

## Ibn Khaldun: The Great Philosopher-Historian An Estimate

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Ibn Khaldun's legacy as a historian-sociologist is, I believe, most relevant to our times in so far as correct recording of events and incidents is concerned. Thus could the portions of mankind be protected from disastrous consequences of misinformation. Ibn Khaldun was the fore most advocate and incompatible Arab scribe of a definitive and accurate historical account based on impartially examined evidence. This view is to be accepted in spite of the fact that certain errors have been pointed out by the critics in his voluminous work. But while searching for Ibn Khaldun's weaknesses and lack of moral values, it is imperative to bear in mind his background and societal environment<sup>1</sup>. The rulers in north-west Africa (Berber states) and Arab East (Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Arabia) were deficient in great qualities and the peoples concerned were tasting the outcome of decline both of power and civilisation. The Arabs in Spain were losing ground under the pressure of Christian warlords. Ibn Khaldun visited Granada, the last surviving Muslim state in the Iberian Peninsula, and it, too, had to join history within a century. In the states of Berber, Ibn Khaldun himself was a witness to repeated disorder and political imbalance. Later, he went to Egypt and lived there for about a quarter century. In the former he held positions of an official and statesman, and in the latter he dispensed justice and lectured in the institutions.

When Ibn Khaldun decided to write his *Universal History*, he found

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tranquillity missing, and the requisite concentration needed for dedicated research was difficult to attain. Yet, he had resolved to proceed with his gigantic project. Not only the history of Berber states but that of Eastern Arabs and the Ottoman Turks, Central Asian regions, Spain, Sicily and other European peoples was also within his plan. He did not lack source material as he had before him the accounts written by eminent historians and he benefited from them. As a matter of fact, the Arabian Islam with the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith had opened the way for Historiography right from its miraculous rise. In this respect, Dr. Abd al-Malik, Professor at Jeddah University, observes:

The coming of Islam brought with it new meaning to History by deepening its moral aspects and by emphasising the religious elements. Islam presented to its believers a whole compass of universal history. Ibn Khaldun's studies of history aimed not only at relating events to other, but also passing beyond history. The attitude toward history came from the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition. Muhammad, on him be peace, said: 'Learn from the world and do not (merely) pass through it; This attitude of reflection upon nature, purpose, and methods of history in Islamic thought inspired Ibn Khaldun to probe deeply into history in order to reveal its secrets through comparison, theoretical comprehension, and the analysis of the nature and causes of historical events.<sup>2</sup>

We are actually indebted to Ibn Khaldun for his method of treating the fund of historical information about various events. It was he who 'invented' the science of History for the coming generations of historians both in the Orient and the Occident. Yet, Ibn Khaldun himself stood indebted to the Book of God—al-Qur'an— for the way he adopted in writing history and the ideas and prerequisites and the issues he discussed in his famed volume, *Muqaddimah (the Prolegomena)*, to his Book One of *Kitāb al-'Ibar (The Universal History)*. Those of the Orientalists of the West who try to wean him away from the fold of Islamic thought, aim at creating a diversion in any scholastic approach to eminent Muslim thinkers and historians of the standing of Ibn Khaldun, who, while compiling his historical work not only had before him the category of the writers of early centuries of Hijrah era, but in order to produce, correct version of events and incidents. He

followed in strict conformity the pattern of the Holy Qur'an which presented the history of the previous peoples and the attitude of the unbelieving Arabs and the qualities of the believers with the sole aim of maintaining world order and institution reform in the universe. Ibn Khaldun adhered to the Quranic method of arguing, and while doing so, the firm traditions (*Hadith*) of the Prophet of Islam, on him be peace, also stood in good stead to him.

### **Contemporary Critics of Ibn Khaldun**

Abul Mahasin wrote in *Al-Manhal al-Safi*, "may Allah have mercy upon Ibn Khaldun: How fond was he of the office (of Chief Justice)!" There was a keen struggle for it and his adversaries (Al-Ifkishi, Al-Busati and Jamal al-Din Tansi) used to hatch plots against him and propagate his weaknesses. Al-Sakhawi quotes his teacher, Hafidh ibn Hajar, saying, "several charges were brought against him (Ibn Khaldun) many of which were false, and he was grossly insulted. "In actual fact, the chief feature of the contemporary society was rivalry among the learned men, men of trade, and the rulers and the rurals. One of the reasons why a section of the Egyptians was angry with Ibn Khaldun, was his opinion about them (possibly the urbans) he had recorded in his *Prolegomena*, defining them as a people "inclined to merriment, frivolity (levity) and disregard of consequences." Hafidh ibn Hajar, who had listened to Ibn Khaldun's lectures found him wanting in many qualities.' Surprisingly, even some north-west Africans (Berbers) did not have a good, opinion about him. One of them, Ibn 'Arafah, on hearing that Ibn Khaldun had been appointed Chief Justice in Egypt remarked, "We had always considered Judgeship one of the highest posts but when he was appointed (to the position) we thought it to be the lowest."<sup>3</sup> As against it, see the magnanimity of the great historian and Judge, who wrote in his *Kitāb al-'Ibar* about the virtue and noble characteristics of the Berber people in the past and the present, and Enan states that Ibn Khaldun never wrote such a chapter on the qualities of any other nation:

As for their (Berbers') humane virtues, their vying with one another in noble qualities, their general disposition which raises a nation to the rank of honour, and evokes praise from people; their appreciation of

neighbourhood, protection of guests, keeping their promises and obligations, patience in adversity, refusal to submit to humiliation or tyranny, facing misfortunes, conquering authority and sacrificing their religion,—these are traditional qualities which, if recorded, would furnish good examples to those nations that follow them.<sup>4</sup>

M.A. 'Enan, whom Heinrich Simon thinks 'biased' as a biographer, observes that both Hafidh ibn Hajar and Al-'Asqalani, were bent upon defaming Ibn Khaldun, for their statements and manner of expression "are characterised by exaggeration and partiality." Some writers opine that the whole atmosphere throughout ninth century of Hijrah Era had become turbid. Al-Sakhawi is said to have gathered all that was told and written against the eminent philosopher-historian. However, Taqi al-Din al-Makrizi, who like Ibn Hajar had heard Ibn Khaldun's discourses, recorded with the greatest respect some of his merits, and reproduced his biographical sketch with admiration in his book, *Durur al-'Uaud al-Faridah*. Yet, Al-Makrizi was accused of lack of objectivity and even ignorance in understanding Ibn Khaldun. Abul Mahasin ibn Taghri Birdi was also impressed by his abilities and administration of justice. It appears there had risen a wave of anti-Ibn Khaldun criticism which subsided after a century's time. Not, only that Ibn Khaldun's chief contribution could not be appreciated by his contemporaries and generations that followed immediately, but that those also who had praised his work remained in the dark for long. One reason why he was neglected was that he was a pluralist and it was beyond the capacity of many to differentiate between his several roles. In the Berber states Ibn Khaldun "lived principally as a statesman, successively occupying posts of distinction at courts (and outside them), and taking part in endless intrigues and adventures. But in Egypt (he lived as a scholar and Judge.<sup>5</sup>

Ignoring the alleged faults of Ibn Khaldun as a human being and regardless of the limitations of his work as Heinrich Simon and his ilk point out in their treatises, it must be recognised with equanimity that he was the founder of a new science in historiography (and sociology) and in that capacity he rejected all historical information gathered without investigation notwithstanding the fact that he himself

might have reproduced some erroneous events mentioned by ancient chroniclers or historians for whom he had great regard because theirs was a big achievement in an age bereft of basic facilities.

### **Al-Muqaddimah (The Prolegomena)**

Whatever Ibn Khaldun had observed and experienced in north-west Africa, he set to work on it, plunged into deep study, in order to compile a history of the lands concerned according to particular principles. By coincidence he revolutionised the study of human societies thus laying the foundations of sociology three hundred years before Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) of Europe. In 1375, Ibn Khaldun went in seclusion, settled in the palace of Abu 'Arif away from the din of Fez and spent his next four years on the completion of his first scientific work, *Muqaddimah*, which according to Simon is not only the result of his systematic investigations but also of his political experience. N.J. Dawud, in the abridged translation of the *Prolegomena* by Franz Rosenthal comments in his 'Introduction' on the ability of Ibn Khaldun to take up the new study:

Fortunately, he was gifted with rare insight, enabling him to penetrate the essentials of accumulated knowledge; so that, when he was ripe for his distinct task, he was able to review historical experience on a universal scale and thus make his last contribution to the study of History.<sup>7</sup>

Having accomplished one of the most important feats of historical and scientific literature, Ibn Khaldun, with unswerving determination proceeded eagerly with the rest of his project, encompassing not only the past of Arab-Islamic world but also the history of the neighbouring Christian peoples. His own younger contemporary Al-Makrizi, enthusiastically wrote about *Al-Muqaddimah*:

It is a unique work of its kind, an accomplishment too difficult to realise; in fact, it is essence of knowledge and science and the result of a sane mind. It reveals the truth of things, events and news; it explains the state of the Universe and reveals the origin of all beings in an admirable and plain style.<sup>8</sup>

Even Al-Sakhawi, the critic of Ibn Khaldun, acknowledges the excellence of the product (The *Prolegomena*), calling it moderate and appreciative. Abul

Abbas al-Qalqaskandi, consulted it, benefited from it and cited portions from it in future. M.A. 'Enan writes in his Foreword: *Al-Muqaddimah* is "an inestimable wealth in the intellectual legacy of Arabic literature, as also an inestimable wealth of Arabic rhetoric. ..." On the whole, it guided all future historians who cared for doing justice to the principles of historiography formulated by Ibn Khaldun. Dr. Abd al-Malik al-Sayed states, "in an excellent summary Ibn Khaldun provided a sound scientific definition of History giving its true scope and explaining the task and qualities of a historian." The same reads:

History is really the record of human society, or world civilisation action, of the changes that take place in the nature of that society, such as savagery, sociability and group solidarity; of revolutions and uprisings by one set of people against another with the resulting kingdoms and states, with their various ranks; of the different activities and occupations of men, whether for gaining their livelihood or in the various sciences and crafts; and in general of all the transformations which society undergoes by its very nature.<sup>9</sup>

Now, we may peruse the starting portion of *al-Muqaddimah* which Ibn Khaldun wrote, and for his profundity of thought and argument, came to be known as the foremost exponent of the Science of History and Sociology, with a hue of religion and natural laws governing the development of human civilisation and society, giving further the causes of the rise and fall of communities and dynasties. Let us note how he proceeds with his advocacy for true historical information. His stress is on the importance of the subject and adoption of methods whereby to achieve the goal of a history at once free from errors, exaggeration and falsehoods. As he writes:

History is a discipline widely cultivated among nations and races. It is eagerly sought after. The men in the street, the ordinary people, aspire to know it. Kings and leaders vie for it. Both the learned and the ignorant are able to understand it. For on the surface history is no more than information about political events, ...elegantly presented and spiced with proverbs. ...

The inner meaning of history, on the other hand, involves speculation

and an attempt to get at truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events. History, therefore, is firmly rooted in philosophy. It deserves to be accounted a branch of it. <sup>11</sup>

Having seen some faulty works of previous chroniclers, Ibn Khaldun questions their claim to be the true historians, saying, "they had no right to occupy themselves with history, introducing gossip into their books," frequently accepting what was false and undependable and inauthentic. Anxious to cure the malady, he continues:

Little effort is being made to get at the truth. The critical eye, as a rule, is not sharp. Errors and unfounded assumptions are closely allied and familiar elements in historical information... Occupation with the (scholarly) disciplines on the part of those who have no genuine claim to them is widespread. But the pasture of stupidity is unwholesome for mankind. No one can stand up against the authority of truth, and the evil of falsehood is to be fought with enlightening speculation. ...<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, Ibn Khaldun wondered at the compilations of earlier Muslim historians and admired their perseverance and sustained and steadfast efforts. While appreciating their contributions he says:

Most of histories by these authors cover everything; because of the universal geographical extension of the two earlier Islamic dynasties and because of the very wide selection of sources of which they did or did not make use. ...

Ibn Khaldun regrets the incapability and narrowness of vision of the subsequent compilers, and passes this judgment on them:

The later historians were all tradition-bound and dull of nature and intelligence, or did not try to avoid being dull. They merely copied their predecessors and disregarded the changes in conditions and customs that the time had brought about in nations, races and dynasties. Thus they presented historical information about dynasties and stories of events from the earliest times as mere forms without substance blades without scabbards; as knowledge that must be considered ignorance; because it is not known what of it is extraneous and what is genuine.<sup>13</sup>

Ibn Khaldun begins his 'Introduction' with this observation on history meant to be excellent by adhering to certain principles:

The goal of history is distinguished and its uses many. But it has to be

compiled in accordance with certain principles, which, if ignored, the whole effort would go futile because of mere forms of information, false and erroneous details. Conditions and situations of each age, dynasty and state, have to be kept in view. Historians who fail to understand these stray from the truth.<sup>14</sup>

Ibn Khaldun then cites instances of errors made by historians even though great like Al-Masudi and other common writers like Al-Bakri. The first is about the claim that the strength of the army of Prophet Moses (AS) when wandering in Sinai or struggling elsewhere was 600,000 men and this at the time when Bani Israel were the humblest. The claim is rejected on the ground that when the Hebrews were a powerful people under King Solomon, the number of his soldiers was only 12,000. The historians, not adopting methods of how to gather correct and fair reports, "let themselves go (without self-criticism) and make a feast of untrue statements." Another 'silly statement' recorded is about the repeated advances of the Tubba' kings of south-west Arabia on regions of northwest Africa, Iraq and central Asia which it is impossible to believe because they were not mighty and resourceful. There were geographical, financial and human barriers in their way on all sides.

Another false story is that narrated about the event of the destruction of the Barmaki dynasty under Caliph Harun al-Rashid. According to Ibn Khaldun, the cause is falsely attributed to 'relations' between J'afar al-Barmaki and Al-' Abbasah, the sister of Harun. With his fecund brain, he strives to argue in favour of personal conduct of the Abbasi rulers and the position of Al-' Abbasah as the scion of the family of Caliph Al-Mansur. Similarly, the report about the alleged relations of Buran, the daughter of Al-Hassan bin Sahl with Caliph Al-Mamun, is yet another instance of untruth. Ibn Khaldun writes that it is unbelievable for the reason that "firm morality and chastity reigned in Al-Hassan's house". As for Al-Mamun, he was known for his religiosity and learning.

Ibn Khaldun would not like a historian to accept reports without sifting evidence whether incidental or circumstantial and investigate the original source of information. This he deemed essential in order to reject false or fabricated stories



and to protect national, regional and religio-social history against untruth which when encouraged has disastrous effects on a people's present and future. On this particular aspect of historiography, influenced by the misguided, Ibn Khaldun observes giving reasons of untruth and falsehood mixed with historical information:

Untruth naturally afflicts historical information. There are various reasons that make this unavoidable. One of them is partisanship for opinions and schools. If the soul is impartial in receiving information, it devotes to that information the share of critical investigation the information deserves, and its truth or untruth becomes clear. ...Prejudice and partisanship obscure the critical faculty and critical investigation. The result is that falsehoods are accepted and transmitted.<sup>15</sup>

Another reason of making untruth unavoidable in narrating history is reliance upon transmitters who may not be dependable. This involves personality criticism, but, Ibn Khaldun warns, the concerned using this 'right' freely, and advises that one must ascertain the possibility of a particular piece of information. "If it is absurd, there is no use into criticising a transmitter". He further recommends that "the way to achieve presumptive soundness is to ascertain the probity (*adalah*) and exactness of the (concerned) transmitters. ..."

Another reason is unawareness of the purpose of an event. Many a transmitter does not know the real significance of his observations or of things he has learned about orally. ...The result is falsehood. Another reason is unfounded assumption as to the truth of a thing. This is frequent. It results mostly from reliance upon transmitters.<sup>16</sup>

Ignorance of how conditions conform with reality is yet another reason as these may be affected by ambiguities and artificial distortions of which the transmitter may not be aware. Again, many people in their avarice for benefits or rewards may become flatterers of high ranking persons who may long or praise. This evil discourages virtue and leads to disinterest in the virtuous. A more powerful reason of acceptance of untruth "is ignorance of the nature of the various conditions arising in civilisation. ...If the student knows the nature of events and the circumstances and requirements in the world of existence, it will help him to distinguish truth from untruth in investigations the historical information critically...<sup>17</sup>

On the whole, if any of the above mentioned reasons were to come in the

way of a historian, he would not then do justice to writing of a true history.

Ibn Khaldun, with his experiences as a statesman, negotiator, judge and teacher, was a pluralist. As is opined by some of the orientalist, there exists difference between his *Kitāb al-Ibar* and *Al-Muqaddimah*. The reason is that there was a difference in the situations in which the two were written or compiled. The discussion in the latter is smooth and systematic'. For recording history peace and order was required. The *Kitāb* was compiled in a situation full of fears and threats. For careful recording and argument, Ibn Khaldun lacked uninterrupted concentration and then he had other duties to attend. He was not content with mere narrating of unconnected events, wasteful activities and the profligacies of the princes.

#### **Ibn Khaldun Presents the Book One**

Ibn Khaldun commanded certain qualities and tools by virtue of his various positions he held from time to time. As against some of the earlier historians, he wrote his accounts without following chronological order and described each topic independent of date and time. He mentioned governments and peoples or societies along with the changes wrought in them separately in order to avoid confusion. He wrote history with a broad vision and as a eyewitness and as a participant in developments in the states concerned. Ibn Khaldun compiled his work on Berber states near Tuji away from Tunis in conditions ensuring non-interfere as in the case of the *Prolegomena* though the situation in both cases differed. Having completed it, he presented the first copy of *al-'Ibar* to his patron, Sultan Abul Abbas of Tunis in 784/1382, and as the occasion was unique and great, he recited an ode comprising 100 verses. A few of these may be cited here:

Here in the histories of time and peoples

As lessons the morals of which are followed by the just.

I smoothed the methods of expression

As if they submitted to my will.

I dedicate it,—a glory, to your realm,

Which shines, and is object of pride.

I swear that I did not exaggerate

A bit exaggeration is hateful to me.<sup>18</sup>

It was a great contribution, everlasting in value and significance, to be of benefit to scholars of all climes that Ibn Khaldun had made in the form of the *Prolegomena* and *The Universal History*. He had patiently gone through the literary treasures left by the preceding historians, no doubt, some of them were faulty. While examining, he had marked their errors, weaknesses and exaggerations. Thus he saved himself and his compilation from the repetition of mistakes committed in the past. He writes:

When I had read the works of others and probed into the recesses of yesterday and today, I shook myself out of that drowsy complacency and sleepiness. Although not much of a writer, I exhibited my own literary ability as well as I could, and thus, composed a book of history. In this book, I lifted the veil from conditions as they arose in the various generations.<sup>19</sup>

As for the history of the eastern Arabs, Ibn Khaldun was required to travel to and stay in Egypt, Syria and Hijaz, and see things for himself and note down his findings. In Syria, he met Timur who had invaded that country in 1374. He went for Pilgrimage to Makkah where he must have gathered relevant information. He also studied the history of Ottoman Turks and Persians and on return to Egypt accomplished the project of history after filling the gaps in information. All his hard labour resulted in the production of a unique book as it was written in consonance with his new scientific rules. It was unique because the author himself thought it contained unusual information and familiar with hidden wisdom. Yet, he admitted of the probable deficiencies in the account, its perfect accuracy and argument. While concluding his own 'Foreword' he writes:

Still, after all has been said, I am conscious of imperfections when I look at the work of scholars of past and present. I confess my inability to penetrate so difficult a subject. I wish that men of scholarly competence and wide knowledge would look at the book with a critical, rather than a complacent eye, and silently correct and overlook the mistakes they come upon. The capital of knowledge that an individual

scholar has to offer is small. Admission (of one's shortcomings) saves from censure. Kindness from colleagues is hoped for. It is God Whom I ask to make our deeds acceptable in His sight. He is a Good Protector.<sup>20</sup>

### **Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Connection**

Ibn Khaldun had a good connection with Islam and its Islamic thought influenced him as a thinker and writer. Dr. Abd al-Malik Al-Sayed in his monumental volume observes:

Ibn Khaldun was deeply rooted in the traditional beliefs and convictions of Islam and steeped in the traditional sciences, chief among them the science of Law and in the *tafsir* (the interpretation of the Qur'an). Just as in the West the concept of law, justice and religious ideas is rooted in the Judeo-Christian theological foundation, so Ibn Khaldun found the seed for his study of administration and politics in the theology of Islam.<sup>21</sup>

Ibn Khaldun's empiricism (that practical experience is the sole source of knowledge) manifests the tradition of Islam and method of science in his 'new science of history'. Elsewhere, the same scholar maintains:

Ibn Khaldun was a confirmed Muslim. Defending religion against the mistakes committed by other theologians and philosophers, he tried to eradicate their errors. He identified himself with the purity of Islam as it was manifested by early Muslims, and the pious who rejected every attempt at rationalisation or justification of religious beliefs as an unwarranted if not dangerous 'innovation' ...He supported pure religion and pure philosophy, but he stood against a hybrid theology.<sup>22</sup>

It need not to insist on how far Ibn Khaldun's views on the Muslim civilisation were influenced or were not imbued with the views of Muslim Aristotlians or other thinkers like Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi and Averroes (Ibn Rushd). He, however, defended religion regarding revelation and Divine Law (the *Shari'ah*) as the exclusive source for beliefs in the essence of the doctrines related to prophecy and the Divine Government. In this, he did not subscribe to the view that these need to be proved rationally. He believed that the adherence to the Qur'an and genuine Hadith, could alone defend God's creatures against misuse of power and waste of resources.

Again, the Divine Law (*Shari'ah*) alone could protect the society against anarchy, injustice and disintegration, as the highest supreme power in the political system. The ideal type of rule, according to him, was that of the Pious Caliphs. In such a rule lay the guarantees of happiness for human beings in this world and the next. The era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs was an ideal state form. He believed that "government decisions are as a rule unjust because pure justice is found only in the legal Caliphate." The ethical and Islamic functions of Ibn Khaldun's thought, are distinct from his constant appeal to texts of the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition, however, are interwoven throughout his writings. Like his contemporary jurists, Ibn Khaldun was concerned about the problem of reconciling the ideal demands of the Islamic *Shari'ah* and historical evolution. A careful reading of his ideas reveals that he was trying to show that the historical trends are what they are because of the infractions of the *Shari'ah* by the sin of pride, the sin of luxury, and the sin of greed. ...<sup>23</sup>

Heinrich Simon, an Orientalist, in his dissertation titled, *Ibn Khaldun's Science of Human Culture*, appears worried about the view that the philosopher-historian could be ranked as a precursor of modern thinkers provided his claim to Islamic connection was not upheld. He would like to preserve the scientific significance of his work away from 'the two extremes',—that is, calling him the fore-runner of modern thinkers, and, accepting the fact that his work was influenced by pure Islamic thought. No doubt, Simon admits of Ibn Khaldun's 'new Science' to be something new in its conception ensuring him permanent fame. In striving to delink Ibn Khaldun's work and Islamic pattern of thought, Simon makes another unwarranted statement which reads:

In studying the work (of Ibn Khaldun), the reader notices the religious formula at the end of the chapters. They have no connection whatsoever with the contents that precede them, and they are nothing but conventional phrases that are irrelevant for our problem. Furthermore, the numerous quotations from the Qur'an in the text do not reveal anything about the character of the author.<sup>24</sup>

Simon like Taha Husain views superficially that Ibn Khaldun was not serious in rejecting philosophy (of rationalisation etc.) and that "his whole work was an

argument against his own theory." However, there are other reputed scholars from the West who would not like separating Ibn Khaldun from Islamic thought. Sir Hamilton R. A. Gibb is one of the eminent Orientalists to whose views Simon refers:

The seemingly secondary position of religion in Ibn Khaldun's ideas is due to the fact that his subject is not religion but the state, that for this reason he discusses religion only in relation to the external course of history. ...That human life is subordinated to the personal Guidance of God Who leads it toward happiness is a matter of course; it is not a tacit assumption but an integral part of the subject discussed.<sup>25</sup>

Heinrich Simon, in order to prove that Ibn Khaldun dealt primarily with the secular and his work was not influenced by religion and its legal features says for instance: "For Ibn Khaldun's history is completely of this world, and Humanity is simultaneously its object and subject, only as the last resort is God the cause for the immutable regularity of the process." In view of Dr. Abd al-Malik's observations already cited it looks futile to go on with the discussion on Simon's statements on the subject.

#### **East-West Estimates of Ibn Khaldun**

It is also interesting to present briefly observations and estimates of scholars mostly orientalist who valued Ibn Khaldun's contribution in its totality. The significance of his *Al-Muqaddimah* and *Kitāb al 'Ibar*, has been universally acknowledged as a lasting legacy for humanity. Philip K. Hitti spoke of Ibn Khaldun "as the discoverer of the true scope and nature of history, as the founder of Sociology, and as one of the greatest historians of all times." Omar A. Farrukh wrote in his *Arab Genius in Science and Philosophy*, "that not only the science of history but also Sociology, were 'invented' by Ibn Khaldun. I. Brocklemann calls *The Prolegomena* as the first attempt at a philosophy of History, while Robert Flint exclaims enthusiastically: "Neither the classical nor the medieval Christian world can show one of nearly the same brightness... as a theorist on history he had no equal in any age or country until G. Vico appeared. ...Plato,

Aristotle, and Augustine, were not his peers, and all others were unworthy of even being mentioned along with him.<sup>126</sup>

Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee, the historian of intercontinental fame, regarded Ibn Khaldun as "the outstanding genius in the field of the study of morphology of History, and G. Vico, ... were moved by their curiosity to surmount a difficulty of different kind. ..." Again, says he, "Ibn Khaldun's brilliant study was inspired by his curiosity to explain the different effects of the two Arab invasions of North Africa in the seventh and the eleventh centuries AD: the first had been followed by political and social progress, while the second had led to chaos and ruin. From his observations he developed a penetrating analysis of social morphology, embracing, in a panoramic vision, the rises and falls of empires and civilizations."<sup>27</sup> Toynbee points out further: "both Ibn Khaldun and Vico after him, had to contend with the dearth of information at their command for carrying out their enterprise." Both had the curiosity to accomplish the task so vital. Toynbee adds: "The brilliance of Ibn Khaldun's and Vico's insights illustrate the triumph of curiosity over the obstacle presented by the dearth of information." However, we must remember that Ibn Khaldun's source-material was enough even though he had to deal with a single civilisation namely the Islamic that encompassed vast regions of the Caliphate and other states in the Eastern hemisphere.

Writing on the scope and importance of Ibn Khaldun's account of the north-west African, east-Arab and non-Arab states, and the states in the north of the Mediterranean, Dozy, a versatile luminary observes: "There is nothing in the Christian literature in the Middle Ages worthy of being compared with it and no Christian historian wrote a version with such clearness and precision on any Muslim State."<sup>28</sup> Prof. Ludwig Gum-plowicz while stating the distinction of Ibn Khaldun in the domain of social investigation concluded his estimate of him in these words:

I wanted to show that long before not only Auguste Comte, but also Vico, whom the Italians wanted forcibly to consider as the first European sociologist, a pious Muslim studied with perspicacity the social phenomena, and expressed profound ideas on this subject. What he wrote is what we term today as Sociology.<sup>29</sup>

Von Wesendonk, the German critic like Von Kremer, regards Ibn Khaldun as the 'historian of Civilisation' and calls him the master of Mechiavelli and G. Vico schools and tries to apply his theories of rise and fall of the states to the German Empire which "did not last long; in its flowery youth, it broke up with extraordinary rapidity. ..." The Italian scholar, Amari, recognised Ibn Khaldun "as the first writer in the world who treated the philosophy of history." And, Colosio, upheld this claim by saying:

The great Berber historian was able to discover in the Middle Ages the principles of social justice and political economy, and applied them with intelligence and skill, long before they were known to Western research. ...If the theories of Ibn Khaldun about the complex life of society, place him foremost among the philosophers of history, his comprehension of the part played by labour property and wages, places him foremost among the masters of modern economy.<sup>30</sup>

Prof. Nathaniel Schmidt of Cornell University views: Ibn Khaldun as the solitary figure, towering above his age, yet is to be explained in the way he himself regarded as proper in the interpretation of every historic phenomena. Comparing Ibn Khaldun to historians like Diodorus and others, he observes:

Had Ibn Khaldun left nothing behind but his political history, it would have been a monument of untiring industry, vast erudition, and keen judgment. ...Ibn Khaldun's title to enduring fame, however, does not rest on his history. It is bound up with that remarkable product of his pen—the Prolegomena to his history. Here his genius reveals itself in its splendour. Here he scatters with lavish hands the ripe fruits of his reflection on the course of human history.<sup>31</sup>

No one according to Prof. Schmidt preceded Ibn Khaldun "as the discoverer of the live space and nature of history." He states categorically: "Indeed, he was the first writer to define the field of history and to look upon history as a special science dealing with the facts that fall within its domain." Finally, Prof. Schmidt quotes the Spanish scholar, Altamira writing about the celebrated historian-sociologist:

It is sufficient: that in the fifteenth century, when the European historiography was still so deficient and so alien to conceptions of the character, Ibn Khaldun expounds and defends, there should have been



written a book like the *Prolegomena*, in which all the problems are treated or suggested which, in a more discursive manner, have come to constitute the principal preoccupation of modern historians.<sup>32</sup>

Dr. I. H. Quraishi quotes George Sarton saying, "Ibn Khaldun was an historian, politician, sociologist, economist, a deep student of human affairs, anxious to analyse the past of mankind in order to understand its present and future." Robert Flint is also cited to have opined similarly, "Ibn Khaldun, considered simply as an historian, had superiors even among Arabic authors, but as a theorist on history he had no equal in any age or country until Vico appeared, more than three hundred years later." Dr. Ishtiyah Quraishi adds to these statements: "It is true that Ibn, Khaldun had no peers in the world of Islam, but it is not correct as has become fashionable to assert that he had neither predecessors nor successors in what he see himself to do."<sup>33</sup> Dr. Muhsin Mahdi of the University of Chicago writes in his essay on Ibn Khaldun in monumental work edited by Prof. M. M. Sharif:

...It was, however, the enhanced interest in the study of history and society in modern times which led to the devotion of increased attention to Ibn Khaldun's thought, to the recognition of his rank as a major Muslim thinker, and to the judgment that he was equal, if not superior to the other well-known Muslim philosophers.

This was in, part the result of the higher prestige, and the peculiar theoretical importance, which history and the science of society have come to enjoy in modern times. ...<sup>34</sup>

Finally, it is argued that the above conclusions appear 'more scientific' to the modern mind than the works of the jurists and political thinkers of Ibn Khaldun's time or of the age before him. This view, however, may not be accepted as absolute by those who know and recognise the real value of the renowned jurist consults of Islam such as Imam Abu Hanifah (Rah. A) and his dynamic disciples.

### **Epilogue**

We should be now in a position to understand the essence of Ibn Khaldun's legacy and his overall contribution to Historiography, knowing well his scientific work on Sociology which for want of space we need to leave out. It looks more

important to find out the relevance of his literary and philosophical lessons to the present day world. Even critics like Heinrich Simon admit that "much of Ibn Khaldun's work is indeed extremely relevant today, and like everything really significant, it has much to tell us even at the present time."<sup>35</sup> It is certain that Ibn Khaldun's times had the same problems which are being tackled by various peoples in modern age. Injustices, oppression and exploitation existed there among the ancients. Cultures in various regions developed but were in the course of time overwhelmed by aggressive cultures. Before Islam's emergence as a Power, the condition of humanity was deplorable and it was liberated from the thralldom of autocrats and guided to the path of progress through arts of peace. It promoted justice and despite subsequent ups and downs, life was stabilised and human rights protected. Under the umbrella of good governments the writ of the Sacred Law ran supreme throughout the length and breadth of Islamic Commonwealth.

By the time Ibn Khaldun grew in wisdom and thought, he could differentiate between the era of glory of the earlier generations of believers and the declining state of the divided Muslim power with the socio-political and religious life threatened by repeated disorders resulting partly from the misconduct of the humans. Ibn Khaldun was a live witness to the recession of Arabs in Spain after a marvellous advance of civilisation of which the benefits were shared by the whole of Europe. He was very much present and busy working during the dissensions among the Berber states. He was aware of the fact that Islamic principles and institutions were losing solidarity at the hands of the strayed communities in eastern Arab and non-Arab regions. Individually, Ibn Khaldun might have at times fallen short of high values, yet he was becoming conscious of his duty to undertake a unique mission by virtue of his versatility, fervour and resolve to remind the Muslim Ummah of its forgotten role which could be revived along with the rich legacies of the forebears through sincere action, steadfast loyalty to the word of God and unbroken adherence to the Prophetic tradition.

Ibn Khaldun, in his curiosity to serve the cause, understood well that he could fulfil his duty towards regaining what had been lost by presenting a correct

version of history and formulate rules of writing it for the future. He knew it that mankind stood obliged to Muslims because of their devotion to scientific research and producing valuable historical literature. Dr. I.H. Quraishi states: "It would be no exaggeration to say that in the Middle Ages, History was very much a Muslim Science. Their contribution is even more remarkable in view of the fact that the Muslims inherited very meagre traditions on which they raised so glorious edifice."

Thus, the Muslims by expanding the scope of history from mere recording of facts into a repository of political administrative and cultural experiences did help in making the Islamic governments beneficent and benevolent at a time when governments elsewhere tended to be arbitrary even tyrannical."

To be precise, in the galaxy of Muslim luminaries and scholastic geniuses Ibn Khaldun commanded distinction as a philosopher-historian apart from his contribution to Sociology. For about a century after his demise, recognition to his work was not accorded because the Muslim peoples were passing then through a period of decline. Ibn Khaldun had taken up his pen to narrate Muslim history in all its phases, beginning from the spectacular rise of Arabian Islam and works of human reconstruction under its umbrella down to the decline of Muslim Power giving the causes of the rise and fall of the nations, dynasties and states. His legacy was universal, from which every one could draw benefit and obtain guidance, be it the slumbering Muslim communities or other cultures that had resisted the inspiring Message of Muhammad, (SAAS). Ibn Khaldun's 'telling lessons' were in the main meant for Muslims who had lost the essence of their religious spirit and values, their solidarity and unity, and had given up implementing the commandments of the Holy Qur'an. Without indulging indelicate thought, they were required to renew their Faith in the teachings of Islam and for their own survival as a moderate and just people, they needed to learn from the changes wrought in the society through evolutionary (or revolutionary) processes.

Modern scholars of the standing of Dr. Abd al-Malik Al-Sayed believe firmly that Ibn Khaldun was imbued with great moral values and deep religious conviction. Appreciating the essential teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the

instructions of the Apostle of Justice and Realism, on him be peace, Ibn Khaldun, who had come to conclude that untruth was at the root of peoples' decline, ignorance, injustice and oppression, insisted that the historians and the scribes must strive to find out truth about an event, incident or a community or its individuals and record it only after impartial investigation. He devised ways for them to avoid accepting falsehood or a manipulated news. Both the scribes and the transmitters were required to be trustworthy so as to ensure registration of authentic statements only. This was strictly in accordance with the Divine command contained in verse 6 of Surah of the Holy Qur'an which reads: "O ye who believe! If a wicked Person comes to you with any news ascertain the truth lest harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done."

The methods or principles devised by Ibn Khaldun for writing correct history were meant for all times. They are relevant as has been already said on modern age as well especially when the peace and security of numerous countries and communities have continuously been threatened as a result of wrong reporting, false statements, inauthentic documentation of human acts and misrepresentation of facts. The ancients and the pre-Islamic communities, had no doubt, suffered under the demagoguery of man, and oppression and injustice of the rulers. However, the latest methods of falsification were not known to the tyrants. Since the rise of European colonialism and imperialism and dictatorships of the last century CE, lying and fabrication of stories became order of the day and historic groups of humans were subjugated or enslaved and their lands captured. Their basic rights were violated and their patrimony taken over by force or fraud. It is no exaggeration that the humanity since the dawn of civilisation has never witnessed so much lies and falsehoods as have been accumulated on record under the so-called civilised governments in the last 250 years. Despite the tall claims of the 'advanced' states that command military prowess and all paraphernalia of destructive wars, they have imposed great and unbearable tragedies on innocent peoples. Thus the whole of mankind has been robbed of its tranquillity through falsification of facts encouraged officially or through a visionless and corrupt Media as also through

unprovoked aggression committed for one pretext or the other.

It is our considered view that Ibn Khaldun's *Al-Muqaddimah* can be the sole effective tool with the help of which the human wrongs can be righted and the peace of the world that Islam had guaranteed restored to it as responsibly as the Creator and the Lord of the Universe hath desired and enjoined from the inception. It is the unavoidable duty of each 'trusty' of Power to remember his origin, respect the factor of time, uphold the rights of all humans, avoid wastage of resources Providence has stored for all, honour the susceptibilities of the fellow beings, and above all bring order out of chaos, and forget not that everyone has to die to be inherited by others. Ibn Khaldun had so thoughtfully recorded on the opening page of his *Prolegomena*, and it is rewarding to comprehend the profound meaning of each phrase:

He (God) created us from the earth as living, breathing creatures. He made us to settle on it as races and nations. From it, He gave us sustenance and provisions.

Our mothers' wombs, and then houses are our abode. Sustenance and food keep us alive. Time wears us out. Our lives' final terms, the dates of which have been fixed for us in the Book (of Destiny), claim us. But He lasts and endures. He is the Living One Who does not die.

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