

The Human or Natural Approach

The human approach to history is just the opposite of the materialistic approach. It gives basic importance to man—and human values, both in relation to the individuals and the society. From the psychological point of view it considers itself to be composed of a set of animal instincts which are common to both man and beasts and the other set of higher instincts, religious, ethical, inquisitive and aesthetic which are peculiar to man and distinguish him from the animals.

From the philosophical point of view it considers a society to have two aspects. Firstly, it is composed of individuals, each of them having a mixture of high and low qualities. Secondly, as a whole, it has its own variety of attributes which are the eternal characteristics of man in general. A Persian poet expresses this fact thus:

"This sweet water and this saltish water in every vein of creatures will flow till the Day of Resurrection. "

Here a vein refers to the veins of the society i.e. man in an indefinite and general application. In some individuals sweet water flows i.e. good qualities dominate and in others saltish water flows i.e. bad qualities are more numerous and remarkable. This position will continue so long as man exists on the face of the earth. The death of individuals makes no difference to it. Anyhow, with the evolution of man and human society the position will certainly improve a great deal.

According to this approach history, like nature itself, is developing and progressing towards a state of perfection. The development of history is neither confined to the technical nor the cultural aspects, nor to the growth and improvement of the means of production. It is an all-round and all pervading process and extends to all human affairs. Man, as a result of his comprehensive evolution, is moving towards liberation from environmental and social bonds and is gradually throwing off the shackles which bind him to his environment.

At the same time his adherence to an ideology and faith is growing. In the future he is expected to secure complete emancipation and with that to reach the stage of complete adherence to faith and ideology. In the past when man was less able to exploit natural resources he was a slave to nature. In the future, with more and more exploitation of natural resources, he will not only be free from the bonds of nature but will also gradually bring it under his domination and control.

It is erroneous to say that evolution follows the development of the means of production. Those who say so confuse the cause with the effect. In fact, the development of the means of production is the result of man's natural craving for perfection, expansion and diversification. It originates from his power of invention which has, with the passage of time grown and is still growing. According to this approach one of the characteristics of man is the internal and individual contradiction between his terrestrial and celestial aspects, i.e. between those instincts which are inclined down wards and aim only at the individual, limited and temporary gains and those which are inclined upwards and want to encompass the whole of humanity and aim at achieving the moral, religious, scientific and intellectual objectives. The famous Persian poet, Mawlawi says:

The soul inclines to wisdom and science,
The body inclines to gardens and fruits,
The soul inclines to progress and honour,
The body inclines to property and chattels,
The body inclines to greenery and flowing water,
because it originates from them,
The soul inclines to life and the living;
because its origin is divine,
Allah also inclines to soul,
So say that He loves them and they love Him.

The internal conflict of man, which the ancients called the fight between reason and passion, automatically leads to the conflict between different groups of human beings, the elated and morally liberated beings on the one side and the nasty and brutish beings on the other.

This approach accepts the existence of a conflict as a part of the development and evolution of history, but not in the form of class war between those attached to the old means of production and old social system and those attached to the more modern means of production.

It claims that a conflict has always existed between men with mature faith who are free from the captivity of nature and the environment of animal instincts and have an object in view and the degraded and brutish persons and it has played a very effective role in the evolution of history.

To interpret all the wars in history as class wars is tantamount to closing the eyes to the most beautiful and the brightest manifestations of human life all along.

Throughout history many battles have been fought to secure material needs like food, clothing or housing, or on questions connected with sex, power and prestige. But there have definitely been certain battles which can be described as fights between the right and the wrong and the good and the evil. They represented a struggle between the human motives and the animal propensities, between the common good and the individual interests, between the high human values and the base desires and between the progressive and the elated man and the low and the perverted man.

In the words of the holy Qur'an they were fights between the troops of Allah and the troops of the Devil. The supporters of this theory strongly censure the attempts of the materialists to interpret all religious, ethical and human movements on the basis of class struggle and regard such attempts as a distortion of history and an insult to human dignity. Historical events show that many movements which were initiated for securing the primary material needs were led and guided or at least supported by individuals who themselves were well-off and well-placed.

Contrary to the claim of the materialists that all progressive campaigns are waged by the oppressed and the deprived classes wanting to displace the existing system and to replace it by another system which may ensure their material needs in conformity with the developed means of production there exists historical evidence to prove that progressive movements have not always been confined to the oppressed classes.

They have occasionally been led by the individuals belonging to the privileged classes who thrust their dagger into the heart of the ruling system.

The risings of Abraham, Moses, Muhammad and Husayn were all of this nature. It is also misleading to suggest that the progressive movements have always aimed at material objectives. The movement of the early Muslims bears witness to the fact that this is not so. Ali identifying the nature of this movement said: "They were given permission to defend their faith with the help of their swords".¹ Similarly, progressive movements have not always been the result of the development of the means of production.

During the past two centuries a number of freedom movements were launched both in the East and the West. One such movement was the movement for securing a constitutional government in Iran, known as the Mashruta Movement. In this case it cannot be claimed that the development of the means of production had created a crisis in Iran.

It is also not true that unrest in the society has always been caused by the unsuitability of the legal provisions of the existing system. In certain cases the provisions as such were quite acceptable, but a campaign had to be waged to secure their effective enforcement and the Alawi uprisings during the Abbasid period had this nature. Human conscience is not so depraved that people cannot be inspired by anything higher and nobler than their basic material needs.

From the above the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Evolutionary battles: Battles in history have been of divergent forms, nature and causes: But those which contributed to the development of history and humanity have been only those which were fought between the men of high ideology, free from selfishness and greed and the men of selfish and beastly nature lacking in aspirational and intellectual life.

The nature of the wars which have contributed to the advancement and evolution was not that of a class war nor that of a confrontation between the new and the old in the sense mentioned earlier during the course of the discussion on the materialistic theory. Wars have, by and by acquired an ideological

aspect and from the viewpoint of human values man is gradually coming closer to perfection i.e. to the stage of an ideal man in an ideal society. He will continue to advance on this path till a world government, having full regard for all human values is established and that will be the end of all the evil forces and selfish wars.

According to the Islamic terminology this government is called the Mahdi Government.

2. Absurdity of logical continuity: A logical continuity of the historical stages as described by the materialists is baseless. Historical events, especially those of the past one century, prove the absurdity of this theory. During this period only such countries have gone over to communism as had never passed through the stage of capitalism. The Soviet Union, China and the East European countries are a conspicuous example of it.

On the other hand the countries with a highly developed capitalistic system like the United States, Great Britain and France are still maintaining their old systems and a century old prediction of the protagonists of materialism concerning the workers revolution in the heavily industrialized countries like Britain and France has turned out to be mere illusion.

It is evident from the above that there is no such thing as a historical compulsion. It is quite possible that in a capitalistic society the proletarian class attains such a state of prosperity and well being that it may totally reject all ideas of revolution. Similarly, it is also possible that with appearance of a clear and convincing ideology and an elevation of religious and social conscience a nomadic society may reach the highest stage of human culture in one leap. The renaissance of the early Islamic era bears witness to this fact.

3. Sanctity of an armed struggle: The lawfulness and sanctity of an armed struggle does not mean an encroachment on any individual's rights or aspirations. The struggle becomes lawful and sacred whenever anything sacred to humanity is in danger. Whenever any right, especially that which pertains to the entire society, is threatened an armed struggle is allowed. Freedom is one such right. A struggle for the liberation of the oppressed, as specifically mentioned in the holy Qur'an, is another instance.

If the belief in the Oneness of Allah, which is the greatest asset of humanity, is in danger then a fight is naturally lawful.

4. Reforms: There is no reason why partial or gradual reforms should be condemned. History does not compulsorily pass through contradictions and the transformation of one contradiction into another is not a universal truth. Hence, it is not correct to say that partial and gradual reforms prevent an explosion and block the way to evolution.

Even partial and gradual reforms do encourage and help those who fight for a rightful and just cause and bring the chances of their final success closer. In contrast corruption, turmoil and perversions help the hostile forces and slow down the movement of history in favour of the righteous people. According to this approach, what is required is a sort of development which precedes the ripening of the fruit on the tree

and not an explosion. The better the care, anti pest protection and watering of a tree, the better, healthier, and sometimes earlier is the fruit it produces.

5. Disorders: The same reasons which justify partial and gradual reforms also make unlawful subversion and sabotage with a view to creating deadlock and crisis, which is recommended by the materialistic theory.

6. Vacillations of history: Although, on the whole, history moves towards evolution, yet contrary to the materialistic view, such a movement is neither compulsory nor inevitable. It is also not essential that every society in any stage of its history should be more perfect than it was in the preceding stage.

The prime mover of history is man who is free and the master of his actions. Hence, history fluctuates in its movements. Sometimes it goes forward and sometimes backward.

It sways now to the right and now to the left. Some times it moves fast and sometimes slow and occasionally stands still. A society continues to rise and fall. The history of human civilization is nothing but a series of rises, falls and extinctions. As the famous historian, Toynbee, has pointed out, decline of every single civilization is inevitable, though on the whole, human history continues to advance steadily along a line of evolution.

7. The evolutionary march of humanity towards freedom from the restrictions imposed by natural environments, economic conditions and individual and group interests has on the whole, been guided towards a purposeful life, a better ideology and a deeper faith.

The will of a primitive man is mostly conditioned by his natural and social environments and his animal impulses, whereas a culturally advanced man with his broad outlook has gradually attained a great deal of freedom from such restrictions and has consequently, to a large extent, brought his environments and his impulses under his control.

8. The jihad and the efforts to persuade others to adopt the righteous path are quite different from a class war, for they have a humanitarian basis.

9. The power of conviction and reasoning is genuine, natural and effective. A conviction enables the human conscience to overcome material urges.

10. The Hegelian and Marxian triangle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis is neither applicable to history nor to nature and consequently it is a false presumption that history passes through contradictories or that historical stages are a series of contradictories derived from each other and transformed into one another.

The triangle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis is based on two transformations and one combination i.e. the transformation of a phenomenon into its antithesis, then its transformation into the antithesis of antithesis and the combination of these two forms at the third and last stage viz. the synthesis.

But, in reality, nature does not work in this manner. What actually exists in nature is either a combination of two contradictories without transformation, or transformation of one contradictory into another without any combination. The third form which is met with is evolution without either transformation or combination.

Many elements which are somewhat contradictory to each other combine together but are not transformed into each other. For instance, water is a mixture of hydrogen and oxygen. In such cases there is a combination, not transformation. There are other cases where nature gradually tilts from one excessive state to the opposite state and in the process strikes a balance between the two. In such cases there is a transformation, but no combination. There are still other cases where a third thing comes into being as a result of the combination of the two things. Of course, there is no harm if we call the resulting third thing synthesis and the two original ones thesis and antithesis respectively, but that means nothing more than the use of common and familiar terms.

The same is the case with the use of the word "dialectic". It is a beautiful and well-sounding word and no writer would like to be deprived of it. Therefore, there is no harm if it is used in connection with any idea that combines the principles of motion and contradiction though it may not have those distinctive features of dialectic thinking to which we have referred before.

1. See: Sermon 154, Peak of Eloquence, Nahjul Balaghah, ISP 1979.

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