

Ques: Rousseau's political theory contains seeds of socialism, absolutism and democracy. Comment.

Ans: Hardly did any scholar other than Marx influence human consciousness as deeply as did Rousseau. Rousseau was a revolutionary thinker of his time, as his ideology went far ahead of his time.

One can underline the elements of socialism in Rousseau's ideas. Earlier scholars like Aristotle had emphasized the philosophy of inequality as he says only those people are the true citizen who is educated and education was available only to those who are having leisure and money. But this philosophy of inequality was first rejected by Christian scholars who declared that all are equal as all are the descendants of God. But Rousseau's went further when he declared that all are equal as all are descendants of nature. It is here one can trace the element of socialism.

The elements of democracy were enshrined in Rousseau's philosophy. In fact, the core of his political philosophy is the concept of 'General will. He declared that General will is the sovereign will. According to him, General will is the collective higher selves of a community. Furthermore, he believes that every individual surrenders his power to the community and simultaneously, he gets a part of his power as a member of this community. So, practically he loses nothing. He is, at the same time, the master and the servant of this community. Here lies the element of democracy.

But unfortunately, his ideas present a blurred picture between democracy and dictatorship. While defining 'General will' he gave an unpleasant hint to future dictatorship. For example, he says, if other members in this community are quite unable to exercise their higher self then even the higher self of a single member of this community could be representative of the 'General will'. Later, opportunist leader's like Robespierre misused their ideology and declared themselves to be the representative of the General will Will the French people.

In this way, Rousseau's ideology contains diametrically opposed views like democracy and socialism on one hand and dictatorship on the other.

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