

Two Concepts About Man

The above-mentioned two approaches to the evolutionary movement of history have resulted from two concepts about man, his real identity and his hidden capacities. According to the first concept man is a prisoner of his material interests, all his actions being invariably determined by the compulsion of the means of production and economic conditions. His conscience, his temperament, his judgement, his ideas and his selections are all but a reflection of his natural and social environment against the dictates of which he cannot make the slightest move.

According to the second concept man is free from compulsion of nature, environment and temperament. He is the master of his destiny and righteousness. Human values are inborn in him. He can use his reasoning power and can implement his ideas. He need not be dictated to by his environmental conditions. No doubt, man is influenced by his environment but this is not a unilateral process.

Environment, too, is affected by man. Being free and a master of his environment, man's conduct and his reactions to environmental conditions are often different from that of an animal. Man's basic characteristic which, in fact, is the criterion of his humanity is his ability to control his passions and base desires. This ability which is a very bright aspect of the human life has been totally ignored by the materialists.

No doubt the holy Qur'an interprets history on the basis of the second view. From the Qur'anic point of view there has been an eternal conflict between a group of righteous people like Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad and their faithful followers on the one hand and the other group of evil-doers like Nimrud, the Pharaoh, the Jewish tyrants, Abu Sufyan etc. on the other.

Against every Pharaoh there is a Moses, says an Arabic proverb. In the words of the Persian poet, Mawlawi, two banners have always been afloat, one white and the other black. In the fight between the forces of right and the forces of wrong sometimes the former has been victorious and sometimes the latter. Anyhow, all victories and defeats have been the outcome of a set of social, economic and moral factors. The holy Qur'an emphasizes the effect of moral factors and thus turns history into a source of instruction.

If history is considered to be merely a string of accidental happenings, having no definite cause behind them, it will not be in any way different from fiction which may provide an entertainment and serve as a pastime, but it can have no instructional value.

In case we admit that history has definite rules by which it is governed, but think that human will has no part to play in determining its course, then history may be regarded as instructive from a theoretical point of view, but can have no practical value. In this case it will only be as instructive as the farthest galaxy about which we may know quite a lot, but can do nothing to determine or change its course.

In case we concede that history is governed by definite rules and man also plays an effective role therein, but think that, despite all that, the determining factor is money or force, then history will no doubt be instructive, but only as an evil. The same will be the result, if knowledge is looked upon, not as a determining factor, but as an instrument for acquiring power or force.

However, if we consider history to be subject to definite rules and at the same time admit that human will plays an effective and final role in determining its course for the benefit of the society, then and only then is history both instructive and useful and its study is educative and rewarding. The holy Qur'an looks upon history from this very angle.

The holy Qur'an has described those who are termed reactionaries as the rabble, pleasure-seekers and egoists and those who fight for the right cause as the oppressed and the persecuted. From the Qur'anic point of view the nature of the eternal struggle, which has continued from the dawn of history and which has helped the advancement of the society, is moral and human, not material, nor is it a class war.

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