

Introduction to Western Political Thought
Professor Mithilesh Kumar Jha
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati
Lecture No. 30
J S Mill - II: On Liberty, Representative Government
& Critical Assessment of his Thought

Hello and welcome everyone. This is a second and concluding lecture on John Stuart Mill. This is also the last lecture in this course, 'Introduction to Western Political Thought'. In today's lecture, we will look at Mill's views on liberty and representative form of government before looking at the critical aspects of his thought and philosophy. In the previous lecture on Mill, we have discussed his views on utilitarianism and *Subjection of Women*. And also, the personal and political life of John Stuart Mill and his major works.

(Refer Slide Time: 1:32)

Mill's views on Liberty

- Mill's *On Liberty* (1859) is a classic defence of liberal individualism. His defence of individual liberty and freedom is based on his belief in human perfectibility. He considered human beings capable of self-improvement through the exercise of their own choice and reason without coercion from external authority. It is through the exercise of their moral and rational faculties that human beings, according to Mill, develop their own personality or individuality. This they could do in the condition of absolute freedom – in the absence of external control or interferences.
- Mill's arguments in favor of liberty are embedded in his utilitarian philosophy; however, it also goes beyond that. He, like many other enlightenment thinkers, believed that human beings could improve themselves and society by thinking for themselves; by exercising their own rational choice. Thus he argued against the conformity which stifles thought and imagination. If human beings are merely conforming to the prevalent norms in society, they will never develop the moral worth or character of their own. He considered liberty as the precondition for the intellectual and moral growth of individuals, which, in turn, would lead to overall growth and prosperity in society.
- According to Mill, 'human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it; but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing'. Therefore, it is a crime to deprive the individual of developing his or her own character or individuality. He wanted such liberty to be extended to women and the working class as well.

Today, we will particularly focus on his views on liberty and the representative form of government. Mill's text, *On Liberty*, is a classic defense of liberal individualism. One thing we need to understand, although his defense of liberty is seen as the classic defense of liberal individualism or the notion of freedom, Mill was a utilitarian philosopher. He argued in support of liberty or extension of rights or equality and liberty to women or working class. He also justified it in sense of how that help would lead to moral, material, and intellectual improvement of individual and society as well.

Mill was a utilitarian philosopher yet this text, *On Liberty* is seen as a classic defense of the liberal notion of individualism. His defense of individual liberty and freedom is based on his belief in human perfectibility. That is to see that human being has an immense capacity for self-improvement. They can do only when they are provided with a condition of freedom to develop, to grow, to improve themselves according to their own will and inner conscience.

So, he considered human beings as capable of self-improvement through the exercise of their choice and reason without coercion from the external authority. Let us understand this point that when a human being gets an opportunity to exercise his will or reason. In most of the societies, individuals prefer to conform to the existing or prevailing ideas and norms. In following or copying the prevailing notions of a good or moral, desirable action, an individual does not exercise his, her rational faculty.

That is not the way for progress or self-improvement. Like other faculties such as physique or body which requires constant practice or exercise to develop physical capacity, similarly, Mill's argued that human being could improve themselves only when they exercise their will or choice without interference or depending upon the external values or instructions from society or any authority over himself other than his will or dictates of moral or intellectual thinking.

This is similar to say, the Kantian idea of coming out of the self-imposed immaturity condition in the sense. That is, rationality or reason should be a guide of action. But one can learn and develop it for himself and his society only when they develop the courage to act according to their will and rationality. Somewhat similar to that in Mill's defense of individual liberty, that it helps them to develop their rational or moral faculty when they exercise them on the matter of choice or options that concern their life. Therefore, they should not be dependent on external authority or society.

It is through the exercise of their moral and rational faculties that human beings, according to Mill, develop their personality or individuality. So, how you differentiate a man from another man is based on how that particular person has used his reason and rationality to develop his personality and individuality. So, they could do in the condition of absolute freedom, and therefore, freedom and liberty is necessary or a precondition for the individual to self-improve or

bring about progress in society. And this should be in the absence of any kind of external control or interference.

Mill's arguments in favor of liberty were embedded in his utilitarian philosophy as well. However, it goes beyond that and there is, in this text, and as we have seen while discussing his views on utilitarianism, he considered utility or 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' as the basis of measuring a value. However, he added the qualitative aspect of pleasure, that is, all kinds of pleasure are not of the same and equal moral worth. So, reading a book is, according to Mill's logic, a higher-order or superior source of pleasure like walking or having a cup of coffee or watching a movie. Thus, all kinds of pleasure are not or equal, and the same moral worth. He made a superior or inferior kind of pleasure in utilitarian philosophy.

Similarly, in his argument in liberty and later, we will discuss his views on representative government. He continued to use the utility or 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' as the basis for assessing or measuring the value of liberty or representative government. Nonetheless, he also went beyond that. And his defense of liberty was in a sense, not confined to the utilitarian philosophy or the logic of utilitarian philosophy as well. He like many other enlightenment thinkers believed that human beings could improve themselves and society by thinking for themselves, not relying on the existing prevailing norms in society and that is the reason for stagnancy.

When an individual subject himself or herself to the prevailing norms and values, there would not be the development of thought or innovation or new ideas. So, once human beings develop this attitude of conformity to the existing norms, there would be no progress, no enlightenment, no improvement in society or individuals. Like many other enlightenment thinkers, Mill believed in this capacity of a human being to improve himself and the society that they can do when they exercise their reason or rationality in the conditions of freedom without coercion or interference from the external authority.

So, they can do so by exercising their rational choice, thus, he argued against the conformity which stifles thought and imagination and if human beings are merely conforming to the prevalent norms in the society, they will never develop the moral worth or character of their own. One of the reasons Mill justified was that freedom would allow individuals to develop his or her

personality. And that is of ultimate importance not just for the individual himself, but also, for the society. Let it bring about new ideas, new imaginations, or innovations and prosperity. He considered liberty as the peak condition for the intellectual and moral growth of individuals, which in turn would lead to overall growth and prosperity in the society.

According to Mill, his justification for liberty or absolute liberty of individual was based on his understanding of human nature, that is, human nature is not fixed, rigid or like a product, it constantly improves itself. That it can do once it is provided with the condition of freedom or liberty. For him, human nature was not a machine to be built after a model. So, there could not be a fixed model built either by society or religious authority, or state. There could be a one size fit model for all the individuals. Individuals develop their personality, and individuality, according to their will and conscience.

He argued that human nature was not a machine to be built after a model and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it. But it is like a tree which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides according to the tendency of the inward forces that make it a living thing. So, this living entity or living thing in human subjectivity should grow on all sides without imitating or following the model prescribed by society or religious authority or by the state.

An individual can develop his or her individuality or personality once he or she is allowed to and guided by his or her internal conscience, which is the driving force or living thing in the human being. Therefore, liberty should be given and human character or individuality should not be based on the model provided by society or religious authority or by the state. Therefore, according to Mill, it is a crime to deprive the individuals of developing his or her character or individuality and this is the classic statement in liberal philosophy.

It wants the individual to define himself as a self-defining autonomous subject, having the reason or rationale capacity that takes decisions concerning his or her life. And on that basis, they also justify the institution of the free market which determines the fair price, or worth of an individual or real worth of an individual or product. Mill wanted such liberty to be extended to women and the working-class that we have also discussed in the previous lecture.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:03)

➤ Mill describes different facets of liberty – liberty of thought, speech, and expression; liberty to make choices and act accordingly on the matters concerning one's own life, and liberty to form an association. He argued for absolute freedom in matters of thought, speech, and expression. This could be best understood through this assertion by Mill –

If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.

➤ Mill's defence of absolute freedom of thought, speech, and expression is based on his philosophy of the multifaceted nature of the truth. Believing in the fallible nature of human beings as well as their capacity for self-improvement, Mill argued that no one opinion could see the truth in totality. Therefore society would benefit if it allows all ideas and opinions to be freely expressed. Thus what society holds as truth should be subjected to scrutiny by those having contrary opinions. If it is true, then trust in society's opinion becomes more firm and it would become a living truth capable of molding character; however, if such an opinion of society is wrong, then society would have an opportunity to correct itself.

➤ Regarding freedom to choose and make decisions about one's own life, Mill argues that 'over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign'. He thus makes a distinction between self-regarding and others-regarding functions.

3

Mill discussed different facets of liberty. He talked about liberty of thought, speech, and expression which also included publication, discussion, free debates, or free speech. And also, liberty to make choices and act accordingly on the matters concerning one's life and liberty to form associations. When Mill talked about liberty, he meant these three things. One is to give the individual freedom to think, write, speak, discuss, and express, so freedom of thought, speech, and expression include discussion, publication, free speech is one absolute freedom that he talked about.

The second aspect of freedom and liberty in Mill was that human beings also should be given the liberty to act according to their moral, intellectual choice or options, and society should not interfere. Only on the condition of harm principles, society can be justified to regulate or interfere in the affairs of individuals against their will to prevent them to harm others. Otherwise, individuals should be left free to take decisions or make choices about their own life. Society, authority, or committee have no business in the interference on matters which concern his life.

And this aspect of liberty is that individuals should be free to form an association and then learn the civic and political values, and how to behave responsibly in the representative government, and how to hold the government accountable as a free, and equal citizen. He argued for absolute freedom in matters of thought, speech, and expression. So, there should not be any regulation, limit, or control on this aspect of liberty that is freedom of thought. One should be free to think the way you want to think. State, society, community, religious authority should not tell you

what you should think and what you should not think. And this thinking is the basis for all progress when individuals use their capacity to reason or rationality, to arrive at certain understanding and act accordingly.

Now, on the acting part, there could be some regulation which Mill talked about in his argument of Harm's principle. But in terms of thinking and expressing the way you think, there should not be any limit or control. It has to be absolute freedom of thought and expression. This could be best understood from the assertion by Mill and this is the brilliant defense of individual liberty to think and express freely. He argued that if all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person was of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he if he had the powder, would be justified in silencing mankind.

Mill's argued that if the whole mankind, except one, was of one opinion, let us take the example a certain thing should be done and one person is of the contrary opinion, still, the mankind does not have right or cannot be justified in silencing that one person, then if that person has the capacity and make an argument to silence the whole mankind. If you think about a breakthrough in science, technology, innovation is carried by one individual acting according to their rational will and not conforming to the prevalent social understanding or social norms.

So, this is the brilliant defense of individual liberty that he gave the one-person justifiable right to silence the whole mankind rather than the whole mankind silencing the one person and his views. And there is the utilitarian argument for such justification as well. Mill's defense of absolute freedom of thought, speech, and expression is based on his philosophy of the multifaceted nature of the truth. So, truth is something that should guide our behavior, it should also guide the behavior of the state and representative institution. But how do we come to know about the truth?

Can one person, one community, one section of the society claim that their understanding or opinion is based on the totality of the truth? And what is this totality of truth? Can it be captured by the opinion of one person, one segment in the society? Or it is the totality of opinions? Or it can be the opinion of one person as well, in the case of this argument, that one person, if he has the courage can silence the whole mankind rather than that whole mankind silencing his opinion.

Mill's argument or defense for the absolute freedom of speech, expression, and thought is based on this idea of the multifacetedness of the truth. So, all the opinion contained certain elements of truth, but none of them, in isolation, contained the totality of the truth. Society, as a whole, develop their correct understanding or improve that understanding, only when it allows all kinds of opinions to be expressed freely. And that freedom of expression will allow the majority opinion or the prevalent opinion in any given point in society to improve it further.

Or it considers something as truth to have more firm belief or trust in the prevalent norms, but if the prevalent norms are wrong, society would have the opportunity to correct itself. And that is possible when it allows absolute freedom of thought, speech, and expression. So, believing in the fallible nature of human beings that individually or in groups, we may be wrong, our opinion may have certain elements of truth, but it may not have the other elements of truth. Therefore, he wanted all kinds of opinions to be expressed recognizing that they might have certain elements of truth. But they could not claim truth in the totality constituted when all kinds of opinions are expressed freely in society.

So, believing in this fallible nature of human beings and their capacity for self-improvement, both these things are something, the basis for the justification of the absolute right of speech and expression. Human beings are fallible, which means, they may make mistakes. But they can also learn from their mistakes and improve themselves. That is possible when the ideas are freely expressed and exchanged in society. Thus, individuals' moral and rational faculty will improve, so will be the overall progress or improvement in society.

Mill argued that not one opinion could see the truth in totality. Therefore, society would benefit if it allows all ideas and opinions to be freely expressed. Thus, what society holds as truth should be subjected to scrutiny by those having a contrary opinion. So, even if some sacred or sacrosanct beliefs and ideas, which majority in the society subscribe to, even those ideas should be subjected to the opinions of the contrary thinkers or those who have contrary opinions. Only when the opinions are freely exchanged or experimented with, then we know the worth of an opinion.


And if it satisfies the public scrutiny by those who are having a contrary opinion, then our belief, and trust in that idea grow. We mold our character according to that. But if the prevalent norms

and the opinion in society is wrong, we have the opportunity to improve from improving it further by learning from the contrary opinion. He argued that if the opinion of the society was true, then trust in society's opinion became more firm and it would become a living truth capable of molding human character.

However, if such an opinion of society is wrong, then society would have an opportunity to correct itself. Therefore, freedom of speech and expression should be absolute without any regulation, limits, whatsoever, according to John Stuart Mill. Regarding freedom to choose or act according to one's choice or option to make decisions about one's life, Mill argued that over himself, over his body and mind, the individual is sovereign. So, he did not accept any authority on a person, body, or mind. In that sphere of life, he should be sovereign.

There should not be interference or control by the external authority. However, made a distinction between the self-regarding action, when he talked about liberty of action. Individuals are free to choose and opt for a particular course of action, freedom there lies in giving the individual absolute freedom to make decisions on matters that concern his life. But on matters that may influence, or that has an influence on other lives or it can harm the lives of others, then the society and external authority can interfere or control or limit the behavior of individual or action of the individual. He made a distinction between the self-regarding and other-regarding function.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:35)

- 
- Mill does not want society or any other collectivity to interfere with an individual's self-regarding functions. He argued that "the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their member, is the self-protection...the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant". Thus, society or any collective groups could not impose their ideas of 'good', 'morality', or 'wise course of action' on the individual against his/her will.
 - Thus the only ground of interference in the individual's actions is known as the *harm principle*. So if any individual's action results in the harmful impacts on others, then society or authority has the right to interfere and regulate such behaviors; however, they could not do so because they 'think' or 'perceive' certain actions of an individual as a threat to others. However, this distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding function is problematic and not as clear as Mill likes it to be.
 - Mill's defence of liberty also includes freedom to form associations. He did not want the government to perform all the public utility functions. The free association of individuals brings fresh and innovative experiences. And a plurality of approaches benefits society and helps its members to improve morally, materially, and mentally through participation in free associations.

4

Mill did not want society or any other collectivity to interfere with an individual self-regarding function. On the matters that concern an individual's life, his moral, intellectual choices, there should be absolutely no interference from the external authority. However, he argued that the state or society or any external authority could regulate or limit the actions of an individual in a minimal way, where individual actions could harm other individuals.

So the sole end, he writes, for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their member, is the self-protection. The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will is to prevent harm to others. And this is also known as the harm principle in Mill's defense of liberty. His good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.

Mill argued, for instance, the society or any collective group could not impose their ideas of good, morality, or wise course of action on the individual against his or her will. At most, they can persuade or convince them. But they must not impose their idea of good, moral action or wise action on the individuals against their will. They can do so to prevent the individual from harming others.

Otherwise, individuals should be left free in a civilized society, where the organization of that society is based on the rational principle and belief in the individual rationality or individual capacity to self-improvement. They can do so when they are allowed to exercise their rationality

and not guided by the morality and norms in society. If they do, then there is no progress, improvement, and no development in the rational or intellectual faculties of individuals or society.

So, for the overall benefit of society, individuals should be left free to make decisions that govern their life. But only on those actions which can harm others, society, and state can interfere, but that is minimal. The only ground of interference in individual action is known as the harm principle in Mill's theory on liberty. If any individual's action results in harmful impacts on others, then society or authority has the right to interfere and regulate such behaviors. However, they could not do so because they think or perceive certain actions of an individual as a threat to others.

When there is real danger or harm to others, only then society and any external authority can interfere in the actions of the individual. They cannot do so because they think or perceive, so it is like an absolute defense of negative liberty. That means the area of life which concerns individual on a person or self-regarding actions, he should be left free even to make decisions about the well-being of his life or thinking the way he or she likes or choosing to do certain actions according to their concerns.

Society or state has no business to interfere in those affairs. They can interfere only on the condition when the actions of an individual can harm others. They cannot do it because they think or perceive certain thoughts, ideas, and actions have the potential to harm others. Only when there is a real or imminent threat, only then they can interfere, not based on their thinking or perception about individual actions or thoughts.

So, there is a kind of harm principle that gives the society and state a very minimal authority or warrant to interfere in the individual's liberty to act according to their will or rational decision. However, for many critics or scholars, this distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding function is problematic and not as clear as Mill's like it to be. Suppose, going by Mill's argument, the individual is free to listen to music. Now, individual lives in society, and listening to music may hamper the other individual's choice or decision to study in silence. Now, how you can differentiate the self-regarding functions of an individual not having an influence on others in society?

Similarly, you can take the example of a property. The individual in the free society is free to use his or her property in any manner he or she likes. Suppose, if that use of the property has a negative influence on others in the society, where one can draw the line between self-regarding and other-regarding functions. So in the real, living historical experiences of the individual, it is very hard to differentiate between these self-regarding functions of the individual and others regarding functions.

Let us take the example of abuse, whether it is drug abuse or another kind of perverted behavior, that may be limited to the individual. But it has the potential to harm the society and social fabric of morality. So, how you are going to differentiate between the self-regarding and other-regarding functions is not very clear and that led many scholars to criticize Mill's theory of self-regarding and other-regarding functions. Mill's defense of liberty also included the freedom to form associations and that is where individuals learned to participate in the affairs of the community or managing the common affairs of the whole society.

When they are allowed to form association freely, without control or regulation from the government. Mill did not want the government to perform all the public utility functions and this we will discuss when we discuss his views on representative government as well. He wanted local authority or decentralization of power to be done in such a manner that individuals learn to manage their affairs. That is the kind of learning or educative experience for the citizens in representative government as well.

So, the free associations of individuals bring fresh and innovative experiences. And a plurality of approaches benefits society and helps its members to improve morally, materially, and mentally through participation in free associations. These are some of the views of Mill on liberty. Now, I will move on to his views on representative government.

(Refer Slide Time: 32:57)

Views on Representative Government

- Mill discussed his views on representative government, democratic rule, and how governance should be based on both participation and competence in his *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861). According to Mill, the representative form of government is the best model of government for the people educated enough to take responsibility for their own affairs. He thought that the executive should be chosen by and accountable to the representative assembly who are, in turn, chosen by and answerable to the people themselves. Thus it ensures, in a limited sense, the sovereignty of the people!
- According to Mill, the basic function of the government is to ensure that existing skills and intelligence of the people is utilized for furthering the common interest of the whole population; second, the process of governance is used to enhance the participation of the people and thereby improving their moral and intellectual faculties. Thus, a representative form of government, for Mill, is a model for educating the citizens in managing the common affairs of the community.
- However, Mill was very apprehensive of democratic and representative government. Although like Tocqueville (1805-1859, and the author, *Democracy in America*), he considered them indispensable, he thought it could jeopardize the liberty or freedom of the individuals. Mill argues that in comparison to despotism, there is a greater threat to an individual's liberty in a democracy. In a democracy, people's representative rule in the name of common interest, and people are less vigilant about their freedom. Therefore, Mill argues for the greater vigilance against the threat to individual liberty not just from the 'self' government but also from the majority opinions in society.

5

So, in this discussion on representative government or democratic rule, that is necessary to make this clear that Mill was talking about a representative government or democratic rule deliberately avoiding the use of democracy. Because there was a possibility or danger in democracy, that is, in the name of self-government or interest of the community, the liberty of individuals could be jeopardized or it might have led to unworthy representatives. He was very cautious about using the term representative government and not democracy when he discussed the state and political authority.

His discussion on the representative government or democratic rule or how governance should be based on participation and he was in support of the extension of the right to vote or inclusion of new members in the participation or choosing the representatives in the democratic state. He combined both participation with competence and he discussed in the consideration of representative government published in 1861.

According to him, the representative form of government was the best model of government for people who are educated enough to take responsibility for their affairs. These are the basic points on which he denied the representative government in non-European societies. That is, something fundamentally problematic in Mill's defense of the representative government.

His idea was that governance is a serious business. It requires the citizen to be responsible enough to take ownership of their action. So, the right to choose one's representative and the whole representatives were accountable to act according to the laws, constitution, and should not use the power arbitrarily and it would need the enlightened or active citizens.

Therefore, he argued that a representative form of government was the best suitable or best form of government only for those educated people rational enough to take responsibility for their affairs. When they learned the capacity to manage their collective affair, only for them this form of government was suitable and not for non-European societies whom he thought were not educated or rational enough to manage their affairs and that is similar to the prevalent imperialist view on civilization mission or white man's burden to civilize the whole humanity.

So, one also needs to make this clear that he was also not in favor of direct democracy, which means, people themselves governing. Because representative government combines participation with competence, that means those who are skilled or responsible in the business of governance are given the duty of executive or implementation of policies. And representative according to Mill, like Edmund Burke and many other conservatives, knows what is best for the people.

The participation of the people in the business of governance should be limited to elect a worthy representative. And that should be based on popular participation. But the business of governance should be carried on by those who are competent enough to serve the interest of the community or protect the interest of the community. He thought that the executive should be chosen and accountable to the representative assembly who are in turn chosen and answerable to the people themselves. So, there is a kind of election by the people of their representatives, and representatives, in turn, elect the executive body.

Thus, it ensures in a limited sense, the sovereignty of the people. People remain the ultimate sovereign and according to Mill, the basic function of the government is to ensure that existing skills and intelligence of the people is utilized for furthering the common interest of the whole population or community. Second, the process of governance is used in such a manner that it enhances the participation of people and thereby, improving their moral and intellectual faculties. So, the governance or process of governance for Mill was not just about the exercise of power,

although, in the exercise of power he wanted the best in any societies to be called for in the business of governance.

However, the whole process of governance should be done in such a manner that the citizen, at last, learns how to manage their common or collective affairs. And in that sense, it is a kind of public education for the citizens. Here, the objective of the government or the best government is decided based on whether it uses the best existing skills or intellect for the governance and whether it enhances the overall moral and intellectual faculties of the citizens or not.

So, that should be the two basic criteria for deciding the nature of a government. In modern times, he considered a representative form of government that is most suitable for that and not a despotic or authoritarian form of government. A representative form of government, according to Mill, was a model for educating citizens in managing the common affairs of the community. However, Mill was very apprehensive of democratic and representative government.

Although like Tocqueville who wrote, *Democracy in America*, in two volumes, this is the classic work on the functioning of modern democracy and the danger of democracy. So, there is so much focus on equality, according to Tocqueville, when he studied democracy and its functioning in America, that it might jeopardize individual liberty. Similarly, Mill also recognized the danger or threat to individual liberty inherent in democracy.

So, like Tocqueville, Mill also considered democracy indispensable. However, he thought it could jeopardize the liberty or freedom of the individuals. Mill argued that in comparison to despotism, there was a greater threat to an individual's liberty in a democracy. That might appear paradoxical to us in contemporary times, that how could threat to individual liberty be more in a democracy than despotism. Mill argued that in despotism, the government was based on the contradiction of interest between subjects and ruler, and subjects are ever vigilant about the encroachment of liberty by the rulers and despotism.

Whereas, in democracy, there is a kind of laxity and realization that democracy is the self-government, governed by their self-representative. And there is no vigilance about when a democratically elected government or representative, usurp individual liberty. Therefore, he argued that citizens take liberty for granted in democracy and that is the real or greater threat for

individual liberty that exists in democracy, not in despotism. Because there, individuals or subjects are ever vigilant about the encroachment by the rulers or state.

But in democracy, they think it is a rule-based on self-government, there is no danger to their liberty but that is not the case according to Mill. Because the ruler or government may take away the individual rights in the name of protecting the collective interest or managing the common affairs of citizens. In a democracy, people's representative's rule in the name of common interest, and people are less vigilant about their freedom.

Therefore, Mill argued for greater vigilance against the threat to individual liberty and not just from the self-government and self is the belief, people do not rule themselves directly in the representative government, they rule themselves through their representative, and that representative once elected to the power, use it to usurp their freedom or liberty. So, he wanted democratic citizens to be more vigilant, ever vigilant from such kind of usurpation, not just from their elected government. But also, from the majority opinions that prevailed in the society.

Sometimes, in democracy, because it is a number game, and that is the next point we will discuss, the tyranny of the majority. The majority opinion may stifle individual thinking. And it does so in a unique way. Unlike authoritarian and despotic rule, where there is the excessive use of violence or physical force to stifle dissenting opinion. In a democracy, in a formal sense, everyone is allowed to express his opinion. However, there is the possibility of danger that somebody because of their opinion, may not be given positions in employment in the universities, newspapers, or institutions of the state, and not because there is a kind of imprisonment or use of direct physical violence against them. But it operates in a very different way.

He wanted the individual in the democratic government to be more vigilant, not just against their government, but also, about the majority opinions that prevailed in the society and the overall purpose for democratic elected representative government. For Mill, it is the improvement of society's prosperity and individuals' rational and moral faculties. So, the purpose of education is not just to exercise the power but to create the conditions, where individuals and society together can improve themselves. And that is possible when there is a condition of freedom of expression given to all kinds of opinions.

(Refer Slide Time: 44:55)

- Like Tocqueville, Mill thus recognized the dangers of democracy. Mill was equally aware of the threat of the tyranny of majority or numbers in a democracy and representative government. It could be a threat to dissenting or contrary opinions. Therefore, he argued that all opinions, including the minority opinion, should be not just allowed to be expressed freely, but they should have sufficient representation in the representative assembly. To avoid the tyranny of the majority and ensure the representation of all shades of opinion, including the minority opinion, Mill, therefore, supported the proportional system of election.
- He also wanted that voting should be extended to all except infirm, illiterates, criminals, and those dependent on the state's welfare for their survival. Mill also realized that the widening of participation could lead to the election of incompetent and unworthy representatives. Therefore, he also argued for plural voting - that is, the weightage of an individual's vote should be dependent on his/her educational attainments and skills. He argued that there should be a 'graduated scale of educational attainments, awarding at the bottom, one additional vote to a skilled laborer and two to a foreman, and at the top, as many as five to professional men, writers and artists, public functionaries, university graduates, and members of the learned societies'.
- Thus Mill combined the value of participation with the value of competence in his description of the functioning of representative government. He was also a supporter of decentralization and devolution of power to the local bodies in which citizens could directly participate to manage the local affairs. Thus the purpose of representative government, according to Mill, is self-improvement of the citizens. However, strangely, he denied it to non-European societies.

6

Like Tocqueville, Mill thus recognized the dangers of democracy or dangers that exist in a democracy. And Mill was equally aware of the threat of the tyranny of majority or majority opinions or numbers. So, the representative government functions on the principle of number. Those who are in the majority are called to rule. Those who are in the minority, are in the opposition or do not exercise power.

It may create the condition of tyranny that is ever-present in a democracy or representative government and it could be a treat to any dissenting or contrary opinion. Because those who are in the majority think what they think and whether their opinion is right or only truth. And as we have discussed, that no sections or groups in society can claim the totality of the truth. All sets of opinions contain elements of truth and once those are allowed to be expressed freely, or represented in the assembly of representatives, then only we get to know what is the correct view and what should be the course of action for the state or society as a whole.

However, because the representative government is based on numbers, it may lead to the tyranny of the majority, where minority opinion or dissenting opinion or contrary opinions may not be allowed. Not using the direct force, but in certain other ways like not giving the scope of dissenters in employment or the institutions of the state, university, media. And that way, the individual has formal freedom but they cannot realize it. The tyranny of the majority is

something that makes Mills uncomfortable with democracy and a representative form of government.

Therefore, he argued that all opinions including the minority opinions should be not just allowed to be expressed freely. But they should have sufficient representation in the representative assembly. So, their representatives of people should be elected in a manner where they represent all opinions in the society and its benefits in formulating policy or governing the state and bringing about overall improvement and prosperity in the society.

So, he did not want just minority or contrary or dissenting opinions should be allowed to be expressed but they should also have or given representation in the representative assembly. And to avoid the tyranny of the majority and to ensure the representation of all sets of opinions, including the minority opinion. Mill, therefore, supported the proportional system of election which allow all sets of opinions to be represented and not just simple majority or first past the system (48:12)

He wanted that voting should be extended to all except infirm, illiterates, criminals, and those who are dependent on the state's welfare programs for their survival, everyone should be given the right to participate through their vote. And voting is a responsible act, according to Mill. So, the first principle for representative government is people are educated or rational enough to take responsibility for their actions and managing the common affairs of their society through their representatives.

So, the right to vote is a responsible act in a representative government according to Mill. However, Mill also realized the widening of participation could also lead to the election of incompetent or unworthy representatives. It is possible when you extend the right to vote, there will be a kind of possibility of electing the unworthy representative or incompetent representative who does not know what is in the interest of the community and how to serve or protecting and enhancing the interest of the community.

And this danger was realized by Tocqueville also, where there was a kind of aristocratic, nostalgia about the past, where the public representatives were seen as elected by the people, but having the freedom to decide what is good for the community. Whereas with the widening of

participation, there was a danger in the name of public or common interest, and the representative may further their personal or the interest of a section of their society.

Now, to prevent them, Mill argued for a kind of plural vote, voting, that is the weightage of an individual's vote should be dependent on his or her educational attainments and skills. So, he argued that there should be a graduated scale of educational attainments, awarding at the bottom, one vote, 1 additional vote to skilled laborers and a foreman, and at the top, as many as 5 to professional men, writers, and artist, public functionaries, university graduates and members of the learned society.

In other words, Mill did not make this argument that all votes were equal and should be given equal worth in society. He wanted that there should be a kind of graded weightage for individuals' vote depending upon their educational attainments and public skills. So, from a worker to a professor or a graduate from the university, they should not all be ranked as of equal moral or intellectual worth, and that would come in a way combine then the broadening of participation with competence those who have the capability and competence to rule are called further governing.

So, Mill combined the value of participation with the value of competence in his description of the functioning of the representative government. He was a supporter of decentralization and devolution of power to the local bodies in which citizens could directly participate to manage the local affairs. Thus, the purpose of representative government, according to Mill was self-improvement or education of the citizens. However, strangely, he denied it to non-European society. That is on Mill's views of a representative government.

(Refer Slide Time: 52:24)

Critical Assessment of his Thought

- J S Mill's major contribution to the history of Western Political Thought is his classic defence of individual liberty. He was also a great supporter of free trade and the market. He argued that freedom of thought and expression, together with freedom of actions and association, would lead to overall progress in society. His justifications for absolute freedom of the individual are based on his faith in the limitless scope of improvement for both individuals and society.
- However, there are many inconsistencies in his philosophy. First, his justifications for utilitarian philosophy are not entirely convincing. Although he tried to rescue utilitarianism by providing a qualitative aspect to the quantitative measurement of pleasure or happiness, he accepted utility or the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number as the sound principle of measuring the value of any action or policy. Similarly, his views on higher and lower order pleasures are unsustainable. Who gets to decide which kind of pleasures are morally or qualitatively superior to other pleasures?
- Mill's argument in favor of the extension of equality and liberty to women and the working class is although consistent with the logic of his defence of individual liberty; however, he did not take it to its logical conclusion. For instance, feminist scholars like Susan Moller Okin (1946-2004, *Women in Western Political Thought*) and others, while acknowledging the contribution of Mill's in defence of women's rights, also question him for taking the bourgeois family as a model. He failed to question the institutionalization of male privileges in the traditional family. Similarly, on the one hand, he defended the rights of the working class but also supported free trade and market economy.

7

Now, we move on to critically assess the political thought or philosophy of John Stuart Mill, his major contribution to the history of western political thought, as we have discussed is the classic defense of individual liberty. He was also a great supporter of free trade and the market and argued that freedom of thought and expression together with freedom of actions and association would lead to overall progress in society. His justifications for absolute freedom of individual were based on his fate in the limitless scope of improvement for both the individuals and societies.

So, as we have discussed that human nature should be allowed to grow according to their will or conscience. There are infinite possibilities for growth and self-improvement. On that basis, he justified that individuals should have absolute freedom to make decisions about matters which concern their personal life. However, there were many inconsistencies in Mill's philosophy. First, his justifications for utilitarian philosophy were not entirely convincing.

As we have discussed, for many conservatives or other traditions of philosophers or scholars, utilitarian philosophy is fit for the swine or the pig, not for the human being as a moral, ethical, rational asset. That is, they do not perform action merely for their pleasure or satisfying their pleasure. They perform certain actions with a sense of moral obligation or a sense of duty. That is not entirely governed by their urge for satisfaction.

So, Mill was trying to justify utilitarian philosophy and rescuing it from such critique by providing it moral and ethical foundation, by making it distinction between quantitative pleasure or qualitative pleasure or higher-order pleasure or lower-order pleasure. However, his arguments were in favor of liberty or for women's right or representative government that is based on utilitarian philosophy and it is not entirely consistent and convincing.

He tried to rescue utilitarianism by providing a qualitative aspect to the quantitative measurement of pleasure or happiness. He accepted utility or the principle of 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' as the sound principle of measuring the value of any action or policy. Similarly, his views on higher and lower order pleasure are unsustainable, precisely, because who gets to decide which kind of pleasure is morally or qualitatively superior to other pleasures.

So, following the logic of his views on liberty, one can argue, how to know which kind of pleasure is higher and which kind of pleasure is inferior and that is something which cannot be entirely decided by the individual. And if an individual decides, then how do you know that it should be uniform for all the individuals, that certain actions are morally superior to other actions. Mill's argument in favor of the extension of equality and liberty to women and the working class was although consistent with the logic of his defense of individual liberty, and this is true to liberal philosophy that the rights or freedom that you want for yourself, you have the moral obligation to extend it for the others.

Even those who are of the contrary opinions, you should give him or her, as much freedom as you want for yourself. That is kind of moral obligation in the liberal society, where you fight for defending your right, at the same time, you should extend those rights to those who are having the contrary opinion and that is how society progress and move from one stage to other.

So, his argument in favor of extension of rights, equality, liberty to women or the working class is consistent with the logic which gives on liberty. However, he did not take them to their logical conclusions. For instance, feminist scholars like Susan Moller Okin in *Women in Western Political Thought* and many other feminist scholars while acknowledging the contribution of Mill's defense of women's rights also questioned him for taking the bourgeois family as a model.

He did not alter the role of men and women in the family and accepted the traditional division of labor. He failed to question the institutionalization of male privilege in the traditional family. Similarly, on the one hand, he defended the rights of working-class, but also, supported the free trade and market economy which for many scholars was the basis of their exploitation.

(Refer Slide Time: 57:58)

- In his defence of individual liberty as to act according to one's own 'will' or notion of 'good' without any interference from society, Mill makes a distinction between self-regarding and others regarding functions which, for many scholars, are problematic. So is his views about the 'harm principle'. How far is it correct to allow the individual to use drugs and even harm his own person?
- Mill is also not consistent with his theory of representative government. He did not want it to be extended to colonial societies. He, therefore, is criticized for arguing that non-European societies are unfit for the representative government; and that their best interest is served/protected by the benevolent or enlightened despotic rule.
- He considered the representative form of government as the best form of government, which could help in improving the moral, intellectual, and material condition of citizens. However, he was very apprehensive about the usurpation of individual liberty in a democracy. He not only combined the demand for participation with competence but also advocated plural voting, i.e., more weightage to the educated and skilled citizens. It defies the modern democratic sensibilities based on the principle of 'one man, one vote, one vote, one value'. However, his cautious approach to democracy and representative form of government is still relevant, especially in the context of rising populism and authoritarianism in many modern liberal democracies. Similarly, his views on individuality and liberty have inspired contemporary philosophers like John Rawls and Robert Nozick. Their texts *A Theory of Justice* and *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* respectively resonates some of Mill's ideas on individual liberty and freedom to decide or choose what is good for himself or herself.

8

In his defense of individual liberty as to act according to one's will or notion of good, without any interference from the society, Mill's made a distinction between the self-regarding and other-regarding functions that for many scholars were problematic and not entirely consistent. So, individual action has the potential to affect other individuals and one cannot clearly distinguish when an action of an individual can encroach the freedom of other individuals or vice versa. This self-regarding and other-regarding function in Mill was not consistent and appeared to be problematic to distinguish clearly.

So, it is true with his views on the harm principle. Many would argue that how far is it correct to allow individuals to use drugs or even harm his person or body. There is the argument in Mill that an individual has sovereign authority over his body. To make decisions about his moral and intellectual life. Now, suppose if some individual harm himself, or abuse his body by using drugs, should society or government interfere or not? That leads to certain moral problems in his argument on this harm principle as well.

Mill was not consistent with his theory of representative government; he did not want it to be extended to colonial societies. Therefore, he was criticized for arguing that non-European societies were unfit for the representative government, and his making this reference in the case of India ruled by East India Company, where he was serving for three decades, so did his father. He did not counter this civilization mission of white's man burden argument which justified imperialism and colonialism.

On the one hand, he wanted a society or community to develop themselves, to improve themselves in the conditions of freedom. But deny the same right to self-government to the colonies or non-European societies. And he argued that these colonies or non-European society's interests could be best served or protected by the benevolent or enlightened despotic rule, usually, historically, European countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin American countries.

His arguments of representative government were limited to the European societies which he considered enlightened, and educated society of people who could govern themselves. But non-European societies were not fit to govern themselves. Therefore, they should be subjected to the benevolent or enlightened despotic rule that he detested for the European people. That is the big inconsistencies and criticisms against Mill's argument on representative government.

He considered the representative form of government as the best form of government that could help in improving the moral, intellectual, and material conditions of citizens. However, he was apprehensive about the usurpation of individual liberty in a democracy. He not only combined the demand for participation with competence but also, advocated plural voting that is more weightage to the educated and skilled citizens, that defines our modern democratic sensibilities based on the principle of one man, one vote; one vote, one value.

So, the democratic egalitarian societies that Mills wanted to achieve through representative government and use of reason or freedom was not consistent with his argument in favor of plural voting or giving more weightage to those who are skilled or having more or greater educational attainments. Modern democratic egalitarian societies or sensibilities are based fundamentally on this premise of one man, one vote, and one vote, one values, that is the complete egalitarian principle.

However, Mill saw in them the danger of electing unworthy or incompetent representatives is somewhat true in a modern context as well. If you look at the public representatives, their behaviors, speeches, and their participation, you will feel that they do not truly represent their constituencies or the will of their constituencies. Therefore, the cautious approach there in Mill towards democracy or representative form of government is still relevant, especially, in the context of rising populism and authoritarianism in many modern liberal democracies.

So, you can think of different modern, liberal states, and their leaders and representative, you get to know that their views are not entirely consistent with the democratic or constitutional ideals of their countries. Therefore, Mill's cautious approach is still relevant in understanding the danger of popular participation that could lead to the election of unworthy or incompetent representatives which can jeopardize the democratic institution and use their liberty as well.

Similarly, his views on individuality and liberty have inspired many philosophers like John Rawls and Robert Nozick in their texts, *A Theory of Justice* and *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, respectively, that resonated with some of Mill's ideas on individual liberty and freedom to decide or choose what is good for himself or herself. Mill's argument continued to inspire many philosophers to think about the individual as the basic unit of analyzing the society or polity or economy and individuals should be given the freedom to choose what is good for themselves. It is not the business of state and society to determine a model of good for the individual, rather than, a society that should provide the condition of freedom in which human beings can flourish, and act according to their will or rational understanding of what is good for themselves.

In that sense, Mill's views remain relevant in the contemporary world as well in terms of understanding democracy, its various challenges, and also the role of individuals in the government.

(Refer Slide Time: 65:30)

References

- Boucher, David and Paul Kelly (eds). 2003. *Political Thinkers: From Socrates to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Browning, Gary. 2016. *A History of Modern Political Thought: The Question of Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jha, Shefali. 2018. *Western Political Thought: From the Ancient Greeks to Modern Times*, Delhi: Pearson.
- Mill, John Stuart. 2006. *On Liberty and The Subjection of Women*, ed. By Alan Ryan, New York: Penguin.
- Ryan, Alan James. 2012. *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*, New York/London: Liveright Publishing Corporation.

9

Now, the topics that we have covered in this lecture, you can refer to these books like David Boucher and Paul Kelly's, *Political Thinkers from Socrates to the Present*. Gary Browning, you can read to understand Mill in his time and also in contemporary times. That text is *A History of Modern Political Thought: The Questions of Interpretation*. You can refer to Shefali Jha's text that remains the reference text for this entire course. The text is *Western Political Thought from the Ancient Greeks to Modern times*. And also, John Stuart Mill's, *On Liberty and The Subjection of Women*, you can read. And James Alan Ryan's, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*.

These are some of the texts you can refer to, to understand the arguments of Mill on liberty and representative government and also to understand the critical assessment of his political thought. So, that is all in this lecture, today. I hope you liked it. Do share your comments and feedback. We will be happy to hear and respond. This is the concluding lecture. So, let me remind you to use the discussion forum to ask your queries or any doubts about the lectures in this course or any themes that are related to this course. We will be happy to respond to any of your queries. Do share your comments and feedback. Thanks for listening. Thank you all.