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**IBN KHALDUN'S VIEWS ON MAN, SOCIETY AND STATE  
IN THE LIGHT OF AL-MUQADDIMAH**

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***Abstract***

The discipline of sociology emerged in the Modern West not more than two centuries ago. The main sociological themes, especially about an individual and society, seems to be incoherent rather contradictory as there are a plethora of opinions of sociologists regarding positioning the place of an individual and society. One group of sociologists lay tremendous emphasis upon the open-ended and unlimited freedom of an individual and denies any social or state intervention in deciding the fate thereof (Ackerman, 2008). On the other hand, other group of sociologists put all their efforts to over-emphasise the significance of society or state whereby the role of an individual is narrowed or reduced to be merely a tool in the whole mechanism of state machinery (MacKinnon, 2000). The fact is that both are important for over-all development and reducing the role of either aspects will culminate at grave imbalance in the existing world. The emergence of Modern Western powers, after multitude of layers of dark ages, assumed the charge of all walks of life not only in so-called developed countries rather influenced the thought and style of Asian and African countries as well. The mega project was to ensure and export the sociological underpinnings based on Euro-centric model of globe to the third world. This paper is a humble effort to bring forth the much coherent and refined ideas about an individual and society. Ibn Khaldun, way before the emergence of Modern sociology, laid the foundation of the discipline and discussed valuable discourses about mainstream themes of sociology in general and about man and society in particular. He sees a natural coherence and a systematic progression between an individual and society. The aim of this paper is to investigate the views of Ibn Khaldun regarding an individual and society in the light of his magnum opus Al-Muqaddimah. The researcher has ensured to quote directly from the main source with reference to Arabic passages to retain the originality of work. The significance of the study is that it helps exploring the views of Muslim sociologist Ibn Khaldun other than the western prism. Ibn Khaldun explains the full

account of an individual, society and state and deliberates upon the unique social orientation of human beings.

**Keywords:** Man, Society, State, Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah*

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## IBN KHALDUN: A BRIEF SKETCH

Walī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn Khaldūn, a Tunasian polymath was born in 1332 in Tunis. the Khaldūniyyah quarter still preserved in Tunis is considered to be the birth place of one of the greatest ever intellectual of mankind (Cowan, 2018). He memorised the Quran at the early age and mastered various disciplines of knowledge including Jurisprudence, History, Law, Literature, Geography, and other social sciences. He was offered a position at the court when he had seen only twenty summers of his life (Fromherz, 2011). He was later appointed as the secretary of the Sultan of Morocco in Fez. Ibn Khaldūn was not the scholar of pen and paper only rather he actively participated in various political activities. His active participation was, sometimes, met with the opposition and became instrumental in exile (Tibi, 2002). He realised at the later stage of his life to seek solitude from active politics and started focussing upon producing the greatest ever masterpiece of intellectual ambitions. Ibn Khaldūn retired to Awlad ‘Arif tribe and began to write his massive work ‘the *Muqaddimah*’ (Fromherz, 2011). Its scholastic and intellectual depth was felt by Arnold Toynbee, and he says: “a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet *been created by any mind in any time or place*. Robert flint went to the extent of describing him unparalleled and matchless intellectual of mankind. He commented: “As a theorist on history he had no equal in any age or country until Vico appeared, more than three hundred years later. Plato, Aristotle and Augustine were not his peers. . .” (Qadir, 2014).

## INTELLECTUAL LEGACY

Ibn Khaldun left behind such an ingenious intellectual legacy that made him immortal even after his corporal death. He produced a plethora of academic and intellectual works reflecting his multi-disciplinary approach. His works incorporate the fundamental discussions of philosophy of history, law, sociology, economy, polity, philology, jurisprudence, onto-comic epistemology based on Islamic world-view (Baali, 1988). Ibn Khaldun produced several academic works including:

1. *Shifā’ al-Sā’il fī Tahdhīb al-Masā’il.*
2. Commentary of al-Būṣirī’s *Qaṣīdah al-Burdah.*
3. *Lubāb al-Muḥaṣṣal fī Uṣūl al-Dīn.*
4. Abridgement of Ibn Rushd’s writings on philosophy.
5. *Taqyīd fī al-Mantiq.*

6. *Kitāb fī al-Ḥisāb.*
7. *al-Ḥilal al-Marqūmah fī al-Lumac al-Manzūmah.*
8. *Diwān al-Mubtada' wa al-Khabar fī Ayyām al-'Arab wa al-'Ajam wa al-Barbar wa Man Āṣarahum Min Dhawī al-Sulṭān al-Akbar* (Irwin, 2019).

Of all his valuable works, *Al-Muqaddimah* has been placed at the top of intellectual pyramid and serves as a preface to his monumental work on history i.e *Kitab al- 'Ibar*.

## IBN KHALDUN AND SOCIOLOGY

The science of sociology has been defined as the study of social actions, behaviours, and the role of institutions in a given society. It is, by and large, dealing about the social principles and cycles that tight spot and separate individuals as people, yet additionally as individuals from affiliations, associations, groups and gatherings, foundations and incorporates the assessment of the association and improvement of human public activity (Barley, 1989). Social theory employs the latent and theoretical frameworks to examine the social processes and patterns. Besides, it analyses the meta social structures and different aspects of social life bound within the societal order (Morrow & Torres, 1995).

Long before August Comte, overtly regarded as 'father of Sociology' within Modern Western tradition (Little, 2014), Ibn Khaldun not only laid the foundation of scientific study of society and the institutions thereof rather coined out the term for the discipline as علم العمران or علم الاجتماع known in present jargon with exactitude as Sociology (Abdullahi & Salawu, 2012). Ibn Khaldun says:

هذا الاجتماع ضروري للنوع الإنساني و إلا لم يكمل و جودهم و ما أراد الله من اعتمار العالم بهم و استخلافه إياهم و هذا هو معنى العمران الذي جعلناه موضوعاً لهذا العلم (خلدون, 2016)

This (science of) society is necessary for the mankind, otherwise, their existence would not be complete and what God wanted of the world to be inhabited by them and to be the successor of Him (through one generation to another generation). This is the meaning of the 'Umran '(Science of society) that we made the subject of this science.

There is hardly any major sociological theme which Ibn Khaldun did not explain in his *Al-Muqaddimah*.

## SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERPININGS IN AL-MUQADDIMAH

The sociological thought of Ibn Khaldun can be well discerned in his *al-Muqaddimah* or Prolegomena. *Al-Muqaddimah* has, in terms of potential content, been, one of the earliest or far from exaggeration, the first ever academic document introducing the scientific study of society, history and social institutions (Alatas, 2014). *Al-Muqaddimah* is the storehouse of multiple disciplines of knowledge ranging from society, social institutions, power, state and statecraft, polity, history, law, culture, anthropology, human nature, economy, civilizational studies and

much more (Rosenthal, 1958). In 1958, Franz Rosenthal rendered this monumental work into English. *Al-Muqaddimah* serves as an introduction to his magnum opus *kitab al- 'Ibar* or the book of lessons.

It has been instrumental in shaping the ideas of Arnold Toynbee to formulate the concept of 'civilizational study of history' (al-Farabi, Toynbee, & Huntington, 2016). Many of the scholars argue that his ideas were instrumental and helped Adam Smith in the structuration of his economic theories (Schumpeter, 1954).

Ibn Khaldun's sociological thought finds coherence in the structuration of individuals and social groups which in turn form societies, states, and civilizations. There is a lack of agreement among modern Western sociologists about individual and society. One group of sociologists over-emphasise upon the individual character of human beings whereby the social aspects are outrightly undermined. On the other hand, other group exert all their energy to prove that an individual is mere a tool whose existence is subservient to society. We shall see the Khaldunian typology of the trio i.e individual, society, and civilization within the framework of *Al-Muqaddimah*.

### **INDIVIDUAL: THE BASIC UNIT OF SOCIETY**

Ibn Khaldun describes the human journey on planet from the very onset. He maintains that human being is no way different from an animal at the early stage of his birth. Both share the same animalistic instincts and biological needs which places them at the same level of cosmic pyramid.

أَنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ قَدْ شَارَكَهُ جَمِيعَ الْحَيَوَانَاتِ فِي حَيَوَانِيَّتِهِ مِنَ الْحَسِّ وَالْحَرَكَةِ وَالْغِذَاءِ وَالْكَنِّ وَغَيْرِ ذَلِكَ  
(خلدون, 2016)

All animals share (their animalistic features) with the human being in his animality by way of senses, locomotion, food, shelter etc.

However, it is the rational propensities of human being that places him at the top of cosmic pyramid. Human being, by virtue of his reason, can tame and utilize all the available resources not only on earth but can harness the celestial resources as well. Man is distinguished from the animals by reason and entitles to be called as 'cream and crown of creation'. Says Ibn Khaldun:

وإِنَّمَا تَمَيَّزَ عَنْهَا بِالْفِكْرِ الَّذِي يَهْتَدِي بِهِ (خلدون, 2016)

Indeed, man is distinguished from them (animals) by way of reason which guides him.

Reason helps a man to unmask the hidden properties of matter and harness its potential for smooth function of his material ambit. All the modern-day technological advancement became possible only when reason could explore underlying features of elements and helped to shape the trajectory of scientific discoveries (Sanders & Sanders, 1998). It is this in-built capability of ratiocination of man that can make material and spiritual progress possible.

One of the basic conditions for a Muslim to be the addressee of Shari'ah is to have sound reason. If a person happens to be insane or is deprived of rational abilities, there will be no application of any ruling of Shari'ah upon him. The prophet (saw) is reported to have said:

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " رُفِعَ الْقَلَمُ عَنْ ثَلَاثٍ عَنِ النَّائِمِ حَتَّى يَسْتَيْقِظَ وَعَنِ الصَّغِيرِ حَتَّى يَكْبُرَ وَعَنِ الْمَجْنُونِ حَتَّى يَعْقِلَ أَوْ يَفِيقَ " (الالباني & الدين, 1998)

Narrated 'Aishah (ra) that the Prophet (saw) said: "The pen has been raised from three types of people: From the sleeper until he wakes up, from the minor until he reaches to puberty, and from the insane until he regains his senses or recovers."

Though man has his own individuality which sets him apart from other creatures. He has the power to will, make changes in his and beyond surroundings. He can harness the features of available resources to him. But man cannot stand alone. The in-built social programming does not allow him to avoid the social life.

### **SOCIETY AND STATE:**

Man, despite all rational abilities, cannot stand in isolation. He is not capable enough to meet all his requirements without the support of other fellow beings. He cannot avert the potential dangers of wild animals of his own. The physiology of man renders him helpless before the ferocious animals and cannot possess enough physical strength to protect himself. Man depends on food and safety which guarantee his life on planet. He cannot ensure food and safety by avoiding other fellow beings:

لا تقاوم قدرته قدرة واحد من الحيوانات العجم سيما المفترسة فهو عاجز عن مدافعتها وحده بالجملة ولا تفي قدرته أيضا باستعمال الآلات المعدة لها فلا بد في ذلك كله من التعاون عليه بأبناء جنسه وما لم يكن هذا التعاون فلا يحصل له قوت ولا غذاء ولا تتم حياته لما ركبّه الله تعالى عليه من الحاجة إلى الغذاء في حياته ولا يحصل له أيضا دفاع عن نفسه لفقدان السلاح فيكون فريسة للحيوانات ويعاجله الهلاك عن مدى حياته ويبطل نوع البشر وإذا كان التعاون حصل له القوت للغذاء والسلاح للمدافعة وتمت حكمة الله في بقاءه وحفظ نوعه فإذن هذا الاجتماع ضروري للنوع الإنساني وإلا لم يكمل وجودهم (خلدون, 2016)

'His (limited) power does not resist the (tremendous) power of one of the ferocious animals, especially predatory animals as he is unable to defend them alone. Nor is his ability sufficient to use the tools prepared for them. In all these (collective) issues, there must be a cooperation with the members of his species in all these issues. And if there is no such co-operation, he cannot find food nor can ensure his existence because Allah Almighty has made him dependent on food in his life, and he will also not be able to defend himself due to the loss of weapons, so he will be prey to animals and the destruction will accelerate to finish his life. The human species will perish. If he ensures the cooperation (with other fellow humans), he will have access to food and weapons for defence. This way God's wisdom has been achieved in his survival and preservation of his

species. Therefore, this (mutual) co-operation is necessary for the human species otherwise their existence would not be complete’.

He cannot live by abdicating the social boundaries which has been drawn for his smooth functioning on the planet. Man needs a set of social patterns that draw the underlying elements of cultural practices. Ibn Khaldun maintains that culture is subservient to society and serves an important tool for establishment of a society. He observes culture as the foundation for society in a way that it exists to provide the rules and patterns for a group of people and helps meeting the basic amenities. The genesis of society starts by exploring the diverse means of production to ensure the accessibility to basic amenities of life. Thereafter, it ushers the phase of extending economic efforts and social endeavours. This unique social orientation is specific to humans and cannot be found in any other creatures. Ibn Khaldun says:

ومنها السَّعي في المعاش والاعتماد في تحصيله من وجوهه واكتساب أسبابه لما جعل الله من الافتقار إلى الغذاء في حياته ويقائه وهداه إلى التماسه وطلبه قال تعالى:  
 «أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَلْفَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى 20: 50»  
 ومنهما العمران وهو التَّساكن والتَّنازل في مصر أو حَلَّة للأنس بالعشير واقتضاء الحاجات لما في طباعهم من التَّعاون على المعاش (خلدون, 2016)

‘This (unique social orientation) comprises of striving for the livelihood and acquiring it from various ways and adopting the means thereof as Allah Almighty has made him dependent on food for his survival and guided him to seek it. Allah swt says: ‘He gave everything its creation and then guided it’. [ 50 :20]

It also comprises of urbanization i.e cohabitation and settlement in cities or a suit for the intimate partner and the fulfilment of the needs as it is their in-built nature to live in co-operation’.

According to Ibn Khaldun, society comes into being by the formation of different social affiliations and groups. These groups co-operate with one another to meet their basic needs which is not possible if all the members begin to live separately. However, different groups within a society needs a binding force which helps in strengthening the social order. According to Ibn Khaldun, this binding force is known as ‘*Asabiyyah*’ or social solidarity in modern sociological lexicon. ‘*Asabiyyah*’ cements the relationship among diverse groups of society and prevents from all external potential threats. Ibn Khaldun maintains:

أَنَّ العَصِيَّةَ بها تكون الحماية والمدافعة والمطالبة وكلَّ أمر يجتمع عليه (خلدون, 2016)

Indeed, ‘*Asabiyyah*’ is the source of protection, defense and demands (of society). Every important element of society lies therein.

The word ‘*Asabiyyah*’ refers to strong group feeling or in the words of Carl Jung ‘collective consciousness’(Benor & Caring, 2003). ‘*Asabiyyah*’ forms the corner-stone of society. The stronger the ‘*Asabiyyah*’, the firmer the foundations of society and state. Ibn Khaldun enunciates that the foundation of state lies in ‘*Asabiyyah*’

وذلك أنّ الملك كما قدّمناه إنّما هو بالعصبيّة (خلدون, 2016)

‘And that is because the rule, as we have discussed it, stands with ‘Asabiyyah’.

However, when the bond of ‘*Asabiyyah* becomes weak, it paves the way for decadence and downfall of state. Then, a new group with strong ‘*Asabiyyah* elements replaces the former group. Ibn Khaldun was calculative enough to map the possible time span of a ruling dynasty. According to him, the rule of state (dynasty) lasts around 120 years which includes almost three generations each one enjoys a period of forty years.

أنّ الدّولة في الغالب لا تعدو أعمار ثلاثة أجيال والجيل هو عمر شخص واحد من العمر الوسط فيكون أربعين (خلدون, 2016)

‘The state usually does not exceed the lifespan of three generations, and the generation is the age of one person of the middle age which is forty’.

He analyzed the pattern of changes that erupt within the given period. As for the first generation, it appears to be robust, strong and pays extraordinary attention towards ‘*Asabiyyah* which results in the consolidation of the state. This generation puts all efforts to extend its frontiers as far as possible. The state becomes affluent enough and the resources of the state are manifolded. The first generation prudently harnesses the potential of ‘*Asabiyyah* and joins the different principalities into a strong vibrant force.

والعصبيّة متألفة من عصابات كثيرة تكون واحدة منها أقوى من الأخرى كلّها فتغلبها وتستولي عليها حتّى تصيرها جميعا في ضمنها وبذلك يكون الاجتماع والغلب على الناس والدّول (خلدون, 2016)

‘And the ‘*Asabiyyah* is made up of diverse (small scale) ‘*Asabiyyaat* (group feeling or collective consciousness). Of all available ‘*Asabiyyaat*, one emerges out to be strongest of all and hence subdues others and rules over them until all small scale ‘*Asabiyyaat* come under its firm control. This is how society is formed and dominance upon people and nations becomes possible’.

The second generation becomes inadvertent towards ‘*Asabiyyah* and negligence thereof results into the weakening of the authority. Moreover, the affluence of resources makes life sedentary, and rulers get engaged into luxuries of life. The bravery and maintaining of authority are mortgaged to lavish lifestyle. Therefore, collective bond weakens, and the fault-lines of various principalities begin to appear prominently.

فإذا حصل الملك أقصروا عن المتاعب التي كانوا يتكفونونها في طلبه وأثروا الرّاحة والسكون والدّعة ورجعوا إلى تحصيل ثمرات الملك من المباني والمساكن والملابس فينبون القصور ويجرون المياه ويغرسون الرّياض ويستمتعون بأحوال الدّنيا ويؤثرون الرّاحة على المتاعب ويتأثفون في أحوال الملابس والمطاعم والأنية والفرش ما استطاعوا ويألفون ذلك ويورثونه من بعدهم من أجيالهم ولا يزال ذلك يتزايد فيهم إلى أن يتأذن الله بأمره وهو خير الحاكمين والله تعالى أعلم (خلدون, 2016)

‘When the state is established, they refrain from the troubles that they used to bear to seek it. They give preference to rest, tranquility, and easements (of life). They pay attention to harvest the fruits of the state by way of buildings, houses and (lavish) clothing. So, they build palaces, maintain the drainage, set up the gardens and enjoy the life of world. They prefer comfort to hardships and get engaged with the affairs of fine garments, (delicious) food, (expensive) utensils and furnishings as much as they can. They become familiar with this (lavish lifestyle) and bequeath it to their successive posterity, and this (lavish lifestyle) keeps on increasing among them until Allah Almighty decrees His command and He is the best of all rulers and knows the best’.

As for the third generation, the stage has already been set for decadence and downfall. This is the last stage for dynasty as the stage is prepared to be replaced by another stronger *‘Asabiyyah*. The trajectory outlined by Ibn Khaldun had a lasting impact upon his late successors who followed the method of study of nations and civilizations. Arnold Toynbee’s civilizational analysis find its roots in *Al-Muqaddimah* (Karahanlı, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

Ibn Khaldun’s thoughts on man and society and state finds a vibrant coherence between the trio. Unlike, modern western sociologists, Ibn Khaldun studies all three entities in a progressive manner and strikes a beautiful balance among them. Individual is important as there can be no conception of any society sans individuals. An individuals’ personal identity must be maintained and there should not be any attempt which stifles his personal individuality as in socialist society. In a socialist society, an individual is not more than a tool for state machinery wherein he must get absorbed in the interests of state completely. However, man, in the capacity of a social being, owes many a responsibility towards society. His efforts should be moderate enough to work selflessly for the well-being of others. He should not be a victim of selfishness whereby all his endeavors are based on selfish greed to grow more and more rich as in the case of modern capitalist society. Man is Khalifah or vicegerent of Allah swt on earth and has been made responsible for the balanced development of both the worlds. Ibn Khaldun’s thoughts on man, society and state prove to be beckon light for all societies of the world. He gives the roadmap for rise and fall of societies and states with academic acumen and brilliance.

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