The Dominant Ideologies in the Nineteenth Century British Social and Political Life

Ondokuzuncu Yüzyıl İngiltere'sinin Sosyal ve Siyasi Hayatındaki Hakim İdeolojiler

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Abstract

In the nineteenth century, British social and political life bears witness to some leading movements such as conservatism, liberalism, feminism and socialism. The spirit of democratization and the dream of a better society and order triggered all these movements. The nineteenth-century British political and social thought has a deep influence on these central ideas of government in the light of industrial changes, their revolutionary consequences and democratic movements and thanks to the works of the representatives of these ideologies. Both Industrial Revolution and democratization are two significant developments that shaped the rise of these ideologies together with capitalist policies and rise of the British Empire. Radical changes and revolutions in British history deeply affect the role of the individual in the society and the role of government by forcing them to inevitable changes in their policies and roles. With the rise of industrial revolution and democratization (together with capitalism and rise of the British Empire), these movements find the possibility to appear and develop more freely and easily. English society and government take a more liberalistic and socialistic stand which require equality and freedom both for men and women. Through the late-Victorian period independent new-type women different from traditional ones occur up and trigger feminism and challenge patriarchy and restrictions imposed upon them. Interrelated with each other, these movements are the basis that radically affect the role of the individual in the society and the role of government. Therefore, the purpose of my essay is to demonstrate how these social and political movements have contributed to British thought under the effect of Industrial Revolution and democratic actions.

Key Words: Industrial Revolution, British Empire, Victorian Period, Democratization, Ideologies

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Öz

On dokuzuncu yüzyılda İngiliz sosyal ve siyasal hayatı muhafazakarlık, liberalizm, feminizm ve sosyalizm gibi bazı önde gelen hareketlere tanıklık etmiştir. Demokratikleşme ruhu ve daha iyi bir toplum ve düzen hayali tüm bu hareketleri tetiklemiştir. On dokuzuncu yüzyıl İngiliz siyasi ve sosyal düşüncesi, endüstriyel değişimlerin, devrimci sonuçların ve demokratik hareketlerin ışığında ve bu ideolojilerin temsilcilerinin çalışmaları sayesinde bu merkezi hükümet fikirleri üzerinde derin bir etkiye sahiptir. Hem Sanayi Devrimi hem de demokratikleşme süreci, kapitalist politikalarla birlikte bu ideolojilerin yükselişini ve Britanya İmparatorluğu'nun yükselişini şekillendiren iki önemli gelişmedir. Britanya tarihindeki radikal değişiklikler ve devrimler, politikalarında ve rollerinde kaçınılmaz değişikliklere zorlayarak, bireyin toplumdaki rolünü ve hükümetin rolünü derinden etkilemektedir. Britanya tarihindeki radikal değişiklikler ve devrimler, politikalarında ve rollerinde kaçınılmaz değişikliklere zorlayarak, bireyin toplumdaki rolünü ve hükümetin rolünü derinden etkilemektedir. Sanayi devrimi ve demokratikleşmenin yükselişiyle (kapitalizm ve Britanya İmparatorluğunun yükselişi ile birlikte), bu hareketler daha özgürce ve daha kolay ortaya çıkma ve gelişme olasılığını bulur. İngiliz toplumu ve hükümeti hem erkekler hem de kadınlar için eşitlik ve özgürlük gerektiren daha liberalist ve sosyalist bir duruş sergilemiştir. Victoria döneminin sonlarında, geleneksel kadınlardan farklı, bağımsız yeni tip kadın ortaya çıkmış, feminizmi tetiklemiş, ataerkilliğe ve kendilerine dayatılan kısıtlamalara meydan okumuştur. Birbirleriyle ilişkili olan bu hareketler, bireyin toplumdaki rolünü ve hükümetin rolünü kökten etkileyen temel faktörlerdir. Bu nedenle, makalemin amacı, bu sosyal ve politik hareketlerin Sanayi Devrimi ve demokratik eylemlerin etkisi altında İngiliz düşüncesine nasıl katkıda bulunduğunu göstermektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sanayi Devrimi, İngiliz İmparatorluğu, Victoria Dönemi, Demokratikleşme, İdeolojiler

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Introduction

In the nineteenth century, British social and political life bears witness to some leading movements such as conservatism, liberalism, feminism and socialism. With the rise of industrial revolution and democratization (together with capitalism and rise of the British Empire) these movements find the possibility to appear and develop more freely and easily. They are inseparable from each other like the rings of a chain because of cause-and-effect relation in which the presence of one stipulates the presence of the other. Industrial Revolution is one of the most influential and significant events in English political and social thought which shapes many different ideologies and on the way through democratization. English society and government take a more liberalistic and socialistic stand which require equality and freedom both for men and women. Through the late-Victorian period independent new-type women different from traditional ones occur up and trigger feminism and challenge patriarchy and restrictions imposed upon them. Interrelated with each other, these movements are the basis that radically affect the role of the individual in the society and the role of government. Therefore, the purpose of my essay is to demonstrate how these social and political movements have contributed to British thought under the effect of Industrial Revolution and democratic actions.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain conservatism was a movement that opposed violent revolutionary changes having nothing to do with traditions, values and past. Therefore, revolutions had to be gradual, peaceful and evolutionary in the eyes of conservatists. The British generally shuddered at the word 'revolution' because of this conservatist manner. In spite of all these conservatist oppositions Industrial Revolution can be regarded as a turning point both inside and outside with its all-reaching results and effects. British became a universal power after Industrial Revolution, (especially being dominant to India with its colonies) because it had to follow imperialist, colonialist policies abroad. A raucous new voice pictures the 'Signs of the Times' in the *Edinburgh Review*: 'We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highway: nothing can resist us. We war with rude nature; and by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils.' (*Nineteenth Century Britain*, 3*)* Industrial Revolution urges British Empire to search for raw material and markets to sell the products it produces in other countries. Especially railways play a great role in the settlement of colonies and in the extension of colonialism. Victorian Age in British history can be regarded as the Golden Age, since Britain was at its peak in every field (economy, commerce, technology) and even crowning Victoria the Indian empress. 'What marked Britain off were qualitative changes, notably in patterns of marketing, technology and government intervention-and, at 33 percent of national product in 1800, capitalist agriculture [....] in Britain feudal title became effective ownership, the key to commercial exploitation' (*Nineteenth Century Britain*, 10). Britain

turns into an Empire in Queen Victoria Period. Economical changes reflect on social life. Queen Victoria was taken as a model or icon of the domestic age or femininity that was centred on the family, motherhood and respectability. A woman was expected to be a good mother and wife. Domesticity was dominant to their lives. The feature of being an industrial nation leads to women to be idealised in Victorian times by bring the notion of separate spheres together. In *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare formulates the roles of the man and the woman in Victorian times in this way:

> When the man wants weight, the woman takes it up,
>
> And topples down the scales; but this is fixt
>
> As are the roots of earth and base of all;
>
> Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
>
> Man for the sword and for the needle she:
>
> Man to command and woman to obey:
>
> All else confusion (*Troilus and Cressida).*

As seen, the woman was active in the private sphere of the home, while the man was active in the public sphere of business, politics and sociability. Automatically this case affected their choices and experiences at home, at work and in the streets. However, through the end of the nineteenth century a new-type of woman appeared. This woman was different from traditional ones, since she wants to work and act independently from men in life. This kind of women paid attention to education and developing themselves opposing marriage. This situation caused feminist movements appear in the era.

In Victorian Age, with industrialization, the condition of the working class in England (1844) became worse and worse. The factories became filled with lots of people working under very hard, miserable and unhealthy conditions, among whom even incest was spread. Many people lived in one room uncomfortably. They had various diseases caused by malnutrition, exhaustion and vice. These unhealthy conditions increased the death rate. Life becomes cheap both at home and at work. In time, this case led to socialist movements that protect the rights of working people and then liberalism arose, which defends individual rights in terms of law, religion, freedom and equality. The spirit of democratization and the dream of a better society and order triggered all these movements.

As far as conservatism is concerned in British history, as opposed to violent, revolutionary change, Edmund Burke, the 18th century British parliamentarian conservative, is known to oppose the French Revolution,

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since it is indicative of the sharp break with history. For Edmund Burke, an organic social growth that respects for the continuity of traditions is preferable to the sudden ground-breaking revolutions. He is not against change, but change should be carried out properly by considering human needs such as history, religion, customs and traditions. He is also a socialist because of his respect for social order and his sense of social reform. Burke follows reactionary politics with traditional claims of monarchy and dynasty, and opposes Industrial Revolution. This shows his interest in conservatism and socialism in terms of respecting for traditions, social order and reform and resisting revolutionary acts.

When we look at the nineteenth-century, we come across William Cobbett who is both romantic and true conservative, and believes that man is identified with nature and admires the traditions, lifestyles, culture or values of English countryside. He is against all kind of machinery and technological innovations. Rather he supports naturality and simplicity found in rural side. He thinks Middle Age Church was the guardian of common people by respecting for land aristocracy, patriarchal principle, prohibition of interest and immoral expansion of wealth. In *Letter VI to the Citizen*, he depends the basis of civil society and the formation of laws to the Law of Nature. He makes a direct relation between them. Just as the Law of Nature arises from the need for self-preservation and self-enjoyment, for the goodness of others, so the civil society and compact are for the sake of the benefit of the whole. Therefore, the root of civil society lies under the law of Nature. However, this time civil society requires the rights and the duties. This is essential for the order in society. Cobbett says that the greatest right is the right of taking a part in the making of the laws by which we are governed. Again, he interrelates this right with the law of Nature. Man takes this right from the law of Nature. The law of Nature imposes the fact that it is the duty of every man to defend his country. Cobbett also thinks all men are by nature equal, rights and duties go hand in hand and one cannot be without the other by referring to one's social roles and rights in society.

Related to the paupers, Cobbett believes the aid a poor person receives is founded in the law of Nature as well as the law of the country. An unequal distribution of talent, industry, perseverance, a capacity to labour by God is accepted as a natural phenomenon and taken for granted. He says 'love of one's native soil is a feeling which nature has implanted in the human breast, and that has always been peculiarly strong in the breasts of Englishmen.' (*Letter VI to the Citizen)* As we see, nature is the basis and focus of Cobbett's writing. Almost in every socialist idea of his does nature have a significant place. The civil society, rules, laws, rights, for the goodness of the whole, all derive from the rule of Nature. As a person fond of the countryside, William Cobbett's work exhibits the contribution of romanticism in his socialist and conservatist views. Beside his romanticism,

his socialist and conservatist viewpoint is easily recognized with the ideal of a civil society.

In British history, the 19th century is seen as a moment of modernity and change and at that time Robert Owen, a social reformer, and one of the founders of Socialism, appears with a new view of society in *New View of Society*. He touches on what the duties of government are and what is necessary for national improvement and for the happiness of those who govern, and those who obey. At one point, he says, "to prevent the evils of any premature change, let the church in other respects remain as it is, because under the old established forms it may affect the most valuable purposes" (*New View of Society*). It indicates the slow changes and not totally breaking away from past traditions or forms. There is still link with tradition. It refers to a partial movement of reform. Owen seems to remain under the effect of romanticism and conservatism besides his socialist views. Even though he believes some changes are necessary for the national church to abstract it from weakness and danger, he does not intend to do away with all established forms of the national church. He considers some of them could do any good to some purposes. Moreover, 'Owenite Socialism, advocating that the means of production be communally owned and the proceeds of labour equally shared, was one of the components to the Chartist procession' (Victorian People and Ideas, 142).

Related to liberalist movements in the nineteenth-century Britain, John Stuart Mill, a British philosopher, political economist, Member of Parliament and an influential liberal thinker of the 19th century, examines the concept of liberty from many different aspects *On Liberty* and questions the nature and limits of the individual. Mill deals with Civil or Social Liberty, rather than Liberty of the Will, which adds to his work a more political quality. He says: 'By liberty, was meant protection against the tyranny of the political rulers.' (*On Liberty*, 1) He believes this kind of antagonistic relation between rulers and their subjects is as dangerous as external enemies. Their relation can be compared to the one between vulture and prey. Therefore, 'to prevent the weaker members of the community from being preyed on by innumerable vultures' (*On Liberty*), it is essential to set limits to the power of the ruler over the community. In this respect limitation means, liberty and this can be realized in two ways: 'first by obtaining a recognition of certain immunities, called political liberties or rights and the second, by the establishment of constitutional checks.' (*On Liberty*) However, this idea of the limitation of power strays through the view that rulers should be identified with the people. In this case, the interest and will of rulers equal the interest and will of the nation. Therefore, there is not the question of tyrannizing since the nation does not need to be protected against its own will. This equation of the power of rulers with the one of the nations is also a common case in European liberalism. After a while, a democratic republic starts to become common and "the concept of self-government" appears. However, it is not

the true state of the case, because rulers and subjects are not always the same people. Given all these points discussed *On Liberty*, we see that John Stuart Mill supports the political freedom of people over their government and he opposes dictatorship or tyrannism in the mechanism of government, which prevents a democratic representation of people.

Another important socialist and liberalist point Mill mentions *On Liberty* is religious freedom. He says: 'the great writers to whom the world owes what religious liberty it possess, have mostly asserted freedom of conscience as an indefeasible right, and denied absolutely that a human-being is accountable to others for his religious belief.'(*On Liberty*) Yet he believes that religious freedom has hardly been practically realized because of intolerance and he also points out that toleration for other religious people is admitted only with tacit reserves even in the most tolerant countries or in the minds of almost all religious persons. This is really the case and it is very hard to mention a true kind of religious freedom. It is obvious that the concept of religious freedom in Mill's mind has a very comprehensive and radical sense that does not give any concession in terms of tolerance to other religious groups in a governmental system.

One significant argument Mill develops about social relations *On Liberty* is the "harm principle". It is related to avoiding harm to others in the exercise of power. An individual is independent as long as his actions do not harm others. The liberty of one person ends at the point where the liberty of another person starts. Individual happiness or physical and moral goodness individually is not a sufficient warrant for the goodness of humankind. Mill explains: 'the sole end for which mankind are warranted individually or collectively in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection and the only part of the conduct of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign' (*On Liberty*). As we see, Mill gives great importance to individualism and defends individual independence on the condition that this sovereignty does not interfere in others' goodness by causing harm to them. Mill claims whatever affects an individual may affect others through himself and attracts our attention to human liberty. He focuses on 'demanding liberty of conscience, that is, liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral or theological' (*On liberty*). This liberty of thought maybe requires liberty of tastes and pursuits, which emphasizes individuality, but Mill interrelates this principle with a wider sense of freedom. A society can be free only if all these liberties are appreciated in that society. In Mill's opinion, individualism is directly related to pluralism. The behaviour of an individual can affect others; therefore, one should pursue his own good in his own way without interfering in others or limiting others' liberties.

Related to the origin of socialist movements, it is seen that the hard life and working conditions in Victorian Age were taken as subject by many authors such as Charles Dickens, and G. Bernard Shaw who compared the old traditional woman with the new type woman appearing in the late-Victorian period in his play *Mrs Warren's Profession*. Moreover, George Gissing, a deeply conservative man concerned with social issues of the day, also touches on the late-Victorian marriage-debate especially in his novel *The Odd Women*. In *Mrs Warren's Profession*, Shaw focuses on the conflicts related to the "new women" of the Victorian era and these issues arose because middle-class girls wanted greater social independence in work and education. The play attacks on the domestic imprisonment of women by the male-dominated society and draws attention to the truth that 'prostitution is caused, not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing, and overworking women' (Shaw 1970: 231). In the same way, we see how women started to regard education as a way of escape from the oppressive working conditions through independence in *The Odd Women*. Representative of the feminist idea in the play, Miss Barfoot expresses: 'I don't care *what* results, if only women are made strong and self-reliant and nobly independent! [...] When I think of the contemptible wretchedness of women enslaved by custom, by their weakness, by their desires, I am ready to cry, Let the world perish in tumult rather than things go on in this way!' (*The Odd Women*, 153) Representing the key streams of 1880s British feminism, Rhoda opposes marriage harshly with her radical and aggressive feminism. She is like a man as Virginia describes her to Monica: 'She is full of practical expedients. The most wonderful person! She is quite like a man in energy and resources. I never imagined that one of our sex could resolve and plan and act as she does!' (*The Odd Women*, 32) Rhoda exhibits an unwomanly manner by challenging patriarchy with her feminism. Independence is a blessed thing for the women who are exposed to physical and mental deterioration because of a miserable life of poverty under oppressive working conditions in this novel. It sheds light to the lives of these women in the Victorian patriarchal circles by reflecting how they transform into self-supporting, self-assertive and independent individuals in society.

The nineteenth-century British political and social thought has a deep influence on the central ideas of government such as, conservatism, liberalism, feminism and socialism in the light of industrial changes, their revolutionary consequences and democratic movements and thanks to the works of the representatives of these ideologies. Both Industrial Revolution and democratization are two significant developments that shaped the rise of these ideologies together with capitalist policies and rise of the British Empire. Radical changes and revolutions in British history deeply affect the role of the individual in the society and the role of government by forcing them to inevitable changes in their policies and roles. Conservatism struggles with revolutions and Industrial Revolution brings in capitalism.

The hard-working conditions of people in factories with industrialization lead to socialist movements and then liberalist ideas supporting individual rights and encouraging democratic system of government in British history. Through the late-Victorian period the suffering middle-class women under the dominance of patriarchy finds the solution in education which enables them to have better employment opportunities and to have influence over their fate. This group of women compose the first-wave feminists who aim at independence in British political and social life. This case shows how these ideologies are tied to each other with a chain relation following each other by affecting and being affected.

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