CHAPTER II

THE CONCEPTION OF MINORITY IN THE LIBERAL POLITICAL TRADITION IN THE WEST
In a way the minority as an issue is of recent origin. The minorities be it religious, racial, linguistic or cultural did not figure in the socio political fabric of any kingdom in the past. The nature and functions of the state and the socio economic relations were such that neither the majority nor the minority was forced to give much attention to such issues. That is because in the past the divide in the society as we can see was not between the majority and minority, but on alternative criteria majority and minority become significant only when there is political space for such distinctions. The earlier distinctions were of other orders. Further such distinctions need not be associated with political relations. There were always, however, social groups which did not constitute the political mainstream. The dissenting groups which did not fall in line with the prevalent doctrine and viewpoint were often the target of persecution, coercion or even annihilation. The dominant group claimed some sort of 'infallibility' and forced the other to surrender and submitted it to subjugation.

The idea of minority can be traced back to such non-conformist groups that emerged at the turn of renaissance and reformation when non conformity itself became an issue both in the theoretical and practical arena. Such themes and policies as 'papal inquisition', 'religious tolerance', 'general will and coercion', 'right to dissent' and 'the
right to non-conformity' provided momentum to it. The idea of minority can also be examined in the context of the emergence of secularism as a doctrine and policy in the post reformation period. With the onset of liberal and representative institutions political ideas of the period such as 'majority rule' and its contrary i.e. the fear associated with such rule that eventually came to be named as tyranny of the majority also help us to have a better understanding of the issue of minorities. It is in these liberal formulations that minority has its paradigmatic setting.

The claims for the minority as formulated thereby can be contrasted with the early Christian and medieval period in Europe, in terms of certain representative thinkers of the age. The early Christian communities subject to religious and political persecution were in an apt position to throw up reflection on this issue. However the early thinkers of the Church do not seem to have thrown up a consistent reflection on it. St. Augustine, one of the Fathers of the Catholic Church argued that the Donatist dissidents from the Catholic Church must be compelled to come in. For this purpose, he felt a "preliminary dose of
fear may be essential" meaning thereby that the dissent from the official line is unpardonable. On the other hand, he argued that 'heretics should not suffer loss of life or limb'. Freedom of pursuit of religious beliefs is thereby highly circumscribed. His perspective on the issue runs in two directions. As a philosopher he saw the church as a voluntary society. As a theologian he emphasised authority and coercion against heretics.

St. Thomas Aquinas, the theologian-philosopher, thinking from within the Church, tried to frame a mode of life agreeable to the Church and also justifiable before reason. He was not concerned about the issue of minorities as such. He treated temporal rule as springing from nature and the dictates of nature as universal. It follows that the Muslim rulers, provided they do not violate natural law, are entitled to the obedience of Christian subjects. He argued that what is due to everyone is to be given, be he a non-Christian or Christian. It is stipulated by nature. Thomas Aquinas, thinking from the point of view of a Christian state reconciles with the idea of non-Christians i.e. a minority within a Christian state. But

2. ibid p.133.
when it comes to a Christian ruler who apostasizes, Aquinas took this position, though philosophically untenable, mainly constrained by the role of the superimposing Church in every walk of life in those days. Religious conflicts following reformation and the inquisition that followed in its wake posed a serious threat to dissent and developed arguments in its favour. Religious sects while they vied for doctrinal, ecclesiastical and ritual exclusivity, denounced the others as outsiders to whom truth has to be reached. Some of them even justified coercion to achieve such an objective. The Catholic church in turn, justified inquisition, the notorious mode of punishing the heretics.

There was the extreme papalist view regarding inquisition which justified and advocated the ultimate penalty of burning at the stake.

The theory that heretics should be subjected to coercion and even death had found currency. Dissidence was snubbed upon. The inquisition reflected the attitude of the Catholic church regarding dissidence or criticisms. Hence there cannot be an idea of minority with any degree of

1. Torture began to be used during the second quarter of 13th century. It was justified in the famous bull 'ad extirpanda' by Pope Innocent IV in 1252 to the Bishops and Princes in Italy. For details, see, Mulford Sibley, Political Ideologies, Delhi, Surjeet, 1981
As said earlier the idea of minority assumes a clearer picture with reformation and its aftermath. Before reformation a multifaith society was beyond imagination. The vision of the society was such that there must be religious uniformity. Even the protestant sects for a long time carried overboard such a vision leading to internecine conflicts between the Catholic church and the Protestant sects on one hand and among the sects themselves on the other.

After reformation both Catholics and Protestants realised that none of them could enforce either a Catholic unity or Protestant uniformity. This realisation is the beginning of adjustment and accommodation. It was the beginning of a life of compromise. A dimension of the idea of secularism begins here. The possibility of the existence of a group of people who do not conform to the so called community, in other words, a minority is emerging. This minority was sometimes religious, sometimes political. But this is a minority with its own autonomous existence.

1. It is another thing to note that the papal zeal was ineffective. Even some bishops were in league with the heretics. Even when the inquisition was in its full swim there was a strong under current of thinking which doubted the justifiability of such steps. This, one might rightly construe as a reflection of the recognition of the basic freedom of conscience, valued by most of the christian philosophers even in the dark days of inquisition.
However such a realisation was premised upon complex changes underway in all walks of life. The way the world was understood and described underwent a profound transformation. The explanation of the world was internal to it rather than on the authority of revelation of an external authority. Even God was seen as expressed in nature rather than as its creator. While extolling reason as both end and means of exploring such a nature, it also led to the highlighting of certain traits as 'selfpreservation' and compassion as prior to reason and more natural. The former while upholding a common human nature and man's rights everywhere pitted itself against tradition, customs and superstitions, the latter spoke of the folk and the community. Wherever the latter was coextensive with the nature there was no problem. However, what if they were minorities of language and culture, beliefs and practices. If popular basis of power was accepted the place of these groups had to be specified.

Liberal political thought was to bestow extensive consideration on the relation between the majority and minority although such consideration was from the vantage point of the specific problematic of a political thinker. John Locke poses this problem in relation to civil society

and state. While the former involves and encompasses all, the political society is directed by the majority. Rousseau provides for a rationally and voluntarily constituted general will the right to promote common good even against the opposition of the minority. Once such a general will is constituted in the form of a state, the majority becomes its mouthpiece. Tocqueville in the background of his American experience doubts the claim of the majority rule in modern democracies. He finds that behind the facade of majority stand minorities. Further the majorities can even though based on such notions as liberty and equality, could be ruthless and insensitive to any dissent although the arrival of the majority to the political stage itself was based on dissent.

John Stuart Mill locates the problem of the minority in a context wherein the majority has safely cushioned itself as the overriding principle of political society. In the process of the above consideration, different perspectives on the minority were to be spelled out giving a sharper focus to its conception.

John Locke, the great British political philosopher of the seventeenth century is treated as a great votary of majority rule. His conception of majority rule is elaborated mainly in the VIII and Xth chapters of the second book of his masterpiece 'Two Treatises of Government'. But
it is brought out largely in the context of the formation of a political society. He envisaged the formation of a political society by 'free equal and independent men', 'with one's own consent'. Once such a body politic is made 'the majority have a right to act and to conclude the rest' while desperate wills of the individuals may acknowledge or abide by the need and the necessity of a society and state they cannot constitute a single will to govern its affairs. "For when any number of men have, by the consent of every individual made a community, they have thereby made that community one body, with a power to act as one body, which is only by the will and determination of the majority".

According to him the community which acts as one body must have only one way, and it is necessary that the body of the community moves in that way 'whither the greater force carries it'. By greater force he meant consent of the majority in the community. He further argued that it is impossible for the community to act as one body if it is not led by the consent of the majority. Therefore everyone is bound by that consent which is to be given and regulated by the majority. Consequently the majority passes laws for the community. According to him, everyone by consenting with

2. ibid p. 165.
others to make one body politic under one government, puts himself under an obligation to everyone of that society to submit to the determination of the majority.

He explains why he gives importance to the majority and why he considers the act of the majority as the act of the whole. If the majority is not given the power to decide and if the majority’s decision is not treated as that of the whole, the alternative, is to make decisions with the consent of all. But for that it is impossible to secure the consent of all, not because of any opposition or disagreement as such, but because of the practical impossibility of securing everyone’s consent. “The infirmities of health and avocations of business keep many away from the public assembly”. Further “variety of opinions and contriety of interests which unavoidably happen in all collections of men” make it not possible to arrive at unanimity.

At this stage he does not delve deeper into this ‘variety of opinions’ and does not enquire or investigate why such variety of opinions originate in a community. His analysis is only in view of the formation of the political society and its preservation or continued existence. “If the power is not given to the majority” he argues, “the

1.lbid. p. 96.

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body of the community will be dissolved again". This is the way he justifies the exercise of power by the majority.

Sometimes Locke's notion of contract even spills into the constitution of the political majority. "People, out of a state of nature, unite into a community and give up to the majority all the power necessary to the end for which they unite. Thus, that which begins and actually constitutes any political society is nothing but the consent of any number of free men capable of majority, to write and incorporate into such a society. this is that which could give a beginning to any lawful government in the world".

For him legislative power is and must be with the majority. It may give the same to one person or to a group of persons. In effect, the legislative power which according to him is a greater power than the executive, may be exercised by a small group. This group is a negligible minority in relation to the majority or even to the community. This negligible group directs the majority from within, and through the majority, it directs the whole community. The governing class too is often a tiny fraction even in the modern democratic systems where majority rule is taken as an absolute and unchangeable truth. But this

1. ibid p.98.
2. ibid p.99.
'minority' is not really the minority but in a way the essence of the majority and therefore need not be distinguishable from the majority. Such a legislative minority needs to be distinguished from a political minority.

Nevertheless, a student of his political philosophy fails to understand why he has not given any attention to the role of minority though he eulogises the majority rule. It may happen that the majority may pursue corporatist interests which may endanger or restrict the expression of the rights of the minority. It was this problem that was to be later confronted by John Stuart Mill. It is equally surprising why he has ignored the 'variety of opinions' which he himself considers as a reason for not securing the 'consent of the whole'.

In the case of religious toleration, John Locke does not appear to be quite convincing and logical to his students. His ideological map does not provide any centrality to religious minorities. While upholding the eminence of majority rule, he almost contemptuously looks upon the religious minorities who do not fall in line with the majority. He classifies atheists and Catholics in this category. He comes on them harshly.

Even before he developed his political theory, the idea of religious tolerance was discussed elaborately and it was
more or less treated as essential for the peaceful living in
the society. Hence he could not escape from granting this
right to the religious groups. But to be precise, his
approach is not tuned to the religious groups as such. He
advocates tolerance believing that the functions of the
state and that of the church are different taking up a major
motif of medieval thought on church-state relations. So
his idea of tolerance need not be essentially limited to
religious minorities but it encompasses in a broader sense
even the majority in the state.

For him the initiative in this regard rests with the
state, as regards the religious believers who might form the
majority or even the minority. Toleration can also be
considered as an attitude from the majority to the minority.
A minority need not tolerate the majority as much as the
latter is required to show toleration to a minority. It may
be better to deal his views on religious tolerance and on
religious minorities such as Catholics and atheists
separately from his theory on 'contract'. Because for him,
religion is a matter of inner belief and the 'contract' does
not commit 'the care of souls' to the civil rulers.

It was the French political thought which took up some
of these themes opened up by Locke although they may have
rendered different emphasis to the issue. Voltaire, for
instance, strongly advocated religious toleration. He was
not a believer in an institutional church, though he had faith in a Supreme Being. He too could not understand nor can he reconcile with intolerance and fanaticism. According to him toleration and justice were both ordered by nature, whereas fanaticism, the root cause of intolerance is a disease created by superstition. He was against the church continuing its long established practice of using the state as an agent for its own intolerance.

However, it was in Rousseau that the issue finds a new formulation. In the world of 'social contract' as visualised by Rousseau, a general will emerges with the creation of the 'public person' i.e. the community. This general will is common to all the members of the community. Each one is an integral part of the general will. In the process of its constitution the individual-distorted judgements cancel each other. A new collective judgement emerges, on the basis of individual judgement yet transcending their narrow, selfish and parochial limitations.

So far, as a philosophical analysis, this looks interesting. But the confusion is regarding the nature of this general will. He makes the majority the indicator of

the general will. But there is little clarity in Rousseau in what way we can demarcate between indicating and constituting. By accepting the majority as the agency to recognise the common good he concedes and even advocates coercion against the minority which could not reconcile to the consensus proposed by the majority. Further there are statements in his work 'Social Contract' identifying general will with the decision of the majority. It does not mean that he develops a theory of majority rule. But if majority will is considered as the general will then it is necessary to force the minority to accept the same. Rousseau justified this 'force' as an expression of the 'real will' safeguarding the good of minority even without their recognising the same. He thinks that the minority has to submit to the decision of majority. 'In order that the social pact may not be a vain formulation that who so ever refuses to obey the general will, shall be constrained to do so by the whole body'. If we delve deeper into the various expressions he has used such as 'He will be forced to be

1.ibid p.93.


3. Rousseau, op. cit. p. 34.
free' and 'to compel a man to be free' we can see that such expressions indirectly, but clearly mean the negation of any kind of minority in his scheme of things. At the level of political execution he seems to identify majority with what is right and minority with what is wrong.

He does not clearly visualise a situation where a few people or a very limited number may be a creative impulse of the society in the longer run as John Stuart Mill was to later point out. He is really harsh on those so called conscientious objectors as he is on those who oppose the law on the basis of passion. According to him a political community's true will is expressed by the majority itself. So there is no relevance for minorities and he, unhesitatingly applies the right to coercion equally on individuals as well as on minorities.

His doctrine on religion is still more unclear and probably unacceptable. He is dead against the Catholic church and also against pagan religions. In fact he advocates the setting of a new religion, wherein every citizen should be asked to believe in certain principles.

1. Ebenstein remarks that Rousseau does not clearly distinguish between the general will and the will of all. Rousseau's idea of general will has frequently attracted the accusation of a totalitarian mentality. See Ebenstein, Modern Political Thought, p.141.
such as the existence of God, immortality, the happiness of the just and the punishment of the wicked. He feels that if a citizen cannot conscientiously support this, he can leave the state or be banished from it. If one accepts it first and later acts like an unbeliever he must be punished with death.

In short, what he visualises is a community thick in its social ties and a minority, in spite of its disagreements finally deferring to the majority. Hence there cannot be an idea of a minority in his scheme of things as embodying permanent interests. If such a one exists, it is not clear — to be fair to his imaginative theory — whether an individual or a minority can be formulator of the 'general will' which he projects through out his treatise.

It was another Frenchman, who was to point out the difficulties when democracy called forth uniformity. In the

1. Rousseau discusses three kinds of religions. a) Purely that of the man, an inner religion of the heart with no external forms of worship. It is the natural divine law. (b) Religion which identifies civic with religious duties. Ancient pagan religious gods are civic deities. When one nation is at war with another its gods are also at war with that of another state. (c) Roman Catholic Church. According to him Catholic Church divides man between religious and civic duties. There are two authorities. Citizens are in perpetual doubt as to where his allegiance should be. Rousseau is opposed to the second and third, because according to him general will or civic unity cannot be attained by following these two. see for more details, Rousseau, Social Contract p.146-148
light of his observations on American democracy, Alexis De Tocqueville analysed the power of the majority in a democratic system and his conclusion is that it can be more dangerous than the power of an autocrat. He argues that the minority must have the right to non-conformity. According to him a democratic government means a government by the majority. Here the majority is permitted to substitute for the whole and the minority readily consents to this transformation, with a hope that it (the minority) can one day convert itself into a majority and it could stand as the whole. This is why all political parties are willing to recognise the rights of the majority. The minority hopes to use those rights to their own advantage at some future time. Here the power of the majority is simply absolute. It can conquer all opposition because it has the right to make and execute the laws. The power of the majority is far superior to that of a king. The King's power is more physical and it controls the actions of the subject without subduing his private will. But the majority's power is physical as well as moral, it can act upon the will as well as upon the actions of men.


2. ibid. p. 192.
Tocqueville carefully examines the nature of the majority rule and finds that it may not always be by the majority itself. Though the power is given to the majority and exercised on behalf of the majority, it may be done very often by a minority, within the majority. This minority is a negligible portion of the 'whole'. Thus in most cases of democratic government, majority rule practically means rule by an influential minority.

For him United States is a country with the least of independence of mind and freedom of discussions although it is least bogged down with the social structures that pervade from Europe to China. The minority is so effectively and thoroughly crushed that he finds that anyone who wrote against the majority opinion would tend repent. 'His political career is closed for ever since he has offended the only authority which is able to promote his success. If he writes against the majority opinion, his opponents censor him, every sort of compensation even celebrity is refused to him and finally he subsides into silence'.

Thus Tocqueville depicts the tyranny of the majority as more cruel and dangerous than the tyranny of a despot. 'The authority of the majority is so absolute and so irresistible that a man must give up his rights as a citizen

1. Ibid p. 193.
and almost abjure his quality as a human being if he intends to stray from the track it lays down’.

As if to remedy this predicament John Stuart Mill suggests representation of minorities both for reasons of democratic justice and for the sake of cultural productivity. His attempt is to bring out the importance of a minority in a democratic system. ’The few can be the salt of the earth and without them human life would become a stagnant pool’ . Mill favours proportional representation because a decision, by a simple majority left minorities unrepresented thus wasting their votes. Further the voice of the minority has as much right to be heard as that of the majority.

He visualised the minority as a group which can often do better than the majority. The majority may be passive, uninterested and indifferent to the issues that affect the community, whereas a minority may have a better awareness and may propose more suitable remedial measures for the maladies that afflict the society. Often his minority is more intelligent, thoughtful and creative than the majority. It seems that he limits the scope of minority to these

1. ibid. p.196.
aspects. But there can be and there ought to be other perspectives. A minority which may not be in anyway better than the majority, a minority with a distinct group interest, a minority that is persecuted, a minority which looks upon the majority as a threat to their life and liberty, and even a minority that may subdue the majority are not visualised in his considerations.

His philosophical discourses on such themes as 'liberty' 'society and individual' 'individuality' and 'liberty of thought and discussion' concentrate on the individual and his rights and also on his relation to the society. He does not discuss much the 'group' vs. society 'nor' the majority vs. 'minority' as such. Perhaps he believes, when each individual in the minority is taken care of the requirements of the collectivity called 'minority' are automatically satisfied.

He saw the possibility of a minority oppressed by the majority and the need for safeguarding their interests. He contented that the oppression of the minority is as dangerous as any other abuse of power and precautions need to be taken against the same. "The will of the people, moreover practically means the will of the most numerous or the most active part of the people, the majority or those who succeed in making themselves accepted as the majority, the people consequently may desire to oppress a part of
their number, and precautions are as much needed against this as against any other abuse of power.

He further argued that the tyranny of the majority is more dangerous than other tyrannies, and such a tyranny is an evil against which the society requires to be on its guard. "When Society itself is the tyrant - society collectively over the separate individuals who compose it - its means of tyrannising are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries. Society can and does execute its own mandates, and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not meddle, it practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life and enslaving the soul itself -- there is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence and to find that limit and maintain it against encroachment is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs as protection against

1.Ibid p. 68.
J.S. Mill's concern is primarily individual liberty when he discusses minority. To what extent the individual can be controlled in the so-called free society is succinctly described by him. Given such a possibility he felt the need of defining the purpose for restraint on liberty much more strictly. He argues that the only purpose for which power can be rightly exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good either physical or moral is not a sufficient reason. 'The only part of the conduct of any one for which he is amenable to society is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind the individual is sovereign'.

Further he felt the need of defining the space for individual freedom more rigorously against the claims of the society. He proposed two maxims in this regard establishing the respective space of the individual and the society. The

1. ibid p.69.
Elsewhere he writes 'If all mankind minus one were of one opinion and only one person were of the contrary opinion mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he if he had the power would be justified in silencing mankind' ibid p.79.

2. ibid p.73.
maxims are, first, that the individual is not accountable to society for his actions, in so far as these concern the interests of no person but himself. Advice, instruction, persuasion and avoidance by other people if thought necessary by them for their own good, are the only measures by which society can justifiably express its dislike or disapprobation of his conduct. Secondly, that for such actions as are prejudicial to the interest of others, the individual is accountable and may be subjected either to social or legal punishment if society is of the opinion that the one or the other is requisite for its protection.

He visualised two kinds of dangers for representative democracy - the danger of a low grade of intelligence in the representative body and in the popular opinion which controls it and the danger of class legislation on the part of the numerical majority. He examined various remedial measures for limiting these dangers. The pure idea of democracy is the Government of the whole people and by the whole people. But it is not possible to have such a government. Instead the common practice is to have a Government of the whole people by a mere majority of the people. Here there is a clear possibility of the minority not getting represented proportionately. He goes on arguing

1.ibid p.149.
that 'majority of the electors must always have a majority of representatives and a minority of electors must always have a minority of the representatives'. According to him this is the only way to ensure equality of opportunity.

Otherwise, the majority government may represent only the minority of the whole people. In a country governed by equal and universal suffrage, there is a contested election in every constituency and often the election is carried by a small majority. In the process of legislation or formulation of policies a bare majority of the majority party becomes decisive. This is in fact a minority of the whole. He concludes that 'any minority left out either purposely or by the play of the machinery gives the power not to the majority but to minority in some other part of the whole'. As a result the government by numerical majority may not truely represent democratic ideas. 'That the minority must yield to the majority, the smaller number to the greater is a familiar idea. But the smaller number also can be equally strong or powerful with the greater. Therefore the numerical minority also must be heard'. In a really equal democracy every section is to be represented proportionately. A minority of electors must always have a

1.ibid p. 257.
2.ibid p.258.
3.ibid 259.
minority of representatives just as a majority of electors have the majority of representatives.

He goes on to make a critical evaluation of the various proposals made by Lord John Russel, Disraeli, Thomas Hare, James Garth Marshall and others regarding representation of minorities. Lord John Russel had suggested that certain constituencies should return three or more members. But each elector should be allowed to vote only for one or two. By this plan a minority equalling or exceeding a third of the local constituency would be able to return one out of three members. James Garth Marshall claimed that his proposal was still better. According to him the elector can retain his three votes but is at liberty to bestow them all upon the same candidate.

J.S. Mill analysed these schemes and came to the conclusion that these are imperfect since 'all local minorities of less than a third, and all minorities which are made up from several constituencies would remain incomplete.

1. Lord John Russel had introduced reform bills in 1852 and 1854. These were not approved by the parliament. For more details see, J.S. Mill, ibid. p.432.

2. James Garth Marshall was the author of 'Minorities, majorities and their rights'. This was a letter written to Lord John Russel on parliamentary reforms (1853). In this letter Marshall advocates the 'cumulative vote' by which the elector was to have as many votes as there are candidates in the constituency. See J.S. Mill op. cit. p.433.
unrepresented.' He argued that real equality of representation is not obtained unless any set of electors amounting to the average number of a constituency, wherever in the country they happen to reside have the power of combining with one another to return a representative.

According to the plan proposed by Thomas Hare, the unit of representation, the quota of electors, who would be entitled to have a member to themselves would be ascertained by the ordinary process of taking averages, the number of voters being divided by the number of seats in Parliament and every candidate who obtained that quota would be returned. An elector would be at liberty to vote for any candidate in whatever part of the country he might offer himself.

J.S. Mill felt that this scheme proposed by Thomas Hare has almost unparalleled merit of carrying out a great principle of Government in a manner approaching the ideal perfection. However he goes a step further and suggests that preference vote or a system of personal representation would be very near to a perfect answer to the representation

1. Thomas Hare - Treatise on the Election of Representatives. (1859) This pamphlet is not merely a scheme of proportional representation but a defence of it on the ground that majority rule can lead to the oppression of the educated minority.
of all groups and sections.

His anxiety is that the enlightened minority might be overshadowed by a mediocre majority. He is convinced that the natural tendency of representative government as of modern civilisation is towards collective mediocrity. The reductions and extensions of franchise lead to place the principal power in the hands of classes more and more below the highest level of instruction in the community.

The voice of superior intellects and that of instructed minority may have no organs in a representative body. Thus his vision of minority appears to be that of a well instructed group who can often make better judgements than those made by the majority but unfortunately it is overshadowed by the numerical strength of the majority. His minority is never with a set of interests which are basically in conflict with at of the majority.

Such a conception of the minority however has to be distinguished from his argument for finding an adequate representation of the minority. In this sense his concern is to identify the various methods of representation of the minorities is laudable. However, he does not appear to go

1.J.S.Mill. op. cit. p.262.
2.ibid p.265.
3.ibid p.270.
beyond the concept of political minorities. The impression he gives to his readers is that if the minorities have representation, their rights can be protected. His argument is that the representation results in a proportionate sharing in the exercise of power. The minorities cannot be the 'object' of the exercise of power by the majority.

But the question pertinent here is about the apparent equation between the representation of minorities and safeguarding of their rights. The political reality is that inspite of proportionate representation, the rights of minorities may not be fully safeguarded. Here comes the need for some other means for safeguarding the rights. Further, a sociological minority may share certain commonality of interests with sections of a sociological majority, wherein it may adequately protect its interests. Such issues do not seem to be central to his concerns.

Further he does not foresee a minority or minorities within the minority, or a minority consisting of contrary even conflicting interests among themselves. The sociological configuration of 20th Century has reasserted minorities of religious, linguistic and ethnic identities. Such minority groups need not be in any way more enlightened or instructed than the majority. The majority can as well be instructed or more than the minority while both having separate identities.
Liberal ideas discussed, hitherto, which formed an integral part of a loose but complex ideological formation called liberalism were influential from the 17th century and had their repercussions on the issues pertaining to minority in varied aspects. Liberalism itself is basically an attitude in defence of the individual against the arbitrary acts of Government. Hence it is anti authoritarian and oriented to the individual and thus developing a broader concept of the individual. Liberal thinking recognises that the individual is to be rescued not only from the arbitrariness of the power holders but also from the tyranny of the majority. Gradually the rights of the minorities and their discussion on its various implications formed a part of liberal thinking.

Different strands of liberal thinking emphasised different facets of the minority issue. Jeremy Bentham argued mainly in favour of political decentralisation. According to him both the political parties in England represented the land owners. As a consequence power was concentrated in the hands of a few in spite of a strong dose

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2. In those days the entire House of Commons was elected practically by around 200 leading families.
of democratisation. He suggested that power must be wielded by the majority and it must not be the exclusive claim of the few, i.e. a negligible minority. He advocated the extension of representation to the whole community. He was the advocate of 'silent majority' against the 'powerful minority'.

The liberal concern for toleration developed in relation to religious beliefs. Till the Reformation, and even after, the prevalent attitude was that 'my-religion-is-the-only-true-faith'. Both the Catholic and Protestant churches were intolerant towards other churches. With the advent of liberalism, 'mine is the right' attitude, slowly gives place to 'you are also right' in relation to religious matters.

In the socio-economic field too liberal ideas had considerable impact on the issues of minority. In spite of the rapid pace of industrialisation and urbanisation, there were many neglected groups or socio-economic minorities ignored by the process. Social-liberalism argued that the state should and could assist the under privileged. It should help in achieving a higher standard of their health, of education of their children and general welfare. The working class though numerically a majority, was in fact neglected by a power-yielding minority. There were many who pleaded for the emancipation of these neglected groups.
including sections of the dominant classes themselves. "I dispise that creation of value and wealth which is based on the sacrifice of human dignity and the degradation of the working class. The purpose of the machine is to free man from animal servitude not to fashion a more terrible bondage."

Another significant manifestation of the Liberal thinking was National self-determination. Till the beginning of the 19th century the stress was on the individual and the philosophers both of individualism and liberalism analysed the relation between the state and the individual so that the latter's identity is recognised and he is given his due share in the socio political life. From the first quarter of the 19th century onwards, the attempt was mainly to reinterpret liberalism in terms of accommodating the demands and aspirations of various nationalities for freedom and economic emancipation.

The European continent presented a multi-national structure. There were competing nationalities—some of them were small and backward and they were a minority in relation to the ambitious and large nationalities. Even the smaller nationalities became conscious of their identities and

demanded freedom not only for the individual but also for the nation. In these circumstances liberty and liberalism obtained a reinforced connotation as they were applied to both the individual and collective freedom. The demand of various nationalities for self-determination and self-respecting existence was equally an assertion of the rights of minorities in a multi-faceted society.

In the Marxist tradition only one type of minority occupies a central space, the national minority. Religious minorities did not find any serious consideration in this perspective as they belong to an order which capitalism was supposed to undermine or in the phase of capitalist decline. They merely constituted additional props for the same. In any case its manifestation and the worldview behind it was expected to be opposed. Regarding cultural minorities Marx and Engels were deeply ambivalent. While in such instances as in the Irish nationality issue they saw its progressive underpinnings, in the outburst of Slav nationalisms of this period they saw strong reactionary strivings. Similarly ethnic identities, they felt, will be eventually undermined with the spread of capitalism.


It was in Lenin's writings especially in his debates with Rosa Luxemburg that the issue of national minority found an unambiguous formulation. He argued for the right of national self-determination including the right to secession.

Although the Marxist perspective on the minorities was shared by a few in India at the time of the nationalist movement and subsequently it was the liberal conception of minority that became the mainstay of the discussion on the issue of minorities in India. The location of the minorities in the British experiments on popular representation in India provided its specific orientation. Their outcome was the existence of politically organised linguistic, religious, ethnic and deprived groups in India as 'minorities.' They shaped to a great extent the formulation and the eventual outcome of the discussion on minorities in India.


2. See, James Manor,' How and why liberal and representative politics emerged in India.' - Political Studies XXXVIII 1990 p.28-39.
The existence of such political interests should not deviate us from the ambivalence which the notion of minority suffered in the liberal conception. This ambivalence covered the entire spectrum from giving an overriding say to the majority to finding an adequate representation to the minorities. There is little discussion in this perspective on what, we can say, the province of political sociology and normative theory. Given the existence of ethnic linguistic and religious minorities of a permanent order, how to accommodate them in the political process was little touched upon. These were the issues which were to become central in the Indian discussion on minorities.

1. On the failure of social and political theory to encounter this issue, see, Frank Parkin, Marxism and Class Theory, London, Tavistock Pub. 1979, ch.3.