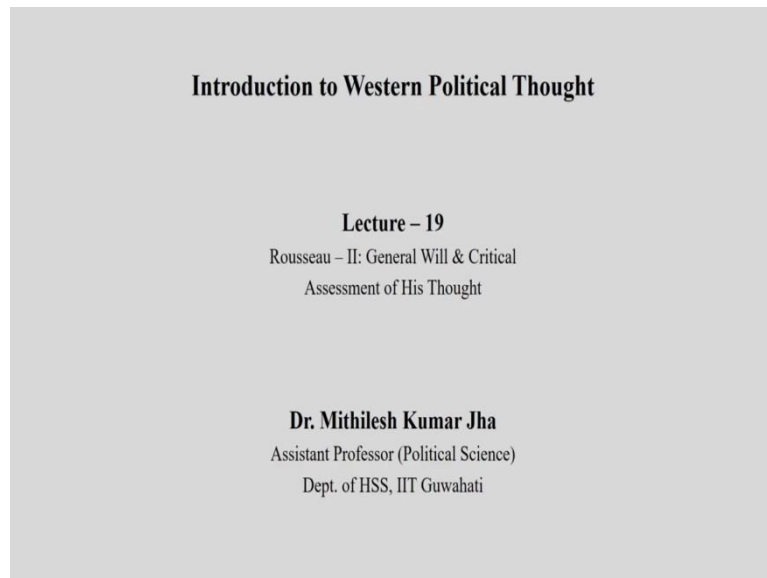


Introduction to Western Political Thought
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Lecture No. 19
Rousseau - II: General Will & Critical Assessment of his Thought

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Hello and welcome everyone! This is the second and concluding lecture on Rousseau. In this lecture, today, we are going to focus on his notion of ‘general will’. It was the basis of sovereignty in the political society or political community that Rousseau envisaged. In the first part of the lecture, we are going to focus on his views on ‘general will’ and before that how this political community was constituted through a covenant.

What were the conditions of such constitutions? In the second part, we will look at the critical assessment of Rousseau’s political thought or philosophical position. And finally, we will have a summary of the contribution of social contradiction tradition in the history of western political thought. The first lecture that we had on Rousseau, we have discussed his personal life and how he was a self-taught thinker and developed many paradoxes.

Thus, he was a modern thinker and someone who was looking at the pre-modern or social living and associational life. The value of morality that would create a public spirited citizen. In contrast, to that the modern, secular, atheistic rationalized living had Rousseau despised. His social contract was a kind of argument against such kind of corrupting influence that was there in modern life, particularly, in Paris and many other states in Europe as well.

As a theorist of popular sovereignty, how Rousseau envisaged a new kind of social association which would enable the individual to live a free life without being corrupted by the socialization or corrupting influence of society or religion. Some of these thoughts we have discussed in the previous lecture. Today, we will study, how he argued about political community and its formation, and what role the 'general will' played in the political stability or ensuring the equality and liberty of individuals.

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➤ Rousseau's argument about popular sovereignty is based on his idea of the general will. This was an ambiguous and controversial idea, which many believed led to the rise of the totalitarian regime in the twentieth century. He draws a strong connection between the general will, political authority, sovereignty, and laws of the state.

➤ Rousseau was both celebrated as well as a much-despised political thinker. There are many paradoxes in his thought. He argued that general will should be binding to all. Those who refuse to obey the general will shall be forced to obey it. And this general will need not to be the aggregate will of the majority or even few.

➤ Rousseau, as a republican thinker, wanted to create a political community in which human beings could live a free and equal life. According to him, men could genuinely realize this freedom in civil society by following the laws which they themselves legislate. Thus citizens in such a political community would be both author and subject of laws. However, deriving from the writings of Montesquieu (1689-1755), Rousseau also argues that the kind of freedom that exist vary from society to society depending upon their natural conditions of the people and physical circumstances.

Rousseau's argument about popular sovereignty was based on his idea of 'general will' and this idea in Rousseau's philosophy was somewhat ambiguous and controversial. Many scholars believed that this idea of 'general will' or popular sovereignty was based on 'general will'. It was something that led to the rise of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century. And Rousseau, drew a strong connection between his idea of 'general will', political authority, sovereignty and the laws there in the state.

Rousseau argued about a popular sovereignty based on the 'general will' and this idea of 'general will' was complex than it appears. So, there was a kind of strong connection between his idea of popular sovereignty and 'general will'. That was the basis of all forms of political authority and laws in the society. In that sense, there was a sense of continuum between 'general will', popular sovereignty, political authority and laws in the state that Rousseau envisaged.

Thus, Rousseau was both a celebrated and despised political thinker in Europe. We have discussed this in the previous lecture that how his former alias or colleagues regarded many

of his thoughts or ideas as contrary to the enlightenment project based on the refinement of him and character on the basis of reason and rationality.

Rousseau was a celebrated thinker. But as a despised political thinker in Europe, he led to the wide reading of his work. At the same time, simultaneous condemnation banning and public learning of his work. There were many paradoxes in his thought and this we will discuss in detail, when we look at the critical assessment of Rousseau's political thought. He argued that 'general will' should be binding to all and those who refused to obey the 'general will' should be forced to obey it.

There were a number of paradoxes in Rousseau. Where on the one hand, he said that the 'general will' was the expression of individual's own will, when they were guided by the public spirit or life of the community. And not by their private selfish interest. However, he argued that individual would be individuals. Man would be as they were and laws as it should be. Thus, Rousseau's objective was to create a law, public institution or republic which would enable the individuals to live a more harmonious or unified life.

And that is possible when individual realised the need of community and associate his or her own self with the self of community. And thereby, there was no scope of disobeying the 'general will'. In that sense, Rousseau's paradoxes that human beings could be forced to be free. And there was a use of force and yet that use of force was according to Rousseau for the freedom of individuals. And there were many such paradoxes that we will discuss. And this 'general will' need not be the aggregate will of the majority or even few.

His characterization of 'general will' was somewhat ambiguous. That is the 'general will' that is not the aggregate or collective will of every member in the society. Every member was sitting in the assembly, expressing their will and aggregating those wills. That would be the 'general will'. It was not the case, according to Rousseau. 'General will' had a very specific characteristic.

Rousseau, as a republican thinker wanted to create a political community in which human beings could live a free and equal life. So, the central pillar in Rousseau's political philosophy was his emphasis on liberty and equality. And that becomes the slogan of French revolution along with the idea of liberty, equality, and fraternity. According to Rousseau, men could genuinely realise this freedom in civil society by following the laws, they themselves legislated. Thus, citizens in a political community would be both author and being author that means citizen and also the subject of laws.

There is a kind of another paradox in Rousseau's thought, where he envisaged members of political community as both citizen and subject. And citizen, is a modern concept, where the member of the political community had certain rights that a state was supposed to protect. And it is different from the idea of subject that is obligation which members have towards the king without having any rights.

The difference between the modern notion of citizenship with the pre-modern idea of subject is that the modern citizens have certain rights which are inalienable and state must uphold or protect those rights. Whereas, the subject is someone having obligation towards the state without having any recognisable rights. So, in the monarchy during the pre-modern times, individuals in the state were nearly subjects and not the citizen. Thus, they could not rightfully demand from the state to recognize their rights and protect it.

Whereas in Rousseau, you have this kind of paradox, where he envisaged a political community. In the political community, individual member would be both the author and being author as citizen and also the subject of law. And subjecting to that law, Rousseau argued that he would be free and achieve self-mastery. Freedom for Rousseau was not a kind of private choice or a kind of personal self-aggrandisement. But it was living in association with the community. Thus, the individual and community was in perfect harmony. By following the laws of community, individual followed their own self-legislated laws. And this was the kind of another paradox that we had in Rousseau.

However, deriving from the writings of Montesquieu, Rousseau also argued that the kind of freedom that existed vary from society to society depending upon their natural conditions of people and physical circumstances. Rousseau being a pragmatic thinker followed his idea of spirit. It was the freedom that he was talking about would be within the confine of laws of the community or 'general will'. By following the 'general will', human beings would realize their freedom that enabled them to live a moral life.

He argued that this kind of freedom was not available to all kinds of community across the circumstances. It would vary from people to people depending upon their own nature. The giving primacy to republican ideas or active participation of the people was the basis for the realization of this kind of freedom. Thus, it varies from society to society, depending upon the nature of individuals in those society or natural circumstances.

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Formation of Body Politic and Political Rights

- Rousseau in the *Social Contract* envisages a body politic that would create the conditions of freedom and equality for the individuals. The formation of the body politic is based on a covenant that transforms the multitude into 'a people'. The constitution of this body politic, according to Rousseau, is the basis of all social, economic, political rights for the individuals.
- According to Rousseau, the act by which people become a people is crucial, and it is also the real foundation of society. And in this society, freedom implies following the rules which individuals themselves legislate. The terms of contract or covenant that become the basis of society require that each individual totally alienate 'himself and all his rights to the whole community'. Thus individuals give away their natural freedom and rights to the community on the strict condition of equality. Second, this alienation of rights is unconditional, so the union of the individual with the community is as perfect as it could be. Finally, the unity thus constituted would be a source of order and beneficial for all as it is based on strict reciprocity of equal and mutual dependence. 'Since each man gives himself to all, he gives himself to no one'.
- Thus constituted, body politic would be a small community of free and equal members where no one would have enough wealth to buy another and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself. Through directly and actively participating in legislating laws, they remain as free as before.

Rousseau's argument on the formation of body politic was the basis of political rights or civil rights for the individuals. It was different from the freedom that individual enjoyed in the 'state of nature'. So, Rousseau in *Social Contract* envisaged a body politic that would create the conditions of freedom and equality of the individuals. This combination of freedom and equality was at the very centre of Rousseau's philosophy.

So, his second discourse on inequality and how to overcome it, how to legitimise a political rule or system of rule would create the conditions for everyone and not just the few propertied to live the life of liberty and equality. In the social contract of imagination of body politic, it was about creating those conditions that would provide equality and liberty to every member of the community and not just a few privileged or propertied ones.

The formation of the body politic was based on a covenant. It was the artificial construct and not natural. Human beings in the 'state of nature' did not lived in associational life. His association with others was episodic and based on the need such as for when they would go for hunting. Otherwise there were no ties in the 'state of nature'. It is only in the society that human beings began to live with the family and community. That living had certain obligations to tie them to family or community that was a kind of bondage for the individuals.

So, to live in, the associational life in the political community was the artificial construct. That is in accordance with the social contradiction. The social or political situation were not something that was natural. It was result of covenant or contract among the free, independent and consenting individual. And the consent was then the basis of legitimacy of the political rule. The formation of the body politic was based on a covenant that transformed the

multitude of people into what Rousseau called 'A People'. And that was a kind of hint towards the idea of nationalism.

When multitude of people coming together through a covenant, it created a political society that had its own culture. It had its own 'general will' that was decided on the active participation. It was decided through the active participation of all its members. This kind of imagination also had a hint of modern nation or nationalism. This multitude of people and their transformation into 'a people' was the result of covenant among the free independent, autonomous individual who are also equal.

The constitution of the body politic, according to Rousseau, was the basis of all social, economic, and political rights for individuals. Individuals enjoyed their right only after the formation of this body politic through a covenant. Prior to that, there was no recognized rights. Individuals were free and equal in the 'state of nature'. But there was no recognition of that by any other body.

Where after the formation of body politic, all the rights of the individual, social, economical and political rights were guaranteed and protected in a sense, put in a firmer footing or having greater protection of these rights after the formation of political community. According to Rousseau, the act by which people become 'a people' that means having a very distinct identity. Having a distinct would be called a 'general will' that was crucial and the real foundation of society. In this society, freedom implies following the rules that individuals themselves legislated.

In this body politic, individual would remain as free as they were by following those laws which they themselves had legislated. The terms of contract or covenant that became the basis of society required that each individual totally alienated himself and all his rights to the whole community. The first term of this contract was that for the multitude of people to become 'a people', it was required that all individuals should alienate himself. That is his own person and all his rights to the whole community.

Once they were part of the political community, they associated and identified themselves with the whole community. There was no gap and personal rights which were different from the community rights and its existence. Thus, individual gave way to their natural freedom and rights to the community. This was done on the strict condition of equality. That means, other individual when they agreed to be a part of that political community should forego their individual rights or belonging.

In Rousseau's imagination, the political community was completely identified with the individuals and whole of the community. So, the individual remained sovereign and free by completely identifying themselves with the community, that is the whole. There was a kind of organic relationship between the individuals and community that Rousseau envisaged. Individuals had no personal or private rights, when they agree to become the part of a political community.

Second, the alienation of rights was unconditional. It was not based on certain conditions as in Hobbes for the protection of life or in Locke, for the protection of life, liberty and property. This alienation of rights by the individuals to the political community was unconditional. The union of the individuals with community was as perfect as it could be. This kind of political community would be a community for which human beings would give up all that is precious to him, even his life for the protection of his community.

And there is nothing that one can think of worth living for or worth protecting for outside the community. This union between the individual and community is a kind of organic union where nothing is left outside this union. And that way, the political community would be as perfect as it could be. Therefore, he argued that the alienation of individual rights to the political community was unconditional and not on any conditions.

Not like Hobbes and Locke for the protection of certain rights. But this was voluntarily giving away of one's rights for the sake of achieving self-mastery or achieving freedom as they had in the 'state of nature'. And that one could do by completely identifying with the community and community identifying with the people. Finally, the unity, thus, constituted would be a source of order and beneficial for all as it was based on a strict reciprocity of equal and mutual dependence, 'since each man gives himself to all, and not to other man or group of men'.

The relationship between the individual and community was that of the whole to the particular and the particular to the whole. Not one particular to the other particular group of men. So, 'Since each man gives himself to all, he gives himself to no one'. That is the rules of the community or the 'general will'. Thus, it was constituted on the basis of the political community where the reflection of individual's own will were guided by the public spirit and not by their personal spirit.

Thus, constituted, the political body, a small community of free and equal members, where no one would have enough wealth to buy another and none poor enough to be forced to sell

himself. And this was another characteristic of Rousseau's political community, where he despised all forms of hierarchy, particularly, the economic inequality. And he argued that you cannot think of equality and liberty in a society, where one person or few persons had resources enough to buy the other person. And multitude of people would be living in the condition of servitude.

He wanted to create a political community which would be a small community, where no particular person would have enough wealth to buy another person. And none would be poor enough to be forced to sell himself. Though directly and actively participating in legislative laws, these members then remained as free as before and enjoying the life of liberty and perfect equality in the society.

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➤ Thus in such a community, 'each one of us puts in the community his person and all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will; and as a body, we incorporate every member as an indivisible part of the whole'. The paradox here is Rousseau's description of men as both citizens and subjects of the body politic. They are citizens as they are its creator. But as a subject, they are obliged to obey its laws. Rousseau argues that real freedom is in following the general will, and those who refuse to obey it would be forced to do so. He explained that it is in such a community that men would learn moral freedom and self-mastery.

General Will

➤ General will in Rousseau's thought is an ambiguous concept. The people themselves must legislate it. It can't be delegated to or represented by any other body than people themselves. It could be the will of the majority, few, or even one enlightened citizen guided by the real will of everyone in the community, who are free from their personal or selfish interests. The general will is the will of the whole community and is binding on all. However, it is not the aggregate will of all its members.

➤ Its characteristic is that it must be followed wholly or neither. 'It must be general in its purpose as well as in its nature; that it should spring from all and apply to all'. In other words, the general will is the expression of what is already there in everyone's heart when they are guided by public spirit and not by their selfish interests. The general will, thus constituted, would be sovereign and 'is always rightful and always tends to the public good'.

Thus, in such a community, 'Each one of us puts in the community, his person and all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will, and as a body, we incorporate every member as an indivisible part of the whole'. So, if some of you can recall, the Gandhian idea of oceanic circle, where the individual member of the community was part of the larger community and larger community were not done away with that particular individual.

The part sustained in the whole and who sustained the part. There were some kinds of similar arguments in Rousseau's idea of individual member to the body politic. The paradox was Rousseau's description of men as both citizens and subject of the body politic. They were citizens as they were its creator. The whole body politic or 'general will' was created or authored by citizen. But they were subjects, obliged to obey its law.

So, once the 'general will' was formed, its citizen turned into subjects. And they had obligation to follow the 'general will'. And if they refused to do so, they would be forced to obey it in that sense, forced to be free, according to Rousseau. Rousseau argued that real freedom was in following the 'general will' and those who refused to obey it would be forced to do so. He explained that it was in such a community that men would learn moral freedom and self-mastery.

The freedom for Rousseau was not in living the private life or in the pursuit of personal interest. But living the associational life in the community guided by the public spirit or in the pursuit of public spirit. There was no kind of divide in the personal interest of the individual and public interest of the community. It had created a kind of divide itself, according to Rousseau in modern social political life. So, there was a kind of argument for organic associational life of individuals with the community and both were indispensable to each other and willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of other.

Then the realization of freedom was the moral freedom or achievement of self-mastery were through the participation in the life of community. Now, let us discuss, his ideas on 'general will'. 'General will' in Rousseau's thoughts was an ambiguous concept. It was a controversial concept. So, the first characteristic of this 'general will', it could not be delegated to any other body or presented to any other body. That means, it must be legislated by the people themselves and it could not be delegated to or presented to any other body than the people themselves.

There was a kind of direct republican notion reflected again. 'General will' was constituted by the people themselves through direct participation. He despised English parliament or periodic election and representative form of government, where people were free only once in five or four years when elections were held. So, after the day of voting, the representative would take over and there was the condition of unfreedom for the masses or citizens.

In contrast, to that Rousseau argued that 'general will' was something which could not be delegated to or represented by any other body than the people themselves. So, they legislated. Now, this 'general will' could be the will of the majority or it could be the will of the few of its members or even one enlightened citizen who was guided by the real will of everyone in the community. Only condition for that was they were free from their personal or selfish interests.

The constitution of 'general will' required not the aggregate will of the whole community. That is the collective expression of each members and you decide what is 'general will'? It could be will of the majority or few or even one member of the political community, when they were guided by the enlightened interest of the community and not their personal, selfish or sectional interests.

The 'general will', therefore, is the will of the whole community and not the particular will or the sectional will of any group of the community. And it was binding on all. However, it was not the aggregate will of all its members. It was the characteristic of 'general will' and its formation. Now, its characteristic was that it must be followed wholly or neither. There could not be modification or alteration in the implementation or following of 'general will'.

So, general will must be followed and there is a kind of continuum between the idea of 'general will' and the popular sovereignty or political authority of the state or government or its laws. All these derived its authority from the 'general will'. And it must be wholly accepted or followed by all the institutions and members in the community without exception. And if they do so, they can be forced to be free, according to Rousseau. Now, it must be 'general will' which is different from the personal or private will of the individual.

It must be general in its purpose as well as in its nature that it should spring from all and apply to all. That is the characterisation of 'general will' that Rousseau argued. The 'general will' was to be decided on the basis of its purpose. So, the individual's will and his private or personal will towards gratifying his personal interest or selfish interest. And a group of people and there would be for the gratification of their sectional or private group interest.

However, 'general will' must be something that caters towards the collective will or 'general will' of the community and not the particular or sectional interests of its members. And then, suppose, the private will as an individual. It should be followed by that private individual or a group of individuals. But 'general will' must be followed by every single member in the community. That distinguish 'general will', again, from the private will or sectional interest in the society.

In other words, 'general will' is the expression of what is already in everyone's heart. It may be expressed by the majority; it may be expressed by the few or by one person. But it gives expression to what is already there in each one's heart. So, many people may not be aware of it, may not be consist of it, and therefore, they live the life of bondage and unfreedom. Now,

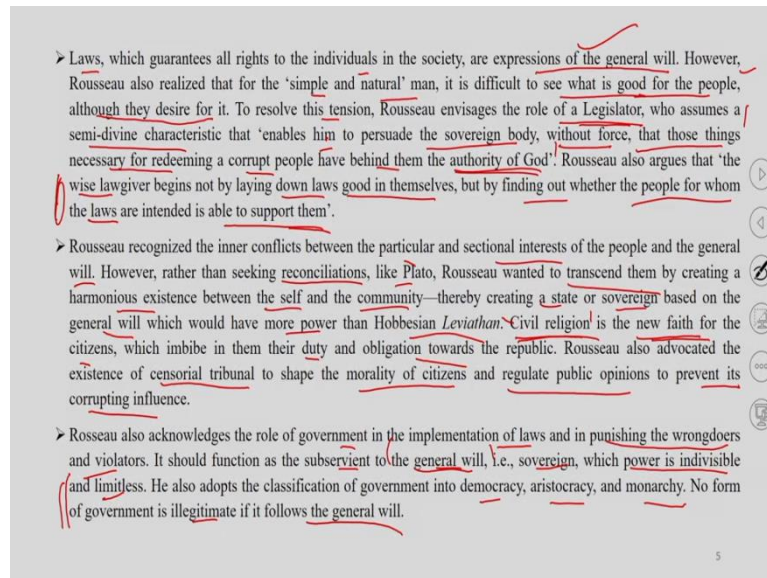
the task of the community is to force that individual to realize what is general and what is free for himself. And in that sense, he should be forced to be free.

So, the general will be the expression of what is already in everyone's heart, when they are guided by public interest and not by their selfish interest. So, the general will, thus constituted will be sovereign and is always rightful and always tend to the public good. So, thus, general will guided by the public spirit would always be rightful, there is no question of corruption or wrongdoings on the basis of general will. It always it is always right and catered to the needs of the whole community, not the private individual or the group or the sections in any society.

So, if you compare it with, let us say, modern plural democracy, so, they are multitude of groups in the society with varying and often contradictory interests. Rousseau do not consider that all of them should represent the will of the community or the political community. That is very different from the private or sectional group interest that different groups or parties propagate and strive to achieve in modern liberal plural democracy.

Rousseau gave a kind of platonic idea of harmony of human will. That is individuals should live not a divided life, one for the self and other for the rest of people or group members in the community. But a kind of harmonious whole within and the 'general will' should be the expression of harmony that should be there with individuals in the 'state of nature'. The corrupting influence of society has taken away that internal harmony presents there and that should be there in the individual. In the similar way, the 'general will' should be the expression of that harmony. It can be expressed by majority or few or one person. But that represent the will there in each one's heart, whether they are consisted of it or not.

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- Laws, which guarantee all rights to the individuals in the society, are expressions of the general will. However, Rousseau also realized that for the 'simple and natural' man, it is difficult to see what is good for the people, although they desire for it. To resolve this tension, Rousseau envisages the role of a Legislator, who assumes a semi-divine characteristic that 'enables him to persuade the sovereign body, without force, that those things necessary for redeeming a corrupt people have behind them the authority of God'. Rousseau also argues that 'the wise lawgiver begins not by laying down laws good in themselves, but by finding out whether the people for whom the laws are intended is able to support them'.
- Rousseau recognized the inner conflicts between the particular and sectional interests of the people and the general will. However, rather than seeking reconciliations, like Plato, Rousseau wanted to transcend them by creating a harmonious existence between the self and the community—thereby creating a state or sovereign based on the general will which would have more power than Hobbesian *Leviathan*. 'Civil religion' is the new faith for the citizens, which imbibe in them their duty and obligation towards the republic. Rousseau also advocated the existence of censorial tribunal to shape the morality of citizens and regulate public opinions to prevent its corrupting influence.
- Rousseau also acknowledges the role of government in the implementation of laws and in punishing the wrongdoers and violators. It should function as the subservient to the general will, i.e., sovereign, which power is indivisible and limitless. He also adopts the classification of government into democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy. No form of government is illegitimate if it follows the general will.

It cannot be wrong therefore. So, the laws guarantee the rights of individuals in society. Therefore, there are the expressions of 'general will'. So, the laws are necessary as human beings cannot enjoy or exercise their rights without the laws. As laws guarantee or protect the rights. But these laws themselves are an expression or 'general will' of the community. However, Rousseau realized that for the simple and natural man who lived the life of free and equal members in the 'state of nature', it is difficult to see what is good for the people, although they desire for it.

The majority of people in the community would desire that the state should function for the interest of all. But they themselves do not see or identify which course of action would be beneficial for the whole community. To resolve this tension, Rousseau envisaged the role of a legislator who presumed some kinds of semi-divine characteristic that enables him, the legislator, to persuade the sovereign body without force. As it is necessary for redeeming corrupt people behind them, the authority of God.

So, there are some kinds of established theological ideas that guided Rousseau's argument. It would sustain the 'general will' or political stability in the community. He did not want a kind of debate and discussion about what is 'general will' and acrimonious or conflicting positions about 'general will'. He wanted some kind of stability that would be something like semi-divine naturally command respect or obligation from the people without the recourse to violence or use of force.

People will be willing to subject themselves to such notion of 'general will', when it is persuaded to them. That it is some kind of a semi-divine or having the authority of god. And

remember, in Rousseau, there was a kind of suspicion towards atheists. Because of their loyalty or patriotism to the state can be questioned. Rousseau resolved this tension of identifying and constituting the 'general will' through this idea of legislation who would make it more acceptable, established, or more firm than everyday interaction and debated about it.

Thus, Rousseau argued that this lawgiver, whom he called the wise lawgiver began not by laying down laws good in themselves. But by finding out whether the people for whom the laws are intended able to support them. So, he was reflecting a kind of excuse or arguments about the spirit of laws. That means, the laws and its applications, and success of the law depends on the nature or characteristic of the people. And it varies from community to community.

Rousseau recognized the inner conflicts between the particular and sectional interest of the people and the 'general will'. However, rather than seeking reconciliations like all politics, particularly if you recall Aristotle in Machiavelli, politics is all about having conflicting position and reconciling those conflicting positions and to arrive at certain workable proposition. Rousseau, however, like Plato wanted to transcend these conflicts between personal interest or sectional interest and 'general will' by creating a harmonious existence between the self and community.

So, there is a kind of complete identification of the whole with the part and the part with the whole, thereby creating a state or sovereign based on 'general will' which would have more power than Hobbesian *Leviathan*. Thus, everyone must obey 'general will', unconditionally without exceptions. If they do so, then they can be forced to be free. First, Rousseau created a political community, where part and the whole has a perfect union.

There is perfect identification of the political community with its individual member and an individual member with its political community, thereby the 'general will' which is the expression of that community must be followed universally, unconditionally, without exception. If there are exceptions, then it is the responsibility of community to forcefully apply or implement or force them to obey the 'general will'.

So, civil religion, he talked about as a kind of mechanism would enable individuals to develop these civic responsibilities and public spiritedness, and participation in the life of community that was not natural, unlike, Aristotle who said that 'My men are by nature, a social being or a social animal'. Rousseau did not consider man as naturally a social being.

So, in the 'state of nature', that association with others is episodic, casual, and need based. Whereas, in the community, men must learn how to live with others and participate in the life of community.

To learn that he envisaged a kind of civil religion that would be different from the Christian religion which teach men to live other worldly only, for other worldly life and have less and less participation in the temporal world or in this life. So, Civil religion is the new faith for the citizens which imbibed in them, their duty and obligation towards the republic. Rousseau advocated the existence of censorial tribunal to shape the morality of citizens and regulate public opinions to prevent its corrupting influence.

So, again, he echoes Plato. All forms of art and literature, and expression of public opinion did not have conducive implication on the morality of members of political community. There has to be a kind of censorship or regulation of public opinion, arts, literature that may have corrupting influence on the people. Rousseau also envisaged such kinds of tribunal. He acknowledged the role of government in the implementation of laws and in punishing the wrong doers and violators of 'general will'.

However, the government must function as the subservient of the 'general will'. So, the idea of 'general will' is the sovereign, the real authority in the political community and all agents and members of that political community derives its power and authority from that general will. So, this 'general will' is sovereign. The power is indivisible and limitless. He adopts the classification of government into democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy. No form of government is illegitimate if it follows the 'general will'.

In Rousseau, you also have the classification of governments and no form of government is illegitimate if it follows the 'general will'. However, he has some criticisms against democracy and thought of communication of rules between democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy depending upon the nature of people and its population. So, if it is a small community with few members, then democracy or direct form of democracy is the most suitable form of government for them.

However, if it is a medium sized state or community, then aristocracy is a better government for that community and if it is larger than that, then monarchy could be most suitable form of government. So, inherently, none of these forms of government are legitimate or illegitimate. Only condition is if they act or perform, according to the 'general will', then they can serve the interest of the whole community and protect its members, and provide them the condition

of liberty and equality. That is the basis for the formation of political community. Now, we move onto the second part that is the critical assessment of Rousseau's thought.

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Critical Assessment of His Thought

- Rousseau was a theorist of popular sovereignty. His personal life and political treatises are riddled with many paradoxes. It starts with the opening statement of *Social Contract*, where he writes that men were born free, however, is everywhere in chains. He invoked the simple, inherently good nature of human beings in the state of nature. Yet, he argued that true freedom is moral and civil enjoyable only in a political community. In his description of the general will, he made the individual simultaneously as citizen, author of the laws and also its subject.
- Similarly, there is religious and moral content in his description of civil religion, yet he gave it a more secular foundation. Similar was his invocation of passion and sentiment and yet preference for reason. The greatest of all paradoxes in Rousseau was his argument that 'an individual can be forced to be free' by imposing on him the general will. These make his works fascinating and controversial at the same time.
- His belief in simplistic, 'natural' life combined with the religious belief, and anti-rational standpoints led many enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire to see his work as anti-progress and backsliding into the tyrannical and ignorant dark age. His books - *Emile* and *Social Contract* were condemned, banned, and publicly burnt. It was only after the French revolution that his works were widely read. Edmund Burke holds him responsible for the bloody revolution and Jacobian reign of terror, which led to the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) in France.

Rousseau was a theorist of popular sovereignty. His personal life and political treaties were riddled with many paradoxes. The first paradox started with the opening statement of *Social Contract*, where he wrote that 'men were born free, however, he is everywhere in chains'. He invoked the simple, inherently good nature of human beings in the 'state of nature'. Yet, he argued that true freedom is moral and civil enjoyable only in the political community. In his description of the 'general will', he made the individual simultaneously as citizens, author of the laws and its subjects.

So, there were many paradoxes in Rousseau's writings. Similarly, there was a religious and moral content in his description of civil religion, yet he gave it a more secular foundation. It thereby invited criticisms from the Church. Similarly, his invocation of passion and sentiment and yet preference for a reason. The greatest of all paradoxes in Rousseau was his argument that an 'individual can be forced to be free'. Thus, the use of force, he justified in the name of freedom.

These kind of contradictory and paradoxical statements made the writings of Rousseau fascinating and at the same time, controversial. And his belief in simplistic, natural life combined with the religious belief and anti-rational standpoints led many enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire to see his work as anti-progress and back sliding into tyrannical and ignorant dark ages. His books- *Emile* and *Social Contract* were condemned, banned, and publicly burnt.

It was only after the French revolution that his works were widely read again and Edmund Burke, however, held him responsible for the bloody revolution and Jacobian reign of terror. It was followed by the French revolution that eventually led to the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte's autocratic regime in France.

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➤ Rousseau's paradoxical thought and range of interests have led to various contradictory interpretations. In the 18th C, he was regarded as a counter-enlightenment thinker who challenged the notion of progress and reason or rationality as an accurate guide of humanity. In 19th C, Rousseau was regarded as the father of the French revolution or the founder of the romantic movement in Europe. In the 20th C, he was either considered to be the democratic-republican thinker or vilified as the forerunner of the totalitarian regimes like Fascism or Nazism.

➤ Feminists scholars and philosophers like Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) accused Rousseau of subordinating women to men. His argument for equality and liberty and disgust for the condition of servitude was limited to men. Women were regarded as naturally weak, and passive, who must submit to the will of men. He did not want women to play any role in the active life of the republic. However, despite the inherent paradoxes and limitations, the range of interpretations of Rousseau's thought establishes the profound influence of his philosophical positions. He influenced the democrats and autocrats alike. He was one of the most original and complex political thinkers in the modern west.

➤ The intellectual debates as to whether Rousseau was a thinker of a totalitarian, republican, democratic regime is far from settled. His works profoundly influenced the philosophy of Goethe, Kant, Marx, and Nietzsche. He was the great champion of revolutionary ideas like liberty, equality, and popular sovereignty, which shaped the French revolution that overthrew the *ancien regime* based on class hierarchy and paved the way for the republican form of government.

Rousseau's paradoxical thought and range of interests had led to various contradictory interpretations. In the 18th century, he was regarded as a counter enlightenment thinker who challenged the notion of progress and reason, or rationality as an accurate guide of humanity. In his lifetime, much of criticisms against Rousseau was because he was the supporter of counter enlightenment tradition and questioned progress, and rationality that human beings achieved through the use of science and reason.

In the nineteenth Century, however, Rousseau was regarded as the father of French revolution who coined the terms or put emphasis on the value of liberty and equality. He was also the founder of romantic movement arguing for simplistic and small community's livings in the 'state of nature'. In the twentieth century, he was either considered to be the democratic-republican thinker or vilified as the forerunner of the totalitarian regimes like Fascism or Nazism.

Feminist scholars and philosophers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, accused Rousseau of subordinating women to men. His argument for equality and liberty, and disgust for condition of servitude was limited to the men. Women were regarded as naturally weak, and passive who must submit to the will of men and that remained the valid critique of *Social Contract* thinkers, by the feminist scholars.

Rousseau did not want women to play any role in the active life of the republic. And that had led to his support for liberty and equality to all and his critique of economic inequality that existed in any society or corrupting influence of society on the men who were inherently good and honest. However, his support for these ideas were not applicable to women. However, despite, the inherent paradoxes and limitations, the range of interpretations of Rousseau's thought established the profound influence of his philosophical positions.

Hence, he influenced the democrats and autocrats alike. He was one of the most original and complex political thinkers in the modern west. The intellectual debates as to whether Rousseau was a thinker of totalitarian, republican, and democratic regime was far from settled. There was continued interest in the works of Rousseau. His characterization was that of a totalitarian or republican or democratic thinker.

So, his works profoundly influenced the philosophy of Goethe, Kant, Marx and Nietzsche. He was the great champion of revolutionary ideas like liberty, equality, and popular sovereignty. He shaped the French revolution that overthrew the ancient regime in France based on the class hierarchy and paved way for the republican form of government.

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Social Contract Tradition: An Assessment

- One of the most significant contributions of social contract tradition that emerged in 17th and 18th C Europe is the idea that political authority, sovereignty, and political obligation are based on the consent of the ruled or governed. It remains the legitimizing ground for legitimacy for modern democratic states.
- There were obvious differences among the theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau and the kind of sovereign they envisaged. However, they all belonged to the social contract tradition, which argued state as an artificial construct based on a contract among free, equal, and autonomous individuals. This was the basis for new ways of thinking about politics and political authority, which was radically different from the divine right theory of the king.
- Locke postulates a theory of limited government, whereas Hobbes and Rousseau present a theory of absolute sovereign power. One of the major criticism against the thinkers of social contract tradition is the fact that their arguments of social contract or state of nature was hypothetical and ahistorical rather than real or actual evolution of society or modern state. In this sense, their theory of the state was ahistorical. However, these theorists and their treatises have decisively shaped the discourse on modern politics, state, and sovereignty.

Now, we briefly, look at the social contract tradition and their contribution in the history or western political thought. So, one of the most significant contributions of social contract tradition that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe was the idea that political authority, sovereignty, and political obligation were based on the consent of ruled or governed. That became the legitimizing ground for the modern democracy or democratic states.

Even in modern democracies across the globe and for that matter, even the authoritarian regime or military would claim to govern it, country in the name of people or legitimize their rule by explaining or arguing that they represented the real or genuine will of the people. So, this is the major contribution of social contract tradition in Europe, where now the legitimacy of all forms of political authority, their sovereignty is dependent not on the divine right of the king. But on the consent of those who are governed or those who are ruled.

So, all states must seek the consent of people or the governed that claim to rule. Among these social contract traditions, as we have discussed Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, there were obvious differences in them and the kind of sovereign the envisaged. Locke supported a limited form of government. And Hobbes and Rousseau had exhibited the absolute notion of sovereignty.

There were internal differences between them. However, they all belong to the social contract tradition. That means, the state was a result of the covenant and contract which argued that the state as an artificial or corporate entity was an artificial contract based on a contract among free, equal, and autonomous individuals. It led to the rise of liberal idea, that the rights were that of the individual for which a state was constructed. And the state must protect those rights.

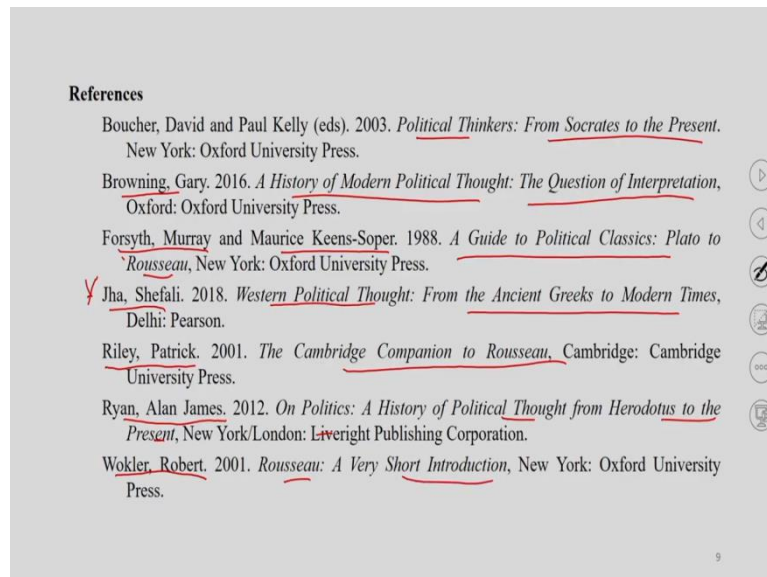
So, the formation of the state as an artificial construct was based on the consent or contract among the free, independent, and autonomous individual. And this was the basis for the new thinking about politics and political authority which was radically different from the divine right theory of the king. And that is again, the major contribution of social contract tradition. Locke postulated a theory of limited government, whereas, Hobbes and Rousseau present a theory of absolute sovereign power.

One of the major criticisms against the thinkers of social contract tradition was the fact that their arguments of social contract or 'state of nature' was hypothetical and ahistorical rather than real or actual evolution of society or the modern state. The society was not formed through the contract in the real world. Not all people would come together and give consent to a group of people or form the state. So, this argument was based on the hypothetical idea of 'state of nature'. Therefore, it is ahistorical rather than real.

In this sense, their theory of the state was ahistorical. However, these theorists and their treatises had decisively shaped the discourse on modern politics, state, and sovereignty. Much of the discussion we have on state, politics, individual, their rights and idea on sovereignty

are based on the treatises written by the social contract tradition thinkers. That is all in today's lecture.

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So, for today's lecture, you can refer to some of these books like David Boucher and Paul Kelly's- *Political Thinkers: From Socrates to the Present*. Gary Browning's- *A History of Modern Political Thought: The Question of Interpretation*. You should also read this Murray Forsyth and Maurice Keens-Soper's- *A Guide to Political Classic: Plato to Rousseau*.

And Shefali Jha's text remains the reference text for this course, you can read, *Western Political Thought: From the Ancient Greeks to Modern Times*. If you want to read more advanced interpretation of Rousseau's political thought or philosophy, you should refer to Patrick Riley's- *the Cambridge Companion to Rousseau* and James Alan Ryan's- *On Politics- A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*.

And Robert Wokler's- *Rousseau: A Very Short Introduction* or other text you should refer to understand more about Rousseau and his contribution to the western political thought. That is all in today's lecture. Thank you for listening. Do share your comments and feedbacks. We will be happy to respond. Thank you all!