

MILL'S CLASSICAL THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

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Mill, the great classical philosopher, was an utilitarian. He believes in the principle of greatest happiness for the greatest numbers, but he differs from Bentham in his principle of utility because according to Bentham if the quantity of happiness is equal, pushpin is as good as poetry. Equal amount of pleasure should be treated equally, but Mill made a clarification in this principle, that which happiness is qualitatively greater than other that should be preferable. He says that everyone is in search of happiness and everyone wants to achieve maximum happiness, but he also believes in harmony of interest, that one's happiness is good for one, therefore all men's happiness is good for all. Therefore man cares for all men's happiness. He says that after weighing the interest man would care for general interest. Man is supposed to feel himself one of the public and whatever is for their benefit to be for his benefit also.

This formula takes us to the root of Mill's theory of democracy. His theory has a moral basis and he holds that in a democratic government one can achieve the greatest beneficial consequences if there exists the necessary conditions for democracy. He gives three conditions for the success of any government :

1. That the people should be willing to receive it.
2. That they should be willing and able to do what is necessary for its preservation.
3. That they should be willing and able to fulfill the duties and discharge the functions which it imposes on them.

And if state is constituted with civilized citizen democracy is the best

government for them. Mill was attempting to lay down the principle that everyone has a right to pursue his own interest in his own way employing whatever means he has or may acquire to this end subject only to moral obligation plus any necessary legal compulsion of each to respect the similar and equal freedom of everyone.

Mill says that man is capable of being sometimes disinterested from his selfish desire. Man can develop his capabilities. Mill does not address man as 'consumer' as other utilitarians do. They say that man makes choice between the policies offered by representative and so he is only a consumer of public policies. But according to Mill man is developer and exertor of his human capabilities. Therefore the worth of an individual is decided by development of his human capabilities.

Mill does not believe that man has only selfish desire which Hobbes believes. But he holds that individual has a sense of morality and he is under a moral obligation to care for other also and he is in the position that he can develop himself. He pointed out that the criterion of the good government is that it should allow the free development of individual capabilities and the worth of an individual is judged by the extent to which it promotes the virtue and intelligence among the people and this development is continuous, and so for him no stationary state of capital and population. This development is not mechanical, but this is natural progress. It is the development of capacities through education. He believes in the greatest happiness for the greatest number. He holds the view that there are qualitative differences in pleasures and so quite right that some happiness is preferable to any other and the aim of society should be to maximise the happiness of the greatest possible number of its number and the wish of the people should not be taken as a consulting wish but it must be put in practice, but it also must be checked by some enlightened people from time to time.

Mill believes that self development or self realization has the intrinsic value and by self development, he means the highest and most harmonious development of human qualities which are distinctive endowment of a human being in the choice of his own plan of life.

"It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in

themselves but by cultivating it and calling it forth within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation."²

Mill rejects the view that the main function of government is to prevent individuals from force and fraud. Rather the good government is that which maximizes the good of the individual. He says

"we may consider, then as one criterion of the goodness of a government, the degree in which it tends to increase the sum of good qualities in the governed collectively and individually, since besides that their well being is the sole object of government their good qualities supply the moving force which works the machinery."³

Representative government is a means of bringing intellect in the society and it is part of the function of state to restrain people from thoughtless errors in the major decision of their lives and more important to make moral judgement and to aid morality and to impede immorality and indirectly by non-coercive methods such as education."⁴

Every government is responsible for the well being of its citizen and if the society is composed of civilization, representative government can do it more successfully because in this type of government representatives are chosen by the citizens themselves.

Mill gives the argument for the participation of ordinary citizen in governmental action. He believes that individuals desire their self perfection and for achieving this participation in government's activity is necessary. He takes this participation as a means of giving political education to individuals and the errors which are probable in this process which are also part of that education because a man learns by his errors also and so for the maximization of happiness, it is necessary that all have right to participate in choosing among government's policies. He says that "it was evident that the only government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state is one in which the whole people participate; that any participation even in the smallest public function is useful. The participation should every where be as great as the general degree of improvement of the community will allow and that nothing less can be ultimately desirable

than the admission of all to assure in the sovereign power of the state.⁵

He phrased man as progressive being and mankind were able to reach a level of mental cultivation. Democracy gives a direct interest to all citizen in government's activity and for participation it gives a right to vote to all citizens, that they can vote for or against any government. Thus it "make people more active, more energetic, in intellect in virtue and in practical activity and efficiency."⁶

Mill was in favour of direct representation because it is a means of mental cultivation but in indirect representation people do not have this opportunity because in indirect representation people do not choose their representatives, but they choose only choosers and so in this process the main purpose of right to vote is lost. In this process people do not have any opportunity to participate in government's activity and it is not useful for increasing political intelligence in people. It prevents people to come in direct contact with their representatives. The indirect representation is based on the view that ordinary people don't have any political intelligence and it is difficult for them to choose suitable policies for themselves and for nation but they can easily know to whom they can trust, to choose their representative but Mill was not agreed on this view. He said that it is a negative idea and each person has capacity to develop themselves and if they have this atmosphere for development, they can develop themselves and can be politically intelligent also.

Power of deciding about matters shifts with the nature of matter. Sometimes it concerns to people themselves but sometimes representatives have right to decide but in a complex matter the legislative committee and experts have right to decide but Mill does not support this view that voters have only right to vote for or against any government after a schedule period and after that they totally depend on their representatives and their wish has no meaning at all. Rather he argued that participation of people in government should be well informed about government's policies and action and by discussing on these matters they can inform to government about their own wish and their wish should not be only consulting wish bur their wishes should be put in practice but oftenly it should be checked by enlightened people.

“Government must be performed by the few for the benefit of many and security of the many, constitution being governed by those who possess the largest share of their confidence.”⁷

He rejects the view that few persons because of their preeminence are entitled to rule over others but the rulers can be only those persons to whom people will choose as their representatives but he says that executive body of the government should be appointed not by popular election not by those of their representatives but by competition.

Mill emphasized that in a representative government, final control should reside in the people, the voter but he believes that actual activity of government is a skilled activity and therefore interference by the unskilled is not appreciated.

Mill introduced the idea of universal franchise that every one should have a right to vote, and open ballot system but he was aware about the danger of democracy, the tyranny of majority. He says the will of the people more over practically means the will of the majority.

If the formula of one person one vote would be applied, there is always possibility of over ruling of majority on minority. There is danger of class legislation, because society is divided in groups and group of working class is always larger than other groups. So they are a numerical majority and if they all have one vote, they will dominate the minority and so that minority has no representative at all but in a real democracy each and every section of the society would be represented, not disproportionately but proportionately. The majority of the electors would always have a majority of representatives but if minority is left without any representative than it is not a real democracy. To secure a fair representation for minority Mill introduced the plan of representation, representation proportionate to numbers. Mill says that this plan of proportion numbers of even division of the electoral body, not two great parties alone. The danger of class legislation is severe problem for democracy but Mill thinks that Hare's plan gives security from this dangers. Because though minority in one constituency cannot be able to choose its representative but minority distributed in all over the country if counted for one will be able to make up a fix quota to choose a representative. Mill says “the majority would insist on having a

candidate worthy of their choice or they would carry their votes some where else and minority would prevail”⁸ and the candidate who is chosen by the aggregate minority for the parliament secure a fair voice for minority and the majority of working class would not dominate the minorities. It does not mean that Mill was against workers’ power, he did not reject the power of numerical majority of working class while as an M. P. he regarded himself as a representative of working class. But he did not want that this majority would dominate the whole parliament. He was willing to grant the working class one half the representation but not more and second thing of the Hare’s plan is “no elector would as at present he nominally represented by some one whom he had not chosen”⁹ because in the local representation voters have only few options to choose any local candidate and if they like to choose any of them, they have right to choose, if they do not like any of the local candidate even then also, they have to choose one of them. They have no other option but in this scheme of representation they have liberty to any candidate all over the country when they want to be represented.

Hundreds of able men of independent thought who have no chance whatever of being chosen by the majority of any existing constituency have by their writings of exertions in some field of public usefulness made themselves known and approved by a few persons in almost every district of kingdom and if every vote that would be given for them in every place could be counted for their election, they might be able to complete the number of the quota. Representative government and leader would not be out voted only because he has done something against the narrow interest of some voters for the national benefit for his task of national reputation.

This scheme of representation depresses the party based politics because Mill thought that in partly system independent thought of intellectuals does not have any effect because they can act only on those principles which party has adopted.

Again this scheme provides a better way for leadership. In democracy though the leaders are choosed by people yet they should be politically intelligent otherwise they can create a danger for democracy. Mill says that to have a wise legislator legislation should be a profession when the value of knowledge is adequately felt a man will choose his legislator as “Constituencies would become competitors for the best candidates and

would vie with one another in selecting from among the men of local knowledge and conscience those who were most of distinguished in every other respect.¹⁰

Mill was anxious to give democracy enlightenment of intellectual people and he thought that though education minority is small in proportion but much weight must be given to their view because to maintain standard of political intelligence, he proposed for the plural voting. Every one has one vote but some have more than one vote that everyone should have an equal voice is a totally different proposition.

He admits that the will of the people even of the numerical majority must be supreme in politics but in spite of that the criterion of what is right in politics is not the will of the people but the good of the people, and therefore our aim is to persuade the people to impose restraint on their own will for the sake of their own good and for this several votes should be given to intellectual people and when people are not equal in knowledge and intellectual vote for all is wrong in principle. For instance, if two persons have joint interest and one is superior to other but we regard both of them equal then we accept something which is not true and it is harmful to their interest, so far the benefit for all superiors should be given more weight than others and it is in the benefit of inferior person to give more value to the view of superior and so how many votes he can secure. Mill says that person's education and profession can give criteria to decide for plural voting. "An employer of labourer is on the average more intelligent than a labourer for he must labour with his head and not solely with his hands. A foreman is generally more intelligent than the unskilled. A banker merchant or manufacturer is likely to be more intelligent than a tradesman because he has larger and more complicated interest to manage."¹¹

In thoughts of Parliamentary Reform Mill has written "that if the unskilled labours had one vote a skilled labour should have two, a foreman perhaps three, a former manufacturer or trader three or four, a professional or literary, an artist a public functionary, a university graduate and an elected number of learned society five or six."¹²

Mill was convinced that Hare plan will now give security from "danger of a low grade of intelligence in the representative body and danger of

class legislation on the part of numerical majority.”¹³

Mill supported plan essentially because it preserved rule by elite, like Hare, Mill was convinced that if the educated classes could have representatives in proportion proper to their number, they would be able to exercise considerable influence beyond these number because of their greater capabilities.

Mill has taken a bold step when he allowed right to vote for women. Though at that time it was supposed that women are mere followers of the male number of their family. Therefore it is useless to give women right to vote but for Mill the participation in itself has unique value and his second argument in its favour has pragmatic value that if women do not use freely it does not create any harm and if they are able it is good. So even if women are not have independent political thought, they must have right, have suffrage. It is itself a means of improvement.

But there are some negative aspects also in his conception of democracy. He restricted suffrage for uneducated and untax-payer. He makes it clear that he is not intentionally against for any sectoin of society and does not want to pull away their suffrage right. Therefore minimum standard of suffrage should be within the limit of every one or at an expense not exceeding what the poorest who earn their own living can afford and even after that any one remains uneducated and excluded from suffrage that it “would not be the society that would exclude him but his own laziness.”¹⁴

He also excluded untax payer from right to suffrage because ha says that “those who pay no taxes disposing by their votes of other people’s money have every motive to be lavish and none to economize...and it is also violating this rule a severance of power of control from the interest in its beneficial exercise.”¹⁵

But according to this view, it cannot be said that Mill had some intention to exclude poor from suffrage, but he says that every one pays indirect taxes they do not have any responsibility on economic matter. Mill thought that some indirect tax should be converted into direct taxes and it also would be within the reach of every one, and it would be necessary for

every adult citizen to pay that direct tax.

Mill denied system of secret ballot because he thought that in this system people would be guided by their selfish interests and they would sacrifice the public interests for their private interests, and Mill says that this secret ballot system cannot emphasise the effect of educated minority. He says that open ballot would encourage people to cast their vote disregarding selfish interests. He takes suffrage as a trust not a right because exercise of any political function is power over other and "if it is a right if it belongs to vote for his own sake on what ground can we blame him for selling it or using it to recommend himself to any one whom it is his interest to please?... The suffrage is indeed due to him among other reasons as a means to his own protection, but only against treatment from which he is equally bound so far as depends on his vote, to protect every one of his fellow citizens. His vote is not a thing in which he has an option; it has no more to do with his personal wishes than the verdict of a juryman. It is strictly a matter of duty he is bound to give it according to his best and most conscientious opinion of the public good."¹⁶

He rejected salary for representatives because he thinks that it would become an occupation and person in hope of return spent more and more and try to win the election at any cost "it would become an object of desire to adventures of a low class and persons in possession with ten or twenty times as many in expectancy would be incessantly bidding to attract or retain the suffrage of the electors by promoting all things honest or dishonest possible or impossible and rivaling each other in pandering to the meanest feeling the most ignorant prejudices of the vulgarest part of the crowd."¹⁷

So in order to save democracy from this demoralizing influence Mill rejected the idea of salary for the member of parliament, but "payment should be in indemnity for loss of time or money."

The duration of parliament cannot be fixed as it depends upon the condition of country that now much time is sufficient for the member of parliament, but it should not be so long that representatives would forget their duties for the groups who have elected them and it should not be so short that he would have no time to understand the real problems of the people and to put his policies into action. So the time would be well decided

according to the situation of the country but Mill says "whether the term is short or long during the last year of it the members are in the position in which they would always be if parliaments were annual, so if the term is very brief there would virtually be annual parliaments during a great proportion to all time".^{18s}

A government can stay in power as long as people have confidence in it but as soon as people lost their confidence in government, government has no right to exist in power but Mill does not give the people right to dissolve the parliament, but he gives this right to executive body. He says "it desirable that some power in the state which can only be the executive, should have the liberty of at any time and at discretion calling a new parliament, when there as a real doubt which of two contending parties has the strange following it is important that there should exit a constitutional means of immediately testing the point and setting at rest"¹⁹ and it is also necessary because "there ought to be any possibility of the deadlock in politics which would ensure on a quarrel breaking out between a President and an Assembly neither of whom during an interval which might amount to years would have any legal means of ridding itself of the other."²⁰

Success of any government depends on the intelligent administrations and citizens, but no government can unite all the wisdom of nation, but a representative government can make best use of it because in it administration depends not only on one man or one group but all people participate in it.

But Mill was aware of this fact also that representative government does not give any guarantee for the goods but it makes them only possible and again democracy is not suitable for all kinds of society, because where the people are uncivilized or in order to be civilized, democracy is not best government for them, because in it citizens should themselves be aware of the government's policies and action and be able to decide what is good for them and what is good for nation. In the consideration on Representative government Mill writes "When the people in order to advance in civilization, have order to advance in civilization, have some less on to learn some habit not yet acquired to the acquisition of which representative government is likely to be an impediment."²¹

Executive body of the government remains in the direct touch with people, and it puts the government's policies before the people, but if this body is dishonest and conscious to only its interest, then it can misguide people and in this condition cannot work successfully and if people are passive and ready to give submission for tyranny, they are not felt fit for democracy.

"Government by a trained officials cannot do for a country the things which can be done by a free government... but freedom cannot produce its best effects and often breaks down altogether unless means can be found of combining it with trained and skilled administration."²²

The greatest danger for democracy comes not from outside of democracy, but it is in itself democracy that is, the danger of class legislation, because in democracy, the government is always of numerical majority and it is possible that ruling power may be under the influence of class interest and they can out the majority. He defined that though democratic government is identified as "self government", the power of people themselves, but it is not true nature of democracy. The people who govern and who are governed are not the same persons. Generally in a democratic government the interests of people are identified with the interest of their rules, because people themselves choose their representative. Mill pointed out that this is a confusion. Both are different and their interests may be different therefore people must need liberty to express their different interests even in the democracy.

He was the defender of the individual liberty. His principle was "the sole end for which mankind are warranted individually or collectively in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their member is self protection that the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community against his will to prevent harm to others."²³ And in the area which concern only the individual himself his right of independence is absolute. He believes that intellectual advancement depends on the freedom of thought and discussion. Suppression of any opinion is indefensible in his view because he writes :

1. Suppressed opinion may be true
2. Suppressed opinion may be false but it may contain a portion

of truth

3. If the favoured opinion is not only partially true, but wholly false then also the expression of silenced opinion is useful because without its expression the received opinion will turn into a dogma.

He believes that there should be a complete freedom of expression if it does not result in immediate harmful effects to others. Men are imperfect and they know only half truths and they have different experiences of life. Therefore for the development of mankind free scope of expression should be given. The development of society and self perfection can be achieved with greater success through freedom of expression than the intolerance and coercion.

Mill also believes in the liberty of action because without this liberty of thought and discussion is meaningless. He draws here the distinction of self regarding and other regarding action, but this is very unrealistic distinction because man is social animal and his every action affects others.

No man is entirely isolated from others. He is a social animal and his every serious effort for any thing affects other also. If we accept Mill's distinction mankind has no freedom of action. Mill gives liberty not only in thought and discussion but in economic relation also. He says that private property is a means of production. It leads to exploitation only when it is associated with monopoly but Mill says it is not unremediable. It can be cured through education. Product is the result of current labour and capital. So both the labour and capitalist have share in product. Without property right no exchange is possible. Mill argued that "the right of property includes then the freedom of acquiring by contract. The right of each to what he has produced implies a right to what has been produced by others if obtained by their free consent."²⁴ Right of property, since the producers must either have given it from good will or exchanged it for what they esteemed an equivalent and to prevent them from doing so would be to infringe their right of property.

Mill accepts the exchange of property by consent because one has liberty to give his property to others also. Mill believes that private property gives the necessary incentive to efficiency and enterprise and it is a condition

of independence, self respect and personal responsibility.

Capitalism and private property is in his view not contrary to democracy. It guarantees to individuals 'the fruit of their own labour and obstinence of others. Therefore the owner and labour both have share in the product decided by market economy.

Mill says that *laissez faire* is more advantageous than restricted economy. Every one has the right to develop himself and the private property is necessary for the development, but Mill was aware that present distribution of wealth is so much unequal that it makes impossible for working class to develop themselves. The target share goes to those who do never at all and after that to those whose work is nominal and minimum share to the labour and this is against his equitable principle of proportion between work and wages but he says that cause of this unequal distribution is an historical accident not the capitalist principle of property. Reward in proportion to the market value of both the capital and current labour required for capitalistic production. The capitalistic principle of private property cannot be said to be responsible for the unequal distribution of wealth income and power. Capital is often gained by gift or by inheritance. Mill was at the last tried to put a limit on private wealth, that how much a people can inherit, but he had put the limit so high that it becomes useless.

There is several other difficulties also in his concept of democracy. He was an utilitarian and he has tried to justify democracy on utilitarian principle but democracy does not always bring the best beneficial consequences even when the necessary condition for democracy exists. Schumpeter challenges Mill's view that man is master of himself and he only knows what is in his interest. He says that political matter is so much sophisticated today that ordinary man does not understand what is the right approach. Again Schumpeter does not see any intrinsic value in participation.

At first Mill gives right of liberty to governed for their protection from governed, but he concludes that minorities of elites should be protected from the majority of ordinary people.

He also believes in equality, but he himself violates his principle of equality by providing plural votes to educated. He also restricted right to

franchise to uneducated and untax payers. Though he made it clear that he does not want initially to exclude any section of society from franchise. Yet it is clear from his point of view that he was afraid from the strength of ordinary man and tried to put a limit on his strength.

He was a liberal thinker and instead of changing liberalism in democratic manner, he changed democracy in liberalism. Democracy is desired by him not because it ensures people's interest but it compels rulers to take account of the interest of their subject and to ensure that rulers will care for the interest of people, he advocated the universal suffrage and annual parliament, but he does not give any answer what the guarantee for this annual parliament and suffrage is.

His principle of democracy gives only empty liberty because he gives liberty to do anything only on that point, which does not concern to others but man lives in society and so what significantly he does for himself affects others also.

In the conclusion it is clear that though Mill believes in democracy and democratic ideals yet he was not bold enough to accept all the consequences of the democracy. He starts his notion of democracy by saying that governed should be protected from the tyranny of governor but he ends with the view that minority of elite should be protected from the tyranny of majority.

NOTES

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