

S.C.

ROUSSEAU — ON FREEDOM

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Born in Geneva (Switzerland)
— in 1712

Rousseau starts his Social Contract — the renowned Book, with this line — “Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains.” Analysing this statement, it can easily be understood that his purpose was to show the way — how freedom and Control can be coordinated. Rousseau has said at the very beginning that authority can never get the right to control by applying force. In the words of Rousseau —

“The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right and obedience into duty” ①

According to Rousseau's explanation, it was due to the emergence of property system that men had to leave their state of nature ~~and~~ and build up civil society and state. At the time of transformation of the state of nature into society, authority will take its birth on the one hand and freedom of men must be kept as it was ~~from~~ on the other hand. The only solution of this problem, according to Rousseau, is social contract. Rousseau has admitted, though, that ~~freedom~~ ~~lost~~ ~~power~~ ~~which~~ ~~men~~ at the time of contract, men had to surrender their freedom and power which they used to enjoy in the state of nature. In the words of Rousseau, “...Each gives himself absolutely...” ② Still it is claimed that men lose nothing. In order to prove the truthfulness of this apparently impossible happening Rousseau said — the actual meaning of the social contract is “Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the General Will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member, as an indivisible part of the whole...” ③ this act of association creates a moral and collective body...” ③

① Rousseau, The Social Contract

② ~~Rousseau~~, Ibid.

③ Ibid.

(2)

According to Rousseau, freedom is men's birth right, but they are being deprived of such right due to the advancement of civilization — science, industry. Rousseau planned, therefore, to get people back their freedom by building a new civil society through social contract. In the process of building this state or moral institution, everybody took part in discussion. They got chances, therefore, to exercise their right to freedom of speech and expression. Nobody opposed therefore, the formation of the state.

According to Rousseau, men used to enjoy unrestricted freedom in the state of nature. But eventually they realized that this is not real freedom. So they ~~executed~~ executed social contract and surrendered ~~all~~ their ^{absolute power} ~~freedom~~ to the state. Sovereign emerges when the state exercises this power under the direction of the General Will.

This Sovereign power is —

"... legitimate, because based on the Social Contract, and equitable, because common to all; useful, because it can have no other object than the general good, and stable, because guaranteed by the public force and the Supreme power." (4)

(2)

Explaining the true nature of General Will, Rousseau writes — "There is a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will; the latter considers only the common interest, while the former takes private interests into account,..." (5)

Rousseau had created the concept of General Will for coordinating freedom with state control. Through this concept of General will Rousseau could prove that when men surrender before state control, then actually he surrenders

(4) *ibid.*

(5) *ibid.*

~~supposed~~ to himself. As a result of which he doesn't lose, in any way, his freedom while obeying state authority. Because actually he is being controlled by the General Will — wherein lies his own will also.

Through this statement Rousseau ~~is~~ definitely could substantiate that men could remain free even under state control. But problem arose when Rousseau said ~~is~~ — "whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free!" (6). Critics point out that Rousseau's idea of freedom is utterly wrong and devoid of any substance. That can never be freedom which contains threat of coercion implicitly. The renowned narrator of the concept of freedom — Isaiah Berlin spoke of two types of liberty (7) in his well-known Book — Four Essays on Liberty — Negative and Positive. Negative freedom means absence of restrictions altogether. While positive freedom implies self-imposed control which men voluntarily impose on himself for the sake of earning some greater purpose. Such coercion can not be counted as absence of freedom.

The civil society as planned by Rousseau is a moral organization, the members of which would be ~~not~~ idealist, ethical persons. The renowned critic of the western political thought — McClelland explains this as — that the phrase 'forced to be free' used by Rousseau, is self-imposed restrictions because the restrictions which the citizens must abide by in their social and personal life — lies in the General Will

(6) Ibid.

(7) Isaiah Berlin, Four Essays on Liberty.

which they themselves formed together in open session. In his opinion, freedom is practically meaningless to ~~socially~~ socially-alienated person.

Some critics have detected, though, infiltration of totalitarian idea. Because pursuit of freedom becomes a collective venture.

Generally we consider 'liberty' and 'independence' as synonymous. But Rousseau viewed them somewhat differently — opined David Held. Independence is ~~not~~ pursuit of self-interest without taking into consideration interests of others. Whereas liberty is an act of fulfilling self requirements with proper consideration for others' requirements also. Common good would be served if men sincerely follow this principle. The sense in which Rousseau used the concept of freedom is, according to David Held —

Liberty is attained by participating in the generation and enactment of the general will which establishes equality among all citizens in that they all enjoy the same rights. ⑧

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