

## Evolution and Change in History

Whatever has been discussed so far concerns one of the two , most important problems of history, i.e., nature of history whether it is materialistic or not. The other important problem concerns change and evolution in human history.

We know that social life is not confined to man alone. Some other living creatures also have social life to some extent. They organize their lives on the basis of cooperation, division of labour, and sharing of responsibilities according to set rules and regulations.

We all know that the honeybee is such a creature. But there is a basic difference between the social existence of man and that of other animals; the pattern of their social life always remains fixed and static. Any evolution and change do not take place in the system of their existence, or in the words of Morris Metterlink, in their culture, if the term 'culture' can be used for animals. On the contrary, social life of man is ever changing and dynamic. There is not just a movement, but even an acceleration; i.e. the rate of movement increases with time.

Thus the history of human social existence has different periods which are distinguished from one another in various aspects. For instance there are different periods according to the means of livelihood: the period of hunting, the period of cultivation, and the period of industrialization. According to economic system the different periods may be classified as the period of communism, the period of slavery, the period of feudalism, the period of capitalism, and the period of socialism. According to political system, we have the period of tribal rule, the period of despotic monarchy, the period of aristocracy, and the period of democracy; according to sex, the period of matriarchy, and the period of patriarchy. In the same way we may have other classifications from the viewpoint of other aspects.

Why isn't such a change exhibited in the social life of other animals? What is the secret of this change, and what is the main factor responsible for transition of man from one social phase to another? In other words, what is that human faculty that propels human existence forward, and which is not possessed by the animals? How does this transition and advancement occur, what are the laws that govern it, and by what mechanism is it controlled?

There is a question which is usually raised at this point by the philosophers of history, whether evolution and progress are real? In other words, are the changes that have been taking place in the social life of man throughout history actually in the direction of progress and evolution? What are the criteria of evolution?

Some are skeptical that these changes may be regarded as progressive and evolutionary, and their views are discussed in related books.<sup>1</sup> And some others regard movement of history as cyclic, claiming that history starts from a point and after passing through certain phases returns again to the same point. 'Once again,' in their view, is the eternal cry of history.

For example, in the beginning a coarse tribal system is established by certain venturesome and determined nomadic people, which gradually evolves into aristocracy. The monopoly of aristocrats results in a popular uprising and giving birth to democracy. The chaos and anarchy created by unlimited and unchecked freedom in the democratic system once again leads to the re-emergence of despotism, helped by a tribal spirit.

Here we do not wish to enter an elaborate discussion on this subject and postpone it to some other occasion. However, for the purpose of the present study, we assume that the movement and course of history are on the whole progressive, and proceed accordingly.

Nevertheless, it is essential to remind here that all those who consider the movement of history to be in the general direction of progress acknowledge the fact that by no means the future is better necessarily than the past for all societies under all conditions; neither do they say that the course of societies is always marked by progress without any interruptions or set-back. Undeniably, societies become stagnant, decadent, and retrogressive. They have the tendency of inclining towards the right or the left and consequently are subject to decline and fall. All that is meant is that the human society on the whole is passing through an evolutionary course.

In the books on philosophy of history the problem regarding the dynamics of history and the motivating factors responsible for social progress is usually formulated in a manner which is revealed to be defective on some reflection. In the following sections the views usually advanced on this issue will be discussed.

## **1. The Racial Theory**

According to this theory, certain races are mainly responsible for the advancement of history. Some races have the ability of creating culture and civilization, while others do not possess such talents. Some races contribute to science, philosophy, arts, crafts, and morality, while others are merely consumers of these products.

It is concluded that there exists some kind of division of work between the races. The races endowed

with aptitude for knowledge, learning, and statecraft, and with ability to create arts, culture, crafts, and technology should be engaged in these higher, sophisticated and refined human activities; while the races not endowed with such talents should be excused from these activities and instead be engaged in hard physical labour and menial tasks which do not need refinement of thought and taste. Aristotle, who holds this view regarding racial differences, justifies the enslavement of certain races by other races on the same grounds.

Some thinkers believe that only particular races are able to lead the course of history. For example, the northern races being superior to the southern races have been responsible for the advancement of cultures. Count Gobino, the famous French philosopher who was for three years French ambassador to Iran about hundred years ago, believed in this theory.

## **2. The Geographical Theory**

According to this theory, the main factor responsible for creating civilization and culture and for development of industry is physical environment. Moderate temperaments and strong minds develop in regions of temperate climate. In the beginning of his book, "*al-Qanun*," Ibn Sina has elaborately discussed the effect of physical environmental factor on the modes of thought, taste, sensibility and other psychological aspects of human personality.

According to this theory, the factor that directs the advancement of history is not of racial origin or heredity. It is not true that a certain race regardless of its region or environment is the maker of history and responsible for its advancement and a certain other race whatever its physical environment lacks such abilities. In fact, the differences of races are caused by different environments. Moreover, with displacement and migration of races capacities are also redistributed. Thus particular regional and geographical factors are responsible in the main for the advancement and revitalization of civilizations. Montesquieu, the French sociologist of the seventeenth century, supports this point of view in his famous book *De l'esprit des lois* (The Spirit of the Laws).

## **3. The Theory of the Role of Genius or Heroes**

According to this theory, all scientific, political, economic, technological, and moral changes and developments throughout history are brought about .by men of genius. The difference between human beings and other animals is that from a biological point of view all other animals are equal in respect of natural capacities. There is at least no remarkable difference among the individuals of a certain species.

In contrast, human individuals bear vast differences regarding their capacities and talents. The geniuses of every society are extraordinary individuals of exceptional abilities endowed with extraordinary powers of intellect, sensibility, will, and creativity. Whenever such individuals emerge in a society they contribute to its advancement taking it ahead scientifically, technically, morally, militarily, and politically. According to this theory, majority of individuals lack initiative and creativity. They are simply followers and

consumers of the Ideas and the products of the industry of others.

But there always exists a minority of creative individuals in almost all societies who act as leaders, forerunners, innovators, and inventors, who produce new Ideas, new methods, and new technologies. They are the people who steer society in the forward direction and enable it to enter into a new higher phase. Carlyle, the famous English thinker in his well-known book *Heroes, Hero worship and the Heroic in History*, starting his book with the role of the Holy Prophet (S), holds such a view.

In Carlyle's view, every nation has one or more historical personalities in whom the whole history of a nation is reflected. Or more precisely, It may be said that the history of a nation reflects the personality and genius of one or more of its heroes. For instance, the history of Islam mirrors the personality of the Holy Prophet (S); the history of modern France mirrors the personality of Napoleon and certain other great men, and the last sixty years of the history of Soviet Russia mirror the personality of Lenin.

## **4. The Economic Theory**

According to this theory, economy is the motivating factor of history. All social and historical modes of every nation, including the cultural, religious, political, military and social aspects, reflect the mode and relations of production of a society. Any change in the economic infrastructure of the society totally transforms it and steers it forward.

The men of genius, whose role was discussed earlier, are nothing but the expressions of economic, political, and social needs of society; and these needs in their turn are the effects of changes in the tools of production. Karl Marx, and in general all Marxists, and occasionally a number of non-Marxists, subscribe to this view. This is probably the most dominant theory of our times.

## **5. The Religious Theory**

According to this theory, all worldly incidents have Divine origin and are governed by God's consummate Wisdom. All evolutions and changes occurring in history are manifestations of the Divine Will and God's omniscient wisdom. Thus whatever moves history forward and transforms it is the Will of God. The drama of history is written and directed by the sacred Will of God. Bossuet, the famous historian and patriarch, who acted as the tutor to Louis the Fifteenth, supports this view.

These are the main theories that are usually discussed in the books of philosophy of history as the motivating forces or causes of history.

In my view this kind of formulation of the problem is not correct and there is a confusion of issues. Most of these theories are not properly related to the motivating cause of history, which we want to discover. For instance, the racial theory is a sociological hypothesis, which may be proposed in relation to the question whether or not all races have—or at least could have had—the same kind of hereditary talents

and are of equal level. If they are equal according to natural talents, all the races have an equal share in directing the movement of history. And if they are not equally talented, only some races have played, and could have played, the role of advancing history.

Then it seems proper to mention this theory in this context. Nevertheless the secret of the philosophy of history remains in darkness: it does not make any difference for the purpose of solution whether we suppose that only a single race has been responsible for the evolution of history or if all human races participated in the process of change and advancement, because in both the cases it does not answer the question why man, or a race of men, undergoes this type of change and evolution while no such changes occur in the lives of animals. Where does the secret lie? Whether a single race is instrumental in the movement of history or if all the races participate in this process, makes no difference at all for answering this question.

Similar is the case with the geographical theory. It is useful in the context of the sociological problem regarding the role of regional environment in the development of man's intellectual, cultural, aesthetic and physiological faculties. Some environments hold the human being at or near the level of animals, but in other environments the distinction of man from animals is made more prominent and pronounced. According to this theory, history's movement is confined to the people of a specific region; in other regimes life remains static and unchanged like that of animals. But the main question still remains unanswered, since the honeybee and all other gregarious animals living in such geographically superior regions and zones remain unaffected by the movement of history. Then what is the main factor responsible for this disparity in the lives of the two different types of living beings, one of which remains static and unchanged whereas the other type undergoes unceasing change from one phase to another?

The most irrelevant among these theories is the theory of the Divine origin of history, because it is not history alone which manifests the Divine Will. The whole universe, from its beginning to the end, with all its myriads of causes and effects and all positive and negative conditions, mirrors the Divine Will. The relation of the Divine Will is the same with all causes and phenomena of the universe. In the same way as the ever-changing and ever-evolving life of the human being manifests the Divine Will, so also the static and monotonous life of the honeybee manifests the Will of God. Hence this theory fails to unfold the mystery why the Divine Will created and moulded human life in a pattern which is ever-changing and evolving, and why it created other beings according to a static pattern which makes them unable to change.

The economic theory of history also lacks in technical and methodical precision. It has not been formulated in a correct way. The way it is formulated, it merely throws light on the nature of history as materialistic and economic, and all the other social modes are regarded as the accidents of this substance of history. According to it, if any change takes place in the economic foundation of a society, the transformation of all other social modes is also accompanied. But the theory is based on "if". The main question, however, remains unanswered.

Supposing that economy is the foundation of society, "if" economic infrastructure changes, the whole society also changes with it. But the question as to when and under what circumstances and by means of which factors the infrastructure changes followed by changes in the superstructures, is not touched. In other words, to say that economy is the basis is not sufficient to explain the dynamic and changing character of society. Instead of saying that society is the base, the advocates of this theory may properly formulate their position in this manner: by stating that economy is the motivating factor of history, which is materialistic in essence; the contradiction between the economic infrastructure and the social superstructure (or between the two tiers of the infrastructure, viz. the tools of production and the relations of production) is the moving force that pushes history forward.

There is no doubt that this is what the advocates of the abovementioned view mean when they say that economy is the moving force of history. What they mean to assert is that all changes in history originate from internal contradiction between the tools of production and the relations of production. But here we are only concerned with proper formulation of the theory, not with conjecturing the inner purpose and objective of its advocates.

The theory of the role of genius in history, regardless of its truth, IS directly relevant to philosophy of history and the question of motivating factor of history.

Thus until now we have arrived at two views regarding the moving force of history. One is the theory of heroes, which considers history to be a product of certain individuals, and claims that the majority of members of society lack creativeness and power of initiative. If a society consisted of such individuals alone, even the minutest change is unlikely to occur in society.

But a few individuals with God-gifted genius, when they appear on the social scene take initiative draw plans, make bold resolutions, and demonstrate extraordinary resistance and force of will, drawing multitudes of ordinary folk behind them for realizing the desirable change. The personality of these heroes is purely a product of exceptional natural and hereditary processes. Social conditions and material requirements of a society do not play any effective role in creating and moulding these personalities.

The second is the theory of contradiction between the social infrastructure and superstructure, or the theory of economic causation which has been already referred to.

## **6. The Theory of Nature**

There is a third theory which may be called 'the theory of human nature.'<sup>1</sup> According to it, man is endowed with certain inherent qualities, which account for the evolutionary character of social life. One of such qualities is the capacity for collecting and preserving the experiences of life. Whatever has been attained through experience is retained to provide the basis for subsequent experiences.

Another is man's capacity of learning through speech and writing. Experiences and attainments of others are communicated through speech and, on a higher level, through writing. Experiences of a generation, through oral narration and writing, are preserved for the later generations. In this way, collective experience is accumulated with the passage of time. This is the reason why the Qur'an gives especial importance to the gifts of articulate speech and the pen by making a prominent mention of them:

الرَّحْمَنُ {1} عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ {2} خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ {3} عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ {4}

***The Beneficent has taught the Qur'an. He created the human being and He has taught him articulable utterance. (55: 1-4).***

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ {1} خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ {2} اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ {3}  
الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ {4}

***Read: In the Name of Thy Lord, Who created, created the human being from a blood-clot. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, Who taught by the pen. (96: 1-4).***

The third quality of man is that he is endowed with the power of reason and inventiveness. This mysterious quality bestows upon him the powers of creativity and invention which are the manifestation of Divine creativity. The fourth quality is his natural tendency for innovation. It means that man not only possesses the ability of invention and creation which he translates into action whenever a necessity arises, but the urge for creation and invention is ingrained in his nature.

The capacity to preserve and store experiences, in addition to the capacity to exchange and communicate experiences with others, and the capacity for creation and his natural urge for invention and innovation are the forces that continually drive man towards progress. The other animals neither possess the capacity of preserving experiences nor the capacity of transmitting and communicating their experiences2 neither the capacity to create and invent, nor the urge for innovation. None of these qualities which characterize the human intellect exist in the animals. It is because of these qualities that man advances and the animals remain static. Now we shall critically examine these theories in detail.

## **The Role of Personality in History**

Some people have claimed that "history is a battle between genius and ordinariness." It means that common and average people always favour the existing situation which they are used to, whereas men of genius want to alter the existing condition into a more developed and advanced one. Carlyle claims

that history starts with the accounts of the lives of great men and heroes.

This viewpoint is actually based on two assumptions. First, that the society itself lacks any nature and personality. The composition of society is not a real synthesis of its members. Individuals are independent of one another. The interaction among individuals does not create any social spirit; any real, synthetic entity which has its own specific nature, personality, and laws does not come into existence. There are merely individuals and individual psychologies.

The relation among human individuals in a society regarding their independence from one another is like the relation among the trees in a forest. Social phenomena are nothing but the sum total of individual events in the lives of individuals. According to this view the causes which govern society are determined by accidents and conflicts taking place in individual lives; there are no general and universal laws of causation.

The second assumption is that human individuals are created with different and divergent characteristics. In spite of the fact that human individuals are social beings or rational animals, almost all human beings lack originality and creativity. The majority are simply consumers of culture and not its producers. The only difference between animals and such people is that the animals cannot be even consumers. The spirit of this majority is one of imitating, following, and worshipping their heroes.

But a very small minority of human beings consists of heroes, geniuses, extraordinary supernormal individuals, who are independent in thought, creative and inventive, with a strong will power, who stand out distinct from the majority, as if they belong to a higher order of beings from a different world. Had it not been for the scientific intellectual, philosophical, mystical, moral, political, social, technical and artistic geniuses, humanity would have remained in a primitive state and would not have taken a single step toward advancement.

I personally consider both of these assumptions as vulnerable. The first one is vulnerable for the reason mentioned earlier. In the discussion<sup>1</sup> on society I have proved that society itself possesses its own specific nature, personality and laws according to which it functions. These laws in themselves are progressive and evolutionary by nature. Hence this hypothesis should be discarded. Now we have to see whether an individual can play any role in the development of society which has its own nature, personality and laws and pursues its course of evolution according to them.

We shall discuss this matter afterwards. Admitting the differences among individuals, the second assumption is also incorrect, as it is unjustifiable to say that only heroes and geniuses possess the power of creation and the majority of people are merely passive consumers of culture or civilization. All human individuals, more or less, possess innovative and creative talents; on account of these talents all individuals, or at least a majority of them, participate in creative, productive, and innovative<sup>1</sup> activities, however small their share may be as compared to that of geniuses.

Contrary to this theory that personalities make history is another view which maintains that history makes



personalities, not' vice versa. It means that the objective needs of a society are responsible for creating personalities.

Montesquieu has said, "Great men and important events are the signs and results of greater and lengthier processes." Hegel said "Great men do not give birth to history but act as midwives." Great men are 'signs' not 'agents.' Some like Durkheim who believe in the independent essence of society hold that human individuals in themselves have absolutely no personality. They acquire their whole personality from society. Individuals and personalities are nothing but expressions and manifestations of the social spirit, and in the words of Mahmud Shabistari, are just as "holes of a niche screen through which the social spirit emanates."

Others like Marx put social labour at the centre of human sociology, and consider society prior to man's social consciousness<sup>1</sup>. They regard the consciousness of individuals as the expression and manifestation of material social needs. According to their view, personalities are manifestations and expressions of the material and economic needs of a society... 3

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1. Refer to 11:116, 21:13, 23:33, 64.

2. See E. H. Carr, *What is History?*. See also Will Durant, *Studies in History, The Pleasures of Philosophy*, pp. 291–312.

3. Among certain animal species, at the level of routine existence, not at the level of scientific consciousness, a kind of transfer of learning exists. For instance, the Holy Qur'an refers to the story of the ant and Solomon in verse 27:18.

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