

Home > Trends of History in Qur'an > Effect of Man's Contact with Nature and with other Man > Historical Materialism Has No Role in History

Effect of Man's Contact with Nature and with other Man

Previously we explained that the line of man's contact with nature is different from that of man's contact with his fellow beings, and that each of these two lines is comparatively independent of the other. But this comparative independence does not mean that these two lines do not influence each other in any way.

In fact both of them affect each other positively as well as negatively. It is this reciprocal effect which produces the relationship that has been mentioned by the Qur'an. The first contact, that is man's contact with nature, affects man's relations with his fellow human beings.

Similarly the second contact, that is man's contact with other men affects man's relations with nature. Briefly it may be said that the more man gains control over nature and natural resources and the more he acquires improved production implements, the more there is a chance for him to exploit other men. The Qur'an says:

Nay, but surely man is rebellious when he thinks himself independent. (Surah al-Alaq, 96:6-7)

This verse refers to this very relationship. It means to say that the more man becomes able to exploit nature, to control it and to utilize improved tools of production, the more he becomes selfish in his relations with other men and uses the means at his disposal to exploit the weak.

Take into consideration a society which earns its livelihood by means of hunting with hands, stones or sticks. The members of such a society cannot withstand the power-seeking stronger men. They can do nothing to frustrate the plans of wealthy brutes. Their power of production being limited, what can these laborious people do in the face of the evil schemes of social exploiters?

No one among them can normally earn more than one day's subsistence. Therefore in such a society there can be no possibility of any large scale exploitation as it exists today. In their case the exploitation

can be at the most on individual level.

On the other hand take into consideration a developed society in which man can manufacture steam engines and huge electric equipments. In such a society man bends nature to his will. The developed and complex machinery at his disposal provides him with a means to develop his relations with other men and to acquire a capability and power of exploitation.

At this stage he feels inclined to exert himself more and more to give a practical shape to his potential capabilities. With the mechanical and electrical power in his hand he can easily set up an exploiting capitalist system. In fact he is stimulated to use his exploiting power as he gets an opportunity to do so. His inner tussle and contradiction impel him to utilize in the social field of the production power and the production instruments at his disposal.

Historical Materialism Has No Role in History

The only difference between us and the advocates of historical materialism is that according to historical materialism it is production instruments which bring exploitation into existence and create a system conducive to it, whereas we do not believe that the production instruments do any such thing. These instruments are no more than tools. They may provide an opportunity, but it is man who sets up a system, takes positive or negative action, is honest or dishonest and is industrious or lazy.

It is man alone who acts and he invariably acts according to his inner content. He chooses his ideal and decides to what extent he should be attached to it. This is the view expressed by the Qur'an in respect of men's mutual relations. Earlier we described these relations as the first contact.

As for the second contact, that is man's contact with nature, the Qur'an is, in short, of the opinion that the more the man's mutual relations are based on fairness and equity and are free from every kind of injustice and exploitation, the more pleasant becomes the relation between man and nature, the more treasures of natural resources become available to man and the blessings of Allah are showered on him from the heaven and the earth. Many verses of the Qur'an mention this relationship. Some of these verses are as under:

If they tread the right path, We shall give them to drink o f water in abundance. (Surah al-Jinn, 72:16)

If they had observed the Tawrat and the Injil and that which was revealed to them from their Lord, they would surely have been nourished from above them and from beneath their feet. (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:66)

If the people of the townships had believed and kept from evil, surely We should have opened blessings from the sky and from the earth. But they disbelieved, and so We seized them on account of what they used to earn. (Surah al-A'raf, 7:96)

As a consequence of this relationship, just social relations have an impact on the utilization of the natural resources. The more these relations are just, the better is the utilization. Justice in man's contact with his fellow beings manifests itself in man's contact with nature. It is in a just society that man's contact with nature thrives. It does not flourish well in an unjust society.

This relationship not only has a supernatural aspect in which we believe, but it also throws light on a divine norm, because according to the Qur'an an unjust society like that of Pharaoh has always been a decadent society. Over history whenever tyrannical policies have been pursued, these policies have culminated in the wastage of the energy of society, in dissensions among the different sections of it and in the destruction of the potentialities of its members.

In this state of disintegration and loss of cohesion it is not possible for the members of society to mobilize their potential resources and gain control over nature. Here lies the difference between choosing the supreme ideal and adopting the inferior and abject ideals.

The true and monotheistic ideal closes the ranks of society and does away with all differences of blood, race, nationality, class or geography. It unites the entire humanity under the banner of monotheism. But a low ideal splits humanity and disunites society.

Just see what Allah says in respect of the supreme ideal:

Surely this, your ummah (community) is one ummah, and I am your Lord. So worship Me. (Surah al-Ambiya, 21:92)

Surely this, your ummah is one ummah, and I am your Lord. So have fear of me. (Surah al-Mu'minun, 23:52)

This is the logic of the supreme ideal which recognizes no frontiers within human society. Now reflect on what Allah says about a society oppressed by the false gods and see how He describes such a society:

Surely Fir'awn exalted himself in the earth and divided its people into castes. (Surah al Qasas, 28:4)

Pharaoh is the symbol of the low ideals which base man's contact with other men on oppression and exploitation. The Pharaohs split and impoverish society and give prominence to class interests. They destroy man's creative power and stifle the growth of his relations with nature. The Pharaohs divide society into the groups and sections detailed here:

I. The first group is that of the oppressed oppressors. They are the oppressors who are at the same time the oppressed also. They may be called the second class oppressors. The Imams have called them 'Lackeys of the unjust' and the 'friends of the oppressors'.

The oppressed oppressors support the tyrants and the despots. The existence of the oppressors and the

continuance of their reigns depend on them. The Qur'an says:

But oh, if you could see, when the wrongdoers are brought up before their Lord, how they cast the blame on to another; how those who were despised on the earth say to those who were proud: But for you we would have been believers. (Surah an-Nur, 24:31)

As may be observed, speaking about the oppressors the Qur'an divides them into two groups, one being that of despised oppressors and the other that of proud oppressors. That shows that among the oppressors also there are some who are despised and others who are arrogant and proud. The Pharaohs – like people are the proud oppressors and those who are their henchmen are the despised or the oppressed oppressors.

On the Day of Resurrection these oppressed oppressors will be raised along with the proud oppressors and there they will say to the latter:

"But for you we would have been believers. "

This is the first group of the oppressors on which the arrogant oppressors depend.

II. In an unjust society the second group of the oppressors consists of the sycophants and the hangers-on. They may not do any injustice direct with their own hand, but they encourage the oppressors and justify all their actions. In this respect the Qur'an says:

The Chiefs of Pharaoh's people said to him: 'Will you allow Moses and his people to make mischief in the land and flout you and your gods?' He said: 'We will slay their sons and spare their women, for we possess power over them.' (Surah al-A'raf, 7:127)

Their role was to incite Fir'awn (Pharaoh). They could strike the right chord of his heart at the right moment. Fir'awn was in need of what they said. Therefore they competed with each other in finding out what was in his heart so that they could bring the current situation in harmony with his feelings and sentiments.

III. In an unjust society the third group consists of those whom Imam Ali has described as "automatons". They allow themselves to be the tools of others and do not realize that any wrong has been done to them. They are unconscious of any injustice. Their actions are mechanical, involuntary and without any consciousness of their subservience and obedience. They are deprived of their intelligence by the despot. They submit to him of their own accord and accept whatever he says without the least reluctance.

They do not allow even themselves to criticize any of his actions, what to say of others. In its treatment of nature this group loses all power of initiative and capability of development and is converted into a tool having no will power. If the members of this group still have any initiative, that initiative is controlled by the despot who operates these tools. They themselves are no longer men who can think and use their

initiative in any way. In respect of them Allah says:

They say: 'Our Lord! We obeyed our chiefs and great men, and they misled us from the way.'
(Surah al-Ahzab, 33:67)

In what they say there is no indication of the feeling that any wrong has been done to them. They speak of blind and illogical obedience only.

According to the classification of men mentioned by Imam Ali, the Commander of the faithful, these people form the third category. He has said: "There are three categories of men: divine scholars, pupils seeking salvation and aimlessly buzzing flies following the cry of everybody."

This third category creates difficulties for a decent society. These difficulties will be removed and the way opened only in proportion to the success of a good society in doing away with this category and converting it into the second category mentioned by Imam Ali, that is those pupils seeking salvation, or in the words of the Qur'an, that of the followers of goodness, or in the terminology of the jurists, that of the eager disciples.

Imam Ali holds that it is necessary for a good and decent society to convert this category of the aimlessly buzzing flies having neither intelligence nor will and incited by every puff of wind. The Imam believes in this elimination of the category, but he does not want to exterminate its existence. He wants it to be converted into the second category so that a decent society may pursue its policy of opening new venues of progress and giving every member an opportunity to participate in this process.

In contrast, the despotic rulers do every thing to increase the number of such mean persons who change their direction with every sound. As a result of their policy society is drawn step by step to ruin, and these despots find themselves unable to defend its integrity.

The more the number of the persons belong to this category increases, the more acute becomes the danger of the ruin of society in case of any internal mishap or an external exigency. That is how societies accelerate the process of their natural death. Evidently the death of a society or that of a nation or community means its natural death, not its physical death.

Societies undergo two kinds of death, one natural and the other trivial. A society meets its natural death as a result of the increase in the number of the persons belonging to this third category, which causes disaster and ruins society. This was the account of the third category in a split and despotic society.

IV. The fourth category consists of those who do not approve injustice, and have not renounced their power of understanding in favour of the Pharaohs. They do not like injustice, yet they accept it quietly without any protest.

Consequently they always live in a state of perplexity and restlessness. This mental state is detrimental to new discoveries in the development of relations between man and nature. According to the following

Qur'anic verse such persons are unjust to themselves:

When the angels take away the lives of those who have been unjust to themselves, they ask them: 'In what circumstances were you?' They answer: 'We were helpless in our land.' The angels say: 'Was not the earth of Allah vast enough for you to emigrate?' (Surah an-Nisa, 4:97)

They have not been unjust to others. Like the first group they are not the oppressed oppressors, nor are they the toadies and servile sycophants. They are also not the aimlessly buzzing flies having no intelligence or will. They are conscious of their being powerless and oppressed.

"They say: We were powerless in our land. "

They have not lost their faculty of understanding and hence are conscious of their sorry plight. But practically they are slothful and indolent. That is why the Qur'an describes them as being unjust to themselves. Can this group be expected to take initiative and do something good to be able to take a step forward in the field of man's contact with nature? Naturally no such thing can be expected of these people.

V. The fifth group of the despots consists of those who escape from the stage of life to practice monkish life. This state has existed in all despotic societies over history. It may be analysed in two ways. One kind of monastic life is real and true in which man keeps himself away from society under strict self-discipline with a view to save himself from the pollution of his environment and social impurities. Islam rejects this kind of life and calls it an unhealthy innovation. The Qur'an calls it

"the monkish life which they have invented."

Monastic life is bad because it has only a negative basis. It implies the renunciation of man's responsibility as Allah's vicegerent on the earth, which is not permissible.

Another kind of monkish life is the affected monkery, which means to assume artificially the manners and the dress of the monks without renouncing the world from the depth of one's heart. The persons who practice it deceive the people and beguile them of the tyranny of the despots, but mentally and spiritually they are supporters of the tyrants. The Qur'an speaks of this group and says:

Many of the Jewish rabbis and the Christian monks devour the wealth of others want only debar them from the way of Allah. (Surah at-Tawbah, 9:34)

VI. The sixth or the last group of despots is that of the oppressed. When the despotic rulers divide society into groups, they choose one group to be oppressed. That is what Fir'awn did. He divided his people into castes and oppressed the people of one caste, who led the opposition to him and were his known opponents. He did not care for their dignity while persecuting them. The Qur'an says:

And (remember) when We did deliver you from Fir`awn's folk, who were afflicting you with

dreadful torment, slaying your sons and sparing your women. That was a tremendous trial from your Lord. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:49)

The Qur'an tells us what the final fate of each of these groups will be after the oppression is over. Concerning the last group it says:

We like to favour those who have been regarded weak in the land and want to make them leaders and inheritors. (Surah al Qasas, 28: 5)

This verse refers to the sixth group which is misfit in a despotic category. Allah intends to grant them leadership of the land and to make them masters of it. This is another norm of history about which we will talk shortly. So far we have mentioned the fact that the relations between man and nature deteriorate in proportion to the injustice that prevails in a society.

Injustice does not allow full exploitation of nature for the benefit of man. On the contrary relations between man and nature flourish in society to the extent that justice and struggle against injustice prevail in it. In such a society creative forces are used to exploit nature.

A despotic society being split and disintegrated, its capabilities and potentialities go waste. The sky withholds rains from falling on it and the earth refrains from granting its blessings to it. Exactly the opposite prevails in a just society. In it all capabilities and potentialities join together. Such a society will be established following the appearance of Imam Mahdi (May Allah hasten his advent and solace).

Islamic traditions give enough detail, of the bounties and blessings which will follow his appearance. That will be so because wherever justice is established, man's contact with nature blooms and a new relationship between man and nature is established.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/trends-history-quran-muhammad-baqir-al-sadr/effect-mans-contact-nature-and-other-man>