

Reading Ibn Khaldun's Political Themes in His *Muqaddimah* with a Special Reference to Royal Authority and *Mulukiyah* in the Light of *Asabiyah*

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ABSTRACT

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) was one of most significant figures in the history of the Muslim world in the pre-modern period. He was born in Tunis at a time when the Muslim dynasties were disintegrating and fighting against each other. He was directly involved in the political activities, as he served in different capacities ranging from diplomatic envoy to minister; and eventually devoted himself for scholarly life. Being a social scientist, his first hand political experiences are reflected in his monumental work, *Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena), distinctively. In *Muqaddimah*, his profound analysis of human society and civilization is a unique attempt on socio-political thought. It contains striking reflections on various political themes as a part of his description of his new independent science, *ilm al-umran*, (science of social organization or civilization) whose subject matter is human social organization. In this paper, an attempt is made to highlight his certain political themes, such as royal; authority and *mulukiyah* in the light of *asabiyah* (group feeling).

Introduction

Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of political sociology is part of his description of his new science "*ilm al umran*" (social organization). He attempts to explain the rise and fall of dynasties in terms of the interaction and cyclical conflict between two types of societies: *badawah* (nomadic) and *hazarah* (sedentary). He discusses the royal authority as the natural quality of man which is absolutely necessary for mankind. Ibn Khaldun's primary concern while describing his political sociology is his concept of *asbiyah* (group feeling). He links it with the struggle for power in society and consequently, for the state formation. He seems to be engaged in his *Muqaddimah* in the task of bridging the ever widening gaps between the theory and practice of the *Khilafah* because of certain substantive and formal structural changes occurred in the political system of Islam under the pressure of diverse social, economic and political forces. While interpreting these concepts, he accepted the *mulkiyah* (royal authority) as the second best form of government but made distinction between its good and negative qualities as we shall discuss in the subsequent paper.

Royal Authority as a Natural Quality of Man

Ibn Khaldun states, that man is social by nature and cannot exist without social organization. Because his various physical needs, like food for sustenance and weaponry for defense against wild animals, cannot be achieved by himself alone and is in need of the cooperation of others to fulfill these needs.¹ After achieving social organization, when humans arrive a certain level of social organization by fulfilling the social needs of food and weapons, Ibn Khaldun says, there is a need for a restraining influence as aggression and injustice are part of human animal nature.² At this stage again, the existence of

man is threatened, so, in order to curb the social conflicts arising out of this aggression and injustice, Ibn Khaldun argues, that a royal authority or kingship (sultan or *mulk*) is needed³ who will exercise a restraining influence and will dominate them; and have power and authority over them. This person must be one of themselves as other animals fall short of human perceptions and inspirations.⁴ Without this ruler, Ibn Khaldun contends, that human society may lead to trouble, destruction and uprooting of mankind.⁵ Thus, Ibn Khaldun makes it clear that "royal authority is a natural quality of man which is absolutely necessary to mankind."⁶

Ibn Khaldun also refers here to the view of the philosophers who say that prophecy is a natural quality of man. They say that, as noted by him, "human beings absolutely require some authority to exercise a restraining influence. They go on to say that such restraining influence exists through the religious law that has been ordained by God and revealed to mankind by a human being."⁷ This human being, according to philosophers, is distinguished from the rest of the people by special qualities of divine guidance, so that people submit him as a restraining influence and is accepted without any question. But Ibn Khaldun regards this proposition of philosophers as illogical because, he says, human life can materialize without the existence of prophecy as majority of the world's population do not follow the prophets and do not have a book, yet they possess dynasties and civilizations.⁸ Ibn Khaldun argues, that authority may be established by the individual on his own with the help of group feeling or *asbiyah* that enables him to force the others to follow him.⁹ In this way, Ibn Khaldun makes a

³*Ibid.*, vol.I, pp.380,91.

⁴*Ibid.*, vol.I, p .92.

⁵*Ibid.*, vol.I, p.390.

⁶*Ibid.*, vol.I, p.92.

⁷*Ibid.*, vol.I, p.92.

⁸*Ibid.*, vol.I, pp.92-93.

⁹*Ibid.*, vol.I, p.93.

¹Ibn Khaldun, Abdul Rahman, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, (Tr) Franz, Rosenthal, (3Vol), London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958, vol.1, pp. 89-90.

²*Ibid.*, vol.I, p - 91.

case for the natural character and necessity of Kingship in the social organization of humans.

Asabiyah and its Implications

Here our main focus will be that how *asabiyah* is a vital factor while elucidating the political sociology of Ibn Khaldun.

Goal of Asabiyah is Royal Authority and Leadership

Ibn Khaldun holds that royal authority as restraining influence is necessary to mankind, so as to curb the social conflict, arising out of aggression and injustice, which are part of human animal nature.¹⁰ But, he argues that such a restraining influence or leadership or royal authority (*mulk*) is possible only through superiority by virtue of *asabiyah*.¹¹ Ibn Khaldun, however, terms royal authority more than just leadership. To him, leadership means to be a chieftain, who commands obedience but without power and force; whereas, royal authority rules by force as it secures such a superiority and power.¹² But it is the leadership or the chieftainship itself which paves way to achieve royal authority. Because on the basis of *asabiyah* when a person reaches the rank of chieftain and commands obedience, he aspires more power and whenever he finds an opportunity to get superiority and the use of force, prerequisites of royal authority (*mulk*), he grabs it as it is desirable to human nature. But it is possible only with the help of *asabiyah* which causes people to obey him. In this way Ibn Khaldun says that royal authority is the goal of *asabiyah*.¹³

In case of diverse group feelings in an individual tribe, Ibn Khaldun says that it is the group with stronger *asabiyah*, who would combine them and make them subservient to become one greater group feeling (*asabiyah kubra*).¹⁴ Once a particular group feeling has established its superiority over the other people of its same tribe, it then with *asabiyah kubra* seeks superiority over other group feelings of another tribe. If it succeeds in overpowering the other group, the two group feelings come into close contact where the defeated one submits and adds power to the victorious one and sets the latter's goal of superiority and domination higher than before and attacks the senile and declining ruling dynasty. If there is no one to defend it with the help of *asabiyah* the new group feeling takes over and deprives this ruling dynasty and thus obtains complete royal authority.¹⁵ However, Ibn Khaldun says, if *asabiyah* of the ruling dynasty is equal or is able to defend the attack and challenge of the new group feeling, then in this case, each group feeling maintains its sway over its own domain and people.¹⁶

Asabiyah and the Transfer of Power within and outside the Nation

Ibn Khaldun argues that when *asabiyah* disappears in one branch, kingship will be passed to another branch of the same people, who have yet strong *asabiyah* as they were far away from the government and were not falling prey to the luxurious life. When the *asabiyah* of the ruling group diminishes and its

kingship is compromised, the royal authority passes to another group with strong *asabiyah* from within the same nation (*umamah*). They are then subject to the same process of decline that their predecessors experienced. In this way the power or royal authority in a particular nation persists until the *asabiyah* of the entire nation dissipates or its groups have ceased to exist, then the power passes to an entirely new nation.¹⁷

Asabiyah and the Lifespan of a Dynasty

Ibn Khaldun, as already discussed in the previous chapter, is of the opinion that the lifespan of a dynasty reassembles with the natural lifespan of an individual, which according to physicians and astrologers is one hundred and twenty (120) years; and are completed in three generations. He says that the duration of the life of a dynasty does not as a rule extend beyond three generations. A generation is identical with average duration of the life of an individual, namely, forty years, duration required for growth, maturity and senility.¹⁸ He contends that *asabiyah*, which is responsible for the rise of power of a dynasty, starts diminishing when the dynasty loses its *badawah* (Bedouin life) characteristics and adopts the *hadarah* (sedentary life) way of life. Because *asabiyah*, as already discussed in the previous chapter, is most strongly marked among the Bedouins than the sedentary people due to their desert toughness and luxurious way of life, respectively. So, Ibn Khaldun argues that a dynasty rises to the power when its *asabiyah* is strong; it sustains when its *asabiyah* is preserved; and it declines when its *asabiyah* disappears completely. He says thus:

The duration of the life of a dynasty does not as a rule extend beyond three generations. The first generation retains the desert qualities, desert toughness, and desert savagery. Its members are used to privation and to share their glory with each other; they are brave and rapacious. Therefore, the strength of group feeling [*asabiyah*] continues to be preserved among them. They are sharp and greatly feared. People submit to them.

Under the influence of royal authority and a life of ease, the second generation changes from the desert attitude to sedentary culture, from privation to luxury and plenty... Thus, the vigor of group feeling is broken to some extent. People become used to lowliness and obedience. But many of the old virtues remain in them, because they had direct personal contact with the first generations and its conditions, and had observed with their own eyes its prowess and striving for glory and its intention to protect and defend itself. They cannot give all of it up at once, although a good deal of it may go.

The third generation then has completely forgotten the period of

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p.91.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp.284,269.

¹² *Ibid.*, vol. I, p.284.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p.284.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp.284-285.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p.285

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p.285.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp.297-299.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp.343-344.

desert life and toughness, as if it had never existed. They have lost the taste for the sweetness of fame and group feeling, because they are dominated by force. Luxury reaches its peak among them, because they are so much given to a life of prosperity and ease. They become dependent on the dynasty and are like women and children who need to be defended by someone else. Group feeling disappears completely.¹⁹

Mulukiyah

Mulukiyah is a vital concept of Ibn Khaldun while deliberating over his philosophy of political sociology. It has been variously translated as "royal authority" by Franz Rosenthal, "monarchy" by Fakhry, and "rule", "dominion", "power or power state" by Erwin Rosenthal.²⁰ However, Ibn Khaldun used it in a deeper sense and corresponds almost to "political power" or "political authority" in general; and as we have chosen the translation of *Muqaddimah* by Franz Rosenthal, so we shall rest with the term "royal authority" used by him.

Ibn Khaldun, as earlier mentioned, states that royal authority is a natural quality of man which is absolutely necessary to mankind and is the goal of *asabiyah*.²¹ He says that "it results from *asabiyah*, not by choice but through inherent necessity and the order of existence".²² Ibn Khaldun identified three types of political interactions in the *Muqaddimah*: (1) *siyasah al-aqaliyah* (rule based on rational politics); (2) *siyasah al-shari'ah* (rule based on Divinely revealed religious laws); (3) and *siyasah al-madaniyah* (rule based on ideal state model of the philosophers).²³ Though, he praises the rule based on *shari'ah* i.e. *Khilafah* and *imamah*, because it looks after the welfare affairs of man in this world and the other world as well, while as, the rational political laws concerning his worldly affairs only. But at the same time viewing royal authority as the natural quality of man he accepts it as the second best form of government after *Khilafah*.²⁴

Being the observer of the Muslim history, he witnessed the ever-widening gaps between the theory and practice of the *khilafah* and *imamah* and showed a high degree of originality in rationalizing the political developments and the ever-changing political realities of the Islamic world. Ibn Khaldun while interpreting Muslim history he divided it into three distinct periods: (1) the period of the classical *khilafah* which existed without royal authority (*mulk*); (2) a period of transition during which *khilafah* mixed with royal authority; (3) and ultimate transformation of *Khilafah* into pure royal authority.²⁵ He says that during early caliphate the predominant restraining influence was *shari'ah* which guided their worldly affairs and thus, subordinated the secular element to the religious one. But after the civil strifes, particularly after Ali, the form of

government came to be royal authority and *shari'ah* was now, no longer a restraining influence but the Arab group feeling and the sword. But there remained the traits of the caliphate as preference for Islam and its ways, and adherence to the path of truth. In this transitional stage caliphate and royal authority existed side by side. Then with the disappearance of Arab *asabiyah* the rule passed to the non-Arabs and thus, the caliphate lost its identity. At this stage the form of government remained royal authority pure and simple. He illustrates it thus:

It is thus clear that the caliphate at first existed without royal authority. Then the characteristic traits of the caliphate became mixed up and confused. Finally, when its group feeling had separated of the caliphate, royal authority came to exist alone.²⁶

Thus, under the pressure of diverse social and political forces, Islamic political system underwent substantive structural changes from classical caliphate to pure royal authority. Therefore, as noted by Dr. Manzooruddin Ahmad, the Muslim jurists from Al-Mawardi to Ibn Khaldun had been engaged in the task of bridging the ever-widening gaps between the theory and practice of the *Khilafah*.²⁷ In this task, Ibn Khaldun instead of mixing theology and politics of Islam, he was able to disentangle the religious and secular basis of political authority. He accepted these new political realities and recognised the *mulukiyah* in the light of *asabiyah* as the second form of government after *Khilafah*.²⁸

Mulk Haqiqi and Mulk Naqis

Ibn Khaldun does not condemn royal authority as long as it fulfils its obligations towards its subjects; to protect their life and property and to show concern for their welfare. He argues that when the Prophet (SAAS) censures royal authority, he censures only its indulging in excess and not the royal authority altogether. Ibn Khaldun writes:

When the Lawgiver (Muhammad SAAS) censures royal authority, he does not Censure it for gaining superiority through truth, for forcing the great mass to accept the faith, not for looking after the public interests. He censures royal authority for achieving superiority through worthless means and for employing human beings for indulgence in selfish purposes and desires... If royal authority would sincerely exercise its superiority over men for the sake of God and so as to cause those men to worship God and to wage war against His enemies, there would not be anything reprehensible in it.²⁹

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol.I, pp.344-345.

²⁰ "Ideals and Realities: Ibn Khaldun's justification of *asabiyya* and Political Power", Ali Caksu, *Felsefe Dunyast*, 2007/2, sayi ,46, p.115.

²¹ Rosenthal, Franz, *op.cit.*, vol.I, pp.92,284.

²² *Ibid.*, vol.I, p.414.

²³ *Ibid.*, vol.I, pp.137-138.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol.I, p.387.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol.I, p.426-428.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol.I, pp.426-428.

²⁷ Ahmad, Dr. Manzooruddin, *Islamic Political System In The Modern Age: Theory and Practice*, Adam Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2009, p.128.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.128-129.

²⁹ Rosenthal, Franz, *op.cit.*, vol.I, pp.416-417.

In order to substantiate further his view about *mulukiyah* he quotes the prayer of Solomon (AS) who said: "my Lord! Forgive me and bestow on me *mulk* such as shall not belong any after me", thus, Solomon (AS) was sure of himself and knew that, as Prophet and king, he would have nothing to do with anything worthless.³⁰ So Ibn Khaldun argues that *mulk* in Islam is basically condemned on account of its negative qualities and conditions but not altogether with its good qualities as well. Thus, he divided *mulk* into two categories-*mulk haqiqi* and *mulk naqis* and distinguished between them. He says if the *mulk* is restrained by the rational laws, and the public interest, it is *mulk haqiqi*, but in case it is unrestrained by rational laws, and considerations of public interest, and is merely based on brute force, it is infact *mulk naqis*. He advocated *mulk haqiqi* as a good alternative for the *Khilafah*.³¹ In this manner Ibn Khaldun tried to rationalize the shift in the classical caliphate by accepting the political realities and condition without putting efforts at the reconciliation between theology and politics of Islam, as his predecessors had been doing.

Conclusion

From the above it can be discerned that Ibn Khaldun's political themes expounded in his *Muqaddimah* are part of his description of his new science "ilm al-umran" (social organization). He maintained that after achieving social organization people need a restraining influence or royal authority to avoid social conflicts which arise out of their aggressive and unjust animal nature. Without this royal authority, he contended that human society may lead to trouble, destruction, and uprooting of Mankind. He has gone at length in discussing this restraining influence or royal authority as a natural quality of man. He has also discussed the role of *asabiyah* in the state formation and argued that the goal of *asabiyah* is royal authority. In the light of *asabiyah*, he has described the transfer of power within and outside the nation, and the life span of a dynasty. He has discussed that the duration of the life of a dynasty does not extend, just like humans, beyond three generations because of the *asabiyah* which is strong in the first generation, weakens in the second, and disappears in the third completely. Being the observer of the Muslim history, he divided it into three distinct periods: (1) the period of the classical *Khilafah* which existed without royal authority (*mulk*); (2) a period of transition during which *Khilafah* mixed with royal authority; (3) and ultimate transformation of *Khilafah* into pure royal authority. Instead of confusing theology and politics of Islam, he accepted these political realities and discussed *mulukiyah* in the light of *asabiyah* as the second best form of government after *Khilafah*. He has also discussed at length that why the Prophet (SAAS) censured royal authority (*mulk*)? He is of the opinion that it is basically condemned on account of its negative qualities but not altogether with its good qualities-where it fulfils its obligations towards its subjects. Thus, he has distinguished between *mulk haqiqi* and *mulk naqis* on the basis of good and bad qualities respectively. In this way, he has tried to rationalize the various shifts in the classical caliphate by accepting the new political realities occurred in the Muslim history.

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³⁰*Ibid.*, vol.I, p.417.

³¹*Ibid.*, vol.II, p.417, Ahmad, Dr. Manzooruddin, *op.cit.*, p.129.