

The Saviour's Revolution

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The author discusses about the idea of Final Victory and the establishment of an ideal society by the final saviour, Imam Mahdi (aj).

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The Final Victory of Righteousness

The idea of the final victory of the forces of righteousness, peace and justice over those of evil, oppression and tyranny, of the world-wide spread of the Islamic faith, the complete and all-round establishment of high human values, the formation of a utopian and an ideal society and lastly the accomplishment of this ideal at the hands of a holy and eminent personality called, according to the Islamic traditions, Mahdi is a belief which, of course with variations in details, is shared by all the Muslim sects and schools of thought.

Basically this is a Qur'anic concept and it is the holy Qur'an which in very clear terms, predicts:

1. The final victory of Islam.

It is He who has sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over every other religion. However much the disbelievers may dislike it. (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:33 and Surah As-Saff, 61:9)

2. The absolute supremacy of the good and the pious.

Indeed We have written in the Psalms after the Torah had been revealed: The righteous among My slaves shall inherit the earth". (Surah al-Anbia. 21:105)

3. The final collapse of the oppressors and the tyrants.

We willed to show favour to those who were persecuted in the earth and to make them leaders and masters. It was also Our will to give them power in the earth and to show Pharaoh, Haman and their hosts to experience from their victims what they feared most. (Surah al-Qasas, 28:5-6)

4. A bright and happy future for humanity.

Moses told his people to seek help from Allah and exercise patience. The earth belongs to Him and He has made it the heritage of whichever of His servants He chooses. The Final Victory is for the pious. (Surah al-A'raf 7:128)

This idea is not an outcome of any wishful thinking, but it emanates from the total working of the system of nature, the evolutionary process of history, man's confidence in the future and the total rejection by him of pessimism about the destiny of mankind, which is extraordinarily bleak, according to certain theories.

Expectation of Solace

Aspiring for the realization of this human ideal has, in the Islamic traditions, been termed as 'Expectation of Solace'. Its underlying idea is substantiated by the Islamic and Qur'anic principle of the prohibition of despair of Allah's Mercy.

Those who believe in Allah's universal Kindness can never lose hope, whatever be the circumstances, and can never submit to despair and despondency. Anyhow, it must be borne in mind that the principles of the expectation of solace and non-despair of Allah's Mercy have no personal or group application. They simply refer to Allah's general Benevolence and Kindness to the entire mankind. As for the exact nature of solace, it is determined by certain other Islamic traditions and prophecies.

Expectation of solace or cherishing of a hope for the future is of two kinds. One is constructive and dynamic. It is an act of virtue. The other is destructive and paralysing. It is a sin and should be taken as a sort of licentiousness.

These two kinds of expectations are the direct result of the two divergent notions of the appearance of the promised Mahdi which in turn have emanated from two different approaches to historical changes and revolutions. Hence, it would not be out of place here to refer briefly to the subject of historical changes.

Let us examine whether the historical developments are a chain of accidental occurrences or a sequence of natural events. In nature there is nothing really accidental.

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In other words, no phenomenon can come into existence casually and without a cause, though, relatively speaking, there are incidents which may be regarded as taking place accidentally and just by chance.

If, one morning, you leave your house and run into a friend whom you had not seen for years and who is passing by your house at that particular moment, such a meeting will be considered accidental. Why? Because there exists no natural law that you leaving your house will essentially be followed by such a meeting or else such a meeting would have taken place every day. However, it is also true that such a meeting is an essential consequence of this particular departure at a particular moment in specific circumstances.

When we see that no binding and invariable sequence exists between a cause and its effect we call the resulting event an accident. Accidental occurrences are not governed by any universal or general rule, nor do they come within the purview of any scientific law, for a scientific law is concerned only with an invariable sequence between specific conditions and a specific phenomenon.

One may say that the historical developments are nothing more than a series of accidental occurrences, not governed by any universal or general rule. To support his view, he may argue that a society is a mere collection of individuals. Every one of them has his own personal traits and individual character. Personal whims and individual motives produce a set of incidents, which lead to a series of accidental occurrences and it is these happenings which constitute a historical development.

But that is not the real story. According to another point of view a society has its own personality, independent of the individuals, and it acts as demanded by its own nature. The personality of the society is not identical with that of the individuals. It comes into being through the combination of individuals and their cultural actions and reactions.

Thus, the society has its own nature, its own character and its own rules. It acts according to its own genius and its actions and reactions can be explained through a set of universal and general laws.

We have to admit that a society has its own independent personality, because only then can we say that history has a philosophy and is governed by norms and rules. It is only then that history can be a subject worthy of deep study and a source for learning lessons.

On the contrary, if it is assumed that history has no personality then only the life of the individuals can be studied and not the collective life of nations and peoples. In that case the scope of taking lessons and drawing morals will also become limited to the individual's life. As mentioned above, there are two contrary notions of history and historical developments, which, in fact, revolve around the main question whether a society has a personality or not.

The Qur'an and History

The expectation of solace, which forms the subject of the present study, is a question which is philosophical and social as well as religious and Islamic. As mentioned earlier, it has a Qur'anic basis. Hence, before an attempt is made to describe the nature of this expectation, it will be in the fitness of things to throw some light on the Qur'anic view regarding society and the ever-changing course of its life i.e. history.

It is undeniable that the holy Qur'an looks at history as a lesson, a precept, a source of knowledge and a subject worth contemplation and deep thinking. Now the big question is whether the Qur'an looks at history from an individual angle or a collective one; whether it puts forth only the life of the individuals for persuading others to emulate the example of the good and to abstain from the ways of the wicked, or it

has an eye only on the collective life, or at least on the collective life too. In the latter case, is it possible to infer from the Qur'an that the society, as distinct from the individuals, has a personality, a life and even consciousness and feelings? Similarly, is it possible to deduce that groups and nations are governed by definite rules which are equally applicable to all of them?

Due to lack of space it is not possible here to discuss these questions in detail, but it may be stated briefly that the answer to all three questions is in the affirmative.¹

The holy Qur'an, while relating the stories of the past for the purpose of reflection and instruction, puts forth the life of the past nations as an admonishing material for the benefit of other people:

That nation is gone. They have reaped what they sowed, and the same applies to you. You are not responsible for their deeds. You are responsible for your deeds only". (Surah al-Baqarah 2:134-141)

The holy Qur'an repeatedly refers to the subject of the existence of the nations and their duration. For example,

Every nation can only live for an appointed time. When its term ends, it will not remain (alive) even for a single hour, nor will they die before the appointed time. (Surah al A'raf 7:34 and Surah al-Nahl 16:61)

It emphatically refutes the idea that destiny can in any way be affected by the blind forces of fate. It clearly states that the destiny of nations is subject to and governed only by the firm and consistent laws of nature. It says

Are they waiting for the punishment which has been the lot of the earlier people. You will not find any change in Allah's way (of dealing with such people). (Surah al Fatir 35:43)

It also draws attention to a point which is of vital importance. It points out that the people, by looking at their deeds and behaviour, can find out for themselves whether a good or a bad destiny awaits them, for the forces which determine the destiny are just a sequence of reactions set in motion by their own deeds. In other words, particular acts are always and invariably followed by particular reactions.

Thus, though the course of history is ordained by the Divine Will, the role of man as a free agent is not eliminated. There are many passages in the Qur'an which refer to this subject. We quote just one verse here.

Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people unless and until they change their own conduct, behaviour, customs and manners. (Surah al-R'ad 13:11).

1. See Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, Tafsir al-Mizan (vol. 4, p. 102 – vol. 7, p. 333 – vol. 8, p. 85 – vol.

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 twofold. 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.

The Human or Natural Approach

The human approach to history is just the opposite of the materialistic approach. It gives basic importance to man—and human values, both in relation to the individuals and the society. From the psychological point of view it considers itself to be composed of a set of animal instincts which are common to both man and beasts and the other set of higher instincts, religious, ethical, inquisitive and aesthetic which are peculiar to man and distinguish him from the animals.

From the philosophical point of view it considers a society to have two aspects. Firstly, it is composed of individuals, each of them having a mixture of high and low qualities. Secondly, as a whole, it has its own variety of attributes which are the eternal characteristics of man in general. A Persian poet expresses this fact thus:

"This sweet water and this saltish water in every vein of creatures will flow till the Day of Resurrection. "

Here a vein refers to the veins of the society i.e. man in an indefinite and general application. In some individuals sweet water flows i.e. good qualities dominate and in others saltish water flows i.e. bad qualities are more numerous and remarkable. This position will continue so long as man exists on the face of the earth. The death of individuals makes no difference to it. Anyhow, with the evolution of man and human society the position will certainly improve a great deal.

According to this approach history, like nature itself, is developing and progressing towards a state of perfection. The development of history is neither confined to the technical nor the cultural aspects, nor to the growth and improvement of the means of production. It is an all-round and all pervading process and extends to all human affairs. Man, as a result of his comprehensive evolution, is moving towards liberation from environmental and social bonds and is gradually throwing off the shackles which bind him to his environment.

At the same time his adherence to an ideology and faith is growing. In the future he is expected to secure complete emancipation and with that to reach the stage of complete adherence to faith and ideology. In the past when man was less able to exploit natural resources he was a slave to nature. In the future, with more and more exploitation of natural resources, he will not only be free from the bonds of nature but will also gradually bring it under his domination and control.

It is erroneous to say that evolution follows the development of the means of production. Those who say so confuse the cause with the effect. In fact, the development of the means of production is the result of man's natural craving for perfection, expansion and diversification. It originates from his power of invention which has, with the passage of time grown and is still growing. According to this approach one of the characteristics of man is the internal and individual contradiction between his terrestrial and celestial aspects, i.e. between those instincts which are inclined down wards and aim only at the

individual, limited and temporary gains and those which are inclined upwards and want to encompass the whole of humanity and aim at achieving the moral, religious, scientific and intellectual objectives. The famous Persian poet, Mawlawi says:

The soul inclines to wisdom and science,
The body inclines to gardens and fruits,
The soul inclines to progress and honour,
The body inclines to property and chattels,
The body inclines to greenery and flowing water,
because it originates from them,
The soul inclines to life and the living;
because its origin is divine,
Allah also inclines to soul,
So say that He loves them and they love Him.

The internal conflict of man, which the ancients called the fight between reason and passion, automatically leads to the conflict between different groups of human beings, the elated and morally liberated beings on the one side and the nasty and brutish beings on the other.

This approach accepts the existence of a conflict as a part of the development and evolution of history, but not in the form of class war between those attached to the old means of production and old social system and those attached to the more modern means of production.

It claims that a conflict has always existed between men with mature faith who are free from the captivity of nature and the environment of animal instincts and have an object in view and the degraded and brutish persons and it has played a very effective role in the evolution of history.

To interpret all the wars in history as class wars is tantamount to closing the eyes to the most beautiful and the brightest manifestations of human life all along.

Throughout history many battles have been fought to secure material needs like food, clothing or housing, or on questions connected with sex, power and prestige. But there have definitely been certain battles which can be described as fights between the right and the wrong and the good and the evil. They represented a struggle between the human motives and the animal propensities, between the common good and the individual interests, between the high human values and the base desires and between the progressive and the elated man and the low and the perverted man.

In the words of the holy Qur'an they were fights between the troops of Allah and the troops of the Devil. The supporters of this theory strongly censure the attempts of the materialists to interpret all religious, ethical and human movements on the basis of class struggle and regard such attempts as a distortion of history and an insult to human dignity. Historical events show that many movements which were initiated for securing the primary material needs were led and guided or at least supported by individuals who

themselves were well-off and well-placed.

Contrary to the claim of the materialists that all progressive campaigns are waged by the oppressed and the deprived classes wanting to displace the existing system and to replace it by another system which may ensure their material needs in conformity with the developed means of production there exists historical evidence to prove that progressive movements have not always been confined to the oppressed classes.

They have occasionally been led by the individuals belonging to the privileged classes who thrust their dagger into the heart of the ruling system.

The risings of Abraham, Moses, Muhammad and Husayn were all of this nature. It is also misleading to suggest that the progressive movements have always aimed at material objectives. The movement of the early Muslims bears witness to the fact that this is not so. Ali identifying the nature of this movement said: "They were given permission to defend their faith with the help of their swords".¹ Similarly, progressive movements have not always been the result of the development of the means of production.

During the past two centuries a number of freedom movements were launched both in the East and the West. One such movement was the movement for securing a constitutional government in Iran, known as the Mashrutiya Movement. In this case it cannot be claimed that the development of the means of production had created a crisis in Iran.

It is also not true that unrest in the society has always been caused by the unsuitability of the legal provisions of the existing system. In certain cases the provisions as such were quite acceptable, but a campaign had to be waged to secure their effective enforcement and the Alawi uprisings during the Abbasid period had this nature. Human conscience is not so depraved that people cannot be inspired by anything higher and nobler than their basic material needs.

From the above the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Evolutionary battles: Battles in history have been of divergent forms, nature and causes: But those which contributed to the development of history and humanity have been only those which were fought between the men of high ideology, free from selfishness and greed and the men of selfish and beastly nature lacking in aspirational and intellectual life.

The nature of the wars which have contributed to the advancement and evolution was not that of a class war nor that of a confrontation between the new and the old in the sense mentioned earlier during the course of the discussion on the materialistic theory. Wars have, by and by acquired an ideological aspect and from the viewpoint of human values man is gradually coming closer to perfection i.e. to the stage of an ideal man in an ideal society. He will continue to advance on this path till a world government, having full regard for all human values is established and that will be the end of all the evil forces and selfish wars.

According to the Islamic terminology this government is called the Mahdi Government.

2. Absurdity of logical continuity: A logical continuity of the historical stages as described by the materialists is baseless. Historical events, especially those of the past one century, prove the absurdity of this theory. During this period only such countries have gone over to communism as had never passed through the stage of capitalism. The Soviet Union, China and the East European countries are a conspicuous example of it.

On the other hand the countries with a highly developed capitalistic system like the United States, Great Britain and France are still maintaining their old systems and a century old prediction of the protagonists of materialism concerning the workers revolution in the heavily industrialized countries like Britain and France has turned out to be mere illusion.

It is evident from the above that there is no such thing as a historical compulsion. It is quite possible that in a capitalistic society the proletarian class attains such a state of prosperity and well being that it may totally reject all ideas of revolution. Similarly, it is also possible that with appearance of a clear and convincing ideology and an elevation of religious and social conscience a nomadic society may reach the highest stage of human culture in one leap. The renaissance of the early Islamic era bears witness to this fact.

3. Sanctity of an armed struggle: The lawfulness and sanctity of an armed struggle does not mean an encroachment on any individual's rights or aspirations. The struggle becomes lawful and sacred whenever anything sacred to humanity is in danger. Whenever any right, especially that which pertains to the entire society, is threatened an armed struggle is allowed. Freedom is one such right. A struggle for the liberation of the oppressed, as specifically mentioned in the holy Qur'an, is another instance.

If the belief in the Oneness of Allah, which is the greatest asset of humanity, is in danger then a fight is naturally lawful.

4. Reforms: There is no reason why partial or gradual reforms should be condemned. History does not compulsorily pass through contradictions and the transformation of one contradiction into another is not a universal truth. Hence, it is not correct to say that partial and gradual reforms prevent an explosion and block the way to evolution.

Even partial and gradual reforms do encourage and help those who fight for a rightful and just cause and bring the chances of their final success closer. In contrast corruption, turmoil and perversions help the hostile forces and slow down the movement of history in favour of the righteous people. According to this approach, what is required is a sort of development which precedes the ripening of the fruit on the tree and not an explosion. The better the care, anti pest protection and watering of a tree, the better, healthier, and sometimes earlier is the fruit it produces.

5. Disorders: The same reasons which justify partial and gradual reforms also make unlawful subversion and sabotage with a view to creating deadlock and crisis, which is recommended by the materialistic theory.

6. Vacillations of history: Although, on the whole, history moves towards evolution, yet contrary to the materialistic view, such a movement is neither compulsory nor inevitable. It is also not essential that every society in any stage of its history should be more perfect than it was in the preceding stage.

The prime mover of history is man who is free and the master of his actions. Hence, history fluctuates in its movements. Sometimes it goes forward and sometimes backward.

It sways now to the right and now to the left. Some times it moves fast and sometimes slow and occasionally stands still. A society continues to rise and fall. The history of human civilization is nothing but a series of rises, falls and extinctions. As the famous historian, Toynbee, has pointed out, decline of every single civilization is inevitable, though on the whole, human history continues to advance steadily along a line of evolution.

7. The evolutionary march of humanity towards freedom from the restrictions imposed by natural environments, economic conditions and individual and group interests has on the whole, been guided towards a purposeful life, a better ideology and a deeper faith.

The will of a primitive man is mostly conditioned by his natural and social environments and his animal impulses, whereas a culturally advanced man with his broad outlook has gradually attained a great deal of freedom from such restrictions and has consequently, to a large extent, brought his environments and his impulses under his control.

8. The jihad and the efforts to persuade others to adopt the righteous path are quite different from a class war, for they have a humanitarian basis.

9. The power of conviction and reasoning is genuine, natural and effective. A conviction enables the human conscience to overcome material urges.

10. The Hegelian and Marxian triangle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis is neither applicable to history nor to nature and consequently it is a false presumption that history passes through contradictories or that historical stages are a series of contradictories derived from each other and transformed into one another.

The triangle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis is based on two transformations and one combination i.e. the transformation of a phenomenon into its antithesis, then its transformation into the antithesis of antithesis and the combination of these two forms at the third and last stage viz. the synthesis.

But, in reality, nature does not work in this manner. What actually exists in nature is either a combination of two contradictories without transformation, or transformation of one contradictory into another without any combination. The third form which is met with is evolution without either transformation or combination.

Many elements which are somewhat contradictory to each other combine together but are not

transformed into each other. For instance, water is a mixture of hydrogen and oxygen. In such cases there is a combination, not transformation. There are other cases where nature gradually tilts from one excessive state to the opposite state and in the process strikes a balance between the two. In such cases there is a transformation, but no combination. There are still other cases where a third thing comes into being as a result of the combination of the two things. Of course, there is no harm if we call the resulting third thing synthesis and the two original ones thesis and antithesis respectively, but that means nothing more than the use of common and familiar terms.

The same is the case with the use of the word "dialectic". It is a beautiful and well-sounding word and no writer would like to be deprived of it. Therefore, there is no harm if it is used in connection with any idea that combines the principles of motion and contradiction though it may not have those distinctive features of dialectic thinking to which we have referred before.

Two Concepts About Man

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

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

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

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

Against every Pharaoh there is a Moses, says an Arabic proverb. In the words of the Persian poet, Mawlavi, two banners have always been afloat, one white and the other black. In the fight between the forces of right and the forces of wrong sometimes the former has been victorious and sometimes the

latter. Anyhow, all victories and defeats have been the outcome of a set of social, economic and moral factors. The holy Qur'an emphasizes the effect of moral factors and thus turns history into a source of instruction.

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

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

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

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

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

1. See: Sermon 154, Peak of Eloquence, Nahjul Balaghah, ISP 1979.

An Ideal Society

To hope for the appearance and revolution of the Mahdi is an inspiring Islamic social idea. Besides being a repose of trust in the future, it is an appropriate mirror in which the nature of the Islamic aspirations of mankind can be seen.

This prophecy comprise many elements, some of them philosophical, others cultural, political, economic

or social and still others human or physio-human.

It is not possible in this short article to discuss the subject in detail nor to quote extensively from the holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, but, in order to make the nature of "The Big Expectation" clear, we propose briefly to throw some light on its salient features. They are as below:

Optimism about the Future of Humanity

There are divergent views about the future. There are some who believe that adversity, distress, disorder and mischief are the lot of humanity and on that account life has no value. In the eyes of such people the most judicious action would be to put an end to life.

Some others think that human life has already been thrown into disarray. They believe that, following the marvellous technological progress and the accumulation of huge stockpiles of the means of mass destruction, mankind has reached a stage where its final annihilation is Imminent.

The English philosopher, Bertrand Russell, says in his book, 'New Hopes' that there are people, including Einstein, who see the possibility of man having completed his span of life and think that with his wonderful scientific skill he may, in a few years, succeed in completely exterminating himself.

According to this theory there is a great possibility of the total extinction of the human race just when it is on the threshold of attaining maturity. If we rely on perceptible evidence only, such a possibility cannot be ruled out.

● According to a third theory distress and disorder are not a part of human nature. Nor will the tragedy of collective suicide ever take place. In fact, a very happy and bright future awaits humanity. A great man will appear who will uproot all corruption and mischief. This is a religiously inspired theory and it is in this context that Islam gives the glad tidings of Mahdi's revolution. Its salient features will be:

- Final victory of righteousness, virtue, peace, justice, freedom and truth over the forces of egoism, subjugation, tyranny, deceit and fraud.
- Establishment of a world government (one government in the whole world).
- Reclamation and rehabilitation of the whole earth so that no area remains waste.
- Attainment of full sagacity by mankind, adherence to ideology and emancipation from animal impulses and undue social restrictions.
- Maximum utilization of the gifts of the earth.
- Equal distribution of wealth and property among all human beings.

- Complete eradication of all vices like adultery, fornication, usury, use of intoxicants, treachery, theft and homicide and total disappearance of abnormal complexes, malice and ill-will.
- Eradication of war and restoration of peace, friendship, co-operation and benevolence.
- Complete coherence between man and nature.

All these points require detailed discussion and analysis but here the idea is just to acquaint the readers with the nature of the Islamic tidings and aspirations.

Big expectations

It simply means hoping and aspiring for the materialization of the order (referred to above) which the Divine Will has destined for the world. Now let us turn back to the point that the expectation is of two kinds. One kind is constructive and dynamic which is an act of virtue and the other is destructive and paralysing which is a sort of licentiousness.

We have already mentioned that these two kinds of expectations are the outcome of two divergent notions of the great appearance of the promised Mahdi. These two notions have sprung from the two approaches to the nature of historical development. Now let us explain further the two kinds of expectations.

Destructive expectation

The concept which some people have of the rising of the Mahdi and the revolution which he will bring about is only of an explosive nature. These people believe that the appearance of the Mahdi depends solely upon the spread of injustice, discrimination, frustration and disasters. They are of the opinion that, immediately prior to the appearance of the Mahdi, the forces of evil will gain a complete hold and not a single good man will be left in the world. They look forward to an explosion, following which the divine forces will redeem the truth but not the supporters of truth, for they would not be existing.

On this basis they would condemn every reform and regard every sin, every excess and every injustice as valid and proper, because, according to their idea, corruption and tyranny bring the explosion nearer and pave the way for the eventual betterment of a permanent nature. They believe in the maxim that ends justify the means and as such unlawful means become lawful if the objective is desirable. That is how deadly sins besides giving pleasures are supposed to help in bringing about the final sacred-revolution. The following lines most appropriately apply to their case:

"Win the heart of your beloved even by deceit and treachery. Commit a sin if you are unable to perform a good deed."

Such people naturally dislike the reformers and all those who enjoin good and forbid evil, because they

think that their action is delaying the appearance of the promised Mahdi. They, even if they do not commit the sins themselves, at least appreciate the reprehensible activities of the sinners who, according to them, are preparing the ground for the appearance of the Mahdi.

This sort of notion may be called semi-dialectic, because it regards corruption and distress as a prelude to the sacred explosion. The dialectic thinking also opposes partial reforms and allows the creation of unrest, but it has some merit, because it does so with a view to making the split wider and the fight hotter, whereas the supporters of this outrageous notion simply allow corruption and disorder and then do nothing except to sit back and hope for the desired result to follow automatically. It need not be added that this sort of notion of the appearance of the promised Mahdi is against the tenets of Islam and must be regarded as a sort of licentiousness.

Constructive expectation

All the verses of the holy Qur'an, which form the basis of the concept of the Mahdi and all the traditions cited in support thereof go against the above notion. What is inferred from the holy Qur'an is that the appearance of the Mahdi is a link in the series of fights between the righteous and the wicked and the Mahdi is the symbol of the final and complete victory of the righteous and the faithful. The holy Qur'an says:

Allah has promised the righteously striving believers to appoint them as His deputies on earth, as He had appointed those who lived before. He will make the religion that He has chosen for them to stand supreme. He will replace their fear with peace and security. They will worship their Lord without fear and will not submit to anyone other than Him and will associate nothing with His worship and obedience. (Surah al-Nur, 24:55)

The appearance of the Mahdi is Allah's favour for the oppressed and the weak and is a means of their coming to power and gaining the promised Divine succession in the whole world. The holy Qur'an says.

We have decided to grant favour to the suppressed ones by appointing them leaders and heirs of the earth. (Surah al-Qasas, 28:5)

The appearance of the Mahdi means the realization of the promise Allah made to the righteous in His sacred Book.

Verily We have written in the Psalms after the Torah had been revealed: My righteous servants shall inherit the earth. (Surah al Anbia, 21: 105)

The well-known saying of the holy Prophet that Allah will fill the earth with justice after its having been filled with injustice and tyranny testifies to the fact that at the time of the appearance of the Mahdi there will exist two classes. One will consist of the oppressors and the other, howsoever small, of the oppressed who are subjected to injustice and tyranny.

Shaykh Saduq narrates on the authority of Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad al Sadiq that the Mahdi would appear only when the virtuous would become the most virtuous and the wicked the most wicked. From this also it is evident that both the virtuous and the wicked will be in existence.

Islamic traditions make mention of a group of people who will come forward and join Imam Mahdi immediately on his appearance. From this again it is evident that the virtuous will not be completely wiped out and though their number may be insignificant, yet they will be best in the quality of faith and comparable to the companions of Imam Husayn ibn Ali.

According to Islamic traditions the rising of the Mahdi will be preceded by other risings of the virtuous. What has been mentioned as the Yamani's rising is an instance.

In some Islamic traditions a mention has been made of a government of the righteous people which will continue to exist till the rising of the Mahdi (May Allah hasten his solace) and, as we know, some Shi'ah *ulama*, who held good opinions about some of their contemporary Shi'ah governments, considered it probable that it would be those very governments which would last till the rising of the Mahdi.

It is gathered from the various Qur'anic verses and traditions taken together that rising of the promised Mahdi will be the last one of the chain of the battles which have taken place between truth and falsehood since the creation of the world.

The promised Mahdi will realize the ideal of all the prophets, saints and fighters in the path of truth.

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