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Q1(e)

J. S. Mill's ideas on women suffrage.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · PSIR GS 1 · 10 marks · Political Theory

Political Theory: meaning and approaches.

Core demand of the question

- **Comment on the following in about 150 words:** J. S. Mill's ideas on women suffrage. (10 marks)

Revision summary

J. S. Mill argued that women must vote as persons, against legal subjection.

The Subjection of Women and the 1867 'person' amendment are the key texts and act.

The case rests on liberty, talent, and the moral quality of representative government.

Pateman and MacKinnon accept the franchise and still criticise the sexual contract.

Indian universal adult franchise realised Mill's demand earlier than Britain did.

Introduction

J. S. Mill, not a truncated "**S. Mill**", made women's suffrage a test of representative government. In *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and in the Commons, he treated the vote as a right of persons, not a male privilege.

Body**The argument**

- Legal subjection of wives is a surviving slavery. It corrupts both sexes and wastes half the talent of the species.
- Suffrage follows from the same liberty of thought and self-development that *On Liberty* defends.
- Mill moved an amendment to the **1867 Reform Bill** to replace "man" with "person". It failed, but it put the claim on the parliamentary record.
- He held that political exclusion teaches women dependence and men unjust pride, which is bad for the quality of government.

Limit and later critique

- Mill still spoke the language of civilisation, education, and household improvement. **Pateman** says the sexual contract is deeper than a franchise extension.
- **MacKinnon** would add that a vote without reconstruction of sexuality and workplace power is incomplete.
- Indian adult franchise in 1950, including women, went further than Mill's Britain. Social domination did not vanish with the roll.

- **The accurate comment is:** Mill supplied the classic liberal case for women as electors and candidates; feminism after Pateman asks for more than the ballot.

Flow diagram

J. Subjection of Women 1869. Mill -> Subjection of Women 1869
J. Subjection of Women 1869. Mill -> Suffrage as personhood
J. Subjection of Women 1869. Mill -> 1867 Reform amendment
Pateman MacKinnon -> Vote is not enough

Conclusion

J. S. Mill tied women suffrage to liberty, competence, and the end of legal subjection. The 1867 amendment was his parliamentary act. Pateman and MacKinnon keep the vote and still criticise the gendered state that Mill only partly saw.

Facts & figures

The Subjection of Women, 1869

Mill's main statement that the legal subordination of women is wrong in itself and a social waste.

1867 Reform Bill

Mill's amendment to substitute 'person' for 'man' in the franchise clause was defeated.

On Liberty, 1859

Supplies the developmental liberty that Mill extends to women's civic membership.

Harriet Taylor Mill

Collaborator whose influence Mill acknowledged on the woman question.

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