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Mill on India: A Reappraisal

“Mill was not the first, or last, sociologist ignorantly to pontificate about the condition of society-as-a-whole, but that does not make his offerings more acceptable.”¹

Maurice Cowling.

The view of John Stuart Mill on Indian affairs have been analyzed at some length by Eric Stokes, George Bearce, and Abram Harris.² However, their treatment of these views is more expository than critical and fails to examine them against the Indian background to which, if anything, they are supposed to be a studied response. The result of this procedure is that Mill is set up as “a philosopher ruling India” and accorded the obeisance due to his rank; but the severe limitations of his “philosophical view of India” go unchallenged.³ Significant as Mill’s views on Indian affairs are, the enormous impact they have had on the English as well as the Indian mind demands more than a summary of the views followed by an uncritical homage.

Stokes, Bearce, and Harris are agreed concerning the relatively uninfluential character of Mill’s Indian views, and they stress the fact that James Mill was far more influential than his son in determining and formulating the principles of the British Indian administration. Such a juxtaposition of undisputed facts tends to protect the liberal image of John Mill by suggesting that as an Examiner in the East India Company, he was in the unenviable position of making the best of a bad job that was already well-defined for him. The implication of this suggestion is that if Mill’s liberalism takes on an authoritarian character in India, it is the imperial situation that is to blame, not Mill himself.

What this view ignores is the fact that it is John Stuart Mill rather than James Mill who seems to have had a great influence on the minds of Anglo-Indian administrators. It is true that James Mill laid down the

principles of the Indian administration, influenced the attitudes of young civilians towards the natives with his *History of British India*,⁴ and carried the Home Government with him on every important point. But he did not have either the philosophical reputation or the intellectual prestige of his son in the Victorian period or in the years that followed. If James Mill was the final source of Anglo-Indian wisdom, it is John Mill who channelled it to generations of English administrators.⁵ As a gifted and revered popularizer of James Mill, he is at least as influential as, if not more so than, his father in spite of his substantial conformity to the paternal tradition.

But the family resemblance between the views of the two Mills should not be allowed to obscure a few facts. First, if James Mill's views on Indian land revenue are mistaken, it could at least be argued that fifteen years is too short a time in which to judge correctly the effects of a new measure. But John Mill perpetuated his father's mistakes when he ought to have known better. Secondly, if James Mill was an authoritarian, his authoritarianism had the grace of being crude, belligerent, and pugnacious. It spoke from a position of military and technological strength, and therefore a native could at least hope to come to terms with it. But in the hands of John Mill, his father's authoritarian gospel donned the garb of superb altruism, moral superiority, intellectual eminence, and unsurpassed selflessness. It established paternalism as an unshakeable political principle and threatened to doom the natives to a perpetual non-age. Thirdly, however mistaken his views and however crude his authoritarianism, James Mill did not for a moment seek to preserve the *status quo* in Indian society. But for John Mill the safety of the Empire took precedence over the progress of the dependency. In short, John Mill's Indian views reveal him to be a misinformed liberal, an imperialist ideologue, and a myopic Sahib. The aim of the present paper is to seek to suggest this interpretation of the Indian views of John Stuart Mill.

It is important to consider Mill's estimate of Indian society and culture, for this estimate forms the background against which he suggests his regimen for curing the ills of India and rejuvenating her. It seems that his views on this subject were formed almost exclusively under the influence of his father's *History*, of which he read proof sheets when he was twelve years old. He acknowledges the "impulse and stimulus as well as guidance given to my thoughts by its criticisms

and disquisitions on society and civilization in the Hindoo part....”⁶ The beginning was certainly not very auspicious because James Mill’s unsympathetic portrayal of Hindus as barbarians, eunuchs, and slaves, and his condemnation of Indian culture as barbaric on the basis of the Utilitarian standards of mechanization, representative democracy, free trade, deism, and Augustan literature,⁷ were hardly calculated to inspire in John Mill any respect for or promote any genuine understanding of the society whose destinies he was going to control. His estimate, therefore, of the Hindus is just what one would expect from his early conditioning. He writes in his review of Macaulay’s draft *Penal Code*: “The Hindus are a more ignorant and passive people than the French Canadians.”⁸ In *On Liberty* he describes Indians as “barbarians”.⁹ He relents a little in *Considerations on Representative Government* and allows them to be semi-barbarians.¹⁰ Offensive though this view may seem to a people who are morbidly proud of their culture and “spirituality”, it was a commonplace of Anglo-Indian apologetics from the eighteenth century onwards.

Unlike others who held similar views, Mill does not attribute these qualities of “semi-barbarism” to the influence of the tropical climate, nor does he consider them to be inherent in the native “race”. Such popular “scientific” explanations were advanced by Evangelicals like Charles Grant.¹¹ But like his father, John Mill has no use for prejudice parading as science. For instance, while commenting on the view which attributes Irish backwardness and want of energy to “a peculiar indolence and *insouciance* in the Celtic race”, he says: “Of all vulgar modes of escaping from the consideration of the effect of social and moral influences on the human mind, the most vulgar is that of attributing the diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural differences.”¹² He also criticizes Charles Wentworth Dilke for applying this most vulgar mode of reasoning to the natives of India. In a letter to him dated 9 February 1869, Mill writes:

You sometimes express yourself almost as if there were no sources of national character but race and climate — as if whatever does not come from race must come from climate, and whatever does not come from climate must come from race.... You do not, perhaps, go so far as I myself in believing these last causes [good and bad influence of education, legislation, and social circumstances], to be of prodigiously greater efficacy than either race or climate or the two combined.¹³

Following his father's environmentalist diagnosis, then, Mill traces the ills of Indian society to such factors as poverty, Oriental despotism, religion, education, social organization, and defective revenue and judicial administration.¹⁴

The regimen John Mill prescribes for raising the native character and improving the tone of Indian society may be studied under the following subdivisions: land revenue, education, and the form of government suited to India.¹⁵

Revenue

Like his father,¹⁶ Mill is firmly opposed to the zemindari settlement introduced in Bengal by Lord Cornwallis in 1784. This type of land settlement conferred the ownership of the land on well-to-do natives, who were not cultivators themselves but who engaged themselves to the government for a fixed land revenue in return for a certain share of it as compensation. Under this dispensation, the cultivator became the direct responsibility of the landlord or the zemindar, and could not deal directly with the government. Mill believes this system to be "a total failure" in as much as it creates not English but Irish landlords who are "useless drones on the soil" (*CW*, II, 321-22). Furthermore, it is wasteful in as much as it sacrifices the legitimate "pecuniary claim" of the government to no useful purpose, for the zemindars, according to Mill, are interested only in self-aggrandizement, not in agricultural improvement (*CW*, II, 322). Therefore he does not expect the zemindari system to stimulate capital accumulation, which was the final goal of all Utilitarian economic reforms.

The ideal system of land settlement, for John as for James Mill,¹⁷ is the ryotwar tenancy introduced in Bombay by Thomas Munro. This system recognized no intermediaries such as the zemindars, and conferred the ownership of the land on the cultivators themselves, who agreed to pay a fixed rent that was subject to periodic review. Mill expects the ryotwar system to be, like the peasant proprietorship of France and Flanders, "an instrument of popular education" (*CW*, II, 280). He seems to believe that the ryotwar tenancy, which resembles the European form of peasant proprietorship, can exercise the same beneficial influence in India that the latter did in Europe. In Europe peasant proprietorship encouraged prudence, temperance, self-control,

and "self-dependence" which is the parent of many other virtues. It checked "improvident multiplication", encouraged capital accumulation, and stimulated mental activity and intellectual development (*CW*, II, 281-92). Mill believes that what was possible on the banks of the Seine is also possible on the banks of the Ganges.

But it must be remembered that Mill recognizes that the British land revenue administration is superior only in comparison with "the unlimited oppression which existed before", when the only practical limit to exactions was "the inability of the ryot to pay more" (*CW*, II, 323, 320). He must have been aware that quite frequently the British land revenue demand was pitched a little too high.¹⁸ However, on the whole, he is convinced of the comparatively just character of the ryotwar rent.

Mill's failure to recognize the oppressive character of the ryotwar rent is a little surprising. He realizes that the ryotwar tenancy is an improved form of the Irish cottier tenancy (*CW*, II, 319-20). He also knows that the cottier rent is not economic rent in the classical sense,¹⁹ for it is determined by the pressure of the population on land (*CW*, II, 313-18). It should have been obvious to him, then, that the ryotwar rent is not by any means "economic rent". However, he maintains that it is economic rent. And like his father,²⁰ who too did not see that the theory suitable to English capitalist agriculture is not applicable to primitive Indian agriculture, he publicly declares that Indians are as good as untaxed! He writes in his *Memorandum of the Improvements in the Administration of India During the Last Thirty Years* (1858):

Where the original right of the state to the land of the country has been reserved, and its natural, but no more than natural, rent made available to meet the public expenditure, the people may be said to be so far untaxed: because the Government only takes from them as a tax, what they would otherwise have paid as a rent to a private landlord....Any amount whatever of revenue, therefore, derived from the rent of land, cannot be regarded, generally speaking, as a burthen on the tax-paying community.²¹

The account is perfectly convincing if one grants the initial assumption that the ryotwar rent is economic rent. But Mill certainly knew better than that. In short, Mill's views on land revenue are substantially the same as his father's. What is even more important, he is almost on the verge of an insight regarding the true nature of the ryotwar rent if only

he pressed further the comparison between the cottier tenancy and the ryotwar tenancy. But he seems to retreat from the logical conclusion in a sudden access of what may well be filial piety.

Another failure of insight is evident in his inability to realize that the ryotwar tenancy failed to benefit the ryot. He did not see that most of the people he called "ryots" were substantial members of the traditional elite²² who rented their holdings to small farmers who, in turn, sub-rented them to still smaller farmers, and thus created a chain of intermediaries and sub-landlords, with the result that the landless cultivators had to bear the crushing burden of private rents as well as government rent. The situation of the ryot, therefore, in the ryotwar area was not very different from that of the miserable ryot under the zemindari settlement of Bengal. It is possible that Mill did not realize his failure because he was primarily interested in expounding a "progressive" principle and getting it accepted. And he seems to have made the intellectual's mistake of believing that once a theoretical position were accepted, the dream would turn into reality. There is terrible irony in the fact that Mill's "democratical" principles had the opposite effect of encouraging the very class he vividly describes as "useless drones on the soil". But it is an irony of which he was blissfully unaware.

Education

Mill's views on Indian education present a puzzle to the modern reader. Before 1835, the year of Macaulay's famous minute and Lord Bentinck's resolution on Indian education, he argues like a Utilitarian. But after 1835 he argues more like a British Orientalist! In his 1828 dispatch to Madras, he is critical of Oriental learning and the traditional system of Oriental education.²³ The defects of this mode of education, according to him, consist in its exclusive concern with religion and horoscopes, and in its want of cultivation of the intellect in the fields of theology and philosophy. However, in his 1836 dispatch, "Recent Changes in Native Education", he argues for continuing support to this very system of education. This apparent *volte face* leads Bearce to conclude that Mill's unfair impression of Oriental learning "was only a passing phase of Mill's thought".²⁴ Did Mill really cease to be a Utilitarian in the field of Indian education after 1835? Why did he join the Orientalist camp?

Before we discuss Mill's reasons for supporting Oriental education, we must review briefly the most important arguments and assumptions of the Anglicist-Orientalist controversy.²⁵ First, the Anglicists fully admitted with the Orientalists that the only effective medium of instruction is the vernacular. However, both the groups realized that the vernaculars were at that time inadequate for the purpose of imparting instruction. Secondly, both the groups realized that the system of education they envisaged was meant not for the masses but for the Indian elite. The funds for education being very restricted, primary education was never an issue in the controversy. Thirdly, the only disagreement – and no doubt, it is important – between the two groups was regarding the content of education and the medium of instruction. The Orientalists pressed for Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit learning as the content of education, and these languages as the media of instruction, with some “useful knowledge” i.e. Western learning thrown in as a concession to the Home Government, the Utilitarians, and the Evangelicals. The Anglicists, on the other hand, pressed for English literature and European science as the content of education, English as the medium of instruction, and they made no adequate concession to Oriental learning. Fourthly, the Orientalists hoped that the elite they trained would develop the vernacular languages by studying the classics and useful knowledge, translate useful knowledge into the vernaculars, and disseminate Western learning among their less fortunate brethren. The Anglicists too subscribed to the same “filtration” theory of education, though they seemed to believe that the natives would know how to develop the vernaculars even if they did not possess Oriental learning. They did not believe that cultivation of Oriental languages was the only or the most efficient means of making the vernaculars a flexible instrument of modern communication. Finally, both the groups had vocational ends in mind. The Orientalists wanted to train experts in Hindu and Mohammedan law; the Anglicists wanted educated natives to man the subordinate wing of revenue and judicial administration. All these arguments and assumptions were well-known at that time, and Mill could not but have been aware of them when he wrote his dispatch of 1836 which takes issue with Macaulay.

We are now in a position to review Mill's objections to Macaulay's plan for native education. First, he believes that the plan is pedagogically unsound. He writes: “[It is] altogether chimerical to expect that the

main portion of the mental cultivation of a people can take place through the medium of a foreign language..."²⁶ Secondly, he fears that Macaulay's scheme would not promote a "disinterested love of knowledge or an intelligent wish for information."²⁷ It would foster, he is afraid, only vocational training, undermine liberal education, and thus prevent intellectual development, which is for him the only "security" for liberty, and an essential precondition of social and political development. Thirdly, he is afraid that Macaulay's proposal would destroy the indigenous "scholarly class" and create a situation that is politically dangerous, and culturally suicidal for the natives. The political danger would consist in the resentments the proposal would arouse and in the suspicions it would stimulate among the masses regarding the intentions of the Government. An abrupt change of policy, he declares, "tends to destroy all confidence on the part of the people in the wisdom of their rulers and not without reason..." "If there be any impression which we ought sedulously to avoid...it is that the tendency of our measures is to undermine their [natives'] national peculiarities of religious creed and observances."²⁸ The cultural danger would lie in the fact that Macaulay's scheme would discourage the only class that is capable of developing into what Macaulay himself calls "interpreters", i.e., those who interpret the West to the East. Mill writes: "It is through vernacular languages only that instruction can be diffused among the people; but the vernacular languages can only be rendered adequate to this purpose by persons who can introduce into them from Sanskrit or the Arabic the requisite words and terms of expression."²⁹ Therefore it is necessary to cultivate Oriental learning as well as English. Mill's final objection to Macaulay's scheme is that the class that receives only English education is a class of mere job-seekers and therefore inadequate to the task of developing the vernaculars and diffusing useful knowledge among the masses. Mill therefore recommends that Oriental learning should continue to receive support. However, he does not recommend that Macaulay's plan be scrapped.

In supporting Oriental education, Mill departs from the spirit of the principles enunciated by his father. Commenting on Oriental instruction, James Mill wrote in his dispatch of February, 1824:

In professing, on the other hand, to establish seminaries for the purpose of teaching mere Hindoo, or mere Muslim literature, you bound yourselves to teach a great deal of what was frivolous, not a little of what was purely mischievous, and a small remainder indeed in which utility was in any way concerned.³⁰

John Mill seeks to support this very “frivolous” and “mischievous” learning in the name of liberal education; James Mill would surely have appreciated this concept but failed to see its relevance in the Indian context. John Mill does not seem to be fired by James Mill’s burning desire to promote useful knowledge and thus help facilitate a social revolution in India. On the contrary, he seeks to support the social *status quo* by maintaining the learned class that was rapidly losing its traditional function. It is hard to believe that in proposing to maintain Oriental education and the effete scholarly class, Mill was “ahead of the intellectual currents of the age.”³¹ It is far more likely that he failed to understand the social currents of the time in India.

Indeed, Mill’s proposals and some of the objections³² they are based on gravely miscalculate the social currents in contemporary India. He does not seem to realize that what he calls the “scholarly class” had been able to play a useful role in India for more than two thousand years for two reasons: (1) Indian society rewarded the Brahmins by allowing them a certain share of the village produce; (2) even Oriental despots, in spite of their despotism, extended state patronage to the Brahmins in the form of *dakshina* (cash payments) or revenue grants. However, the cash economy introduced by the British destroyed the network of mutual help and obligations that prevailed in Indian villages. Consequently, the learned class was deprived of its economic base. It could not possibly continue to eke out an existence by depending either on private charity or on Government subsidies. In other words, it had to find an adequate economic base. This could be done only by finding a new social role. The new role that they could acquire from the thirties onwards was that of Baboos, i.e., clerks and junior officers to the British Government. In other words, what Mill does not recognize is that the “scholarly class” had to adopt a new role if it was interested in its survival in the new socio-economic set-up inaugurated by the Raj. And this is precisely what the “scholarly class”, as a matter of fact, did. There is no other explanation for the fact that till the end of the nineteenth century, the class that received English education was drawn largely from the “scholarly class” of Brahmins. It seems that Mill did not recognize the pressures operating within Indian society and therefore supported the learned class in a pursuit which, however laudable, was a passport to starvation.

Moreover, Mill does not recognize that the ideal of “liberal education” and “intellectual self-development” can be pursued by a

class only when it has a sure economic base within its own society. English gentlemen could pursue it; and so could the Rajahs, Maharajahs, and zemindars of India. But a class that had lost its traditional role and its traditional means of support could not afford the luxury of self-cultivation. For what means of support could they have once government stipends were withdrawn? And surely no government could give life-long subsidies to the numerous Brahmins. The learned class would not really be very wise if they did not realize that in the changing socio-economic context they had to adopt a new role.

Besides, Mill is mistaken when he equates "liberal education" with the traditional system of Oriental instruction. For the very ideal of liberal education is foreign to that mode of instruction as it was practised in the nineteenth century. It is difficult to believe that liberal education consists in memorizing for six years a deliberately mystified Sanskrit grammar, or in studying for an additional six years the sterile linguistic and grammatical subtleties of the commentaries on the Vedas, or in casting horoscopes, or in foretelling auspicious days, or in translating Bacon into Sanskrit and retranslating him back into English.³³ But this is what the Oriental learning Mill supports really amounted to. He does not seem to realize that if Indians were ever to approach their heritage in the liberal spirit, they would first have to be steeped in the Western tradition. Probably Mill is fighting an English battle on the Indian soil when he supports Oriental learning. But the choice of the battlefield does not inspire much confidence in Mill's generalship.

The same lack of awareness of the needs of a foreign society in transition reveals itself in his forecast that the class that received English education were mere job-seekers and therefore not capable of cultural and intellectual leadership. Mill does not realize that the number of jobs even the British government could provide is finite as compared with the Indian population, that this class would therefore have to create employment opportunities for themselves, and that some good might come of this spirit of self-help and "self-dependence". As a matter of fact, the class that received English education went into different professions; as lawyers, journalists, and teachers they provided intellectual, cultural and political leadership to the masses. Mill's job-seekers were Brahmins and their contribution to India's rejuvenation was truly impressive.³⁴

Perhaps the most significant reason for Mill's advocacy of traditional Oriental learning was his fear for the safety of the British empire if an influential class was disturbed by the withdrawal of subsidies.³⁵ This characteristic concern of the Empire-builders reveals itself in the vehement tone and language he adopts to describe Macaulay's measures. He writes to Henry Taylor:

In any case you will sympathize in the annoyance of one having for years, (contrary to the instincts of his own nature, which are all for *rapid* change) assisted in nurturing and raising up a system of cautious and deliberate measures for a great public end, & having been rewarded with a success quite beyond expectations, finds them upset in a week by a coxcombical dilettante litterateur who never did a thing for a practical object in his life. (CW, XVII, 1970)

Contrary to his own instincts, Mill does not want rapid change in India. Caution is the word for him. He is the first great English intellectual to sound this note. The note itself is not new. It was often sounded before by British Orientalists like H.H. Wilson and administrators like Thomas Munro. But it is absent in James Mill. Obviously, Utilitarianism had begun to lose its vitality in India.

Government

The basic tendency of Mill's political thought is idealistic. As John Robson points out, he believes that "political institutions bear more upon moral and educational questions than upon material ones."³⁶ One could go further than Robson and say that what he says of Mill's interpretation of political institutions is also true of the latter's treatment of political questions. Thus, for instance, Mill says that Negro slavery was abolished in the British Empire and elsewhere "not by any change in the distribution of material interests, but by the spread of moral conviction" (*Rep. Govt.*, 15). The sentiment does credit to Mill's moral faith but it also betrays a failure to analyze the economic issues underlying the anti-slavery movement.³⁷ This tendency to assign primacy to mental and moral factors over material interests is the hallmark of Mill's speculations concerning India's capacity for representative institutions.

Mill seems to divide "uncivilized" people into two broad groups: savages and slaves. The form of government appropriate to each category depends on a number of factors. But under native dispensation

this form has tended to be a rule of one or few. Unlike James Mill, John Mill realizes that native despotism, monarchical or oligarchical, is not *a priori* an evil. For it can, and sometimes does, perform a useful function, such as teaching the savages the virtue of obedience or welding the slaves with "an inveterate spirit of locality" into a political whole (*Rep. Govt.*, p.77). But native despotism is contra-indicated as an unmitigated evil when the state of culture, morality and civilization is so low and the people so prostrated in character and moral worth that the ruler or the rulers themselves are not free from the defects of the body politic, and the body politic has stopped advancing further (*Rep. Govt.*, p.80). For centuries, Oriental nations remained in this state of barbarism presided over by Oriental despotism. They did not progress further in the scale of civilization because they were incapable of making any further progress on their own. Obviously, the improvement of these people "cannot come from themselves, but must be super-induced from without" (*Rep. Govt.*, p.39). They must be raised from a government of will to one of law. They require "a government of guidance", "a government of leading strings", which would be attended with "the greatest amount of beneficial consequences, immediate and prospective" (*Rep. Govt.*, pp.39-40, 54). Such a government has necessarily to be a government of foreigners who are superior in intellectual advancement, civilization, and morality (*Rep. Govt.*, p.80). Though there may not exist a perfect identity of interests between the foreigners and the natives, the former have the least interest in bad government, which is as good a "security" as one could expect under the circumstances. The aim of this government should be to utilize the moral, intellectual and active worth already existing in the community and encourage general mental advancement. It should carry the natives through the next step in social progress without unfitting them for the next step beyond (*Rep. Govt.*, p.41). After they have been carried through successive steps to the summit of intellectual and moral advancement — obviously, a lengthy process — the foreign government or benevolent despotism shall wither away. "I need scarcely remark," Mill writes, "that the leading strings are only admissible as a means of gradually training the people to walk alone" (*Rep. Govt.*, p.40). But till this proud day in British history arrives, these people are not fit for representative institutions. In fact, it would be positively harmful to them if they were given such a choice before their time. He observes:

“If a people thus prostrated by character and circumstances could obtain representative institutions, they would inevitably choose their tyrants as their representatives, and the yoke would be made heavier on them by the contrivance which *prima facie* might be expected to lighten it” (*Rep. Govt.*, p.75). In other words, without adequate intellectual and moral advancement, representative institutions are not only premature but also mischievous.

This is a thoroughly paternalistic theory and develops further Burke’s theory of the Empire as a trust in the safe-keeping of the British nation. It assumes that “semi-barbarians” do not know what is good for them, that it must be determined for them by the trustees, and that the trustees alone can decide on the pace and progress of native development. Mill has enunciated here what instantly became the official political philosophy, first of Liberals and Tories, and later of British Labour. Thus he became the first prophet of gradualism in Indian politics, and till 1947 had the uncomfortable distinction of supplying arguments to those who were interested in holding India in bondage.

This political philosophy was certainly appropriate to the Indian conditions in the sixties of the nineteenth century. But its most important limitation lies in the fact that it can be used as a respectable justification for keeping a people in eternal thralldom. After all, Mill’s criteria for judging the readiness of a people for representative institutions tend to be subjective. How does one gauge mental and moral advancement without setting up oneself as the ideal norm? Or does Mill wish to set up universal primary education as a criterion? And is the morality of a nation to be judged by what happens in its criminal courts? Even if universal primary education were an accomplished fact, and courts were closed for lack of litigation, couldn’t an imperial power postpone its departure by saying that the level of education was poor and that the people were too “passive” and “prostrated” to have any “energy” for litigation? In short, Mill’s criteria create the illusion that imperial occupation is a benevolent process that must stop at some indeterminate future date, but they do not enable him to map out any co-ordinates of that point other than “mental and moral advancement”.

Mill’s failure to map out reliable co-ordinates is a function of the idealistic basis of his political thought. Relying almost exclusively on cultural and moral advancement to explain the nature of political

institutions, he does not in *Representative Government* take into account the dynamics of social relations that exert a decisive force on political institutions. What is meant by social dynamics is class relations in a given society, and in the imperial context, economic relations between native classes and foreign exploiters. But Mill ignores social dynamics of this kind in his theory of government. He prefers to believe that "class interests" or "sectional interests" need not conflict and that, indeed, in England they do not conflict (*Rep. Govt.* 56). Consequently, he does not attribute to this conflict the importance it does have, according to Marx, in shaping society and history. In rejecting "class interests" and class conflict and in fastening on to culture and morality as decisive factors in explaining political institutions, Mill throws away an intellectual aid that might have enabled him to visualize a less vague course of development in India.³⁸

Indeed, the events that took place in India from the founding of the Congress in 1885³⁹ offer a practical exposure of the limitations of Mill's political philosophy, particularly as it applies to "semi-barbarians". By the 1920s, the decade of popular mobilization against the Raj, the demand for representative institutions was not confined to the educated middle classes but had spread to workers and peasants. Of course, it was pointed out by British administrators trained in Mill's political philosophy that the masses were still illiterate, morally corrupt, and still had no idea of what democracy meant. The masses *were* illiterate; probably they were as corrupt as ever; and they certainly had no book-knowledge of democracy. But the point that Mill misses is that a people could know from day-to-day experience that their interests as workers, peasants, professionals, merchants, and manufacturers conflicted with those of the occupying power, that their training for "a higher civilization" could come from other than academic sources, and that they could therefore legitimately desire a greater say in their own affairs, though they were poorly educated and morally corrupt. Mill's failure to note these possibilities is all the more strange because he is aware of the contradiction that could develop between the interests of the natives and those of the ruling power.⁴⁰ It seems that the situation he envisages in tropical dependencies admits of infinite gradual changes in respect of culture, morality and intellectual advancement, but it is curiously free from social changes consequent on the release of powerful economic forces.

Of course, Mill's radical conscience is somewhat uneasy with the compromise it makes with pragmatism. He is aware that "such a thing as government of one people by another does not and cannot exist" (*Rep. Govt.*, p.334). But he also realizes that there are "conditions of society in which a vigorous despotism is in itself the best mode of government for training the people in what is specifically wanting to render them capable of a higher civilization" (*Rep. Govt.*, p.331). This balance of radicalism and reaction seems to be characteristic of Mill's reflections on such colonies as India and Ireland.⁴¹ Though he does protest that his instinct is all for *rapid* change, his Reason dictates otherwise. And when the choice is between instinct and Reason, the issue is never in doubt — at least not in the case of John Stuart Mill.

To sum up, Mill's estimate of Indian culture and Indian people belongs to the mainstream of British opinion as it was shaped by Charles Grant and James Mill. But unlike the hard-boiled Evangelical, he does not erect the Indian race and climate into a temporal equivalent of original sin. His views on land revenue are the same as his father's, and he has the same unshakeable faith in the ryotwar tenancy. However, he supplies the paternal faith with a formidable empirical foundation in the form of a searching analysis of the different forms and virtues of European peasant proprietorship. Moreover, unlike his father, he sees a significant parallel between the ryotwar and cottier tenancies. Unfortunately, he stops short of recognizing the true implications of this parallel for the Utilitarian theory of rent in the Indian context. Nor does he recognize that the ryotwar tenancy, by multiplying the number of intermediaries and with them the amount of rent paid by the primary producer, had the effect of laying the basis of chronic rural poverty. Though the good intentions of his theory of Indian land revenue are beyond doubt, they paved the way to economic hell for the landless cultivators of India. His views on Indian education reveal his concern for Oriental learning. But the real significance of this concern is his fear for the safety of the British Empire, not any zeal for Oriental culture. Besides, he shows no awareness of the changing needs of a society in transition when he recommends continued support for Oriental learning. The only progressive aspect of his educational views is that he did not recommend that English schools and education be abolished! His theory of government supplies an eloquent apology for imperial occupation, and may be said to be the first respectable,

philosophical expression of what was later to be called "the white man's burden". It completely ignores Indian social dynamics in its obsessive concern with culture, morality, and intellectual advancement. Its liberalism consists in its vague, pious hope that at some distant period in time India may be able to do without "our assistance".⁴² Though this pious hope must have cheered the natives in their darkest hour, it was already a liberal platitude in Mill's time.⁴³ In sum, it is difficult to see how one could maintain with Bearce that Mill's views on India combine the best of conservatism and the best of liberalism.⁴⁴ It would be truer to say that he lacks the spirit of Sir William Jones — his father's *bête noire* — and the vision of Lord Macaulay — "a coxcombical dilettante".

Footnotes

- 1 *Mill and Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1963), p.145.
- 2 Eric Stokes, *English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1959); George D. Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India 1784-1858* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1961), pp.276-95; Abram L. Harris, "John Stuart Mill: Servant of the East India Company," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 30 (1964), 185-202.
- 3 Bearce, pp.295, 293.
- 4 5th ed. with notes and a continuation by H.H. Wilson, 10 vols (London: James Madden, 1858).
- 5 It is significant that nineteenth century Anglo-Indian administrators should prefer to quote John Stuart Mill rather than James Mill in their books on India. Sir John Strachey's *India*, revised ed. (1888; London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1894) is a case in point.
- 6 *Autobiography* (1873; New York: Columbia U. Press, 1924), p.17.
- 7 For James Mill's view of the Hindus, see *History*, II, 131-32. For a discussion of his Utilitarian standards, see Duncan Forbes, "James Mill and India," *The Cambridge Journal*, V (1951-52), p.28.
- 8 "A Penal Code," *Westminster Review*, 29 (1838), 405.
- 9 (Boston: Tickner and Fields, 1863), p.24.
- 10 3rd ed. (London: Longman, Green, 1865), p.348. Further references to this edition, hereafter referred to as *Rep. Govt.*, will be made in parentheses.
- 11 See "Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals; and on the means of improving it," in *Parliamentary Papers*, VIII, 1831-32, General Appendix, 3-89.
- 12 ed., J.M. Robson, *Principles of Political Economy*, Vols. II and III of *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto U. Press, 1965), II, 319. All subsequent references to this edition, hereafter referred to as *CW*, will be made in parentheses.
- 13 eds., F.E. Mineka and D.N. Lindley, *The Later Letters of John Stuart Mill*, Vols. XIV to XVII of *Collected Works* (Toronto: Toronto U. Press, 1972), XVII, 1563. All subsequent references to this edition, hereafter referred to as *CW*, will be made in parentheses.
- 14 For James Mill's diagnosis, see *History*, V, 396-448.
- 15 Mill's views on Indian judicial reforms are not particularly significant. He welcomed Macaulay's draft Penal Code as "an eminently successful attempt" to frame a Benthamite code which needs no "adventitious aid" and which contains "in itself all the law that is necessary" ("Penal Code," *Westminster Review*, p.393). Similarly, the Law Commission's draft of the Code of Civil Procedure seemed to him to realize to a certain extent the Utilitarian ideal of making justice simple, swift, cheap, and readily accessible. See, Stokes, *English Utilitarians*, p.259. In short, the son lived to bless the measures which his father had crusaded for all his life. For James Mill's views on Indian judicial reforms, see *History*, V, 423-37.

- 16 For James Mill's opposition to the zemindari settlement, see *History*, V, 446. Also see *Parliamentary Papers*, 1831, V, 301, 309, 313, 323, 367.
- 17 For James Mill's approval of the ryotwar tenancy, see *Parliamentary Papers*, 1831, V, 321.
- 18 Though John Stuart Mill does not express this opinion categorically in his writings, it is fair to assume that he could not have been ignorant of the charge of "overassessment" frequently brought against the Indian government. For James Mill's endorsement of the charge, see *Parliamentary Papers*, 1831, V, 324.
- 19 James Mill defines economic rent in the classical sense as "the whole of the surplus produce derived from land, after making full remuneration to the cultivator for his labour and the use of his capital" (*Parliamentary Papers*, 1831, V, 361).
- 20 For James Mill's opinion that India is "untaxed," see *Parliamentary Papers*, 1831, V, 334.
- 21 Quoted by Stokes, *English Utilitarians*, pp.136-37.
- 22 In "The First Century of British Colonial Rule in India: Social Revolution or Social Stagnation?" Stokes observes: "For all the romantic notions of the Munro school, the 'peasant' with whom they dealt was of the elite landholding castes, and cultivated his field with the aid of inferior landless castes" (*Past and Present*, No. 58 (February 1973), p.148).
- 23 The educational dispatches of 1828 and 1836 have not yet been published. For the former, see Bearce, p.283.
- 24 Bearce, p.283.
- 25 For a detailed survey of this controversy, see T.G.P. Spear, "Bentinck and Education," *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 6, No. 1 (1938), 78-101; Elmer H. Cutts, "The Background of Macaulay's Minute," *American Historical Review*, 58 (1952-53), 824-53; Gerald and Natalie Sirkin, "The Battle of Indian Education: Macaulay's Opening Salvo Newly Discovered," *Victorian Studies*, 14 (1970-71), 407-28; John Clive, *Macaulay: The Shaping of the Historian* (New York: Knopf, 1973), pp.342-426. Sirkin and Sirkin, "John Stuart Mill and Disutilitarianism in Indian Education," *Journal of General Education*, 24 (1973), 231-85.
- 26 Quoted by K.A. Ballhatchet in "The Home Government and Bentinck's Educational Policy," *The Cambridge Historical Journal*, 10, No. 2 (1951), 226.
- 27 Quoted by Bearce, p.284.
- 28 Quoted by Harris, p.198.
- 29 Quoted by Ballhatchet, p.226.
- 30 Quoted in *Parliamentary Papers*, 1831-32, IX, 488.
- 31 Bearce, p.285.
- 32 I shall deal with the last two objections in the main body of the paper. As for his first objection, the Anglicists, as we have already seen, recognized its truth. But they rightly argued that Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian too were foreign languages to the natives of India. (See Charles Trevelyan, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1852-53, XXXII, 149.) Mill's second objection based on his ideal of liberal education was, frankly, a red herring. As explained before, the Orientalists were training Shastris, Pundits, and Maulawis for British law-courts and not imparting liberal education. But plans were already mooted for a unified code for the whole of India, and therefore very soon these scholars were destined to be unemployed if they were not already jobless. (See Clive, *Macaulay*, pp.374-75.)
- 34 This view of the role the "scholarly class" played in India is different from the unfavourable, colonial view Spear suggests in *Cambridge Historical Review*, pp.98-99. Clive suggests in his *Macaulay* that "pride" and "the barrier of caste" prevented the upper class Hindus from absorbing new learning (p.415). While this may be true of the first twenty years of the nineteenth century, it is patently false of post-Mutiny India. The leading figures of the Indian nationalist movement were Brahmins. One has only to think of such names as B.G. Tilak, G.K. Gokhale, M.G. Ranade, S.N. Bannerjee, etc., etc.
- 33 This is what one gathers from H.H. Wilson's testimony before the Select Committee. See, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1852-53, XXXII, 263, 265.
- 35 See Clive, *Macaulay*, p.390.
- 36 *The Improvement of Mankind: The Social and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: Toronto U. Press, 1968), p.223.

- 37 See Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; rpt. New York: Capricorn, 1966).
- 38 It must be remembered that Mill is aware of the significance of class relations in determining the state of society. (See his *Logic*, Book VI, Ch. X, Section II). But the element of "class conflict" is missing from his discussion. For a criticism of Mill's belief in human nature as the foundation of society, see Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 2nd ed. (1957; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p.158. For a defence of Mill, see, Alan Ryan, *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp.169-86.
- 39 The most perceptive discussion of these events will be found in R.P. Dutt, *India Today*, 2nd Indian ed. (1940; Calcutta, Manisha, 1970).
- 40 This comes across quite clearly from Mill's remark in *Representative Government*: "One people may keep another as a warren or preserve for its own use, a place to make money in, a human cattle farm to be worked for the profit of its own inhabitants. But if the good of the governed is the proper business of government, it is utterly impossible that a people should directly attend to it" (p.334).
- 41 For a discussion of Mill's views on Ireland, see E.D. Steele, "J.S. Mill and the Irish Question: *The Principles of Political Economy, 1848-1865*," *The Historical Journal*, 13 (1970), 216-36.
- 42 Mill expresses this view in his evidence before the *Select Committee, Parliamentary Papers, 1852-53, XXX, 325*.
- 43 Macaulay expressed this hope in Parliament in 1833. See, *Life and Works of Lord Macaulay* (London: Longmans, Green, 1908), VIII, 142. Sir Charles Trevelyan, Macaulay's brother-in-law, expressed the same hope in his testimony before the Select Committee of Parliament. See *Parliamentary Papers, 1852-53, XXXII, 246, 170, 173*.
- 44 Bearce, p.277.