

## Chapter 28: Islamic Philosophy of History

**Criteria:** To ascertain the view–point of a school in respect of the nature of history, a number of criteria may be used. By taking these criteria into consideration, it can be found out what exactly the approach of a particular school is on historical movements and the nature of historical events.

Here we recount the criteria which have come to our notice in this respect. Of course it is possible that there may exist some other criteria which might have not come to our notice.

Before mentioning these criteria and finding out the view of Islam on them, we deem it necessary to point out that from our point of view the Qur'an hints at certain principles which point to the prime importance of the spiritual basis of society as compared to its material basis. The Qur'an expressly enunciating one of these principle says: "**Allah changes not the condition of a people until they change what is related to their own conduct and behaviour.**" (Surah ar-Ra'd, 13 :11)

In other words, Allah does not change the destiny of a people until and unless they themselves change their spirit. This verse expressly negates the theory of the economic compulsion of history. Here we mention the criteria so far as they could be ascertained by us and in their light would determine the logic of Islam.

### I. Strategy of Mission

Every school has a message for society and calls upon people to accept it. For this purpose it has to use some special method which may suit its main objectives and be appropriate to its general approach on the nature of its historical movement. The preaching of a school consists of acquainting people with its basic view, and exerting pressure on special levers in order to stir and mobilize them.

For example, the school of Auguste Comte, which claims to be a sort of scientific school, holds that mental development is the essence of human evolution. This school believes that as far as his mentality is concerned, man has already passed through two stages, mythical and philosophical, and has now reached the scientific stage. As this school claims to be scientific, all the doctrines preached by it are

couched in scientific terms and the levers which it wants to use as a means to mobilize people are also scientific levers.

Marxism is a revolutionary theory of the working class. Its preaching aims at creating consciousness of class contradictions among the workers. The levers on which it exerts pressure are obsessions and a sense of having been deprived and cheated.

The publicity that the various schools make and the points which they emphasize to mobilize people differ in accordance with the outlook of these schools on society and history. Similarly they have divergent views about the scope of their mission and about the morality and immorality of the use of force, in propagating and enforcing their doctrines in accordance with their particular outlook on the evolution of history and the development of man.

Certain schools, such as Christianity, maintain that as far as human beings are concerned only peaceful preaching conforms to the rules of morality. They consider the use of force in any form and under any circumstances to be immoral. That is why the Christian faith teaches that if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, offer your left cheek also, and if anyone seizes your forehead, surrender your cap also. On the contrary certain other schools such as that of Nietzsche are of the opinion that it is only the use of force that is moral, because man's greatest virtue lies in his power, and the most courageous man is equal to the highest man. From Nietzsche's point of view Christianity is tantamount to servility, weakness and humility, and is the main cause of the stagnation of humanity.

Some other schools hold that although morality depends on power and force, yet the use of force is not morally good in every case. From the view-point of Marxism the force that an exploiter uses against the exploited is immoral, because it is used to maintain the status quo, and therefore it is a factor of stagnation. But the force which the exploited uses against the exploiter is moral, for it is used to revolutionize society and to push it to a higher stage.

In other words, in the eternal conflict prevailing in society, one of the two parties fighting against each other, performs the role of the thesis and the other that of the anti-thesis. The force that performs the role of the thesis, being reactionary is immoral, and the force that performs the role of the antithesis, being revolutionary and evolutionary, is moral. But the same force which is moral at one stage may become immoral at a subsequent stage when it plays a negative and reactionary role against some other force which is revolutionary. As such morality is a relative term. What is moral at one stage may become immoral at another higher stage.

From the view-point of Christianity the contact of a school with its opponents whom it considers to be anti-evolutionary is in itself a simple contact. It is moral provided it is gentle and friendly. On the other hand, Nietzsche holds that the only moral contact is that of the powerful with the weak. According to him there is nothing more moral than power and there is nothing more immoral than weakness. There is no bigger crime or graver sin than being weak. From the view-point of Marxism there can be no contact

between two groups holding opposite economic positions except that of force and the use of power. In this contact the use of force by the exploiting class is immoral, because it is anti-evolutionary, and the use of force by the exploited class is moral. Further there can be no doubt that the contact of a young force with an old one always amounts to a clash and for that matter, a morally justifiable clash.

Islam censures all the above-mentioned theories. Morality is not confined to peaceful contacts and kindly preaching of benevolent nature. Sometimes the use of force also can be moral. That is why Islam considers it a sacred duty to fight against violence and tyranny and considers jihad and armed uprising, under certain circumstances, an obligation.

As for Nietzsche's theory, it is obviously absurd, inhuman and anti-evolutionary.

The theory of Marxism is based on the same mechanism as it believes to be the mechanism of history.

From the view-point of Islam force is not to be used against an anti-evolutionary group in the very first instance. Contrary to the teaching of Marxism it is to be used only at a subsequent stage. First the method of convincing and exhortation should be employed. The Qur'an says: "**Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and exhortation.**" (Surah an-Nahl 16:125)

The use of force against an anti-evolutionary front is allowed only when peaceful methods of convincing by arguments and through rational persuasion have been used and have failed.

In fact, all the Prophets who fought against their opponents, first tried to convince them by means of arguments and exhortation and often entered into debates with them. They resorted to force only when they could achieve no success or achieved only a partial one which they often did. The basic thing is that as Islam reflects in spiritual terms, it believes in the remarkable power of arguments and exhortation.

As it believes, in the words of Marx, in the critical force of weapons, it also believes in the force of the weapon of criticism, and takes full advantage of that. Anyhow, it does not believe that it is the only force which should be used everywhere. It is because of the special spiritual outlook of Islam in respect of man and consequently in respect of society and history that it regards fighting against an anti-evolutionary front as the second stage of its contact with it, the first stage being the arguments, exhortation and debate.

That shows that the contact of a school with its adversaries may either be based on mere persuasion or on mere conflict or it may be a two-stage contact, firstly of persuasion and secondly of conflict and clash. The policy which a school pursues in this respect makes clear its view about the effectiveness of the force of logic and exhortation and the limits of their efficacy. Similarly it makes clear what that school thinks about the course of history and the role of conflict in it.

Now we shall discuss the other aspect. Let us see what kind of consciousness Islam strives to awaken and what means it employs to invite people for embracing its message.

Islamic consciousness attaches paramount importance to the belief in the Divine Source and Resurrection.

This is the method which the Qur'an uses to inculcate its teachings, and says that it was used by the former Prophets also. The consciousness which Islam provides is in respect of the questions: "From where have you come? Where are you now? And where are you going? From where has the world come into being? What stage is it passing through? In which direction is it moving?" The first pinch of responsibility which the Prophets created was the pinch of the responsibility man owes to the whole creation and life. The pinch of social responsibility is a part of this pinch. As pointed out earlier, the chapters of the Qur'an revealed in Makkah during the first 13 years of the Holy Prophet's mission scarcely dealt with any subject other than that of the Divine Source and the Resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Prophet started his mission with the declaration: "*Say, there is no deity except Allah so that you may prosper.*"

This was a religious movement which aimed at purifying human belief and thought. It is true that monotheism has vast dimensions. If all the Islamic teachings are analysed, they can be summed up as monotheism, and if monotheism is expanded, it encompasses all these teachings. But we know that in the beginning the creed meant nothing more than an intellectual and practical turning from polytheistic doctrines and acts of worship to monotheistic doctrines and acts of worship. If the creed had any extensive meaning, people at that time were not conscious of that.

This teaching which struck roots in the depth of human nature, created in the followers of the Prophets such a zeal and spirit that they jealously defended their creed, left no stone unturned to spread it and did not hesitate to sacrifice their life and property for the sake of it. The Prophets began with what is known in our times as the super-structure of society and gradually reached its infrastructure. In the school of the Prophets man is more concerned with his faith and belief than with his personal gains and interests.

In this school belief and thinking are the infrastructure; and work, that is the contact with nature and its gifts and with society, is the superstructure. Every religious preaching must be prophetic. In other words it should be accompanied by the remembrance of the Divine Source and the Resurrection. The Prophets mobilized society by awakening this feeling, unfolding this consciousness and shaking off the dust from conscience, having trust in the *Rizwan* (good pleasure) of Allah, His commands and His retribution. In the Qur'an at thirteen places the pleasure of Allah has been mentioned. By pressing this spiritual point the Qur'an has mobilized the society of the faithful. The understanding of this fact may be called Divine or cosmic consciousness.

In the next category there are the Islamic teachings which draw man's attention to his own dignity and superior position. According to Islam man is not that animal which in the beginning was just like all other primates, but was so dexterous on the scene of the struggle for survival that over hundreds of millions of years he has acquired his present position. On the contrary man is the being who has a shadow of

Divine spirit in him and before whom the angels have prostrated themselves. In spite of his animal propensities of lust and vice, man in himself has a pure essence which is against bloodshed, lies, corruption, meanness, lowliness, hatred and putting up with violence and tyranny. Man is a manifestation of Divine honour. The Holy Qur'an says: **"Honour belongs to Allah, to His Messengers and the believers."** (Surah al-Munafiqun, 63:8)

When the Holy Prophet says: *"Man's nobility lies in his vigil at night and his honour lies in his not being in need of the help of other people"*; or when Imam Ali says to his companions at Siffin: *"If you die as victors, that is your life and if you live as the vanquished, that is your death."* (See Nahjul Balagha – Sermon 51) or when Imam Husayn ibn Ali says: *"To me death is nothing but good fortune and living with the tyrants is nothing but a matter of grief."*

All these sayings stress the sense of dignity and honour which man possesses by virtue of his true nature.

The third stage is that of the consciousness of one's rights and social responsibilities. In the Qur'an we come across several instances in which stress has been laid on the lost rights with a view to arouse people to create a movement.

***"How should you not fight for the cause of Allah and of the oppressed among men and of the women and the children, who say: Our Lord! Deliver us from this town of the oppressors, and appoint for us from You a protector and send one that will help us?"*** (Surah an-Nisa 4:75 )

In this verse in order to persuade people to embark upon jihad, stress has been laid on two spiritual values: (i) that their movement is for the cause of Allah, (ii) and that helpless people are being oppressed by the tyrants.

In the following verse the Qur'an says:

***"Sanction is given to those who fight because they have been wronged; Allah is indeed able to give them victory. Those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said: Our Lord is Allah for had it not been for Allah's repelling some men by means of others, cloisters, churches, oratories and mosques wherein the Name of Allah is often mentioned, would have assuredly been pulled down. Surely Allah helps the one who helps Him. Surely Allah is Strong, Almighty. Those who if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the zakat and exhort to do what is right and restrain from what is evil. And to Allah belongs the issue of all affairs."*** (Surah al-Hajj, 22:39-41)

In this verse we see that while giving permission of jihad, a reference has been made to the lost rights of the Muslims. At the same time a value which is higher than the lost rights, and which forms the real philosophy of defence has also been mentioned. The Qur'an says that if jihad is not undertaken and the believers do nothing, the safety of the mosques and other houses of worship, which constitute the

throbbing heart of the spiritual life of society, would be endangered and they would cease functioning. In the Surah an-Nisa' the Qur'an says: **"Allah does not like the utterance of harsh speech except by one who has been wronged."** (Surah an-Nisa, 4:148)

Evidently this is a sort of encouragement of the uprising by the oppressed. In the Qur'an after censuring the poets for their extravagantly fanciful ideas, adds: **"Except those who believe, do good deeds, remember Allah much and vindicate (by means of poetry) themselves after they have been wronged."** (Surah as Shu'ara, 26:227 )

Although according to the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the conduct of the Holy Prophet) it is a grave sin to submit to tyranny and it is the duty of everyone to realize one's rights, these things have been mentioned as values having human aspect. The Qur'an does not rely on any psychic obsession nor does it excite jealousy or a carnal desire. For example it never says that such and such group is enjoying a lavish style of life, eating, drinking and making merry; why don't you take its place?

If an attempt is made to seize the property of someone, Islam does not allow the owner to keep quiet on the plea that material goods have no value. Similarly if an attempt is made to violate the honour of a person, it is the duty of that person not to take the matter lightly or keep quiet. According to a tradition, a person who is killed defending his honour or his property is to be regarded as a martyr who has laid down his life for the cause of Allah. If Islam urges people to defend their property, that does not mean that Islam asks them to amass wealth or to be greedy. It only asks them to defend their rights. Similarly when it considers it a duty to defend one's honour, it does so because it regards chastity as the highest social value and considers man to be the custodian of it.

## II. An Ideology's Nomenclature

Every school of thought identifies its followers with a specific name. For example the racial theory is the distinctive mark of the adherents of that theory. When they say " We", they mean the whites. The Marxist theory is the theory of the workers. The followers of this school call themselves workers and identify themselves by this name. When they say " We" , they mean workers. The Christians simply ascribe themselves to the person of Christ as if they have no doctrine nor any ideology. Their mark of identification is that they look for Christ and want to join him.

It is a characteristic of Islam that it has not chosen any racial, class, professional, local, regional or individual label to introduce its school and its followers. The adherents of this school are not known by any such designation as the Arabs, the Semites, the poor, the rich, the oppressed, the whites, the blacks, the Asians, the Easterns, the Westerns, the Muhammadans, the Qur'anians, the Qibliters etc. None of the above names represents the real identity of the adherents of Islam.

When the question of the identity of this school and its followers arises, all these names vanish. Only one thing remains, that is the relation between man and Allah. Islam means submission to Allah. The

Muslims are an ummah that submits to Allah, to truth and to the revelation and the inspiration rising from the horizon of truth and communicated to the heart of the most worthy persons. Then what is the nature of the identity of the Muslims? What label does their religion attach to them and under what banner does it want them to assemble? The answer is Islamic submission to truth.

The criterion of unity that every school approves for its followers is a reliable means of judging its aims and objectives.

It also helps us to understand the outlook of school regarding man, society, and history.

### **III. Favourable and Unfavourable Conditions for Acceptability**

We have said earlier that different schools have different view about the mechanism of the movement of history. One school is of the opinion that the natural mechanism of this movement is the pressure of one class against another class. Another school holds that it is the friction between a reactionary class. Still another school maintains that the real mechanism should be looked for in the pure state of human nature, which is evolutionary and progressive.

Some other schools have some other opinions. Every school in its teachings enumerates such causes, conditions, obstacles and impediments of the movement of history. as are appropriate to its conception of its mechanism The school which believes that the mechanism of the movement of history is the pressure of a class against another, in order to mobilize society and bring it into motion tries to create such pressure if it does not already exist. Marx in some of his works has pointed out that the existence of a subjugated and oppressed class is absolutely necessary for the emergence of a class of free people.

At the end of his study he says: " Where does the possibility of liberation for the German nation lie? Our answer is that: We must form a class which is decisively in chains.<sup>1</sup> Such an ideology regards reforms as an obstacle in the way of a revolution, because reforms reduce pressure and a reduction in pressure prevents the explosion or at least delays the revolution. In contrast, a school that believes that movement is an intrinsic and essential quality of society never suggests the creation of shackles for any class, for it does not regard pressure as a necessary condition of evolution, nor does it consider reforms as an obstacle in the way of progress.

What does Islam say about the conditions conducive to progress and the obstacles which may block its way? In Islam all prerequisite conditions and the difficulties in this respect revolve round what may be called a pure state of human nature. That is why on some occasions the retention of primordial purity has been mentioned as a condition. The Qur'an says: "***It is a guidance to the pious.***" (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:2).<sup>2</sup>

In some places a prick of conscience ensuing from a sense of responsibility and duty which one owes to

the world, has been mentioned as a condition in such words: **"Who fear their Lord in the unseen."** (Surah al-Anbiya', 21:49) and **"Who fears the Beneficent in secret."** (Surah Ya sin, 36 :11)

At some places a 'living nature' has been mentioned as a condition. **"To warn him who is alive."** (Surah Ya sin, 36:70)

Islam maintains that its call is accepted by those who are pure, have a sense of responsibility and live a natural life. As opposed to these qualities it mentions such qualities as the spiritual and moral corruption, the sin of the heart, the rust of the heart, the hearts becoming sealed, the loss of insight, the heart's becoming inattentive, the deformation of the soul, the observance of ancestral customs and habits, the following in the footsteps of the elders and the notables, acting upon conjectures etc. The Qur'an regards all such things as obstacles in the way of the development of society and its moving towards peace and prosperity. Extravagance and luxurious living are also considered to be obstacles as they turn a man into a beast.

According to the Islamic teachings the young people are more prepared to accept the truth than the aged. The reason is that psychic pollutions have not yet spoiled their true nature. Similarly the poor, being free from the pollution of wealth are better prepared than the rich.

The mention of this sort of qualifications and disqualification indicates that according to the Qur'an the mechanism of social and historical changes is rather spiritual than economic and material.

## **IV. Rise and Fall of Societies:**

As a rule every school expresses its view about the causes of the progress and the decline of societies. The causes which a school considers to be the basic factors of the progress and the decline of society demonstrate its point of view about society, and about the evolutionary movements of history and its decline.

The Holy Qur'an, especially with reference to the stories and anecdotes related to these matters, explains its views. So let us see what things it regards as basic and infrastructural and what things as superstructural. Does it look upon the economic and material questions as the basic question or considers the doctrinal and moral questions to be so, or does not discriminate between these two types of questions?

In the Qur'an on the whole we come across four factors which affect the rise and fall of a society. We briefly refer to them here:

### **(i) Justice and Injustice**

This point has been hinted at by the Qur'an in many of its verses including the second verse of the Surah al-Qasas quoted by us earlier: **"Surely Fir'awn exalted himself in the earth and divided its**



***people into castes. A section among them he oppressed, killing their sons and sparing their women. Surely he was of those who work corruption.*** "

In this verse first it has been said that Fir'awn exalted himself. He claimed to be a super-god and regarded others as his slaves. In different manners he discriminated between his subjects and created rift among them. The Qur'an says that he oppressed a section of his people, killed their sons and spared their women (with a view to make them serve Firawn and his tribe). It describes him as one of those who work corruption. This description implies that such social tyrannies as were perpetrated by him, were likely to destroy the foundation of society.

## **(ii) Unity And Discord**

The verse 103 of the Surah Ale Imran urges all to be united on the basis of faith and to hold fast to the bond of Allah. The verse 105 of the same Surah says: "***And be not like those who separated and disputed.***" The verse 153 of the Surah al-An'am also says almost the same thing.

In the following verses the Qur'an says: "***Say: He is able to inflict punishment upon you from above you or from beneath your feet, or to bewilder you with dissension and make you taste the tyranny one of another.***" (Surah An'am 6:65 )

***"Do not quarrel with one another for then you will be weak and your power will depart from you."***  
(Surah al Anfal 8:46)

## **(iii) Observance or Disregard of Allah's Command About Exhorting to What is Good and Restraining from What is Evil**

The Qur'an has at many places stressed the necessity of acting according to this command. The following verse implies that the people who ignore this important duty, may be ruined and doomed to oblivion. One of the reasons why the Children of Isra'il were deprived of the blessing of Allah was that: "***They restrained not one another from the wickedness they did. Surely evil was what they used to do.***" (Surah al Ma'idah 5:79)

## **(iv) Moral Depravity and Licentiousness**

There are various verses in the Qur'an in this regard also. Some of them describe luxurious living as a cause of ruin. In many other verses the word *Zulm* (injustice; cruelty, oppression, transgression, tyranny) has been mentioned. In Qur'anic terminology injustice does not exclusively mean violation of the rights of an individual or of a group. It also includes the injustice done by an individual to himself or by a people to themselves. Every kind of moral depravity and going astray from the right path of humanity is injustice.

The conception of injustice in the Qur'an is vast enough to include injustice done to others and the

indulgence in all corrupt and immoral deeds. Mostly this word has been used in the Qur'an in this second sense. The number of the verses of the Qur'an in which injustice in its wider sense has been described as the cause of the ruin of a people, is too extensive to be cited here.

From the sum total of these criteria we can gather the view-point of the Qur'an in respect of the basis of society and history. The Qur'an believes in the definite and decisive role of many things which may be called superstructural.

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1. Some contemporary so-called Muslim intellectuals absolutely deny the existence of even a single verse in the Qur'an referring to the Resurrection. Wherever in the Qur'an there is a mention of 'dunya' (this world), they interpret it as the lower system of life, that is the system of social discrimination and exploitation, and wherever there is a mention of 'Aakhirah' (the next world) they interpret it as the higher system of life free from social discrimination, inequality, exploitation and private property. If 'Aakhirah' really signifies this, then that means that the Qur'an one thousand years before the inception of materialist school gave up religion as the lost proposition.

2. This shows that the Marxist theory that the use of force by the exploited class is moral, for it has an effective role in progress and its use by the class of the exploiters is immoral, because in this case it is a factor of stagnation is not a valid theory. When this school believes that the pressure of the exploiters plays as much role in the development as the revolutionary reaction of the exploited class, evidently the action of the exploiters should be as moral as the action of the exploited. The only difference between the two forces is that one looks to the past and the other to the future. Otherwise both of them play the same role in development. Hence the criterion of their morality and immorality should be the intention behind them and not that one looks to the past and the other to the future.

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