

THE UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGION AS SOCIAL INSTITUTION; UNDER THE LIGHT OF SIR MOUNT STEWART ELPHINSTONE'S BOOK "HISTORY OF INDIA"

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Abstract

M.S Elphinstone, the founder of British Historiography in India was a famous British diplomat. During his stay in India, he visited various parts of the country. He had taken a keen interest in society's social and religious aspects. His compelled travel as "An Account of the Kingdom of Kabul and his famous writings "History of India" and "The Rise of British Power in the East" bestowed the historiography to a new trend in India. Elphinstone introduced new ideas and he promoted historiography based on regional identities. In India Elphinstone also discussed the various socio-political issues. He explained religion as a social institution and its connection with the other institutions of society. It affects the common life of the people because people always express their views in the light of religion. He argued that religion always influences the norms and traditions of society and it differentiates between right and wrong. When religion gains dominancy over the entire social institutions, it captures them and brings changes to society. Elphinstone point of view about religion is clearly in the social sense. According to him, religion passes through some evolutionary stages and he does not believe it is a permanent and solid thing. He says social needs also changed religion. As a religion, Islam is an important and universal religion in the world. It is thought a very important institution of human society. Islam influenced greatly the social environment of Indian society. This research paper highlights the concept of religion by Elphinstone in the light of his literary work "History of India".

Keywords: Religion, Islam, Elphinstone, India, History, Society, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Sir Mount Stewart Elphinstone was a famous British Diplomat and he came to India during the time of British rule in India. He traveled from Calcutta to NWFP and observed keenly the socio-political and religious culture of the Subcontinent. He assessed different aspects of Indian society and one of them was the position and status of religion in the Indian context. His famous book History of India and Account of the Kingdom of Kabul interpreted all this. This paper primarily deals with and explores the concept of S.M. Elphinstone regarding religion as a social institution and this was noticed through his own philosophical thinking which was expressed in his book History of India Vol-I.

Methodology and Review of Literature

This research paper has been prepared on the religious thoughts of M.S Elphinstone. For a review of the literature, we are concerned with his most relevant work "An Account of the Kingdom of Kabul, "History of India" and "The Rise of British Power in the East" for a research point of view, I have



adopted a historic model based on a qualitative approach. The historic method is also based on his book *History of India and Rise of British Power in the East*.

Religion's revival and resistance in M.S Elphinstone's Book *History of India*.

We examine the second part of Elphinstone's *History of India* which is about the Muslim era and judge what the concept of religion according to Elphinstone is and how he described Islam as a religion in Sub-continent. We throw light on how the changes of eras and the policies of governments the propagation of Islam and how the element of resistance emerged.

According to Elphinstone religion is a type of social institution that is connected with other institutions and the thoughts and actions of an individual are the expression of their religion but with the passage of time, the ancient uncivilized beliefs and laws included in it change their face according to present time. We cannot search for a religion in the history of India rather where religion affects the ethics and traditions and differentiate right and wrong on the basis of social values. When religion affects society it dominates society and this dominates the other institutions of society and creates changes in them. Elphinstone takes religion as a social concept. The changes in society are unavoidable acts. According to Elphinstone religion also cross evolutionary destinations. According to Elphinstone religion is not a permanent thing it just unites people on a belief rather the needs of society create changes in religion.

The 5th chapter of Elphinstone's *History of Hind* starts with the name of Muhammadan. He describes the religion Islam from the start and its coming and promotion in Sub-continent. He gave clear positions to Iranian, Turks, and Arabs in the evolutionary age of Islam. According to him, Hazrat Muhammad S.A.W laid the foundation of Islam on the base of Jews and Christian beliefs. Islam got dominance in other territories on the base of power but he described the believer in one GOD. He describes Muhammadan rather as a religion of Islam. The regular attack and establishment of government in India start under the leadership of Muhammad Bin Qasim. The advent of Muhammad Bin Qasim provides facilities for the promotion of Islam among natives. Sindh and almost other areas are impressed by the ethics and tolerance of Muslims.¹ According to Elphinstone natives, people accepted Islam due to predominate by the power of Muslims. When Mahmood Ghaznavi attacked India his continues conquests show Islam as a power through that way Muslims got power and stability in India.²

The wars of Mahmood against the Ismailis of Multan were actually the promotion of Sunni beliefs in the Sub-continent. The person who promotes the concept of extension of empire got glory in that age. Mahmood gave power and glory to the Muslims. Mahmood was fond of scholars, poets, and virtuosity. He established schools and promote knowledge. According to Elphinstone Muhammadan religion got power and that power was not the war against non-Muslims. The prince of Qanoor becomes the supporter of Mahmood without changing their religion. There was no religious allotment in his army but on the other hand, he spread Islam.³

The Muslim Historian promoted his concept of "*Butt Shikan*" because he broke the idols.

Mahmood was of the Sunni sect and for that reason he was a follower of the Caliph of Baghdad and the Fatimid caliphate of Egypt which was established parallel to the Caliph of Baghdad was considered illegal by Mahmud. The Abbasid caliph had given him the title of Amin al-Mulat and Yamin al-Dawlah, so he considered himself the representative of the caliph in the East. On the basis of this strong connection, he considered it a sin to follow the Fatimid Caliph as opposed to the Abbasid Caliph and was against his followers and considered them out of Islam. He used to fight all such people calling them infidels. History Angel has told many stories of his religious devotion.⁴ Arab conqueror left their law philosophy and literature in Indian recitation according to Muhammad Habib, Mahmood was the symbol of Iranian recitation. The new era started in India with the advent of Mahmood he brought new culture literature which already flourished in the Middle East.⁵ He brought with his glory and a warrior nature. In his age, the language of historians was full of proud violence and included the tolerance of Arabs. He impressed the natives and new Muslims.⁶

According to Elphinstone religions were implemented with minor changes due to native traditions. Mahmood established their government only in Lahore and adjoining territories. On the other hand, Shahab-u-Din Ghaori is called the founder of the Muslim government in India. When there is no



equal Muslim ruler remained around him he attacked India the Hindu Rajput who considered an inborn warrior tried to counter him but after the continuous defeat, Ghorī appointed his slave as the ruler of India. After the death of Ghorī, Qatub ud Din Aybek laid the foundation of an independent and sovereign empire in India and established their government in those areas where they advent as an attacker and made strong their position.⁷ The biggest danger that emerged for the Muslim government in Asia was the Chaghai Khan and in the age of Al-Tutmarsh, various practical steps had taken for saving him which provide safety from Mangol attacks on the Muslim empire. Al-Tutmarsh was the ruler of religious trends so scholars and Sufis like him. The caliph also granted him Khilat and this government was recognized in the world.⁸

Another Muslim ruler who save his empire from the attacks of Mangol was the Balban who came into power after the Nasir-ud-Din Mehmmod. He made strong defenses and did not allow the scholars and Sufis to interfere in interior affairs. But despite his drastic nature, the effects of scholars and Sufis appear in his palace. The famous poet Ameer Khusro and Sanjri were present in the palace of his son Muhammad. Elphinstone thought about Balban he took steps to spread Islam stressed the implementation of Sharia and eased the exact religious affront of the non-Muslims and minorities. He made the natives diminished due to his policy which eradicate the slave government.⁹ The murder of Siyyadi Moula in the age of Khillji which seems Sufis and mendicants both support the empire of Dehli and form and finalized the social structure of the Dehli empire. According to Elphinstone, they don't negate the palace rather they finalized him. The hermitage of Siyyadi Moula defaulted from his duty. He should be made strong the Sultan and his elite but he did not as it is so he lost his life. The age of Alaud Din Khilji increased the number of conquests but he adopted the policy of the separation of religion from politics. Sultan Alaud Din also thought like Sikandar to conquest the whole world and established a new religion but the suggestion of a wise man kept him away from this thought. After that, he focused his energies on countries administration and the defense from the attack of the Mongols. At his age, the Muslim Mangol tried to kill him but all the supporters were killed where they were found.¹⁰

There were numerous rebellions emerged in the age of Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq but most of their causes were political in nature. But that rebellion was racial cultural and religious nature. The decline of the empire was start in his age after him those who came into power cannot reduce these rebellions. According to Elphinstone Ameer Timor eradicated the remaining power of the empire. After his departure, Syed's and Lodi's families established their governments.¹¹

Skindar Lodhi introduced the orthodox nature. He restricted the Hindus to pay for their religious traditions and pray in their temples. He also restricted Ashnann in rivers. At his age, Barhaman had the theory that all religions are true and believe in God. Sikandar Lodhi said him to accept Islam and murdered him after his refusal to accept Islam. Lodi's age fueled the orthodox beliefs. After the attack of Timor established peace in their government and Muslims got power.¹² The advent of the Mughals started with the Babur who laid the foundation of the Mughal Empire in India but his successor Humayu cannot save his government from Afghan leader Sher Shah. He escaped from his empire. Sher Shah established the government. In his regime, he just not emphasized administrative, defensive, affairs but also build the Mosque appointed Imam and Mouzzan on a government level.¹³

Humayun with his family reached the palace of the Shah of Iran. The Shah of Iran was the biggest supporter of the Shia religion. He gave honor and esteem to Humayun but on various occasions, he forced Humaiyo to adopt the Shia religion. According to Elphinstone, two opinions are established on whether Humayun accepted the Shia religion. But when he come back with the help of the Shah of Iran and established their government the Shiiya elites and values developed freely in India and conflict between Irani and Taurani was established in the palace.¹⁴

There was a lack of unity among Muslims. Shia and Sunni sects got progress and growth in India which appeared from the age of Arabs to Mughals. Elphinstone gave importance to intellectual aspects in his history of Muslims of Hind when political changes emerged due to them. He described Akbar's Din-e-Ilahi and his religious policy in detail. But at the end of his regime, the emergence of the Roshaniy sect seemed. In that belief there was no belief in Quran do not believe in any other



except God and believe on the body of God is in the space of all universe. The followers of this sect had full liberty to occupy the property of non-Muslims. Bazyeed the founder of this sect increase their power in Koh-e-suleman and connected areas. He became powerful even though the government took steps against him and killed him during the war.¹⁵

The element of tolerance was clear in the religious policy of Akbar. Akbar himself takes part in many debates and all Hindu Muslim christen Parsi philosopher representatives include in it. His policy was considered a symbol of national unity. Akbar's religious beliefs and traditions were actually the needs of the time for the achievement of political objectives it was a useful weapon.¹⁶ According to Elphinstone the philosophical thoughts of Sheikh Mubarak and his sons Faizi and Abu-al-Fazal affected the Mughal king and deeply affected his thoughts so he prepared a new religion.¹⁷ The followers of Islam were not in favor of any kind of change or betterment so Akbar faced heavy criticism. Elphinstone liked his religious thoughts and determined them actable for the future government. According to him the social and political needs of the 16th century made many changes in the religion Islam Elphinstone declared Akbar as a secular ruler.¹⁸

In the regime of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, they tried to reduce the solicitude of people but continued the religious policy of Akbar and treated them with objects without any discrimination of race or religion. According to Elphinstone, the religious policy was suitable according to the country's needs. But with the end of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, the politics were changed and the regime of Aurangzeb had seen as a result of Akbar's religious beliefs. In his regime, religious effects seemed in every institution like the implementation of capitation on non-Muslims which effect the majority of Hindus and affected their national emotion. According to Elphinstone, the government of orthodox was established and they were active to brought social meliorate and start interfering in the personal life of people. That was the recitation of orthodox Muslims which was the answer to the policies of Akbar. The opposite policies of Akbar and the religious discrimination of Aurangzeb played a very important role to lead the empire to decline.¹⁹ While the political atmosphere of India provided a chance for foreign attackers. Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah, who considered his enemy by every supporter of the Sunni sect.²⁰

As a result, the Shia sect and their supporters changed their states into Shia states. They were enthusiastic in promotion and printing despite the lack of individuals they were ready to sacrifice their lives for it.²¹ In his second book "The Rise of British Power in East" Elphinstone made racial geographical linguistic elements the base of civilization despite the religion,

Conclusion

The above mention study explains the historical concept of M.S Elphinstone regarding religious context. Mount Stewart Elphinstone was one of the major historians of the Colonial period of India. He was a famous British diplomat in India. He is famed as a great historian. He is called the father of British historiography in India. During his stay in India, he performed different assignments. With this M. S. Elphinstone was considered among the British think tanks and he introduced and defined the new aspects of colonial administration in India. During his administration, he not only visited the different parts of India but also pointed out the different socio-cultural aspects of the society in his writings. There is a lot of historical work in his credit, but one of the books "History of India" is his most remarkable historical work regarding the Indian context. Another one is also "The Rise of British Power in The East" With these books he also compiled his travel with the name "An Account of the Kingdom of Kabul" and informed about the socio-cultural condition of the people, especially the religious aspect of the society in Indian perspective during the colonial period. While his book History of India is a good explanation of religion as a social institution. In this book, he discussed Indian society from ancient times to the start of Colonial rule till the success of Plassy. Elphinstone highlighted and explore every aspect of Indian society. He also discussed religion and its impact on Indian society. Through this book, he tried to prove that religion is the most significant and magnetic force in Indian society. The book is an important document and provided a chance for the scholar to emphasize a new door of research.



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