Chapter I

Socio-Political Background of F. M. Dostoevsky

To understand a writer, it is necessary to understand the society, as literature and society is complementary to each other. Literature gives greater insight into a nation’s soul than the superficial activities of the multitude. In this regard it is necessary to know the socio-political atmosphere that prevailed in Russia to understand Russian literature. Historians have traced early Russian writings to the religious sermons, hymns and biographies of saints from Byzantine Empire and the Slavic Kingdoms of Bulgaria and Serbia. Many of these works, which includes some of the greatest masterpieces ever written, despite religious themes, are characterized by vivid details of Russian life. Early Russian literature was written in a mixture of Russian and Old Slavonic language. The wide spread acceptance of Christianity in 988 A.D. also influenced the Russian literature.

Western Europe, from which Russia was isolated since 1100, has a strong influence on Russian writing. Czar Peter The Great (1682) initiated the Westernization process as a solution to overcome Russia’s backwardness. He encouraged translation of many European works, and sent people to Europe to study Western ways of life. He invited European scholars and intelligentsia to Russia. This Westernization program led to such an atmosphere that Russian intelligentsia abandoned everything Russian and welcomed everything European, as a magic potion for the social ills of Russia. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the growth of novel in Western Europe. By the end of seventeenth century translations and imitations of Western European works appeared in many of their languages.
Russia’s encounter with science and culture of Europe transformed Russian elite into Western by the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was a period of social upheaval and transition which resulted in a renewal in the field of art and literature. French language almost replaced Russian as the language of the educated society. Despite many political changes that occurred in Russia, European culture continued to flourish there. The Russian intelligentsia by and large became accustomed to uncritical acceptance of readymade ideas born in the West, as solution to their historical problems.

The writing of Fyodor Michailovich Dostoevsky (1821 -1881) was greatly influenced by three major events of nineteenth century, namely the Napoleonic invasion of Russia, the French Revolution and the Decembrist insurrection. Apart from these political events, his family, and the troubled personal life also enabled him to portray the characters that are emotionally and spiritually down trodden.

Fyodor Dostoevsky grew up in a middle class Orthodox Russian family in Moscow, a city of churches and cathedrals. His family background introduced him to the social inequality in Russian culture. His father, who is from a priestly class, had no right to own landed property as per the Russian social system. He rose from a lowly origin to a higher position, by his personal effort to that of a civil servant, on the Russian social scale. He became a doctor, thereby a member of a learned profession and a nobleman. This social inequality left a deep psychological scar in Fyodor which reflects in his works.

From his early childhood Fyodor was introduced to two important traits of man, the good and the bad. He was exposed to the virtues and vices of man. His early childhood was also influenced by three women, his mother, a nanny (wet nurse)
employed by his father, and Marie a peasant woman. His mother was a mild, humane and pious woman. She taught Fyodor to read and write from the Bible. (Later Dostoevsky adopted the same method to teach a prisoner in the Siberian prison)

From her Fyodor learned to feel sympathy for the unfortunate and deprived, which became so important for his work. She told her children about the invasion of Moscow by Napoleon. She read episodes from scriptures like –The Creation of the Universe, Adam and Eve in Paradise, The Flood, and The Raising of Lazarus, the rebellion of Job- the just man against God, and several sacred stories from Old and New Testaments. These stories immersed young Fyodor in the spiritual and cultural atmosphere of Old Russian Piety.

The wet nurse awakened his interest in literature by narrating Russian sagas, fairy tales, folklores, and legends. She recited the emotionally charged, highly expressive stories of simple Russian people. The fairy tales and Russian folk legends nourished in him an unshakable conviction that the soul of the Russian peasant was imbued with the Christian ethos of love and self sacrifice. Marie the farmer helped him to come out of the fear of hallucinations which is the result of his reading of Gothic stories. This brought him emotionally close to the feelings of the illiterate peasants still untouched by the secular Western culture. For Fyodor, who is thoughtful and imaginative, these stories helped to develop a deeply ingrained religious piety and a kind of supernatural humanism and imagination which he often uses in his works.

The virtues and defects of his parents played an important role in forming his worldly views. He saw two opposite characters; the oppressed and the oppressor in his parents. His mother is the embodiment of the meek, mild and pious qualities. He is
grateful to his mother for her mild and generous version of the obligations of the Christian faith. His father represented the dominating, harsh, stern oppressive characters. Fyodor experienced oppression and tyranny in the person of his father who treated his serfs with brutality and abuses; and whipped them often. He suspected the servants of cheating, and watched over them.

Fyodor also suffered a lot from his father’s intractable code of morality, as he forced the boy to remain standing throughout his Latin class. This made him to stress the importance of love and forgiveness for sinners rather than harsh condemnation of their short comings in his novels. His parents awakened in him a consciousness embodying the teachings of Christian faith. This helped Dostoevsky to always remain transfigured by the glow of supernatural illumination.

At an early age he read The Bible, and the Book of Job. He writes in Diary of a Writer, “I descended from a pious Russian family. We, in our family, have known the gospel almost ever since our earliest childhood. I was only ten when I already knew virtually all the principal episodes in Russian history- from Karamzin whom, in the evenings, father used to read aloud to us. I heard these narratives myself, before I even learned to read. I am reading the book of Job; this book was one of the first things that impressed me in life, at a time when I was still almost a baby.”

Since his parents valued education, Fyodor was introduced to the Russian literature at an early age. In spite of his sternness, Dr. Dostoevsky spent a considerable amount of his time to educate his children. He personally taught them Latin at home, and read stories in the evenings. A variety of books filled his father’s library and encouraged his growing interest in literature. Later in the Diary of a Writer Dostoevsky remembers and recalls very well how he used to spend the long
winter evenings before going to bed agape with ecstasy and terror, as his parents read aloud, as he could not yet read, from the novels of Ann Radcliff.

As a child, his world was a world of literature, and he read widely both Russian and Western European literature. He read the Gothic novels of Eighteenth century, a genre that enthralled him. He was attracted by the lurid fictions of Ann Radcliff, the mystery and suspense of her plot based on the incidents of murders and mayhem of various sorts. Her stories dealt with situations of extreme psychological and erotic tension. In her stories, he experienced an atmosphere that imparted a demonic and spiritual shiver in him. Ann Radcliff was followed by the works of ‘Monk’ Lewis, Hoffmann, Eugene Sue, Walter Scott, Balzac and Dickens.

During summer the family visited their estate, where the children played games inspired by Robinson Crusoe and the Last of the Mohicans, an adventurous story. The days he spent in the Russian country side left a deep and most powerful impression on him. He recalls a memorable summer evening in Diary of a Writer when the family was taken to a performance of Schiller’s ‘The Robbers’, a play that had a deep impression on the early nineteenth century Russian culture than any other foreign works. It dealt with the theme of a threat to the sanctity of family bonds and moral and social importance. Young Fyodor was also very much bemused by the Gothic novels of Walter Scott that depicted the importance of preserving the unity of the family, as against the disintegrating individualism of European society. His wide reading took him to the world of criminals and debauchees.

These childhood experiences made him to understand the strong family relationship. Later in 1870s, when he discerned the breakup of the Russian family he writes that their family was the ‘outstanding family’ as against the ‘accidental
families’. He was proud of his parents for their love, affection, care, and responsibility. Consequently, though his works are full of poor, unhappy, abandoned, and brutalized children, yet they are from ‘outstanding families’. These childhood experiences contributed for his later spiritual development.

In spite of all these exciting childhood experiences he had no social life. His father never allowed his children to talk to the children of patients who came to the hospital. As a result several of his fictional characters live in a garret like place with a sense of intolerable confinement. But he was allowed to mingle with the peasant, which was rare in those days. In spite of the restriction Fyodor once met a young girl of nine in the hospital, who had been raped. This encounter haunted him throughout his life and had a traumatic influence on him. We often come across such incidents in his later works. Edward Hallet Carr writes in his book Dostoevsky 1821-1881, “Because of his isolated childhood, he always conceived human intercourse in terms of intense, intimate relations of the family hearth. His singular childhood made his characters spend their lifetime in isolation, in contemplation of their souls. In a confined room, says one of his heroes, even thought becomes confined, a phrase which might serve as a motto of many of his novels. There is a certain philosophic detachment common to most great artists which is utterly denied to Dostoevsky who is a victim, both in his life and in his art, of the narrow and narrowing intensity of the great city.”

Later, Fyodor was introduced to the glorious events of the West through the works of Karamzin, a Russian reactionary and a mosonic liberal. In the evenings, Fyodor’s father read from Karamzin’s History of the Russian State, an important work on Russian history. The book praises conservatism and the independence of
Russia from other countries, the ideas that Dostoevsky embraced in his adulthood. Karamzin’s travelogue Letters of a Russian Traveler impressed young Fyodor to a great extent which gives a personal description of life of late eighteenth century European civilization. As Karamzin’s visit to Europe coincided with French revolution, it helped him to propagate the idea that was important for Russian thought in the nineteenth century. History of Europe stresses the importance of the autocratic power in maintaining Russian unity and preserving national independence. It describes Karamzin’s impression of his visit to Switzerland, Germany, France, and England; and his excitement of meeting some of the famous writers.

Young Fyodor was also introduced to Kant through Letters of a Russian Traveler which describes Karamzin’s visit to Kant. The book gives a detailed account of Karamzin’s discussion with Kant on the main ideas of the ‘Critique of Practical Reason’. The book also introduced Dostoevsky to Kant’s philosophy that explains the consciousness of good and evil. According to Kant good and evil is innate to mankind, which is written indelibly into the human heart. Fyodor was very much interested in those aspects of Kant’s philosophy that enable a man to become a ‘real man’, and to lead a better life without shedding blood. This ideology of Kant is well expressed in several of his characters like Rascolnikoff and Alyosha Karamazov. Further Ivan Karamazov echoes Dostoevsky’s sentiment based on Karamzin’s history.

Being influenced by Kant later Dostoevsky wanted to unravel the nature of man. As an eighteen year old boy, just after the death (murder) of his father, Fyodor writes to his brother Michael, that he is interested in understanding man and life. In a letter written to his brother, from St. Petersburg, on 16th August 1839 he writes, “My
soul is no longer susceptible to its former violent impulses. Everything in it is quiet as in the heart of a man who conceals a deep secret. I am learning a good deal about ‘What man is and what life is?’ I can study human characters from writers with whom I spend the best part of my life, freely and joyfully. This is all I can say about myself. I have confidence in myself. Man is a mystery. It must be unraveled, and if it takes a whole lifetime, don’t say that it’s a waste of time. I am preoccupied by this mystery because I want to be a human being.” 7

These childhood experiences had a long lasting influence on him. It inspired his interest in the mystery, the crimes and the horrors of life. His youthful reading encouraged his taste for the melodrama. It helped him to develop plots of adventure and crime to which he added his highly original characters and their philosophical dialogue. The Bible awakened in him a religious sense, the Russian Folklores and the Gothic stories aroused the horror in him, and the Letters of a Russian Traveler enlightened his European knowledge. Balzac and Stendhal who glorified Napoleon helped Dostoevsky to understand Hegel’s concept of historic hero and his victims.

In spite of these strong literary experiences, Fyodor did not have any formal education till he was thirteen. His father appointed two tutors, a Priest and a French teacher, to teach him at home. The study of Religion and French was nicely adjusted to each other. Dr. Dostoevsky wanted his son to learn French because he knew the advantage of French. He knew that Russia’s encounter with the science and culture of Europe, transformed the Russian elite into Western. By the beginning of nineteenth century knowledge of French became the open sesame to any sort of advancement in Russian society. French language almost replaced Russian as the language of educated society. The Russian intelligentsia had become accustomed to
uncritical acceptance of ready-made ideas born in the West as solution to their historical problems. So he appointed a French tutor, to introduce his son into the mysteries of European ideas.

His father always insisted them to report their progress in learning French. This quality of his father can be seen in some of Dostoevsky’s characters. In his first novel Poor People he writes about Varvara’s report on her French learning, when she returns home from her boarding school. She recalls, “There would be explanations, talks; descriptions would begin. There would be serious conversations with father about our studies, our teachers, French, Lomond’s grammar. I tried my very utmost to learn and please father. I saw he was spending his last farthing on me and God knows what straits he was in. Father would begin saying that I was no joy, no comfort to them; that they were depriving themselves of everything for my sake and I could not speak. I used to come in for more scolding than anyone. Often I did not understand what it was about. Everything was a subject of complaint! … French and my being a great dunce and that Lomond’s was a very poor grammar and Zapolsky’s was very much better”8 This description clearly shows that his characters are desperately eager to satisfy their bureaucratic superiors in some clerical task consumed with guilt at their vanities of rebellion. This also oppressed their sense of social inferiority as Varvara’s father thought that, ‘all his failures, and misfortunes’ were because of Varvara’s failure to learn French.

Dr. Dostoevsky also subscribed to the periodical The Library Reading. This literary journal published, under the editorship of Osip Senkovsky, translated works of Balzac, George Sand, and Victor Hugo. In this way, in the pages of The Library
Reading, Fyodor first became aware of **French** writers, who played later, an important role in his literary evolution and spiritual development.

When Fyodor was thirteen he was sent to a boarding school. For the first time he came out of the protective confines of his family circle. It was his first experience of his real contact with the outside world. His first day at school is well explained in *Poor People*, when Varvara, the protagonist was admitted to a school in St. Petersburg. She writes, “How sad I was at first with strangers! Everything was so cold, so unfriendly! The teachers had such loud voices, the girls laughed at me so and I was such a wild creature. It was so stern and exacting! The fixed hours for everything, the meals in common, the tedious teachers – all that at first fretted and harassed me. I could not even sleep there. I used to cry the whole night, the long, dreary, cold night. Sometimes when they were all repeating or learning their lessons in the evening I would sit over my French translation or vocabularies, not daring to move and dreaming all the while of our little home, of father, of mother, of our old nurse, of nurse’s stories… Oh, how I grieve! The most trifling thing in the house I would recall with pleasure. I would keep dreaming how nice it would be now at home! I should be sitting in our little room by the samovar, so familiar. How, I used to think, I would hug mother now, how tightly, how warmly! One would think and begin crying softly from misery, choking back one’s tear, and the vocabularies would never get into one’s head. I was so depressed and dejected.”

Later in *A Raw Youth* he writes, that it was in school that his hero, an adolescent boy, Arkady first became aware of the shame of his birth. He was publicly humiliated and separated from other children as he was an illegitimate. “Touchard walked in with the letter in his hand, went up to the big oak table, at which all the six
of us were seated learning something by heart; he seized me firmly by the shoulder, picked me up from the chair, and ordered me to collect my exercise books. Your place is not here but there he said pointing to a tiny room on the left of the passage, where there was nothing but a plain deal table, a rush-bottom chair, and an American leather sofa. I don’t understand how a man, not of spiteful character, a foreigner like Touchard, who rejoiced at the emancipation of the Russian peasants, could have beaten a foolish child like me.”

At the boarding school young Fyodor came into contact with an older boy, Vanya Umnov, who had interest in literature. Fyodor was very much impressed by his superior's knowledge of what was going on in the world. Vanya gave Fyodor a manuscript copy of Voeko’s The Madhouse, a work prohibited by the censor. It was a long satirical poem, imitating Pope's Dunciad, which was directed against the reigning luminaries of Russian literature and society. Later Dostoevsky writes in Notes From Underground, “They all began by degrees to grasp that I had already read books none of them could read, and understood things (not forming part of our school curriculum) of which they had not even heard. They all took a savage and sarcastic view of it, but were normally impressed, especially as the teachers began to notice me on those grounds”

In the boarding school his professor of history I. I. Davydov introduced him to the whole tradition of German Romantic Idealists of 1830s that made him to become an ardent admirer of Alexander Pushkin. His characters are closely linked with Pushkin’s literary figures. In PoorPeople, his first novel, the hero, Devyushkin imagines and identifies himself as the hero of Station Master. In Crime and Punishment, Rascolnikoff recreates the murderous folly of Pushkin’s Hermann in
The Queen of Spades. Just like Pushkin’s Hermann, Rascolnikoff is equally ready to murder to obtain wealth and power. Later in The Possessed Stavrogin transforms the charming never do well Eugene Onegin into a demonic force.

When Fyodor was admitted to the Military Engineering Academy, he moved from Moscow to St. Petersburg. His journey from Moscow to St. Petersburg was a bitter experience for him. It introduced him to the world of Western Europe and Western Ideas. For the first time he witnessed the oppression of the aristocrats on the peasantry. He saw the disparities between the bourgeois and the Russian peasantry. On his way to St. Petersburg in a post house he witnessed a violent incident. He saw a courier peasant boy being beaten by a government official who in turn went out his wrath on the poor horse.

This incident symbolically speaks of the oppression of the government, the aristocrat, and the capitalist society on the peasantry. It also shows the violence and harshness of the peasant life that haunted him throughout his life. Later recalling this incident Dostoevsky writes in his Diary of a Writer, “Never was I able to forget it, or that courier, and many an infamous and cruel thing observed in the Russian people. I was inclined for a long time thereafter to explain obviously much too one-sided sense.” 12 This reaction of Dostoevsky clearly explains his concern for the oppression of the peasantry in socio-political terms. This incident reveals his attraction towards radicalism in the 1840s. He became aware of the inhuman treatment of serfs, which made him to develop a passionate obsession with the issue of serfdom.

Another incident that influenced his ideals was his inability to get admission to the military academy. Dostoevsky realized that only those who have money and influence can get good education. Dr. Dostoevsky could not give the ‘gift’ in order to
get admission to his son in the academy. Later Dostoevsky writes in *The Diary of a Writer*, “What rottenness. This completely floored me. We, who struggle for every last ruble, have to pay, while others- the sons of the rich fathers- are accepted without fee. God be with them.”  

It taught him at thirteen how to get a rank, what is more profitable, how to rake in cash, and the fastest way to get a cushy, independent command. He saw the horror and savagery of the upper classes of the academy towards the lower. It introduced him to the social sources of evil in the society. This social inequality later influenced his portrayal of characters who rebel against such things. The experience of the nameless *Underground man* in the school reflects his own life in the Engineering Academy. He writes, “Everything that was just, but oppressed and looked down upon. They laughed at heartlessly and shamefully. They took rank for intelligence; even at sixteen they were already talking about a snug birth.”

His first experience at the academy shattered his early dreams of Moscow life that was filled with thoughts of sublime beauty. He revolted against the ill treatment of the lower class. In the beginning he used the college magazine to express his views on social disparities and moral convictions. To express his views he contributed articles to the student newspaper of the academy. He writes that human life is an eternal struggle between the material and the spiritual in man’s nature. His schoolmates respected him for his moral convictions that were expressed in his articles. Later he adopted the same method to express his views, through his characters, who write articles to be published in newspapers and journals.

His school life brought in him a dramatic change. His exposure at the tender age of sixteen to the social inequalities made his characters to rebel against the
existing order of things. The young boy influenced by the romantic atmosphere of his early life, for the first time witnessed the crude realities of the urban life. He was introduced into the turbulent socio-political problems of real life. It also showed him all the dirty underside of the resplendent façade of the government. This brought him face to face with the hidden corruption that ran through all the institution of Russian society. Hence he advocated social changes in his works as he was critical of serfdom and the official nature of inhumanity.

While he was in the academy he received the news of his father’s death. Later it was learnt that the oppressed serfs, waiting for an opportunity to take a revenge on Dr. Dostoevsky, consequently murdered him. But the nineteen year old Fyodor was not ready to accept the news that his father was murdered by his serfs. As he had seen the peasantry from early childhood and knew them thoroughly he refused to believe the news that his father was murdered by his serfs. Since he was against the serfdom he sympathized with the peasantry. Here, indirectly he identifies himself with the criminals. The rift between his emotion and ideology is well expressed in his reaction to his father’s death. Ideologically he was with the serfs, against the oppression. But the feeling of guilt conscience of supporting his father’s murderers haunted him throughout his life. The reaction of young Fyodor at his father’s death is another important event in his life. He writes to his brother from St. Petersburg, on 16th August, 1839, “My dear brother! I have shed many tears over our father’s death, but now our situation is even worse than before, and I am not talking about myself but about our family.”

At the academy his Russian professor V. T. Plaksin, a moderate partisan of Romanticism taught Pushkin, Lermontov, and Russian folk poet Koetsov. His
French professor Joseph Cournant introduced him to Racine, Corneille and Pascal. He also taught French Renaissance writers Ronsard and Malherbe. His French professor urged young Dostoevsky to subscribe to a French circulating library. He was re-introduced to the contemporary literature of Victor Hugo, Balzac, George Sand and Eugene Sue whom he had read as a boy.

The most important event in the academy was his association with Shidlovsky, a young Russian Romantic poet of the 1830s. In him Dostoevsky saw the living embodiment of the great Romantic conflict between man and his destiny. Shidlovsky discussed Warther, Chatterton, and suicide with young Dostoevsky. He believed that there is a God who sometimes vouchsafes his presence in Nature, and holds out hope of solace to unhappy humans. The stars became for him the visible signals, guiding mankind on its painful path to God. Later Dostoevsky uses this belief of his mentor and guide Shidlovsky in The Brothers Karamazov. He writes, “The air was fresh and cool, there were big stars shining in the sky. It was the very night and perhaps the very hour, in which Alyosha fell on earth, and rapturously swore to love it forever and ever.”

According to Joseph Frank, Shidlovsky brought him face to face with ‘the true sketch of man as a marvelous, exalted being’. His influence contributed to strengthen Dostoevsky’s own commitment to the Romantic values. Shidlovsky’s views assimilated with Dostoevsky’s religious agitation and questionings that had stirred him profoundly as a boy in the Book of Job. Shidlovsky helped Dostoevsky in making the transition between his childhood faith and its sophisticated modern equivalents. He showed him how Romanticism and Orthodox forms of worship could be combined. Contemporary French writer like Lamartine, Victor Hugo,
Frederic Soulie and Paul de Kock also attracted him. But gradually his attention diverted from romantic writers to realists; he diverted his attention from Pushkin to Gogol.

In the early 1840s the Russian intelligentsia had developed an infatuation with everything Western. They tried to absorb the ideas of Enlightenment, German romanticism and idealism, French Utopian Socialism, English Materialism, Atheism, Positivism and Utilitarianism as panacea for their social problems. Utopian Socialists such as Fourier, Proudhon, Pierre Leroux, Saint Simon, Cabet, Lamennais, and George Sand had tremendous influence on Russian intelligentsia. George Sand evoked in Dostoevsky an uneasy consciousness of social inequalities, the germ of all revolutions. Her book Spiridium, illustrates a sort of moral-religious Christian Socialism. It revealed that the socio-political slogan of liberty, equality, and fraternity is the modern manifestation of the Christian doctrine of love.

Dostoevsky completed his engineering in 1843, but could not resist his passion for literature. So he gave up his commission as an engineer and devoted his entire life to literature. His long cherished aspiration to pursue his career in literature introduced him into the world of Russian intelligentsia. He associated himself with the radical groups of his time such as Belinsky’s plaiede, Beketov circle, Petrashvesky circle, Speshnov, and Palm-Durov circle. He read to a great extent the philosophy of Left-Hegelians, Utopian Socialist, and Positivists.

In the beginning of his literary career Dostoevsky was influenced by the French sentimental novels, the fantastic school of the German and the English. He translated the works of Balzac and George Sand. In Poor People the influence of
French writers can be traced. He describes the tortures of the humiliated sensibility that is found in the French social novels of the 1830s. But the most important influence on him was that of the naturalistic novels created by Gogol. He was very much enthusiastic about the Socialist Ideology of Belisky.

Poor People introduced him to Belinsky, the undisputed authority of the Russian literary world. His view that life should serve the needs of society became an established principle in Russian criticism during 1800. After Poor People, he published several novels and short stories like The Landlady, The White Nights, Netotchka Nezvonova, A Faint Heart, etc. His early novels recognized him as one of the greatest emerging writers of Russian literature. The Landlady marked a decisive moment of the transition in his artistic maturity. His incomplete novel, before his imprisonment, Ntotchka Nezvanova shed much light on his internal evolution as a writer.

During 1840s along with Belinsky’s adherence and philosophy of Utopian Socialism, the idea of German Left-Hegelianism also began to penetrate into Russia. Left-Hegelianism was primarily a critic of religion. The effect of its influence was to call into question the religious foundation of Utopian-Socialist convictions. Philosophical ideas of Kant, The left Hegelians, George Sand, D. F. Strauss, Feuerbach, Marx Stinner, Emile Littre, Proudhon and Engles are also reflected in the Russian literature of nineteenth century in various forms. In the middle of 1840s Russian intelligentsia was caught between the opposite philosophical movements of Feuerbachian humanism, and moral determinism of Hegal and M. Stirner.
At the same time many of the noted members of Russian intelligentsia had switched over to German Left Hegelianism. Left Hegelianism which is a critique of religion questioned the religious foundation of the Utopian Socialists. The entry of Hegelianism led to the exit of religion. Rational egoism held that life could be perfected solely through the application of reason and enlightened self-interest. Along with many other radical social thinkers of the 1860s, the rational egoists put great emphasis on the powers of reason and natural law. The rational egoists’ theories grew out of the social liberalism of the 1840s, in which Dostoevsky was interested.

When Dostoevsky met Belisky, the latter was in the peak of his career. He was in the forefront of the progressive movement of Petersburg. He was concerned with the new emerging definitions of the rights and obligations of man. He believed that realistic life to give an honest picture of life and should preach social reforms. Gradually Dostoevsky’s relationship with Belisky strained as Belinsky’s atheism and dislike of religion clashed with Dostoevsky’s Orthodox beliefs. As a Russian Orthodox, Dostoevsky opposed the radical and revolutionary views of Belinsky. After his estrangement with Belinsky, Dostoevsky associated with the Beketov circle, a group that advocated Fourierism and Utopian Socialist Ideals. His fascination with the ideals of Romanticism and Western liberalism led to his involvement with the Palm-Durov circle, a group of Petrashevsky influenced Utopian Socialists.

Dostoevsky’s association with Petrashevsky M.V. (1821-1866) was a turning point in his life. He was a leader of a circle of Progressive Russian intellectuals during 1845-49. Petrashevsky was an active fighter for liberation, especially for the emancipation of the serfs. There were two wings in the circle: the first a revolutionary and democratic, while the other group is a liberal one. The first
included Patrashevsky himself; while Dostoevsky identified himself with the liberals. This liberal group met to discuss political, social and literary questions of the day. At Patrashevsky, Dostoevsky got first hand information about left Hegelian thought. He read D. F. Strauss’s Life of Jesus and French history. He acquired information on socio-political conditions that led to the creation of Utopian Socialism.

Later he came into contact with Maikov, who emphasized on the psychology of law of sympathy. According to Maikov, “Both Gogol and Dostoevsky depict existing society. But Gogol is pre-eminently a social poet, while Dostoevsky is pre-eminently a psychological one. For the first, the individual is important as the representative of certain group; for the second, society itself is interesting because of its influence on the personality of the individual. … Gogol’s collected works may emphatically be called the artistic statistics of Russia. Dostoevsky also gives us a strikingly artistic depiction of Russian society, but with him this provides only the background of the picture, and is conveyed, in most instances, with such minute strokes that it is completely swallowed up by the importance of the psychological interests. Even in Poor Folk, the interest aroused by the analysis of the people that he brings on the scene is incomparably stronger than the impression created on the reader by the vivid depiction of the life surrounding them.”¹⁷ This analysis of Maikov gives an acute insight into the dominating feature of Dostoevsky which reverses the relation between the individual and society.

Maikov was influenced by Fourierism, which says, that, “Man is endowed with virtues, i.e. needs and capabilities that make up his vitality and the source of everything vicious can be located in nothing other than the clash between his
suffering and acting powers and external circumstances, which create a disharmony between them by the destruction of the proportion of satisfaction for each established by the nature. Human nature is essentially good, and evil is a result of the arrangements of society that do not allow mankind properly to satisfy its needs and capabilities.”

He argues the harmful psychic effects of such frustration, and particularly to resist the temptation to take revenge on others for his own mortifications. Dostoevsky’s idea of Christ was profoundly affected by Maikov’s Utopian Socialist icon.

Maikov also writes that the issue of free will and moral responsibility had already begun to gnaw at those who refused to surrender the moral religious basis of their progressivism. Further Dostoevsky was influenced by the sharp distinction he draws between the majority and the minority, between ordinary and extraordinary people. Maikov writes, “Every nationality has two faces; one of them is diametrically opposed to the other; one belongs to the majority the other to the minority. The majority of a people always reveal a mechanical submission to the laws of climate, situation, race and density; the minority to the other extreme in its negation of such influences.” This social injustice became a dominating feature in Dostoevsky. When Dostoevsky wrote Crime and Punishment, Rascolnikoff writes an article on ordinary and extraordinary people. Later Shigalov of The Possessed brings out the difference between the minority and majority people. Much later Ivan Katramazov of The Karamazov Brothers also speaks of this social inequality in his story on the Grand Inquisitor.

In 1849 Dostoevsky was arrested by the Tsarist government for his active involvement in the Petrashevsky circle. The Russian intellectuals who met at
Petrashevsky discussed literary and political issues. They exchanged forbidden books, and talked about freedom of press. They also frequently discussed the liberation of the serfs, and the abolition of the family, and the establishment of the ideal common wealth. They abandoned German philosophy and were attracted by the French Utopian School, and were influenced by George Sand and Fourier. But in the reactionary climate of mid nineteenth century Russia such groups were illegal. Consequently, Dostoevsky and several of his associates were imprisoned and sentenced to death.

As they were facing the firing squad, an imperial messenger arrived with the announcement that the Tsar had commuted the death sentence to hard labor in Siberia. This scene haunted Dostoevsky the rest of his life. While in prison Dostoevsky underwent a profound spiritual and philosophical transformation. His intense study of the New Testament, the only book the prisoners were allowed to read, contributed to his rejection of early liberal political views. It led him to the convictions that redemption is possible only through suffering and faith. This doctrine of self purification through suffering became a recurring theme in his later works.

His prison life played an important role in the formation of his world view. He witnessed the Romantic golden hearted criminals of Schiller in goal. His reading of Schiller aroused his social consciousness. In prison he found the same variety of qualities as in Schiller. He saw the baffling contradictions as in the world outside, the same vicious practice and the same potentialities of virtue. He indirectly admits in the House of the Dead, that describes the life of a convict, “There were even times when I blessed my fate for sending me this solitude, without which neither this trail of myself, nor this harsh revision of my previous life, would have come about.” In jail he
realized the importance of personal possession and freedom as he was denied of these precious things of life. He writes “A man cannot live without work and something he can legitimately normally call his own; he grows deprived and brutalized. And that is why from natural necessity and instinct for self preservation every person in the jail had his own trade and occupation.”

Dostoevsky was tormented by a feeling of intense solitude during his years of penal servitude. The prison inmates hated and isolated him as he was the only intellectual among a small group of ordinary people. This attitude of the prisoners aroused in Dostoevsky a sense of rift between the mass of the people and the handful of intellectuals who carried the banner of freedom. He compares freedom of work with freedom of individual. For him the money earned of the work became a symbol of freedom. According to him the work in jail becomes hard labor not because it was arduous and never ending, but because it was forced, compulsory and done under pressure. He writes, “A peasant probably works much harder and even at night, especially in summer but he is working for himself, working with rational purpose, and it is incomparably easier for him than for a convict to do his forced, and as far as he is concerned completely, useless work. Prison work is incomparably more agonizing than any free work, precisely because it is forced.”

His extensive reading of Bible in prison evoked a spiritual development in him. Later the ideals of Renaissance, of Enlightenment, of German classical philosophers, positivists and other Russian scholars enlightened him. He was influenced by the humanists of the Renaissance who transformed man into an open man. They placed man in the central place, which hitherto had been occupied by God. The art of Renaissance found beauty of man in the unity of body and spirit. On the
other hand, **Enlighteners** advocated freedom of man, and complete independence of man from the yokes of feudal government and church. Free man devoid of any obligation to society became the central theme of their philosophy. They considered man as good by nature, and evil and injustice as the products of social environment. They had great faith in man, and his intellectual capacity to change the course of history.

In 1854 Dostoevsky was released from jail; however he was forced to serve in a Siberian camp for another five years. During his stay in the army camp, he requested his brother to send him books including *Kant*, *Hegel* and others. He writes in his letter dated February 22nd, 1854 from Omsk, “Don’t forget to send me books, above all, the historians, the economics, notes of the father land, the church fathers, and the history of the church. Books means life; they are my food and my future. Send me *Kant*’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Hegel*’s *History of Philosophy*. My whole future is linked with it.” Later Dostoevsky was influenced by *Immanuel Kant*, *Hegel*, *Schelling*, A. *Schopenhauer*, L. *Feuerbach*, Max *Stirner*, V. *Belisky*, *Herzen*, Speshnov, and Federick *Nietzche*.

He read *Immanuel Kant* (1774-1804), a famous German philosopher, who lived near the end of *Enlightenment*, a European cultural movement that spanned the entire eighteenth century. It is in Karamzin’s letters that Dostoevsky came across for the first time *Kant*’s philosophy- the philosophy of consciousness of **good** and **evil** that is innate to mankind. Later Dostoevsky read ‘*The Critique of Pure Reason*’; where *Kant* questions some of the fundamental tenets of rationalism, who attempted to lay the foundations both for the certainty of modern science and for the possibility of human freedom.
He distinguished between phenomenal and nominal reality, i.e. that which appears to us through the senses and that which lies behind appearances, in other words he distinguished the difference between reality and appearances. He links Good with one’s dedication to the social goal and adherence to moral values. Evil is man’s crave for selfish goals. Kant believed that neglecting moral values for the sake of selfish interest is the worst form of evil. He believed that the conscience of man warns him of the presence of evil in him. Hence freedom without conscience will lead to tyranny. Kant explains that individuals are conditioned by the law of causality which states that every effect has a predetermined cause. He also suggests that every individual is aware of himself as a purely rational and intelligible being.

According to Kant man is a complex phenomena bearing within him both good and evil. The good is represented by the good by heart or emotions, and the bad by mind or reason. Man who is guided by heart follows the rules of the state and man guided by reason wants to be free and puts his individual objective before him. He wanted man to be free from egoism, and to sacrifice his personal interest for the sake of the larger interest of the state. He believed that, when there is a conflict between the interests of an individual and a state, individual should voluntarily sacrifice his self interest for the sake of the larger interest of the state. He asserts the concepts of God and immortality, distinguishes good from well-being and evil from ill-being.

Hegel (1770-1831) in his History of Philosophy criticizes both empirical and formal approaches to natural law as exemplified in Kantian philosophy. He argues that though society exists in the form of an individual; the individual cannot achieve his full accomplishment in a society. This leads to the sickness of individual, and his
subsequent death. Further, for him, state is a banner of reason known as objective spirit and the individual is the bearer of subjective spirit, and subjective spirit should voluntarily surrender itself to the objective spirit. If it does not take place then there will be tyranny. By subordinating to the state, an individual accomplishes his rational free will and deviates from tyranny. Objective spirit accomplishes its Will in the form of moral values, family, society, and state. Moral values should be judged from the angle of state not from the angle of an individual. Hence, Hegel contends that the state dominates an individual from birth till death.

Schelling (1775-1854) believed that an idea or spirit is capable of enslaving man. Unlike Hegel, Schelling did not believe that the absolute could be known in its true character through rational inquiry alone. His Naturphilosophie exhibits the ideal springing from the real. Like Kant, Schelling also believed in the duality of man. According to him duality is caused by two types of Will of man: individual Will and state Will. The state Will is considered as good, and the individual will is evil.

Schelling believed that evil is nothing but the perversion of good and every man has good and evil within him. It is the Will of the God that unites an individual with the world and preserves him with the unity. Evil is associated with the individual aspiration and isolation, and places individual against a state. An individual in his attempt to absolutize his Will places his Will in the place of Will of society, and in the process gets isolated from the state. Thought and ideas are the creation of soul, once born they become independent and act in their own way and acquire such a power that could control the creator. He favored the supremacy of the state over individual and it would be difficult to subordinate the individual Will to the Will of the state. According to him freedom of individual is always accompanied by evil.
A. Schopenhauer (1778-1860) in his masterpiece *The World as Will and Idea* gives a systematic exposition of his philosophy. He argues that man is duel by nature, and man’s character is formed in the course of his life, and not suddenly. Action of man is conditioned by conflicting motives determined by will and reason. According to him, man cognizing himself does not achieve freedom of will but expresses his individual character. Freedom of will is achieved only by refraining from one’s desires. He considered that, individual should overcome the principle of individuality, and then only he can see himself as part of suffering world. He should consider all suffering in the world as his own suffering. For him compassion is the only way to improve moral standard of mankind. He did not believe in the possibilities of eliminating evil.

L. Feuerbach (1804-1872) is a materialist, who believed that reason and emotion is the two important traits of man. He links reason with motives of society and emotion with individual. His theme is a derivation of Hegel’s speculative theology in which the creation remains a part of the creator, while the creator remains greater than the creation. He considered Christ as a mere personality or an individual, and the essence of Christianity lies in emotion or soul. He criticizes Christianity as it gives more importance to individual. He argues that the concept of state and its meaning disappeared by the arrival of Christianity. The Christianity with its cult of Christ succeeded in maintaining mutual relationship between the individuals. Hence, Christianity needs no individual other than its God.

Max Stirner (1806-1856) placed individual over the state. According to him, God and mankind based their deeds in themselves. For him there is nothing good or bad, and the man should be concerned about an individual I. Hence, he negated
everything, except the individual I, and demanded lowering of all moral concepts. For him individual and uniqueness are more important than anything else in man. Hence, to be a man does not mean to reach the ideal of man. On the contrary it means revealing the self of an individual man. Its task should not be realization of the common goal of mankind but gratification of itself. So, it itself is its state. I should not be subordinated to any laws or regulations, and is unique without anything like it. According to him man who became an end and the logical outcome of Christianity in the form of I is the beginning and creative material of the new history; the history of delight. Such a history of delight that replaces the history of self-sacrifice belongs not to the history of man or mankind but to individual I.

V. Belisky, Vissarion Grigorievich (1811-1848) is a famous Russian critic, and a convinced Westerner, who guessed the universality and the national character of Pushkin’s genius. His critique Literary Reviews: An Elegy in Prose (1834) is a masterful review of Russian Literature from its beginnings in the eighteenth century to the early thirties of the nineteenth century. Because of lack of systematic education, his philosophical conceptions were contradictory and confusing. Even so, his captivating sincerity, genuine enthusiasm and passion for truth make him an outstanding figure in the history of Russian Literary thought. Belinsky was a realist, but his realism was colored with Hegelian idealism. He exercised an immense influence upon his contemporaries. His fiery but always didactic and partisan articles contributed much to the emancipation of Russian public opinion, thus paving the way for the enactment of the great reforms in the Sixties.

Dostoevsky’s association with Belinsky is very important as he had much influence in his life. He also tried to combine the interests of individual and state.
According to him an individual outside a society is an illusion, but society outside individuals is also an illusion. Both are interrelated. For him, people preserve the living juice of all progresses. Individual is the flower and fruit of this soil. He opposed individualism, while condemning individualistic reticence he fought for the development of individual spirit. According to him man is not the end in itself; he is among others and for others, and in the same way others also live for him. What Dostoevsky assimilated from Belisky provides the framework within which his subsequent ideological evolution can be understood.

**Herzen, Alexander Ivanovich** (1812-1870) is a well-known Russian publicist, a political emigrant, and the founder of populism. In his work *The Legend* he links Utopian Socialism and the transformation of religious values found in the social and psychological theories of Fourier, Saint-Simon, and Pierre Leroux, with Russian Kenotic idea. He was concerned about the dignity and centrality of an individual. He also developed psychological categories focusing on the notion of self-interest. He considered egoism as proper medium for man to express his rightful position. He paid much attention to find a solution to the problem of the relationship between individual and society. According to him it is very difficult to identify the sanctity of rights of individual and to protect them without shattering the state into fragments. He had clear vision on the Russian and Western solutions to the problem of relationship between the state and individual. According to him, the West protected the individual, neglecting the state spirit; whereas Russia preserved social system keeping individual away.

He tried to combine the interests of individual and state. In Western Europe he embraced extreme revolutionary doctrines. However, he became disillusioned in
the revolution of 1848, and proclaimed that ‘the West is decaying’ and also that ‘Europe is not asleep – she is dying’. Herzen, in his Bell, came out in support of the Polish uprising. He advocated abolition of serfdom and autocracy. After vacillating towards liberalism, evoking criticism from Chernishevsky and Dobrolyudov, returned to fearless platform of revolutionary democracy in 1860s. He exerted a powerful influence on progressive thought in Russia.

Nikolay Speshnov: Dostoevsky’s concern for the serfdom and social injustice brought him close to Nikolay Speshnov. Frank considers Speshnov was Dostoevsky’s mentor in revolutionary radicalism. He shaped Dostoevsky’s conception of importance of underground conspiracy. He was attracted by the doctrines of extreme French Secret Societies that preached the necessity of violence. His philosophy was a philosophy of combined ideals of materialism, atheism, and Utilitarian self interest. According to Speshnov, the categories such as beauty and ugliness; good and bad; noble and base, always were and always will remain as a matter of taste. These ideals of Speshnov can be traced in Stavrogin, in The Possessed. In his confession to father Tikhon, Stavrogin writes, “I have neither the feeling nor the knowledge of good and evil……..it’s myself in various forms – nothing else.”

Frederick Nietzsche (1844-1900) envisaged the theory of Superman, which is one of the most significant concepts in his thinking. He maintained that all human behavior is motivated by the will to power, which is not simply power over others, but the power over oneself. Such power is manifested in the Superman’s independence, creativity and originality. He believes that no Superman has yet arisen. He saw the Superman as the answer to the nihilistic rejection of all religious and moral
principles. His Superman is the ultimate life affirming being and, the goal of humanity is to affirm life. The Superman does not follow morality of common people since it favors mediocrity but instead rises above the notion of good and evil. The Superman is someone who can, with appreciation, face life that may seem so suffering and absurd, knowing that the basic conditions of life will not change even when he is in the ideal state of a superman. This concept of Superman has often been interpreted as one of a master-slave society which has been identified with totalitarian philosophies.

The Superman is the one who is willing to risk all for the sake of enhancement of humanity. This Superman has his own values, independent of others. A Superman is someone who has a life which is not merely to live each day with no meanings; rather he should be able to affect history indefinitely. Napoleon, who is highly admired by Nietzsche, may be seen as an example of superman. Later this Superman theory of Nietzsche was adopted to analyze Rascolnikoff’s idea of ordinary and extraordinary people in Crime and Punishment. The utopias envisaged by Shigalov in The Possessed and The Grand Inquisitor in The Brothers Karamazov express the social dangers of the future Nietzschean philosophy.

According to him man, instead of relying on old, Christian values, must create a new morality under which he decides to live. Since humanity is always based on a concept of morality which regulates social practices, he calls for a new way of thinking about, that is, a new structure to morality. This new morality is encompassed in the figure of the Superman, who represents a free spirit whose occupation is to rethink morality in our everyday life. His Superman is not a singular man; he is represented by a multiplicity of people.
He defended extreme immoral manifestation of individualism and challenged
democratic out-looking of equalitarianism of conformity. He called his philosophy as
**aesthetic immoralism**. For him, man full of living forces should think only about the
ways to reveal himself and to realize his individuality. He should not be bothered
about the outcome of his action. The new self, the true **Nietzschean** style, places the
individual right at the centre of the universe and insists that the individual has a
perfect right to not only happiness and contentment but even total self-aggrandizement. Some of **Nietzsche’s** concepts later became merged and enmeshed
with **Freudism** which is prevalent in modern psychology.

**Positivists:** Positivists played an important role in the socio-political
developments of **Russia** in the middle of the nineteenth century. According to them
everything related to man and society can be understood and explained scientifically
employing mathematical approach. Leading intellectuals like **Belinsky,**
**Chernishhevsky,** **Maikov,** **Herzen** and others were influenced by **Positivists.**
**Dostoevsky** came into contact with these **Positivists** when he was in **Petrashesky**
circle. But later in his **Post-Siberian** works he reacted sharply towards **positivism,**
especially to the position of **Chernishhevsky.**

Upon his return to **St. Petersburg** in 1859, Dostoevsky re-established his
association with his old mates, **Milyukov,** **Maikov,** **Apollon Grigoriev,** **Yanovsky**
and **Strakhov.** This resulted in a rapid evolution of ideas in him. The passionate
young **radical** of 1840’s transformed into a champion of **Orthodoxy.** This period
contributed much for his spiritual development. He resumed his literary career by
writing articles in the periodicals on literature and politics. These articles expressed
his socio-political views based on the spiritual values of **Russian** people.
His brother Michael, waiting for his arrival, started a new literary journal The Vremya (The Time) with himself as editor, and Fyodor as the principal contributor. As a keen reader of trial reports, Dostoevsky published articles on famous crimes of the past in Vremya. The first issue of Vremya was published in January 1860. Its principal attraction was the first installment of a new novel by Fyodor. But their happiness was short lived, as this could not continue for a long period. Because of political disturbances Fyodor turned to Europe closing Vremya. Though he was dissatisfied about the lack of free press and free speech, he never sympathized with the violent revolution to bring about a better society.

On his return from Europe, however, he tried to revive his journal. The authorities agreed for the revival of Vremya by the new name Epocha. But once again, the political disturbances of 1862, made the Dostoevskys to put an end to their journalistic efforts. With the untimely death of his brother Michael he was forced to wind up his journals. Later, the publication and success of The Possessed in 1872, with its attack on radicalism made Dostoevsky to become the editor of the conservative magazine The Citizen.

As a feuilletonist he gave a specific notion of his ideological position. He fervently desired the liberation of the serfs and was deeply troubled by the suffering of the people. He talked about serfdom and illustrated the difference between appearance and reality. He brought out the vices hidden behind a façade of virtue. He also felt that Petersburg was not just a symbol of tyranny and despotism, but also a centre, with a desire to absorb Western progress and enlightenment. As a journalist he insisted to build Russian civilization on ‘the national spirit’ and on ‘national principles’.
With the *Diary of a Writer* Dostoevsky created a new form of literary journalism. The *Diary* consist a series of essays on matters of literature and politics and on the idealization of the people. It well expresses his criticism, socio-political views, and nihilist ideas. He satirizes the contemporary Western influenced Russian intellectuals. It also analyses the issue of the Russia and the West. In every page of his *Diary* he elevates the poor over the bourgeoisie. There are many chapters in the *Diary of a Writer* in which Dostoevsky exemplifies the true wisdom of the people as against the false wisdom of the intellectuals. He brings out the rift between the Russian people and the Russian intelligentsia which began with the Westernization program of Peter the Great.

Dostoevsky, who was introduced as a child to Western ways of life in Karamzin’s travelogue, discovered the Western civilization in his visits to Europe. In 1860s he visited European countries and got first hand information about Western intelligentsia. He witnessed the Western civilization that was built on the basis of individual, and on self assertion of ego. His visits to Europe gave him a full knowledge of capitalism and strengthened his belief on the ill effects of Western education on Russian intelligentsia. Later he writes in the *Diary of a Writer*, “The moment we have taught a man to read and write we shall make him take a sniff of Europe. We will make him ashamed of his former best shoes and kvaas, of his ancient song. They suffer from the contemporary chaos of life. Because of the failure to comprehend the things taking place all around that their conception becomes disintegrated.”

The momentous events of his life took place during 1860s, the period of his visits to European countries. It was during this period that he wrote the great master
pieces of his literary career. Though the first four years were among most troubled, the later half proved to be the most emotionally and creatively enriching period of his life. After the publication of his last four novels his financial position improved. His visit to several Western European countries resulted in his drift in the direction of Slavophilism. His journalistic writings of this period express his hostility to what he considered the destructive influence of European thought in Russia.

Like other Russian intelligentsia, Dostoevsky also, was oppressed by the general lack of freedom in Russian social life. But the most important factor that affected him was the enslavement of peasantry. He supported Slavophil because of his untroubled boyhood relation with the peasants. According to him, Western education is based on individualistic ideas, whereas Slavophil is based on society. The debate between the Westerners and the Slavophils split the Russian intelligentsia into two opposing groups. He tries to bring about a harmonious unity between the educated class and the peasantry. He felt that the rift can be set right only with the intelligentsia returning to the common people and religion. Dostoevsky believes that the intelligentsia going away from the church has gone away from the common people. Hence he supported Slavophilism, as against the Westernism.

In one of his visits to Europe, in 1867, he attended the meeting of International Congress of the League of peace and freedom at Geneva. There representatives of every shade of opinion gathered together under the expansive banner of freedom and peace. Bakunin, the Russian nihilists who stood for internationalism, anarchy, and atheism also attended the meeting. This inspired Dostoevsky to write about the young nihilists in his novels, especially the character of Ippolit in The Idiot. He was attracted by Garibaldi’s speech, who asserted Universal
brotherhood of nations, the necessity of religion, and the wickedness of the papacy as a political institution.

While in Florence he read Victor Hugo’s Les Miserable’s, and was influenced by Hugo’s Social-Christian quality. As Frank writes, “It can be formulated as the generation of fallen mankind, crushed by the unjust weight of circumstances, the inertia of centuries and by social prejudices. This idea is that of the justification of the humiliated and of all the rejected pariahs of society.” This can be traced to Rascolnikoff’s justification of crime, who says that he murdered an old obnoxious vermilion who is of use to no one.

He returned to Russia in 1867, and after 1872, the uncertainties of his former troubled existence returned no more. The most important event in the last year of his life is the Pushkin festival. Dostoevsky was invited on the occasion of unveiling of a statue erected in Moscow. It had, like other literary event in Russia, a strong political flavor. The celebration of unveiling of the statue was organized by the ‘Moscow Society of Lovers of Russian Literature.’ Dostoevsky recited Pushkin’s Prophet and, spoke on universal brotherhood. According to Dostoevsky, among all world poets, only Pushkin possessed the faculty of completely reincarnating in him an alien nationality. In his speech, he said that, Pushkin’s works preeminently reflect universal ideas. For him there is never a poet with such a universal responsiveness as Pushkin.

In his impassioned speech, among other things, Dostoevsky also proclaimed Russia’s mission of regenerating the world through the universal service of its people, and the brotherly love of its Orthodox faith. He writes in his letter written on 8th June 1880, to his wife Ana, “At every page, sometimes at every sentence, I was interrupted
by bursts of applause. I read in a loud voice, with fire. And when, in the end, I proclaimed the *universal oneness* of mankind, the hall seemed to go into hysterics, and when I finished, there was – I won’t call it a roar – it was a howl of elation. People in the audience who had never met before, wept, sobbed, embraced each other, and swore to become better, not to hate each other anymore but to love one another. … suddenly – to give you an idea of what went on- two old men I’d never seen before came up to me: ‘for twenty years we have been enemies, have never spoken to each other, but now we’ve embraced and made up. It is you who have reconciled us. You’re our *saint*, you’re our *prophet*! *Prophet!* *Prophet!* People were shouting in the crowd.’²⁶ People recognized him as a *prophet*. A select, distinguished audience, who were enraptured by his speech shouted, as later Dostoevsky writes, ‘*Genius, Saint* and *a Prophet*.’ After his speech on Pushkin he became the undisputed hero of the time. He struck a universal chord in people. Later he writes that it wasn’t simply a speech but a historic event of his life.

By this time he had found domestic happiness and literary fame. He no longer resisted death. He still had with him the *bible* given to him by the wives of Decembrist revolution. He always kept it with him. In fact whenever he found himself in a dire situation, in a critical moment of his life he sought guidance by opening the *bible* at random and reading the words which met his eyes. In his death bed he opened the bible and asked his wife to read aloud the gospel of *St. Matthew* which is as follows: “and Jesus answering said unto him, suffers me now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.” When he died, every section of Russian society from the imperial family to the revolutionaries was united in mourning him.
There was no political demonstration at his funeral such as the authorities had feared. Upon his death everyone felt the loss of a great man and a tormented genius.

This study of Dostoevsky’s socio-political background reveals that, Dostoevsky fought all his life against universal rationalism, its conviction that reason is able to grasp all of reality to create a new and better world. Though he was punished severely for his so called crime, he never spoke a word against the government. On the contrary he attributed his punishment to building up of his moral nature. This attitude of his not talking against the government clearly indicates his going against retribution. He strongly asserts that to take revenge is of no use, one should suffer for his guilt conscience. His writings are all colored by the various stages in the socio-political developments of his time. Dostoevsky displayed a rare foresight which anticipated, and branded the revolting super-individualism that found expression in the philosophy of Nietzsche.

By means of his novels, articles, and personal correspondece he warned about the consequences of entering into unethical paths. He gave a clarion call to the society not to pay back evil for evil but to forgive the offenders and to have faith in God. His doctrine is self purification through suffering. For him suffering for the sins of others should be the prerogative of every Christian. He advocated that one should abide by the law of Christ’s gospels. According to him sin is a transient matter, whereas Christ is eternal. He tries to convince that there is a clash between men’s suffering and acting powers. Freedom without conscience will lead to tyranny. He believed that God is the custodian of moral values guarding the individual consciousness. Man is irrational by nature and only curbed by a higher power and not by reason. His characters having exhausted themselves become bankrupt of both good
and evil. They either submit to God or destroy themselves. He believed that the strongest and most fundamental need of the people is the need of suffering. In his works he shows the inner struggle that takes place in a person who is on the path of returning to God.

Hence, all his fictional characters realize their mistake and suffer for their crime. His works effectively brings out the various facets and moral development of his criminal characters. He brings out the motif, the problem of alienation, poverty, the idea of superman, the psychology and, above all the result of irrational deed, the crime. His fictional characters believe in utilitarian ideology, that is, the greatest happiness for the largest number of people, and followed the Napoleonic tradition of super human existence. The struggle for self respect, a sense of human respect, and the humiliation to which they are exposed form the major themes of all his novels. He argues that man himself is responsible for his actions. A true Christian will accept the responsibility whatever the environment is. He argues that crime is a personal-moral responsibility and believed in collective guilt. It is an urge for negation in man, negation of everything, of the most sacred thing in one’s heart, of one’s loftiest ideal in its totality. As a result they all suffer for their evil deeds.

As he could not speak out his mind, expressing his dissatisfaction over the moral-social blight of Russian society, he selected the printed media to voice his opinions. He was influenced by the ideals of Fourierism and its love of humanity and, thought it was possible to achieve his Utopian dream through his works. His extensive reading of Bible, German classical philosophers, positivists and Russian scholars influenced his later writings. His Post-Siberian works express his matured
ideology using teachings of Christianity, of the Renaissance and Enlighteners, and Positivists.

Despite his French education, it was Russian culture that loomed large on his horizon as a child. He was taught in an early age to identify himself emotionally with Russia and her past. He describes the dangers of intellectual pride, of intellect detaching itself from emotion and instinct and tradition. He expresses his horror of human thought serving to crush people, and opposes such thoughts. He realized the dangers of Western educated rationalists, and dreaded the autonomous intellect most. He was afraid of the intellectuals who are loosened from the controls of Christianity.

He understood clearly that the greatest problem of man is his departure from God. The problem lay not in the social but in the spiritual realm. The social problem is the result of the people’s spiritual conditions. In all his works he feels that the Russian intelligentsia had abandoned its religion for Democracy and Utilitarianism. Economic materialism has consummated its own divorce from people. He argues that reform is not just adaptation of European dress, habits, inventions, and science. It should be for vital Universal, and for all humanitarian fellowship. He accuses the intelligentsia which has gone away from the religion, is going away from the people. The remedy is in the return of the intelligentsia to the religion and to the people. He sought comfort in religion, and identified the growth of individual consciousness with the development of individualism.

Earlier he felt that in the groups of Belinsky and Petrashevsky he found himself among men who rejected the Orthodox Church and all forms of religious dogma. But his prison experience made him to realize that they respected Christian ethics, in which they found support for their revolutionary creed. Throughout his life
he accepted the ethical ideal of Christianity and rejected its dogmatic content. Christ always remained for him, not just a savior from the bonds of sin and death, but as a sacred pledge on the possibility of moral freedom. He firmly believed that suffering was the necessary psychological conditions of the forgiveness of sin. The forgiveness which seemed so important to Dostoevsky was not the forgiveness by others, but the forgiveness of sinner by himself, a process of his own conscience.

If we attempt to estimate the nature and extent of his influence, even after 130 years of his death, we can notice that his message has been accepted and acclaimed by posterity. We can see that his philosophic creativity grew out of the religious consciousness. He believed that the solution to the social problems lies in the tradition and values associated with the Christian teaching of love, compassion and self sacrifice. He proclaimed the regeneration of the society through universal service to mankind, and brotherly love, and religious faith. By means of his novels, articles and personal correspondence he warned about the consequences of entering into unethical path. He believed that the strongest and most fundamental need of the people is the need of the suffering. In his works he shows the inner struggle that takes place in a person who is on the path of returning to God. He gave a clarion call to the society not to pay back evil for evil but to forgive the offenders and to have faith in God.

He believed that the individual is motivated to transgress the social will, in other words, the moral values, for his self aggrandizement. Reason cannot hold man back from going against society as man often acts in an irrational way. Such an impulse within the individual can be curbed by a higher power reigning through the soul, which he recognizes as the humanness existing within an individual. As a humanist, as a thinker interested in the freedom and fate of each and every individual,
his concern was to aspire for society wherein no one is denied of freedom. As society exists in the form of individual, the violence of a society also exists within an individual. He strongly believed that man or society could not remove evil from within man by improving the environment only. He asserted that the traditional concept of Christianity should therefore be recovered. He believed that all these theories have no importance for common mass. They should seek for sources of a development of the society not in the doctrines of Western Socialists, but in the life and age-old historical organization of the society.

Dostoevsky opened a new period in the history of Russian thought as a writer of sentimental stories, feuilletonist and journalist. His literature includes novels, novellas, novelettes, short stories, essays, epistolary novels, and a few poems. Elements of gothic fiction, romanticism, and satire are inherent parts in some of his works. He grew up as an author of great ideological novels amidst the ideological polemics between Westernism and Slavophilism. His works comprise such themes as poverty, social inequality, human manipulation, crime and morality. His early works emphasized the realistic and naturalistic social life, that is, the differences between the rich and the poor. In his later works, he focused on the issues of the existence of God and nihilism, the nature of human co-existence, the requirements of fraternity and the coherence between freedom and fortune.

In this sense the works of Dostoevsky are important as they give a real picture of life of one of the stormiest periods of European history. His works are the artistic expression of the literary and cultural values, the problem of transition and the crisis of the age. His characters are built around the problem of assertion of the right to crime and the abandonment of moral criteria. They also depict the disintegration of
moral and social ties taking place during nineteenth century. In his writings he as well gives expression to the boundless suffering of humiliated mankind. Many of his characters epitomize the traditional Christian conflict between the body and the spirit. The dominating features that constitute his writings are the influence of Bible, and the crime thrillers and adventure stories of eighteenth century.