Princes except for short periods. Even during the periods when Gujarat was subject to the overall suzerainty of a powerful Hindu dynasty or the Muslim Sultans or Mughul Emperor, the local princes and nawabs continued to rule different parts of Gujarat under the supremacy of the sovereign. Thus, politically, Gujarat was a cluster of principalities, sometimes under an over all suzerain or subject to the partial supremacy of powerful dynasties like the Solankis, the Sultans, the Mughuls, or the Marathas. There was a continuous struggle among various powers to establish overall supremacy.

On the eve of the British conquest, particularly during the eighteenth century, and also during the earlier phase of the British settlement, Gujarat was divided politically among three or four competing political rulers striving for suzerainty over as much territory and as many chieftains in various parts of the territory as possible Ahmedabad was governed by the representative of the Mughul rulers and Surat, Bharuch and Cambay were ruled by

independent nawabs accepting the tutelage of the Delhi ruler. A larger number of Rajput and Kathi princes ruled over parts of Saurashtra, and the expanding Maratha power which was itself split among the Peshwas, the Scindhias, and the Gaikwars, ruled over some areas. The advent on the scene of the East India Company added a new claima t to power and territory in Gujarat. Skillfully established a foot hold in Gujarat and ultimately brought a large portion of the territory under its direct rule.

In short Gujarat was a politioally disunited area, lacking peace and security owing to constant friction among various categories of chieftains and rulers. The Gujarati people were constantly subjected to the strains of war, plunder, frequent changes in political rule, and also hardships arising out of instability and the growing claims of changing victors.

Every political system must have administrative machinery, a judicial system and a system of revenue collection. In eighteenth century Gujarat, each principality had its own revenue collecting machinery. There were, however, certain common features. The overall suzerains like the Solankies, the Muslim sultans and subsequently the Mughuls had introduced administrative machinery appropriate for the large areas under their direct control, and established a system of relationships between suzerain and the subordinate princes and nawabs.

On the eve of the eighteenth century and even during the nineteenth century, till British conquered Gujarat, the broad pattern of administration worked out by the Muslim sultans and slightly refined by the Mughul Governors was operating in certain parts of Gujarat and was being adopted by some major princes. By and large, this formal administrative machinery was retained intact by the Maratha chieftains who established their supremacy in various parts of Gujarat after the decline of Mughul rule. In the initial stages, the Maratha conquerors were not interested in establishing Kingdoms but only in collecting as much wealth as possible by securing chauth, sardeshmukhi and other tributes from the people and chieftains of the conquered territories. They therefore did not disturb the mode of administration prevailing in the area.

At the end of the eighteenth century and in the early decades of the nineteenth century as a result of foreign political domination, Gujarati society came into contact with a society which was entiredly different in social and ideological structures. India had numerous experiences of foreign invasions and domination prior to British rule. Indian society was affected in various ways by these invasions. It should, however, be noted that prior to British rule, the nature of India's contacts with other countries was a juxtaposition of two pre-industrial societies. The contact between the Britain of the nineteenth century and India was one between a growing industrial

country and a pre-industrial one. Thus juxtaposition of two societies at different levels of development generated an entirely new situation.

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century Gujarat was in ferment. The Mughul authority as well as the Maratha supremacy waned gradually and in its place the English entered the scene as a formidable territorial power with the sure prospect of becoming a paramount power. The British earned the gratitude of the people as well, and their system of Government was in many respects an improvement over the one developed by the Mughul and Maratha administrators. The whole system of administration the Marathas developed was aimed at maintaining their precarious hold over the country.

Mountstuart Elphinstone who joined the British service in India in 1795, became the Governor of Bombay Presidency in 1819 and as a Governor, he had jurisdiction over the modern Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, His activities in the area which was known as Bombay Gujarat form the thrust of the work which is proposed to be done. The period covered is from 1819 to 1827. The term Bombay Gujarat is used here in a limited sense. Its territorial limits are mainly confined to those areas which the British conquered from Nawabs and Peshwa. Thus Surat, Bharuch, Ahmedabad and Kheda form the jurisdiction of this study. Elphinstone's long life witnessed almost the entire drama

of British conquest. Born in 1779, when Warren Hastings was still Governor General, he went out to India in 1796, before Tipusultan had been finally subdued. In 1803, he rode by the side of the future Duke of Willington at his first great vicory. At the maturity of his powers he failed the intrigues of the Peshwa, defeated him in battle, and annexed his dominions.

To him the Bombay Presidency owes both the enlargement of its administrative system. Returning home after more than thirty years of uninterrupted labour, he passed his remaining days in retirement. He died in 1859, having survived the mutiny and the transfer of the Government from the Company to the Crown.

The Bombay Presidency was singularly fortunate to have Elphinstone as the first Governor after the annexation of the Deccan to Bombay on 1st November 1819. As a Deccan Commissioner in Poona and then as the Governor of Bombay from 1819 to 1827 he gave to the British administration a spirit of benevolence. He was an youngest of eight children of a Scotish peer, came to India in 1779 after schooling in Edinburgh and Kensigton. Throughout his career in India he remained a voracious reader of European and Indian classics. In addition to writing a number of valuable minutes, diaries, treaties and letters which throw a flood of light on the life and history of the times, he also wrote 'History of India', that includes the Hindu and Mughul periods.

He landed at Calcutta in February 26th, 1796 at the age of sixteen and spent here thirty two years of his life. How Elphinstone spent his early years in India is not known. It is perhaps during his time that lonliness and monotony of life may have driven him to reading which became his solace. The habit once formed grew with the years. His first appointment was at Benaras and in 1801, he was appointed Assistant to the Resident at the Court of Poona. He spent the best of his career in Western India in different capacities. From 1811 to 1817 he was the British Resident at Poona before he took over as the Deccan Commissioner of the newly enlarged Bombay Presidency.

He had leannt much of India. His work had given occasion to travel widely, and early in his career he resolved to 'employ my time in learning something of the country through which I pass instead of indulging in mere unprofitable thought'.

He knew the people of Western India more closely than any other British administrator. During his Governorship, he visited every district twice. He had learnt the language, customs, manners and habits of the people of the Deccan which included northern district of Gujarat.

He never married. He led a strenuous life all the time he was in India. Figsticking and hard riding were his great recreations.

His determination not to be surpassed may well have been strengthened by his pride of birth. But his pride of birth never betrayed him into complacency. He was

restless and ambitious, but his ambitions were as soundly based upon his abilities and accomplishments as upon his birth. As Bishop Heber wrote several years later, he was 'in every respect an extraordinary man'.

As Resident, Elphinstone soon found cause to intervene both in the domestic and in the foreign affairs of the Peshwa's Government.

Elphinstone was soon recording in his journal how he was longing for 'change, bustle, interest and distinction'. In October 1817 he resolved, 'I must keep up my relish for society, for hog hunting and for all kinds of enterprise and activity, and avoid the strange, torpid, solitary, shy habits I had fallen into last year'.

In December 1817 the Governor General in Council told Elphinstone that Bajirao was to be deposed and that his territories were to be annexed by the East India Company. Elphinstone, unrivalled in his knowledge of the Marathas and of the country was appointed 'sole Commission for the settlement of the territory conquerred from the Peshwa, he was told to provide as he thought fit for the temporary administration of the country and to employ any officers whom he thought suitable for the work. The shape of the new system of the Government was in fact left to his discretion. He had no clear-cut plans. All that he could do for the time being was to choose his men and provide for the needs of war.

His success as an administrator was especially due to his realisation that the political institutions and social suages which had been in vogue for ages possessed some innate merit. These could not be broken up all at once and new once imposed, however, beneficial they may appear to be. He was careful to show to the people that the new rulers respected their laws, previlages and prejudies as well. In support of this he wrote to Governor General, 'it is however to be remembered that even just government, will not be a blessing it at varionce with the habits and character of the people'. It was his intention to see that the yoke of the British pressed as softly as possible and hurted at as few places as possible. He wanted purification, he desired no basic change.

These attitudes of Elphinstone's were responsible for the formation of his noted education minute, codification of laws, and the employment of Indians in the civil service. Elphinstone belonged to that set of early British Indian administrators who evinced keen interest in things Indian and administration for the early Hindu civilization. At the same time he was also influenced by the Ulilitarian philosophy of Bentham and Mill. Himself an enlightened man because of his upbringing and wide learning, he brought the Ulilitarian idea of the haopiness of the governed to hear on his administration of Bombay presidency. His sympathetic approach to Indians and to Indian problems is obvious in his administrative measures. His history of India

and his sympathetic approach to the subject stands in clear contract to J.S. Mill's History of India were J.S. Mill looks down upon things Indian.

In the same spirit he took up the codification of laws. He wrote to Strachy, 'what we call Hindu law applies in fact to the Brahmins only, each caste has separate laws and customs of its own and even they very according to the part of the country in which the different portion of a caste us settled. There is a good deal of truth in one assertion, but it only shows how much a general code is wanted'. He argued that even though it might take long, 'you would then have a code of laws - a very imperfect one, but one known to the judges and the people - capable of comparison and improvement by the legislature'.

Elphinstone's views with regarding codification of laws were quite in advance of his age. In 1823 he advocated the necessity of codification of laws of the Hindus on a scientific basis. What he proposed in 1823 was taken up in 1833 when Machaulay was appointed the Law Member of the Governor General's Council. After Elphinstone became Governor he appointed a Committee at Bombay with two aims - to revise and reduce to system the existing Regulations or status passed by the Bombay Council and to investigate throughly the legal customs and usages of the people. The first task was accomplished and the revised Bombay Regulations came into force in 1827. Elphinstone's project of

reducing to intelligible form the entire body of Hindu law and custom both written and unwritten, had to wait for a long time.

His enlightened approach was evident in his educational policy for the Bombay Presidency. He stressed that spread to education should be the duty of the Government, a view contrary to that of the court of Directors, and advanced at a time when education was not considered a state responsibility even in England.

In 1825 he laid down the duties of the Government in order of priority as follows - repression of violence, fixing of moderate and equal assessments of land revenue, administration of justice, establishment of freedom of trade, promotion of education. He summed up the whole by adding that education was the best means of promotions all the rest.

In his judgement the education of peasants occupied as important a place as that of the learned class. For the diffusion of knowledge among peasants would not only remove superstition, it would also enable them to follow the declarations of the Government, workout their own accounts, and read their own revenue certificates. Such education, he believed, would make the ryotwari systems more effective. In planning for literacy among peasants, he was far a head of his time. Even after 150 years this dream of Elphinstone

remains unfulfilled. His aim was not to provide clerks for offices but to diffuse of the people. His approach to Indian education was thus different from the general British policy in this regard.

Through education Elphinstone was envisaging a comprehensive reform with in Indian society. If the Government wanted to remove sati, infanticide and superstitions it could be done successfully only through education. Even for bringing about racial harmony he suggested the teaching of European principles and ideas by the diffusion of rational education.

But it should be clear that Elphinstone was motivated not by altruism but by enlightened self-interest. It would be a contradiction with in it self to imagine that he was planning for the liquidation of the empire he had helped to build. But he was planning within a long term perspective. He admitted that an enlightened educational and employment policy might make Indians clamour inpatiently for more. But he added, if one endeavours to depress the natives, Government may be overthrown by their resistance and such a catastrophe would be more disastrons and more disgraceful than that first supposed. Elphinstone was more pragmatic than enlightened.

As in the spread of education, Elphinstone foresaw in the development of the press on obvious danger to British imperialism. Yet he supported it as a beneficial agency. But he wanted the Press to function under restrictions

imposed from his belief in Utilitarianism. However, he never allowed the basic interests of the empire to be subordinated. His efforts were directed towards proping up the empire, a direction from which he did not deviate in desiring that the burden of British yoke should not unduly hunt indians.

REFERENCES

1. Abyabar Nadvi - Gujarat nu Ithihas, Vol. II, (Gujarati) Ahmadabad, 1949.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Nandshankar Lal Shankar - Gujarat Sarva Sangraha.
6. Rajyagor, S.B. Rajakiya and Sanskritic Ithihas, Ahmadabad, 1976.
7. Ibid.
8. Bearce, G.D. British attitude towards India - 1784 - 1858 Oxford, 1961.
9. Ibid.
10. Ballhachet, K. 'Social Policy and Social Change in Western India, 1817-1830, Oxford, 1957.
11. Choksey, R.D. Mounstuart Elphinstone - The Indian Years - (1796-1827) Bombay, 1971.
12. Colebrooke Sir T.E. The Life History of Mounstuart Elphinstone, London, 1884.
13. Cotton, J.S. The Rulers of India - Mounstuart Elphinstone, Oxford, 1892.
14. Choksey, R.D. op.cit.
15. Ibid.

16. Choksey, R.D. op.cit.

17. Ibid.

18. Ballhacket, K. op.cit.

19. J.D. Vol. 48 for 1826, Elphinstone's Minute - Maharashtra State Archeview.

20. Ibid.

21. E. Minute on education, 1823.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Cotton, J.S. op.cit.