

Interpretation of the Evolution of History

If it is admitted that a society has its own nature, character and a living, growing and developing personality then the next question is, how is its evolution to be interpreted i.e. how does it strive for a state of perfection?

We have already seen how the holy Qur'an lays stress on the genuineness of society's personality and its evolutionary progress. We also know that there have been, and still are, other schools holding a similar view. Now we must find out how, from the viewpoint of the holy Qur'an and from these other schools of thought, history develops. What are the responsibilities of man in this respect and what part is he supposed to play? What form should "The Great Expectation" assume is another closely related subject which must be explored simultaneously.

Historical evolution is interpreted in two different ways. One method is known as the materialistic or dialectic and the other is called human or natural. In other words, in respect of historical evolution there exist two different approaches and two different ways of thinking.

According to each of them the great expectation assumes a different form and a distinctive nature. We propose to explain these two ways of thinking, but only to the extent that they are related to the question of the expectation and hope for the future.

Dialectic Approach

Some people interpret history from the angle of transformation of one contradictory into another. Not only history but the evolution of the entire nature is also interpreted by them on this basis. Hence, before explaining the materialistic interpretation of history, we propose to explain briefly the dialectic interpretation of nature, which is the basis of the materialistic interpretation of history.

Firstly, according to this doctrine, everything in nature is constantly moving and striving to reach the next stage. Nothing is static or motionless. Therefore, the correct approach to nature is to study things and phenomena while they are moving and changing and to realise that even our thinking, being a part of nature, is constantly undergoing a change.

Secondly, every part of nature is influenced by other parts and in turn influences them. The whole universe is bound by a chain of actions and reactions. Nevertheless, a complete harmony exists among all parts of nature. Hence, the correct approach is to study everything in nature as it is related to other things and not in isolation.

Thirdly, motion originates from contradiction. It is contradiction which is the basis of every motion and change. As the Greek philosopher, Heracleitus, said 2,500 years ago, struggle is the mother of all progress. Contradiction in nature means that everything is inclined to its opposite and it nurtures its antithesis within itself. Along with everything that exists, factors which tend to destroy it, also set off factors those which tend to preserve the existing state and those which tend to transform it into its antithesis.

Fourthly, this internal struggle continues to intensify and grow till it reaches a point where a sudden revolutionary change takes place. There the struggle culminates in the triumph of the new forces and the defeat of the old ones with the result that the thing is transformed into its antithesis completely.

Following this transformation the same process begins anew, because this phase again nurtures its opposite within it, and a further internal struggle leads to a fresh transformation. Anyhow, this time the thing does not revert to its original state, but is transformed into a state which is a sort of combination of the first and the second phases. This third state is known as synthesis. Thus, nature moves from thesis to antithesis and then finally to synthesis and after completing one cycle, again starts following the same evolutionary course.

Nature has no ultimate goal and is not striving to a state of perfection but is rather inclined towards self destruction. However, as every antithesis tends towards its own antithesis, this process perforce takes the shape of synthesis, resulting in compulsory evolution. This is what is called the dialectic interpretation of nature.

History being a part of nature, the same law of evolution applies to it also, the only difference being that, its components are human. History is a continuous process and is influenced by inter-relations between man and nature and between man and society. There is a constant conflict and confrontation between the progressive groups and others which are in a state of decay.

This struggle, which in the final analysis may be described as the struggle of contradictories, after going through a violent and revolutionary process, ends to the benefit of the progressive forces. Every event in the course of this struggle is followed by its antithesis and the process goes on until the evolution is completed.

The basis of human life and the motive force of history is the function of production which at every stage of its development creates particular, political, judicial, domestic and economic conditions necessitating the development of relations among individuals.

But the function of production does not remain static at any particular stage. It continues to develop, for man is a tool-making creature. With the gradual development of tools the production goes up and with that new men with a fresh outlook and a more developed conscience appear on the scene, for not only does man make the tools but the tools also make the man. The development of productions and the increase in its quantum create new economic equations which bring about a set of new social conditions.

It is said on this account that economy is the understructure of a society and all other affairs are subservient to it. Whenever it undergoes a change as a result of the development of the means of production and the going up of production level, it becomes necessary to change the superstructure also.

But that stratum of the society which depends upon the old economic system regards this change as being against its interests and endeavours to maintain the status quo. In contrast the newly up-coming stratum attached to new means of production, considering a change in the situation and in the establishment of a new system to be in its interest tries hard to change and push the society and all its affairs forward to bring them into harmony with the newly developed means of production.

The intensity of the struggle and the conflict between these two groups, one decrepit and reactionary and the other progressive and forward-looking, continues to grow until it reaches an explosive point and the society with a revolutionary group steps forward and undergoes a complete change. The primitive system gives place to the new and thus the process ends in the complete victory of the new forces and defeat of the old ones. Thereafter a new phase of history begins.

This new phase again faces a similar fate. With the further development of the means of production fresh men come into the field. With the increase in the quantum of production the current system loses its capability of solving social problems and the society once again faces a deadlock. There again appears the need of a big change in the economic and social systems. This phase also gives place to its antithesis and a new phase begins. And thus the process of change and development goes on steadfastly.

History, just like nature itself, passes through contradictories, i.e. every stage of it harbours the germs of the next stage within itself and gives place to it after a series of struggles and conflicts.

This mode of thinking in respect of nature and history is called dialectic and according to it, all the social values throughout history have been subservient to this means of production.

Chief Characteristic

Now let us see as to what is the chief characteristic of the dialectic thinking which distinguishes it from what is termed as the metaphysical thinking. The exponents of dialectic thinking mention four principles as the distinctive features of their doctrine. Let us take them one by one.

Firstly, they maintain that all things are constantly moving and progressing whereas, as they assert, according to metaphysical thinking, things are static and motionless.

This imputation has no basis. The upholders of metaphysical thinking do not believe that things are static. They use the term "Unchangeability" relatively. Otherwise they also believe that all physical things are subject to change. It is only metaphysical things which may be described as static.

Unfortunately the supporters of dialectic logic, being the adherents of the maxim that the end justifies the means, concentrate their attention on achieving their objectives and in doing so, ignore the correctness or other wise of what they attribute to others. Anyhow, the principle of motion is not a distinctive feature of dialectic thinking.

The second principle is that of correlation and interaction of things. This, too, cannot be considered to be a characteristic of dialectic thinking. Though the supporters of this doctrine allege that the rival theory of metaphysical thinking does not believe in this principle, yet the fact is not so.

The third principle is that of contradiction. But the question is whether it is the characteristic only of the dialectic thinking. Is it a fact that the upholders of metaphysical thinking totally deny the existence of contradiction in nature? On this point the supporters of dialecticism have unnecessarily raised such an uproar.

They base their arguments on the existence of the principle known in logic and philosophy as the law of non contradiction and assert that as the supporters of metaphysical thinking believe in this principle, they must naturally deny the existence of all sorts of contradiction. But the dialecticians conveniently forget that this logical principle is not even remotely connected with the existence of contradictions, in the sense of conflict between the various elements of nature or the elements of the society or history.

Anyhow, the dialecticians go a step further and assert that the supporters of the metaphysical thinking because of their beliefs that all parts of nature, including such obviously divergent things as fire and water, are in a state of mutual harmony and compatibility call upon the various elements of that society to be at peace and on this basis urge the persecuted not to resist oppressors and adopt a policy of appeasement and surrender.

We again emphasize that all this is a distortion of the truth. According to the supporters of metaphysical thinking contradiction in the sense of divergence and mutual competition of the various elements of nature does exist and it is necessary for the continuity of Allah blessings.

The fourth principle of mutation in nature and of revolution in history is also not a basic characteristic of dialectic thinking. It was never mentioned as a dialectic principle by Hegel, the father of the modern dialectic method of reasoning, nor by Karl Marx, the hero of dialectic materialism. It was recognized as a biological principle of evolution in the 19th century and was later introduced into dialectics by Frederick Engels, a disciple of Karl Marx. Today it is an accepted principle of biology and is not the exclusive

monopoly of any particular school of thought. Then what is the basic characteristic of dialectic thinking?

In fact, the distinctive feature and the real basis of this school is two fold. One is the doctrine that not only external realities but ideas also have a dialective nature i.e. the ideas are subject to the above mentioned four principles. In this respect no other school of thought shares the views of this school. (This point has been discussed in detail in the 1st volume of the book 'The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism').

The other distinctive feature of this school is that it interprets contradiction to mean that everything necessarily nurtures its antithesis within itself and subsequently gets transformed into it and that this antithesis itself passes through the same process. This doctrine is claimed to apply to both nature and history both of which, as they put it, pass through contradictories. According to this school evolution means the combination of two opposites, one of which is transformed into the other.

The doctrine of contradiction in the sense of conflict between different parts of nature and their occasional combination is quite old. What is new about dialecticism is the claim that, besides contradiction and conflict between different parts of nature, contradiction also exists within each part of itself and this contradiction takes the form of a battle between the new progressive factors and the old decadent ones and culminates in the final triumph of the progressive ones. These two features are the corner stone of the dialectic way of thinking.

Hence, it is entirely wrong to consider every school upholding the principles of motion and contradiction to be dialectic. Such a mistake has been committed by those who, having come across the principles of motion, change and contradiction in Islamic teachings, have drawn the conclusion that Islamic thinking is also dialectic. The fact is that according to the dialectic thinking all truths are transient and relative, whereas Islam believes in a series of permanent and eternal truths.

Further, to believe that nature and history move in a triangular form (thesis, antithesis and synthesis) and pass through contradictories is an essential characteristic of the dialectic way of thinking. Islamic teachings do not approve of this belief.

The fact is that this misconception has been created by the supporters of dialectic materialism. They, in their discourses, which are never free from an element of propaganda, give all non-dialectic thinking the name of metaphysical thinking according to which, as they allege, all parts of nature are motionless, unrelated to each other and free from all sorts of contradiction. They accuse the Aristotelian logic of being based on these very principles. They assert this view with such force that those who have little direct knowledge are often misled.

Not only that, but also those who are impressed by such statements, if lacking in the knowledge of Islam, easily come to the conclusion that the principle of immobility, unrelatedness and absence of contradiction must form the basis of Islamic thinking. They base their arguments on the premises that Islam, being a religious creed, has a metaphysical basis and therefore, its thinking must also be

metaphysical and that metaphysical thinking being based on the above-mentioned three principles the belief in them must be a part of the Islamic way of thinking.

Another group, which is somewhat acquainted with Islamic teachings, presume that Islamic thinking, not being metaphysical, must be dialectic. As this group recognizes no third alternative, naturally it comes to this conclusion.

All this misunderstanding and confusion is the result of undue reliance on what the supporters of dialectic materialism attribute to others. Anyhow, as already mentioned, truth is quite different.

From the above discussion we may draw the following conclusions:

The new and old ideology

In the present context the young and the old do not refer to the younger and the older generation and the conflict between them has nothing to do with the problem of the so-called generation gap. It does not mean that the younger generation always supports a revolutionary movement, or that the older generation is necessarily conservative. Similarly, confrontation between the new and the old has no cultural implications either. It does not mean a confrontation between the educated and the illiterate. Its significance is purely social and economic and it simply means a conflict between those classes which are the beneficiaries of the existing order and those which are dissatisfied with it and being inspired by new means of production, are keen to bring about a change in the existing social structure.

In other words it means a struggle between the progressive and the liberal minded elements of society favouring evolution and those that are decrepit and narrow-minded and tend to maintain the status quo.

Consequent to the fact that social conscience and the social attitude of man are inspired by his class position and environmental conditions the privileged classes, being the beneficiaries of the existing order, necessarily become obscurantist, whereas the exploited and deprived classes are stirred to action. This is entirely different from the question of having or not having a formal education. Mostly the evolutionary movements are launched by those who are educationally backward but, owing to their class position, are forward-looking and liberal minded.

Logical continuity of history

Evolutionary stages of history are linked with each other by a natural and logical bond. Each stage has its own place and cannot be moved forward or backward. For example, capitalism is the middle link between feudalism and socialism and it is impossible for a society to pass directly from feudalism to socialism without passing through capitalism. Such a happening will be in a way similar to what was termed by ancient philosophers as "abrupt jump" i.e. passing from one point to another without passing through any of the routes connecting them.

This will be as if the human seed, without passing through the foetus stage, reaches the delivery stage, or a new-born child, without passing through childhood, becomes a fully grown-up youth, or that "B" who is the son of "A" should take birth before "A" comes into the world.

That is why the supporters of this logic gave the early socialists, who wanted to lay the foundation of socialism merely on ideology, ignoring the compulsion of history and logical continuity of its stages, the name of idealists and called their socialism fantastic. Contrary to early socialism, Marxism is based on the logical continuity of historical stage.

Not only is an abrupt transition and traversing several stages in one leap not possible, but it is also essential that every phase reaches its natural climax before the evolutionary process takes the final form. For instance, feudalism, or for that matter capitalism, has its definite course which must run gradually so that, at a historical moment, a change may come about. To expect any stage to come, before the stage prior to it attains its climax, is tantamount to expecting a child to be born before completing its foetal stages. In such a case the result may be an abortion, not the delivery of a healthy child.

The fight between the new and the old is the basic condition of the transition of history from one stage to another and is an essential factor in the evolution of human society. Such a fight is always sacred. Similarly, the extermination of the old elements is lawful, even if they do not commit any act of aggression, because without doing so the society cannot be pushed forward towards evolution. On the basis of this logic lawful fights need not necessarily be defensive, or with a view to forestalling an aggression.

Not only is the struggle against the old by the new lawful and sacred but every other action also, which paves the way for a revolution and accelerates the evolutionary process, is equally lawful. Thus, all subversive and disruptive activities, with a view to creating dissatisfaction and unrest, widening the split and deepening the conflict, are sacred.

As stated earlier, evolution depends on a revolutionary and violent change of one contradictory to another and such a change does not materialize unless and until the internal conflict reaches its boiling point and the breach becomes the widest. Therefore, anything which widens the gulf accelerates the transition of the society from lower stage to a higher stage. As unrest and discord may play such a role, they are also lawful and sacred, according to this logic.

In contrast, such measures as partial reforms, appeasing and pacifying action and redress of grievances are considered to be wrong and improper. They are supposed to serve as an anaesthetic and are, therefore, tantamount to a betrayal of the cause. Such actions obstruct the way of evolution as they, at least, temporarily narrow the split and thus delay the revolution. These are the conclusions which may be drawn from the materialistic approach to history.

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