Chapter I

Introductory
Chapter-I

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A few things need to be stated at the beginning. The word ‘discourse’ that I have been using has no Foucaultian sophistication in it; by the term the ‘early nineteenth century critical discourse’, I mean the articulation of certain cohesive thoughts by a group of writers, in opposition to the dominant ideology of utilitarianism and laissez faire doctrines which held the middle class captive for nearly three decades. This discourse had considerable influence on the growth of social and political thoughts of the early nineteenth century England. The writers on whom I have put special emphasis are Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), Frederick Denison Maurice (1803-1872) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). Again, by the word ‘critical’, I am not referring to literary critical writings, but using the word for critical, discursive reasoning through which they framed a perspective of their own and tried to project a critique of the signs of the times. This perspective sprang mostly from the tradition of the Romantic thoughts in reaction to the Eighteenth century Enlightenment ideas, articulated against the background of an expanding industrial society. The members of this group belonged to different areas of specialisation, yet all of them
responded to a common situation. The socio-political environment prevailing in the Post-Napoleonic and Post-Revolutionary Europe and the socio-economic situation which was just beginning to see the results of industrial transformation, primarily provoked the response of the articulators of the ‘discourse’. There were simmering of protests, since the first decade of the nineteenth century, from various quarters, as the new situation disturbed the old order and the modern capitalism was in its formative stage. The purpose of this research project is to focus attention on the response of the group of writers, imbued with a social mission, to this situation and on the formation of a critique or a discourse which was primarily inspired by the polemical and speculative writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the early part of the nineteenth century.

This was a depressed period of Post-Napoleonic wars and of the working class unrest which culminated in the so called ‘Peterloo Massacre’ (1819). This became a symbolic event and had many literary responses to it, of which P.B. Shelley’s *Masque of Anarchy* (1819) was notable. ‘Peterloo Massacre’ turned out to be the focal point of discussion and was sought to be connected with later events as a paradigm of future confrontations. Carlyle described the great ‘turn out’ of August 1842 with reference to the Peterloo episode and called it ‘Manchester Insurrection’ in *Past and Present* (1843)—

> Such are Peterloos. In all hearts that witnessed Peterloo, stands written, as in fire characters or smoke characters prompt to become fire again, a legible balance-account of
grim vengeance; ... Such things should be avoided as the very pestilence! For men's hearts ought not to be set against one another, but set with one another, and all against the Evil Thing only$. (emphasis added)

Here is the crux of the 'discourse' which aims at avoiding confrontation of this type and achieving a united opposition of good against evil. By-passing the call for class-struggle, Carlyle, in the above passage, substitutes class reconciliation to achieve a common destiny for the nation. His message, 'men's hearts ought not to be set against one another', echoed throughout the period in various articulations of the discourse. This critical opinion or discourse was counter-revolutionary and yet radical. It aimed at the re-examination of most of the received opinions, generated since the European Enlightenment, which led to the development of the antagonistic spirit of the French Revolution and the Benthamite pursuit of the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'. A reformulation of attitudes to these issues was one principal concern of the thinkers and writers of the early nineteenth century that I am trying to place as a cohesive discourse.

If we look at the Romantic Poets who were pioneers in holding up a new vision, it was Coleridge who addressed effectively to the higher and middle classes on the distress and discontent of the period in his 'A Lay Sermon' (1817). Shelley wrote his 'A Philosophic View of Reform' in 1819-1820, looking back on a life-time of enthusiasm. These two writers expressed themselves in apparently opposite
directions. Coleridge said, “Name to me any revolution recorded in history that was not followed by a depravation of the national morals”.

Here the condemnation of the revolution is clear. Shelley, on the other hand, though equally distressed by the turn of events in France, wrote, reversing an almost proverbial utterance of Shakespeare, “the good which the Revolutionists did lives after them, their ills are interred with their bones”. Therefore, according to Shelley, the ultimate effect of the revolution was beneficial. Whateoer their respective conclusions, the common sentiment among them was the anxiety which arose from the events of the French Revolution and the subsequent developments which embroiled the whole of Europe in wars and threatened the dominant social structure everywhere with fear of disruption.

The group of writers I am trying to combine as the articulators of the discourse, took an anti-revolutionary, conciliatory stance and were engaged in educating the higher and the middle classes as well as the working classes towards a common pursuit of social amelioration. Those writers themselves belonged to the middle class, yet their concern was the whole nation. They aimed at shifting the focus from conflict to reconciliation among the classes, in terms of mutual acknowledgement of duties and responsibilities. A sense of community was their basic desideratum in examining the social malaise and this was projected as a substitute for the paradigm of class war. They were all conscious of standing on the threshold of a
great change, but they warned that this change should not take the destructive turn of the French Revolution.

John Stuart Mill, in one of his essays, describes 'the present age' as one of 'moral and political transition'. He further says that it should be the duty of the thinkers to obtain a far deeper insight into the 'futurity' which awaits them and their age and that they should try to discover the means by which they can improve the blessings of that 'futurity', avoiding its danger. All the articulators of the discourse were aware of this danger and shared a common concern for finding a way out of this.

With the apprehension of anarchic disorder and working class unrest on one hand, and the awareness of the evils of the capitalist system on the other, this group of writers geared their activities and their thoughts and writings to the aim of steering the nation clear between Scylla and Charybdis. They tried to articulate a sense of urgency and pleaded that something must be done to overcome the immediate danger of violent social conflict. The paradoxical situation arising out of the accumulation of wealth, co-existing with dire poverty due to the absence of a fair distribution of wealth, has been movingly described by Carlyle:

> England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition. With unabated bounty the land of England blooms...
and grows; waving with yellow harvests; thick-studded with workshops, industrial implements, with fifteen millions of workers, understood to be the strongest, the cunningest and the willingest our Earth ever had.9

This condition of England has to be changed if the country is to be redeemed and Carlyle assumes a prophetic tone in his essays to bring this message home.

The critical discourse that this thesis seeks to analyse has this historic situation as background. The disappointment resulting from the French Revolution led to rethinking on the background of thought which generated this great upheaval in history. Coleridge was the leading thinker who commented on this issue. To him, the so-called 'Enlightenment' was only a half-truth. The French thinkers, Coleridge said, had "transvenomed the natural thirst of truth into the hydrophobia of a wild and homeless scepticism".10 Similarly, Shelley said, "they told the truth but not the whole truth".11 The high priests of rationalism ignored the creative faculty of man. Shelley thought that the concept of reason needed to be bolstered by a philosophy of mind and nature. Coleridge reminds us elsewhere that "the dullest wight is at times a Shakespeare in his dreams",12 and one has to account for it. He considered it a dangerous delusion that by teaching man how to read and write one would have realised the objective of national education; education should be aimed "educing the faculties and forming the habits."13 Similarly,
‘democracy’ in the crude form of the glorification of the majority principle was questioned by these thinkers. Coleridge further says, “the voice of ten millions of men calling for the same thing is a spirit” only then when we know “whether that spirit is of Heaven or Hell, by trying the thing called for by the prescript of reason and God’s will”. He fears that the “multitude are always under the domination of some one feeling or view, whereas the truths and above all practical wisdom must be the result of a wide comprehension”. So, let us, he says, draw everybody’s attention to that comprehensive truth in guiding the nation to the future.

The memory of the French Revolution was soon overcast by the Napoleonic invasions. Events like the Spanish war against French occupation stirred the imagination of the poets. This swung the English poets like Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley to write on liberty. Younger undergraduates, like Sterling and Maurice, were inspired to help the Spanish patriots and exiles to fight the French army. The Post-Napoleonic wars created an awareness among the middle class in Britain about the dangers of anarchy on one hand and an enthusiasm for reform on the other.

Coleridge’s writings were also concerned with the moral and the social issues of the period. Like all Romantics, he was concerned with the fall-out of urbanisation and industrialisation, the break-up of the organic village communities and the concentration of the ‘labouring
poor' in the towns. He was fully aware of the inhumanities of the *laissez faire* economy. He said that the so-called 'self regulatory machine', which political economists tended to glorify, was 'a menace to the human personality'. The employment prospects of the poor were tied to the constant fluctuations of trade. Bankruptcies and lockouts spread 'like fever'. The richer sections of the society could absorb these temporary break-downs, but the poor unemployed workers had traumatic experience: 'ill-fed, ill-clothed and un-fuelled winters' made incalculable damage to the children of the workmen. The economists could callously say that depressions and booms alternate. If some factories which are not productive are closed down, more factories might come up elsewhere. Political economy depends on 'head counting'; they say, 'If three were fed in Manchester instead of two at Glencoe or Trosachs, the balance of enjoyment was in favour of the former.'

Coleridge pleaded for the regulation or the intervention of the state to control industry and agriculture:

*Our manufacturers must consent to regulations, our gentry must concern themselves in education as well as in the instruction of their natural clients and dependents- must regard their estates secured indeed from all interference by every principle of law and policy, but yet as offices of trust with duties to be performed in the sight of God and country.*

Coleridge meant that though private owners guaranteed their right to property by law, they must also perform duties to the society.
Law and morality enjoin them that property must be enjoyed as trusts and not as absolute possessions. This implied, duties are to be performed and obligations to be carried out, both by the manufacturers and the gentry.

Such ideas set the parameter of thought on social issues to the early nineteenth century critical discourse. The eighteenth century rationalism led to irreligion and atheism in France, and also to a very simplified view of religion among those who practised it. But Coleridge thought that in England ‘notwithstanding the attempts of Payne and his compeers,’ much damage could not be done. He noticed that in England, “it became a mark of original thinking to defend the Belief and the Ten Commandments: so the strong minds veered round and religion came again into fashion”. Coleridge is acknowledged as the main inspiration behind the revival of Anglican theology in the mid-nineteenth century. He imported philosophic criticism as it was practised in Germany and influenced important thinkers like Julius Hare and Frederick Denison Maurice. Maurice dedicated his magnum opus, The Kingdom of Christ (1832) to Coleridge’s son, remembering his indebtedness to his father. Thus Coleridge could attract the finest intellects of the early nineteenth century towards him and two among them, John Sterling and Maurice, to dedicate themselves to religion rather than to other vocations like Law and Politics which were the usual avenues for the middle class intellectuals of the period. “Religion”, Coleridge says, “expands the intellect while it purifies the heart.”
Considering the predominance of the utilitarian philosophy, he also pleaded for the ‘enlargement of the soul above mere self-interest’. He called for a life-breathing philosophy to withstand the mechanical philosophy which was dominant since the eighteenth century. He also pleaded for a philosophy of society rather than mere philosophy of history. The latter imagines a science of cause and effect, believing the latest to be the highest. The rejection of the past was the basis of Benthamite thinking, when the past was understood without concern for the ideas which enlivened the past age. In Coleridge’s language, such a study of history was as ‘Cyclops walking backwards under the fascination of the past’. Real philosophy of society in contra-distinction to the one-eyed philosophy can teach us the relevance of the past in the present, and can see the past and the future contained in the present, assimilating the events of our own age to those of the times before us.

Coleridge summoned his countrymen, as Bentham did from another angle, to an immediate re-examination of the principles on which personal and public actions alike should be based. His complaint against the ruling administrators was based on the fact that they were unprincipled. Conscious as Coleridge was of the evils that were endemic in the nineteenth century in the social formations due to the heartless and unimaginative profit-oriented capitalist economy, he was equally apprehensive of the dangers of anarchy that might arise and engulf the society.

The critical discourse, initiated by Coleridge, questioned many
of the current ideas of the time and the spirit of the mechanical rationalism and materialism spawned by the Eighteenth Century Enlightenment. The psychology of material progress which sought “the purchase of few brilliant inventions at the loss of all communication with life and the spirit of nature”\textsuperscript{23} was regretted. The discourse which arises out of Coleridgean tradition is, therefore, a protest of the imaginative consciousness against the scientific ‘neutralisation of nature and mechanisation’\textsuperscript{24} of mind. Coleridge regrets “modern mind has become infected with the contagion of its mechanistic philosophy.”\textsuperscript{25} He dreamt of a state in which all could realise their best selves, instead of being self-seeking individuals glorified by the laissez faire doctrines and the utilitarian philosophers. He wanted to unite the interest of all classes under the panoply of the state. Like most medievalists, he shared the typically conservative belief in the cohesiveness of community and the efficacy of tradition. For spiritual direction and social order, the Romantic thinkers turned to the Middle Ages for inspiration to overcome the material and moral impoverishment of the world around them. Coleridge was a pioneer in generating an awareness of a contrast between the past and the present. He started a critique of modern capitalism as it was seen in its early stages in the nineteenth century. He wanted to find out an alternative to the present state of affairs. He looked at the present in a ‘circuitous way’\textsuperscript{26} as Carlyle later put it in Past and Present, so that an awareness of the past could enrich the understanding of the present.
and guide its direction.

Julius Hare, Thomas Carlyle, F.D. Maurice were Coleridge’s avowed disciples. Coleridge was described by Julius Hare, an Oxford Don, as the ‘true sovereign of modern English thought’ to whom he said, he owed his education. F.D. Maurice acknowledged his help as invaluable in preparing for the consideration of the great subject – his idea of the ‘Church Universal’. In his Autobiography (1873), Mill said that he used to meet the Coleridgean thinkers in the London Debating Society and he was indebted to the learned discussions they had: “I had carried away from them much that helped me to build up my new fabric of thought”. Mill’s essays on ‘Bentham’ (1838) and ‘Coleridge’ (1840), where he revised his views on Bentham and the Utilitarians, were an outcome of this association. He was the bridge-builder between the two extremes – Benthamism and Coleridgean idealism. They, Bentham and Coleridge, were the two great seminal minds of the age, Mill affirmed. The Germano-Coleridgean doctrine expressed the revolt of the human mind against the philosophy of the eighteenth century. Mill found a necessary corrective in the message of Coleridge and Wordsworth, with which he sought to replace the one-sided tradition he inherited from his father, James Mill, the great ally of Bentham.

The writers of the Coleridgean group had an opportunity to articulate these views and to formulate a critical discourse when The Athenaeum, the literary journal, came under their control. Maurice and
John Sterling, who came down from Cambridge without taking their degrees, as they refused to sign the required affirmation of the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church, were burning with radical inspiration at that moment and decided to express their views in the columns of *The Athenaeum*. Mill, in a letter to C.E. Maurice, Maurice’s son, put the matter in this way, “under their influence and that of their friends, *The Athenaeum* set forth many invaluable thoughts and maintained an elevation of character, very uncommon”. Maurice was the editor and a regular contributor to this journal which became an intellectual platform to combat utilitarianism and propagate an alternative discourse. In the same letter, Mill called himself a ‘sympathising as well as admirer’ observer of Maurice. Maurice’s articles on the Romantic Poets, serialised in *The Athenaeum* (1826-27), and later published as *Sketches of Contemporary Authors*, offered a fresh assessment of the Romantic Poets.

Carlyle also started writing at this time. In his ‘Signs of the Times,’ published anonymously in 1829 in *The Edinburgh Review*, he assimilated Coleridgean thoughts with a new activist emphasis, which became the characteristic of the Carlylean discourse. He condemned the current trends of thought and utilitarianism specially, as ‘Mechanical’ and not ‘Dynamic’. He thought that the spirit of the machine permeated every area of human thought and activity of his times:

Public principle is gone; private honesty is going; society, in short, is fast falling in pieces; and a time of unmixed evil is
come on us… Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also. 32

What Carlyle wanted to point out is that the mechanised thinking had impoverished the creative faculty in man and society. He follows this idea up in another essay called ‘Characteristics’ in 1831, where we find an analysis of the consequences of this impact of the mechanical-rational spirit on human thought. Rationalism has nursed only the doubting faculty in man. It is likely to paralyse action and cultivate self-consciousness. Carlyle had an optimistic outlook on life in this period, though he believed that rationalism inculcated in the eighteenth century, was ‘a canvas of darkness’ 33. Yet something positive can come out, he hopes, if a new awareness about the evils of mechanism infiltrating in all human spheres can be created. It is through his faith in the shaping power of mind, expressed through action, that Carlyle contributed a special bias to the early nineteenth century discourse. Both the material condition of the society and the philosophical attitude of man have to be reshaped. As such, most of his works, ‘Chartism’ (1840) and *Past and Present* (1843) in particular, were inspired by this new-found mission. He criticised, in memorable phrases, the basis of the relation between man and man. His analysis of the ‘condition of England question’ made a strong impact on the intellectuals and creative writers of the period, whether conservatives or liberals, and offered fresh insights to the novelists of 1840s to reflect on.

F.D. Maurice and John Sterling came down from Cambridge
University in 1826 to chart out for themselves their role as writers. As the novel was the dominant literary form of the period, they tried their hands in it. Maurice wrote *Eustace Conway* in 1834, a three volume novel, in the *bildungsroman* form. At that time, Maurice was highly rated by all his friends and acquaintance. He was ‘one of the honest few,’ Tennyson claimed. The son of a Unitarian minister, Maurice went to Cambridge in 1823 and earned a great reputation among his friends. He was one of the founder members of the Cambridge Apostles, a literary and debating club of exclusive nature of the most bright undergraduates.

Thus Maurice, Mill and Carlyle all converged to London and a friendship and understanding grew among them. They were all in each other’s wave-length and, in unison, responded to Coleridge’s ideas enunciated in his socio-philosophical writings. They were thus open to mutual influence and could inspire each other through social commentaries. Their ideas were largely similar, though they belonged to different areas of specialisation. They thought alike on the fundamental issues of the time. Maurice and Carlyle were critical of democracy and Mill had his characteristic reservations about it. Democracy was re-interpreted by them in their respective articulations, which, they thought, would be suitable for their times. In *Past and Present*, in ‘Chartism’, and also in the early essays like ‘Signs of Times’ and ‘Characteristics’, Carlyle offered a serious critique of democracy:

Huge Democracy, walking the streets everywhere in its Sack
Coat, has asserted so much; irrevocably brooking no reply!

... But no man is, or can henceforth be, the brass-collar thrall
of any man; you will have to bind him by other, far nobler
and cunninger methods.\(^\text{35}^h\)

Maurice in *The Kingdom of Christ* and Mill in his essay ‘On
Liberty’ and ‘Civilisation’ and also in his essays on ‘Bentham’ and
‘Coleridge,’ pleaded for moderation and avoidance of the extreme claims
of democratic principles. That the will of man should be reconciled
with his sense of social responsibility was one important idea of Mill.
He wanted to ‘steer human inclination to acceptable forms’ and towards
social good. “It is good for man to be ruled, to submit his body and
mind to the guidance of a higher intelligence and virtue”,\(^\text{36}\) Mill said in
one of his letters. Of course, the members of this group located the
higher intelligence and the virtue in different centres, but the emphasis
was common.

Maurice says in his *The Kingdom of Christ* that “spiritual
knowledge can only be acquired by the submission of the heart and
understanding to the heavenly”.\(^\text{37}\) Catharine Gallaghar, in her
illuminating survey of the period under our review, has pointed out that
the early nineteenth century critique of industrialism combines, among
others, “the enlightenment tradition that claimed man’s will was
externally determined but that freedom could be achieved by training
the will to coincide with the dictates of reason; and a tradition …that
claimed man’s will was free but in need of a supporting social hierarchy
to encourage its proper exercise. 38 Apparently contradictory though these two ideas are – they often co-exist in the thinking of the period.

Another source of affinity among this group of thinkers can be located in their scepticism towards revolution. According to them, revolution cannot bring permanent good to the social order. They believed in the ‘silent moral influence’ 39 of education as a greater force in shaping the goal of a society. All the writers, I have included in this project, warned the society and the government of the danger of leaving the people untaught. Mill thought that universal education should precede the spread of democracy.

There was an underlying amity among these writers in their ways of looking at most of the fundamental issues. Mill said that he did not agree with Carlyle in everything, yet he treated him as a friend: “I did not, however, deem myself a competent judge of Carlyle...he could see many things which were not visible to me even after they were pointed out.” 40 It was a faith in the freedom of thought that man’s speculation should be free and fearless, that brought Carlyle and Mill close to each other, though temperamentally no two persons could have been more different. Both of them had faith in the people’s capacity for discrimination between truth and falsity and also a faith in order. They believed that people could be educated. Starting as a Benthamite, an inheritor of the enlightenment ideals of rationalism, Mill veered towards a wider critical position, incorporating the best of what he could find in Bentham with the insights offered by Coleridge. The outcome was a
far richer and more humane philosophy, which moved him from utilitarianism to the threshold of socialism.

All the articulators of the discourse were critics of the industrial society, dedicated to material progress. They pleaded for a more comprehensive attitude to progress and social ethics. They wanted human relationship to be based on the recognition of one another as moral beings, capable of sensitiveness to other things than mere material necessity.

In this introduction, I have tried to draw attention to the similarity that one notices in the ways of thinking of the writers and formulators of the discourse. F.D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley founded the Christian Socialist Movement which brought the Church closer to the working class. For Maurice, man is a spiritual being; his inwardness or the existence of an invisible government within him was a reality, which made him believe in the existence of a divine order in man's consciousness. The doctrine of free will along with that of need for obedience was central to Maurice's theology.

Mill, Maurice, and Carlyle were concerned with an ordered society which, they hoped, would replace the anarchic disorder that prevailed in the existing society. They confronted the 'condition of England question' and suggested various ways of solving it. They differed in their proposed solutions. Carlyle believed in a benevolent dictatorship to which Mill failed to respond. Nevertheless he agreed that the laissez faire doctrine was harmful. Both Carlyle and Maurice
intended to protect the social order from demagoguery. They intended to foster a change in the life of the workingmen, by liberating them from the iron laws of political economy, centred around supply and demand.

Mill's view on the legitimacy of organisation among workers and their right to bargain for better wage was a challenge to the prevailing iron laws of political economy, hitherto considered immutable, as unchangeable as the natural laws. Mill's monumental study of political economy, where he affirmed the right for wage negotiation, Carlyle's attack on 'cash nexus' as an evil, worked as a spiralling influence among all sections of the society and paved the way for reform.

The writers and thinkers whom I propose to study for this project applied their ideas to challenge the prevailing ethos of the utilitarian thought. Coleridge affirmed, "Men...ought to be weighed, not counted. Their worth ought to be the final estimate of their value."

These ideas were the basis of an alternative discourse to the Benthamite pain and pleasure criteria of ethics. The mechanical and determinist view of man and society was substituted by the view of man as a moral and spiritual being, capable of free choice. Man's relationship with the world should be based on love, loyalty and duty, on instincts nobler than the concern for utility or computation of happiness alone. The essence of this attitude is reflected in Carlyle, who, in his Past and Present, said:

"Love of men cannot be bought by cash payment and without
love men cannot endure to be together... they will not march
farther for you, on the six pence a day, and supply-and-
demand principle.·44

Thus, all the contributors to the discourse were united in this
vision of a world, united by the mutual ties of fellowship. This faith in
the possibility of human relations across all class barriers, in fellowship
with each other, as Maurice put it, and this affirmation that one need
not despair of the future as long as this faith can be sustained, left a
heritage to the novelists of 1840s, who carried on their exploration of
the human situation in a troubled time. Mrs. Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell,
Charles Kingsley, and Benjamin Disraeli, among others, carried on, in
their novels, the same search for order and the same protest against the
inhumanity of the industrial society and the short-sighted political ideals.

I shall now discuss the basic ideas of the principal articulators,
and later, the impact of these ideas on the novelists of 1840s.