CHAPTER 7

MILL IN RETROSPECT
J. S. Mill’s influence on subsequent English thought was extraordinary and was incomparably pervasive. His advocacy of the cause of liberty and tenets of democracy sparked a political consciousness which near revolutionised political institutions and Mill goes down to posterity as the representative of a century when democratic ideas crystallised. There was a new perspective to the legion of social facts and forces. Ethics, politics and philosophy had a new meaning, a fresh expression and they found their voice in the inquiring spirit — the hallmark of democracy and freedom of the individual.

Mill’s overpowering enthusiasm for humanity took shape as an aspiration to supply the unimpeachable method of search for conclusions in the moral and the social sciences. He is a veritable Jesus of Nazareth, in his selfless and disinterested concern for the welfare of mankind. Mill enhances the flavour of altruism by stressing the distinction between the agent’s own happiness and that of others. He holds that with the decline of religious sanctions, a secular vision of life must become the source of the necessary integrating beliefs and values.
He hopefully visualises a time when men would feel it their beholden duty to serve humanity at large and when society itself would strive to cultivate in all individuals an involvement in a sense of common unity and an equally pressing concern for the general good. Mill's entire socio political philosophy is based on the ethical principle of utility. He values the ideals of freedom, democracy, justice and equality and places a lot of significance on the dignity of human individual by treating every man as an end and not as a means. He holds that 'each should be counted as one' and as such full scope should be given for the development of one's individuality. For him the perfectibility of human nature and character in each individual self is the goal of all social change and progress. This in fact helps in advancing and enhancing the ultimate principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, which spells the humanistic and altruistic ramifications of Mill's thought. Mill rejects a conception of man which has no room for the pursuit of spiritual perfection as an end in itself.

The superstructure of Mill's utilitarian morality rests on the firm foundation of social feeling of mankind, that is, desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures. The social state, according to him, is
is natural, necessary, and habitual to men, that in some unusual circumstances or by any effort of voluntary abstractions he never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body. This assertion that man by nature is a social being means that society cannot be regarded as an aggregate of self-seeking individuals only. In other words, Mill gives up Bentham’s notion of happiness of society as built up of the irremediably selfish interests of the individuals who constitute it, and consequently bases his utilitarianism on social motives.

Utilitarianism for Mill is predominantly an insistence that all moral acts are in pursuit of one ultimate end which is recognizable and desirable. He seems to be building a case on behalf of reason and putting forth a demand that human life should be seen as having a rational purpose. He seems to be inspired by an optimistic conviction that a clear recognition of that purpose is in itself a step towards its attainment.

Mill is reluctant to doctrinaire acceptance of anything which has not an empirical backing, or an intuition which has excluded thinking. He affirms a moral experience which involves ultimate principles and for which in the end one may claim intuitive assent, however, the importance of the empirical elements in ethics, so meticulously brought out by Mill in his
admirable account of justice, cannot be underestimated by any criterion of a rationalistic system of morality. The underlying distinctive characteristic of this philosophy is to emphasize the significance of human reason. In other words, he stresses the obligation incumbent upon all thinkers to analyze and investigate for themselves the truth rather than to accept the same on the authority of others.

For Mill rationality is inextricably bound with the concepts of proof, evidence and with being able to use reasons for beliefs which one may hold. He holds that the criterion of rationality in sciences is different from the one applied in ethics. For instance, the absence of proof in case of ultimate principles does not necessarily mean that there can be no rational argument about ultimate ends. The inherent subjectivity of an evaluative judgement rules out the possibility of its being proved scientifically for there is the essential exclusion of factual statements.

Mill contends that value judgements are to be analyzed as species of imperatives. He, however, does not doubt that some first principle is necessary for rationally justified conduct. It is imperative in order to avoid the mutual contradiction of various principles that we conform to one constant higher principle
consistently which sets the criteria for us. And this principle is the principle of utility as the ultimate standard of all values.

The utilitarian theory was valuable both in the field of practical politics and in political philosophy. From it germinated much significant reforms of the nineteenth century. Mill's utilitarianism sought to spell out the relationship between political authority and the values of justice and righteousness towards a collective human happiness, freedom and equality. This relationship cannot be authenticated by a mere appeal to reason or right in the abstract but rather is to be ascertained by the criterion of benefits accruing due to the rules. This pragmatic approach had its deep roots in the philosophy of Mill.

Mankind is irrevocably indebted to Mill for his views on the value of freedom and hazards of intolerance. He asserts that social tyranny may be far more grinding than legal tyranny and any despotism, however benign, does indeed destroy the development and growth of people. He found himself torn all his life between his love for individual liberty and initiative and the sense of political desirability of social control, in revolt against the visionary impracticability of the eighteenth century idealism and commitment to the socio-political objectives of the preceding century.
Mill gives limited justification to State interference in the context of social liberty because otherwise liberty would be impossible. He was trying to impose proper limitations on the society, state and the individuals only in order to protect the liberty of the individuals. His defence of liberty would rest on the utility principle. He regarded liberty as the only permanent source of improvement — which would include total individuality and its entire self-development. Mill was an enemy of status quo; he was a staunch propagator of a new moral posture and a new ethical order. Perhaps there has not been a clearer and a more univocal and better argued defence of individual liberty than the one provided by the social and political writings of Mill.

According to Mill, the State can do much to enlarge an individual's effective enjoyment of his liberty and provide conditions for an effective self-development through free participation and education. Mill believes that being answerable to the governed is not the only way of ensuring the identity of interests between the rulers and the ruled, since to some extent their interests in fact do coincide. The selfish interests of rulers do play an important, if not an exclusive, part in determining their actions. It is therefore, in mutual interest that law and order should
be maintained. To avoid the overplay of self-centered actions, Mill advocates constitutional checks as a necessity. State is a creation of man and therefore it should be subordinated to his wishes. State should so act as to maximize the total good through its actions. Social well being is the end of government; the fostering of virtue and intelligence is the test of its success.

As an ethico-political philosopher, Mill maintained that the function of a true system of political philosophy is far more complex and many sided than could be imagined, and that it was aimed at providing not only a set of model institutions but also the principles from which the institutions suitable to any given circumstances might be deduced. Consequently Mill's ideology seems to be concerned not with the historical or sociological explanation of the origin and forms of the institution of property but rather with the problem of social expediency. It gives us a clear glimpse of Mill's method of analyzing social institutions and his views with regard to expediency of an institution in terms of effects to be expected from the given changes of a given pattern. These effects, we know, Mill has exhaustively analysed.

In fact, he developed a fuller and richer conception of happiness as involving a varied and rich growth of
personality. The political institutions must be relevant to the social milieu and duly recognize the important role of an intellectual elite in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of a society in a stage of transition. However, he was susceptible to fears about the growth of mass conformity and its stifling effect on individual freedom. Mill also maintains that the power of education is boundless and that it promotes the social good through the cultivation of individuals. He ascertained that even the social and political changes were rationally planned on the basis of well-conceived principles. Education he conceived as an agent of social change and as the chief cause of social progress. Through it alone it is possible to arrive at a clearer understanding of the truth pertaining to the nature of individual and society.

Mill's juxtaposition of liberty and education is particularly arresting for those who live in our times. His polemics about the alternatives whether the State is responsible for the education of children, the organization of education or a complete freedom of choice to parents, children, intrigues for it anticipated today's problem. Mill asserts that the State should insist upon all children being educated but should not itself do the educating, though he had not given much expression...
to his thoughts about how this education should be done.

However, the implicit assumptions of his varied treatment of the problems of education can be summed up in the following, almost ideal, and somewhat utopian answer: Education should be so organized as to enable individuals right from their early childhood to become qualified to form reasonable judgments on controversial problems, on the basis of which they are expected to act. This presupposes a training in objectivity and access to perfect impartial knowledge. This alone, according to Mill, would prepare the individual for a genuine freedom of choice to enable him to assume the moral and social obligations incumbent upon him. Such a system of education would provide the necessary conditions for the intellectual growth of a man's individuality and make the foundations of democracy stronger.

However, he is apprehensive of the danger that the uneducated and uncultured people may not make their irrational mark on society and government. He wants the labouring class to cultivate their faculties and get themselves educated, so as to maximize their happiness and make them more intelligent. He is of the firm conviction that education would give a sense of participation to all concerned in rational living.
Mill's belief in the enormous importance of knowledge explains his concern to ensure the existence of an active intellectual elite in an age of mass pressures. Truth and knowledge are the products of a few individuals, therefore society must secure for its potential innovators and seekers of truth; the means and conditions for the creative role that they are required to perform. His defence of elitism did not dampen his spirit to proclaim his concern for equality as is evident from his justifications of universal franchise, equality for women and sympathetic consideration of socialism.

Mill's treatment of equality of women is almost prophetic for the world has gone completely as he would have wished, however his was a qualified egalitarianism for the specific purpose of avoiding misgovernment. The chief egalitarian qualifications are evident in his concern for favouring gradual implementation of universal franchise, plural votes for the educated, proportional representation, and denial of votes to the illiterate and the immoral.

In fact, this issue poses a serious challenge to the realization of the essence of democracy. One is tempted to ask whether this kind of government is really the government of the people. The major preoccupation of democratic thought in our times has been its continuing
effort to reconcile this paradox of democracy. The concept of democracy takes for its assumption and presupposition the goodness and rationality of human individuals, whereas in practice one is confronted with irrefutable evidences of human weakness and irrationality. Hence, the dilemma of a man who hopefully visualizes an ideal state of society and is ruthlessly frustrated in his attempt to concretize the vision into a reality.

It is for the above reason that we are led to assess Mill's socio-political philosophy and the entire value dimensionality in his ideological framework in the perspective and context of some leading ideologies of recent times. One is led to the possibility of alternative ideologies in the quest for ideals which may be more consonant with human life and existence. In the context of twentieth-century politics, one of the foremost ideologies — is the ideology of socialism which seems to be the closest contender for being preferred to any other ideology. The socialists drew the essence of their thought from such proclamations as 'men are born free but are everywhere in chains;' and 'general will makes for perfection in society,' etc. Socialism originally appears to have given particular emphasis on communal co-operation in contrast to liberalism which
was becoming the creed of industrial revolution. The fundamental belief of the socialists is that the existing system of a society and its established institutions, like political and legal authority, the church and the capital owning classes are potentially responsible for the oppression of the working class, and as such are most unjust and morally unsound in nature.

Yet, another belief of the socialist ideology is that society can be changed and socially desirable institutions can be created on the basis of moral values which will tend to enrich the existence of mankind. Such an assumption makes a direct appeal to the notion of perfectibility of mankind. The socialist ideology, thus, brings in the moral values of human dignity and equality which constitute integral dimensions of the concept of social justice. The entire possibility of realizing these socio-moral values depends on the transition from theory to practice. In other words, socialism is an action-oriented ideology.

A great majority of socialists have been democrats in the ordinarily accepted sense of the word, but some have rejected any formal democratic process, in favour of a communal consensus. The debate with regard to what kind of institutions will be best suited for the realization of justice has been continuing unresolved throughout the
history of socialism. However, they are all agreed on the fundamental necessity for the transformation of society in and through the collective will and the revolutionary action. Since socialism has presumably a strong rational basis, all shades of socialists are also agreed upon the significance of the awakening of social consciousness through education, persuasion and social perception.

It is the vision and hope of the socialists that changes in the modes of production and exchange and in the ownership of the means of production would inevitably lead to a social order free of any exploitation of the labouring classes by the existing capitalist class. It is that kind of classless society in which the lost brotherhood of mankind is realized once again. In this image of society, power is equitably distributed and the range of freedom, justice and equality is realized to its maximum. Marx was one of the important votaries of the socialistic ideology maintaining that the capitalistic order is only a historical phase and is bound to develop by virtue of its inherent logic into something else.

Karl was in favour of socialistic experiments because he thought that those who believed in socialism had a right to try out their beliefs. He did plead for an experiment with socialism as its base in the form of
co-operatives, but this does not necessarily prove that he was a socialist. The principles of political economy of J.S. Mill are by no means uncritical of socialism. He feels that it is the common error of socialists to overlook the natural indulgence of mankind and on this ground he fears that the socialist community may stagnate and kill the individuality.

Mill was more of a pragmatist who considered no idea or institution above challenge. He spoke of all institutions and social arrangements merely as provisional; and it was this sense of the unavoidable imperfection of private property which opened the way for trying other schemes. He asserted the mitigation of inequalities, especially those resulting from the ownership of land and rejected the theory saying that property rights were inalienable and inviolable and instead accepted their relativity. As a means for eliminating extremes of inequality of wealth, Mill proposed several restrictions on the rights of inheritance and bequest. In so questioning property rights, he challenged one of the main grounds of opposition to socialist theories.

Further, Mill's dominant concern was whether socialism or private property would lead to the utility principle and allow most scope for liberty, individuality and self-development. The decisions to choose between
Socialism and private property lies only in one consideration — as to which of the two systems is compatible with the greatest amount of liberty and spontaneity. His ideal society, with its social and economic dimensions, was the one which combined maximum liberty with the maximum of economic justice. But he was most unwilling to commit himself a priori to any system without the cautious and slow test of practice.

Mill also held that men could change capitalist institutions through a rational perception of what they considered to be the defects of institutions. Mill did not entertain the belief that institutions could change by themselves or by the idea of transition by revolution. He had sympathies for socialism, more as an evolutionary socialist who lived in the climate of the eighteenth-century faith in the intellectual progress of mankind. Like Marx, Mill also believes that ideological beliefs are not a matter of chance but are the product of socio-historical conditions.

In the later years of his life, Mill came to be inclined towards socialism. It seems that he took up the issue of probable futurity of labour class and consequently developed an utopia to the concretization of which he hopefully looked forward. It is generally remarked that if he had lived a little longer, he would have become a champion of socialism.
n the concept of unjust power has a new dimension — that of capitalism. The pre-dominant conflict is of labour and capital to a progressive socialist and points to a newer form of tyranny and exploitation. There are the concomitant sequels of alienation, denumanization and self-estrangement at all levels of social existence. Will was conscious of such a possibility. Alienation, it may be mentioned, is the exact antithesis of liberty and follows naturally from despotism and unjust power.

Will the great individualist was disturbed by alienation which he conceived as the loss of identity of men in a crowd. The mass media submerge personal liberty and in the multitude an individual becomes an indistinct entity. The problem of the development of individuality is closely connected with the problem of alienation. According to Will alienation is a process by which part of men’s powers are separated from him and erected into powers independent of him and controlling him.
The problem of alienation however is viewed by Mill in a manner different from that of Marx or Negri. Marx saw the remedy in the abolition of the bourgeois class and consequent ownership of the means of production by all equally, but Mill deals with the problem more deeply. He holds that there are certain problems of industrial society which are inherent in its nature and growth and independent of the legal and political questions of who owns the means of production. He saw the gradual weakening of the classical individual ethics, according to which man was guided by his conscience in choosing between different alternatives of action. Thus we find that Mill has looked at the social and political problems from the point of view of utilitarian ethics which while keeping the vision of an ideal society in view, believes in rational and democratic methods of bringing about social change rather than dramatic and violent methods of revolutionary change.

Mill not only restrained himself from speaking in favour of the effectiveness of a direct revolutionary action but in fact pleaded for an alternative course of action i.e., constitutional method for the transformation of a social set up. One can realize the deep wisdom of such a preference only after visualizing the far-reaching consequences of the earlier alternative. Mill's great
near it is to have realized the necessity for functional efficacy of a projected form of society and its correspondingly political institutions. It is easy to have a romantic vision of an ideal society, but it is far more difficult to be able to assess the functional efficacy of the given structure so as to realize the ideals that an ideology defines itself with.

Mill's influence in politics and morality can be looked upon retrospectively as unprecedented and exceptional. His pleadings were responsible for a number of socio-political reforms not only in England but in other countries as well. In the United States slavery was abolished a little after the publication of Mill's Essay On Liberty. In France, the monarchy of Napoleon III, which Mill hated, came to have a downfall some years after his book was published. In Germany adult franchise was introduced during the immediate post-publication period of the same work. Obviously therefore Mill's optimism with regard to liberty was not misplaced considering how his thoughts gave an impetus to the growth of liberalism.

Mill was a great exponent of the unity of theory and practice. According to him the criterion to ascertain the truth and validity of the values in any ideological framework is to be found in the test and
reality of practice to which all ideals and values must subordinate themselves. The extent to which the values and existing institutional forms permit the human needs to be satisfied provides one measure of the level of civilization that a society achieves.

The quintessence of Mill's endeavours, therefore, was geared to define the ends of human existence. The liberal tradition sired by John Stuart Mill gripped the European mind for its sheer profundity and even the popular appeal of Marx found it a tough precursor. While the violent tempers struck an easier rapport with Marx, it was difficult to dislodge the liberal idea that was the ministry of the rationalist. Mill's rationalism and socialism struck roots so deep that contemporary Europe accepted that the constitutional democracy and universal suffrage could convert a capitalist state into a welfare one.

J.S. Mill did not storm as a revolutionary like Marx to change the world order dramatically by shaking the existing institutional framework from which would rise Phoenix like a new and better world order. He was no idealist dreamer but the pragmatist who sought to combine the depth of his theoretical basis with practical feasibility. He was therefore a surer influence that is the starting point of liberalism even today. Mill's
achievement lies not in becoming a sensational or
transitory controversy but in getting bracketed with
the most profound thinkers who bear being quoted even
after centuries. He becomes the starting point on which
to build infrastructures. Mill carved a place for
himself among the coterie of socio-political philosophers
who are categorized as classic.