

Development of West Asian Tradition of Historiography With Reference to Ibn-Khaldoon

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When we talk about West Asian Historiography. It suggests the tradition of History writing in the Arabic language. In other word it signifies the fact that in the realm of history and its development in true sense, how far the Arab World and its literature are supposed to be historical. When we see the Arabic word. 'Tarikh' means the organization of material by date and hence, by extension, history.

Key words: Historiography, Arab World, Tarikh, Caliphate, Abbasid

In the pre-Islamic Arabis the feelings of past had been expressed through the popular poetic form¹ which were half legend and half history. It was the life of Prophet Mohammad that marked the great dividing line in Arab history. But historiography was an acquired characteristic in Islam as Arab's were not really historical minded², however it is interesting to note that the influence did not come from the Greece, but the first decisive influence behind the rise of this historiography was the Arab Conquest of the vast empire. The Arab's like the Roman's built an empire spreading over Asia, Africa and Europe. The two cohesive forces that held this empire together were the Islamic religion and the Arabic language. The second decisive influence came from the Arab Conquest of Persia³, and the inspiration for history writing seems to have come directly from sasanid Persia, where the tradition of history writing has already grown up under Greece influence⁴. A considerable amount of historical sources survived, when the Arab's conquered Persia in 641 AD after the battle of Nehaband. Among the captured treasures there was a copy of the important historical work "Khudai-Namak" (Book of Kings), this book was translated into Arabic in the middle of Eighteenth century by a Persian noble converted to Isla, which revealed to the Arab's the long and great history of the country to which they conquered.

The third factor which gives stimulus to Arab historiography was the establishment of common chronology, which began with "Hijara" of the migration of Prophet Mohammad from Mecca to Madina in the year 622 AD. This tradition of historiography further

flourished with the foundation of the Abbasid Caliphate and established itself as an independent branch of knowledge throughout the Islamic world.⁵ In fact during this period many great name came to the knowledge as Arab historians popular among them were Mohammad Bin Ishaq (767 AD) wrote about Mohammad's campaign and history of Umayyad dynasty. The name of Abu Ibn-i-Yahya and Alwaqidi comes as the early Arab historian, Waqidi's Kitab-ul-Maghazi, is a history of the military and missionary expansion of Islam.⁶

Historian's of eminence was Al-Madaini (845 AD) Book of the Caliph's (Abu Bakr to Uthman) two monograph on India and toehr happend to be the name of Al-Baladhuri, (892) who was prolific historian of the age. He wrote about the Westward Expansion of Islam, which covers the story of subjugation of Syriya, Mesopotamia, Aronenia, Egypt, Spain etc. Then comes the name of Al-Tabari (923 AD). He was a traveler searcing knowledge. Then comes the name of Al-Masudi (956 AD), who contributed Thirty six kind of works. The name "Miskawahi" is worth mentioning (1032 AD). was of Persian origin, wrote book "Experience of Nations", then Al-Beruni and Ibne-Batuta and many more name will come in between when finally we talk about Ibn-i-Khaldoon.⁷

The most celebrated thinker and historian of the Arabl world comes under West Asian tradition is the name of Ibn-i-Khaldoon, who was Tunisian by birth, (1332-1406 AD). He was a very well educated man and his adventurous career took him to Egypt where he died. For glimps of his true nature, one has to turn to the Al-Taarif the short autobiography which he

attached to his 'Kitabl-al 'Abrar' (universal history). Where in he does not attempts to whitewash his nature and character. The author of the 'Al-Taarif' is not a man of above moral reproach but one recklessly pushing his way to grasp what he considered his due. Yet it is storage that this man who has politically unreliable changed sides as many times as he had master to serve, should have kept steadfast all through his turbulent life to the occupation of thought.⁸

Khaldoon's Kitabl-al-Ibrar consists of three great books. The first treats civilization and its essential characteristic and its influence upon human beings. The second book tells the story of Arab's and the Third book covers the history of the authors own Maghrib (North West Africa and its berber dynasties). Prefixed to these three books is the celebrated Muqaddama (introduction) which contains the whole idea of Khaldoon viz a viz history and civilization. Here he expounds his Philosophy of history which is rather a sociological view of history⁹ which even after six centuries becomes the object of admiration of the sociologist. This Muqaddama of Khalddon is in intention, an introduction to the historians Craft,¹⁰ because he says that knowledge of past comes to man in a very untrue hence he sought to certain principals of historical criticism.

Further, in Muqaddama, Khldoon asserts that belief in God did not deter our Philosopher, historians from the study of process he restricts the concept of divinity in the human affairs, and rejects the element of super naturalism in the realm of historical drama.¹¹ In this Khaldoon criticism comes for previous annalists, chroniclers and historians for their lack insights and their inability to think to check and to probe; therein he says that this inability made many historical accounts the vehicle of nonsensical statements.¹² To avoid this a historian must have skeptical mind, which would not trust as true all that is transmitted to him.¹³ He goes on to enumerate the source of error which make objective history impossible. The first is bias or partiality wherein he talks about sectarianism and prejudice.¹⁴ He says that the reason that makes un truth inevitable in historiography is uncritical reliance on transmitters or informants.

In the Muqaddama, Khaldoon studied the general lows of historical developments which are necessary for historical changes that are cyclic view of history. According to him what makes history a science is the investigation of human organisation. In fact history is a information of human social organisation which is identical with world civilization.¹⁵

Accordingly he says that history is a science of culture, which is generated through material cause, formal cause, efficient cause, and final cause by material cause he meant the geographical factor, by formal cause he meant, the political factor. The efficient cause, is abstract ideas or the teleological principles; and the final cause describes the idea of common God. Culture like any living organism, is subject to the Laws of birth growth and decay..

What makes the Muqaddama an independent work is authors attempt to explain the historical process in terms of sociological phenomenon Khaldoon rightly regarded his new approach as "al-amran" means Sociology or science of human society. Herein, he keeps man in centre and calls him as "Social animal". Hence society is necessary because man cannot live by himself; mutual help is the law of human life. Khaldoon describes man biologically Social organization is the first step for the beginning of the civilization. Whenever several human beings began to co-operate with each other; and forms a sort of organization "amaran" results. Amaran is the key word which Rosenthal translates as civilization.¹⁶ Amaran is of two types Badavi and Hazari coming from Badavi to hazari Asabiyah plays important role. Here another key word of Khaldoon appears im Muqaddama i.e. "Asabiyah" which means group feelings, solaridity or a desire to make common cause with others. He says, the nomads, possess strength, courage and endurance as well as Assabiyah to more higher degree than the more civilized people.¹⁷

According to Khaldoon, a nomadic community with a superior asabiyah led by Wazi (Leader) conquest an existing dynasty or state. For such a process, one further binding element is religion. The classical example is that of the early Muslim conquests. The Arabs United under the rule of Prophet and his successors by Asaiyah and by devine religion and set up the urban

civilization of Caliphate.¹⁸ The state ones established, proceeds through a natural sequence of growth, maturity, decline and fall no dynasty could survive for more than three or four generations, and civilization inevitably

erodes asabiyah. Khaldoun talks about methods of production and evaluation of social groups and corresponding surplus values brings him closer to spirit of Marxist dialectical materialism.¹⁹

NOTES & REFERENCES

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5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
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8. *E. Sreedharan, Opcit, page 71.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Encyclopaedia of Islam Vol. 3, page 829.*
11. *Rosenthal, translation, introduction to Muqaddama, XXIII.*
12. *Ibid, 16.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid, 71.*
15. *Rosenthal, Dictionary of the history of ideas 71.*
16. *E. Sreedharan, Opcit page 75.*
17. *Ibid, page 76.*
18. *Morgon, Ibn Khaldoun in Blackwell dictionary of historians page 502.*
19. *Encyclopedia of Islam, Opcit, page 830.*