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English

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Thoreau’s ideas for Civil disobedience

In “Civil Disobedience”, Henry David Thoreau figures out that any government hardly finds any way to prove its worth. The governments are backed by the majority, and therefore instead of following the right things they normally adopt changing and dynamic policies. For Thoreau, the governments should not be allowed to overrule the consciousness of the people and neither should they be allowed to adopt the unjust practices. The author strongly believes that each citizen, irrespective of the thoughts he has in the mind must be given a chance to practice his ideas. If these ideas go against the government, governments should have the moral courage to confront these ideas (Thoreau and MacLeish). Contrary to this, the people who obey the ideas of governments and do not stand up against plans which are distressing are like animals. His theorization is linked to an unjust government, which should not be obeyed. For such concepts, he opined that people gradually distance themselves from laws.

In the passage provide, Thoreau has classified the populace in three manners. He believes that each person living under control of the government can conform to one of three manners. For example, the first group comprises of those who serve the regimes with their bodies. For him, they are the militias who obey the orders irrespective of what the circumstances are. They even had to obey the commands for the price of their lives. The next group of people are those who serve with their head. These heads are people who obey commands by sitting in good offices, and by presenting themselves as the ears and eyes of regimes. Thoreau believes that such people normally don’t go against the regimes. The third group comprises of those, who serve the state with their consciences. Their consciences are based on the individual circumstances they face. As the government hardly conforms to the consciences of people, therefore these people turn to be rebellions (Thoreau and MacLeish).

Thoreau who is considered as an anti-government person respects those who obey governments with their consciences. Although Thoreau himself is not an anti-government person, his ideas oppose a general conceptualization about governments. For Thoreau, a government remains the ultimate source of keeping the people combined and defending their interests. If there is an absence of authority, people might get distracted thus impacting negatively on the affairs of states. The three divisions among population he has made are not a synonym of igniting bad feelings in people, rather a characterization of how people obey the governments over them. For him, the three tiers along with the rest of the population will not stand against the government if they feel that justice is been served (Thoreau and MacLeish). Here, I first agree with the classification Thoreau has drawn about people and then I agree with his ideas presented in Civil disobedience.

As Thoreau believes that the majority is always not right, I second his opinion. Despite the fact that the conceptualization of human society is based on the notion of majority; however, by being part of any group one cannot consider himself superior. In the idea of majority, no one from the minority is inferior. Similarly, according to him, in a majority, justice cannot always prevail. As majorities sometimes limit the chances for accessing justice to minorities and this is how they are been denied the rights (Puner). For example, the Indian Removal Act is a prime example of this. Indians were minorities and they could not access the justice in the presence of a government and a majority. This is just one aspect of how minorities may feel distressed and subjugated in the presence of a government. This is where the people serving in the three tiers mentioned above belong too.

For the first who serve with their bodies, the state holds extreme respect. Since their lives are at stake, therefore the state offers huge advantages to them. Although the material things do not compensate for the loss they bear, the state creates a positive case for itself. Thoreau blames the majority decision for making their lives at stake. A soldier or any person from the militia would never go for a conflict for his individual circumstances. The individual instinct of human suggests that they avoid confrontation and go to the last extent to manage their individual affairs peacefully (Puner). The state representatives or the militias who obey the state orders by their bodies pay the price of decisions made by majorities. Despite the fact that states sometimes defend themselves and their military motive remains the ultimate way, but still, for these people and their families, these decisions appear as harsh, disrupting and fearful.

Those who serve the states with their heads are those who actually are the state crafts. They design things, present them to the governments and start deciding about the fate of the population. These people emerge sometime from nowhere and sometimes climb to this locus by using positions offered to them for the services they render to states (Thoreau and MacLeish). Once part of the system, they start deciding the fate of state which in one way or another impact on the life of ordinary citizens. As they hold on the reigns of position which impact directly on the lives of people, therefore by one way or another, the minority decision is neglected. There are also times when the decision made by those who serve the state by heads impact a large population. In such perspectives, the opinion of the majority is overruled. Concerning the decisions relevant to the important matters in statecraft, the opinion of the majority must be cared for by the government.

The third ones are those who hold negligible value for the government. Their negligence is not only related to their least interests in government affairs, rather it is related to the least worth of their opinion. Thoreau makes a comparison of such people with horses and dogs. There is no reason here that a person should disagree with the author. In a government-based system, the opinion of people leaves a thorough impact on the decision-making process. In such cases, if one chose to disconnect himself from a system or don’t hold an opinion, for Thoreau they are devils. He calls them devils because their voice could have impacted the decision-making process, to a minimum level, if not on a major level. For Thoreau, these people serve the purpose of devils and do not care for their own people. He urges such people to at least a hold a view about matters of pressing concerns.

Everett C.Marm, who is the central character of this reading appears not to fall in any of this category. Since those who belong to these three categories in one way or another serve the states. C. Marm is different from all these people. For him giving the life in the service of the state, being a member of the statecraft and being a silent member all remains of zero worth. The reason for him being a rebellious person goes back to the circumstances one face (Bryant). The government or otherwise the state remain a beneficiary of what their people do for them. In one way or another the state takes the benefit from the presence of people, they defend its boundaries and work to make it prosperous. Despite such services to the states if it remains to fail to serve justice, there remains no other option other than going against the very concept of state and government. When a person or a group decides to stand against the government, there is no reason other than they are been denied the very basic rights. This is what led to emerging as an idea called ‘Civil disobedience (Bryant)’.

Thoreau’s writings are relevant to the present time as well. In these times, there are instances which force people to stand up against the suppressive regimes. A close analysis of this push back from the people against the government suggest that such people don’t feel comfortable in the presence of such regimes. Whenever states deny the rights, the drawback will be swerving. Not a single, rather each citizen will be Thoreau’s character Everett C.Marm. The debate of civil disobedience ends up on the provision of basic rights and negligence of the statecraft. The civil disobedience arises wherever the state fails to provide justice and substantiate the provision of human rights. This book, therefore, can provide an analysis of such situations. The relevance of this book remains to date for the fact that although human civilizations have evolved the people of this day still consider the provision of rights as the first duty of the state. Since the start of human civilization, it remains quite similar that injustice anywhere impacts negatively on large populations. Therefore, despite the moderations in the system, to this date, the human rights provision remain of prime importance. This is also what the idea of Thoreau’s ‘Civil disobedience’ is.

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