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AN EVALUATION OF IBN KHALDUN'S THEORY OF THE RISE AND THE DECLINE OF THE STATE

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Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) was an Arab scholar who was born in Tunis. He was involved in practical politics not only in his native land and Northwest Africa, but also in Muslim Spain and Mameluke Egypt. Ibn Khaldun combined his knowledge of practical politics by extensive studies of political theory, philosophy, religion, and history and wrote many works. His pioneer work is the "Muqaddimah" (Prolegomena) and his "Kitab-al-ibar" (Universal History). The "Muqaddimah" is a philosophy of history and embodies a system of sociological, political and economic thought. The Muqaddimah has been translated into several languages. Franz Rosenthal, has done the English translation in three extensive volumes, published by the Princeton University Press.

Ibn Khaldun is held in high regard among Western intellectuals, particularly historians and sociologists. The following quotations from Arnold J. Toynbee, and George Sarton will not only substantiate this assertion, but will also throw light on the achievements of Ibn Khaldun:

> "Abd-ar-Rahman Ibn Muhammad Ibn Khaldun of Tunis (vivebet A. D. 1332-1406) - an Arabic genius who achieved in a single 'acquiescence' of less than four years' length, out of a fifty-four year span of adult working life, a life - work in the shape of a piece of literature which can bear comparison with the work of Thucydides or the work of a Machiaevelli for both breadth and the profundity of vision as well as for sheer intellectual power."[i]

> "Ibn Khaldun was a historian, politician, sociologist, economist, a deep student of human affairs, anxious to analyse the past to understand the present and its future. It is remarkable that Ibn Khaldun ventured to speculate on what we should call today the methods of historical research."[ii]

Besides the above comments there are others by other intellectuals such that if the quotations are compiled they will themselves form a volume.

Ibn Khaldun's claim on our attention rests on firm grounds. His "Prolegomena" represents the most comprehensive synthesis in the Human Sciences ever achieved by the Arabs. Other Muslim thinkers notably Ibn Sina[iii] (Avicenna), and Ibn Rushd [iv] (Averroes), had much deeper insights into metaphysical and religious problems and their influence over Europe was immense; but Ibn Khaldun, while profiting from their philosophical speculations, greatly surpassed them in his

understanding of social problems. Indeed some Western writers have recognised him to be one of the greatest social scientists of all ages.

To present even a major part of his political ideas is beyond the scope of this paper. The purpose of this paper is then limited to providing an introduction to his theory of the rise and the fall of the states and an evaluation thereof. Like all introductions this one necessarily simplifies the intricacies of an elaborate system of thought to which justice cannot be done due to the limited nature of this enterprise. In attempting to evaluate Ibn Khaldun's stages of the growth and the decline of the state we will try to see if his theory coincides with historical facts. For this purpose we will refer to the Islamic State and the Roman Empire as our historical case studies.

Ibn Khaldun is of the view that the state follows the natural and necessary law of growth, maturity and decline. If the state is not interfered with from without, it passes through five distinct stages, each of which has its own essential attributes.

The First Stage

The civilised state comes into being through the establishment of a primitive people welded together by solidarity and religion. These establishers of the state are driven by the aim of satisfying their natural desires, the need for the actualisation of their potentialities, and the completion of the life begun in primitive culture.

During this period the ruler and the ruled are forced to build institutions necessary for a civilised culture. If there already is such a culture then a new ruling class is accepted. During this period, therefore, the state is very active and creates new political relationships.

Like all other natural powers, the power generated by solidarity and religion has its limits. The united force of a people when conquering cities or buildings then becomes consummated in the very act of building or conquering. Soon a limit is reached beyond which new cities (conquered or found) can be barely held. This determines the geographic boundaries of the state.

During this first stage, power in the state is not concentrated in one man. This is so, because the very establishment of the state is not due to a single individual or a small group but it is the result of the effort of a whole community bound together on cohesive sentiment. This is not to say there is no leader in the community. It is merely to assert that the ruler is not absolute, arbitrary or despotic. His rule is dependent on his fellow tribesmen. This is also true of theorcratic states. The ruler who is establishing a state with the aid of a religious message cannot act as a master or king, since religion means the obedience of all to God and the religious law.

Evaluation: Ibn Khaldun's assertion that the state comes in to being through the establishment of a primitive people welded together by solidarity and religion

seems to be a good generalisation about the establishment of many states including Rome and particularly the "Islamic State."[v] However, the pattern of the establishment of a state is not as clear cut as Ibn Khaldun has asserted. For instance, Rome, believe the modern historians, arose "early in the eighth century B.C." when "the occupants of some small Latin settlements on hills in the Tiber valley united and established a common meeting place, the Forum, around which the city of Rome grew."[vi] However, this "Tiberian" people's state remained insignificant in terms of growth until it was conquered by the Etruscans by the sixth century under whom Rome expanded to become an important commercial centre and in this period are vested the seeds of the Roman Empire. If we were to apply Ibn Khaldun's theory to the development of Rome we will see that the state of Rome was not simply the result of the "Tiberians" welding together by solidarity but also of a Tiberian-Etruscan synthesis in which the Etruscans predominated to the extent of ruling the Tiberians initially but later adopting some of their customs and fusing with them racially. Thus the establishment and the growth of the state of Rome does not follow a neat and logical pattern as Ibn Khaldun has asserted.

Ibn Khaldun's other assertion that the establishers of the state are driven by the aim of satisfying their natural desires and the need for the actualisation of their potentialities seem to be a plausible psycho-sociological explanation of the driving force behind the establishment of the state. Thus, the very act and the accomplishment of the state consumes the need for actualisation thereby minimising the energies for the construction of the state and this reasoning is ably used by Ibn Khaldun to explain the determination of the physical size of the state, its stagnation and ultimate decline.

The Second Stage

The second stage of the life of the state is characterised by a consolidation of the ruler's powers. An absolute kingship is created. Natural solidarity and religion are checked so far as they mean the sharing of power. They are used at the discretion of the ruler. Solidarity is replaced with paid army. The administration of the state is carried on by an impersonal bureaucracy who rules in conformity with the will of the ruler. Natural solidarity becomes superfluous and the subjects gradually acquire the habit of obeying. The organised army and the bureaucracy take care of the protection of the state and the development of the various institutions of a civilised culture.

The monopolisation of power is natural to men. Monopolisation of power is not only due to the desire of the monarch for merely centralising power in order to freely develop the state economically and civilisationally. It is also necessitated by the innate lust for power in man's animal nature.

Evaluation: the conception of the consolidation of the ruler's power during the second stage seems not only internally consistent with Ibn Khaldun's overall theory but is a phenomenon that can be observed in the history of a many states. The concentration of power in the Ummayad dynasty and later in the Abbasid

dynasty[vii] of the early Islamic stage is a case in point. This period of the Islamic state, also supports Ibn Khaldun's assertion on (1) the obsolescence of natural solidarity as the basis of compliance and its replacement by the habit of obedience, (2) the development of an impersonal bureaucracy, and (3) the monopolisation of power.

Ibn Khaldun's explanation of the cause of the monopolisation of power as residing in man's lust for power is in consonance with the findings of the modern social scientists[viii] . From Ibn Khaldun's perspective the Abbasid Caliphate falls in the second stage of the development of the state.

The Third Stage

As the ruler's lust for absolute power is satisfied with the concentration of authority in his hands, he starts to use his authority for the satisfaction of his other desires – he desires to "collect the fruits of authority." Thus, a stage of luxury and leisure follows. The ruler concentrates on the collection of taxes and the organisation of finances of the state. He spends lavishly on public works and on beautifying the cities in imitation of famous civilised states. He provides riches to his followers who in turn start living a life of luxury. Economic prosperity follows. The crafts, the fine arts, and the sciences are encouraged and flourish under the care of the new ruling class. The state has finally reached the stage where it is able to satisfy man's craving for luxuries and his pride in possessing them. This is a period of rest and self-indulgence in which man enjoy the comforts and pleasures of the world.

This third stage then, completes the cycle of overall growth and development of the state. From the primitive conditions at the beginning, the state has now gone through a period of civilisational refinement. The state has reached its zenith. The next stage heralds stagnation, which is followed by the decline and the withering away of the state [ix].

Evaluation: Again Ibn Khaldun's description of the state at it's apex is illustrated by the Islamic state during the reigns of Harun al-Rashid (786-809 A.D.) and his successor son al-Ma'mun. During their periods and in the periods in proximity to theirs' there was a rapid growth of what may be termed the manifestations (arts, learning, research, cities, comfort, leisure) of a civilisation at its zenith. The tremendous growth of the libraries during this period illustrates this. Ibn Sina described a library in Persia as fabulous [x]. The palace library of Egypt is said to have had "forty rooms full of books."[xi]

Ibn Khaldun's description of the attributes of the state at its peak can also be seen in the Pax Romana (30 B.C. to 180 A.D.) of the Roman Empire. During the Pax Romana to a writer in the second century the world was "every day better known, better cultivated, and more civilised than before", and there were "as many cities as there were once solitary cottages."[xii]

The "readiness" of the state at its apex is merely the "ground-work" for the setting in of the decline of the state, asserts Ibn Khaldun. The very process of arriving at

this stage has not only consummated the energies that made progress and achievement possible but has brought about abundance and satiation, thereby ushering the state in a period of complacency. Again this can be supported from the example of Rome. "Despite the general prosperity, the empire under the Antonines (96-180 A.D) (dates have been inserted by me) had already entered upon its "Indian Summer." Once the empire had ceased to expand geographically its' economy became more static. This early evidence of declining prosperity foreshadowed the economic crisis of the third century A.D., when political anarchy and monetary inflation caused the economy of the empire to decline rapidly[xiii]

The Fourth Stage

Having reached its zenith, this fourth stage is a period of contentment in which the ruler and the ruled are satiated and complacent. They live on the laurels of the past and imitate their predecessors in enjoying the pleasures of life-ignorant of how these predecessors struggled to achieve them. They think that the various advantages of civilisation always existed and will continue to exist. Since stagnation mars this stage of the state, its length of duration depends on the immensity of the work of the ancestry.

Evaluation: Ibn Khaldun's analysis of the forth stage, again seems to accord with the known histories of several states. Without trying to support this point I will merely assert that the period of contentment and stagnation that followed the Pax Romana and the period after Mau mun is an elaborate testimony to Ibn Khaldun's description of his fourth stage.

The Fifth Stage

During this stage the state is already beginning to decline and disintegrate. This last stage in its advancement is characterised by prodigality and waste. The state has reached an old age and is doomed to a slow or violent death - violent if an external people or state conquers it due to its feebleness. Slow if it is left to its own.

The very process of establishing the state had destroyed its vital forces of solidarity and religion that were the basis for its creation and existence. The ruler had destroyed the communal pride and loyalty of their kinsmen, who, humiliated and impoverished, have lost the drive to conquer. Instead of government based on solidarity the state has come to be administered by an impersonal bureaucracy who is more concerned with salary than patriotism.

Beside, the continued wasteful expenditure and indulgences become a habit that lead to the over taxation of the citizenry. The over taxation stunts economic growth. In fact it discourages economic activity. People live with a sense of impending doom. This further throttles efforts to overcome problems. Such is the process of the disintegration of the state.

The despair becomes so widespread that it halts economic activity and building. No longer long-range plans are made. The birth rate declines. Physically weak and

morally bankrupt population is susceptible to disease and plagues in overcrowded cities. With the decrease in economic activity and the depopulation of the cities the state disintegration becomes conspicuously visible. Starting from the outlying areas of the state, local administrators, princes, generals, and dissatisfied kinsmen of the ruler become independent. The state becomes fragmented into small localities. In the capital the civil bureaucracy and the army begin intrigue to rest the actual power from the ruler, leaving him a figurehead. In this weakened state of affairs, the state provides a temptation to neighbours. If it is conquered it dies violently. If it is left alone it withers away.

Evaluation: Ibn Khaldun, in my opinion, is not very comprehensive in his enumeration of the causes of the decline of the state. From prodigality and waste, the destruction of the vital forces of solidarity and religion (That accordingly were the basis of its creation and existence) to economic dislocation, Ibn Khaldun attributes several causes that account for the destruction of the state but he leaves out a few other important causes of the decline of the state, i.e., tyranny of the rulers. The tyranny of the rulers has been a very fundamental cause of the decline of the state. To illustrate the persecution of Christianity by Roman Emperors from Decius around 250 A.D. to Diocletian about 303 A. D. was a major cause of the decline of the Roman Empire. "The first systematic campaign against the Christians ... was instigated by the emperor Decius in 250, and the last and the greatest by Diocletian in 303."[xiv](14)

Ibn Khaldun's failure to mention tyranny as an important cause of the decline of the state is even more glaring in view of his lack of attention to the causes of the decline of the state that are alluded to in the Quran [xv](15). For instance, "How many a community that dealt unjustly have we shattered, and raised up after them another folk! And, when they felt our might, behold them fleeing form it! (But it was said unto them): Flee not, but return to that (existence) which emasculated you and your dwellings, that he may be questioned. They cried: alas for us! Lo! We were wrongdoers. And their crying ceased not till we made them as reaped corn, extinct [xvi](16)." The Quran uses the word "Zulum" which Pickthall has translated as unjust. The word "Zulum" does not refer merely to ordinary social injustices but particularly to tyranny and oppression (especially in this context). Mazheuruddin Siddiqui has concluded "the word 'zulum' means "tyranny" and it is "not ordinary injustices that lead to social disintegration, because ordinary injustices exist in every society." "Therefore, the Quran is here referring to those grave injustices which amount to oppression, whether one section of the people is oppressive in relation to the other or the people, as a whole, deal unjustly with other nations and communities [xvii]."

Thus, Ibn Khaldun's lack of identification and treatment of tyranny as a one of the causes of revolution of the decline of the state is a serious omission and is but an example of the important causes of the decline of the state that Ibn Khaldun has failed to identify. Nevertheless, the causes that Ibn Khaldun does identify are supported by historical evidence.

CONCLUSION

Ibn Khaldun's theory of the rise and decline of the state being derived from the histories of actual states goes a long way in describing and analysing the patterns, and the attributes of the growth and the decline of states.

Certain generalisations (like the one the neatness of which we questioned regarding its historicity in our critique of the first stage) may have been oversimplified to impart logical brevity to his theory, but in the main, Ibn Khaldun's abstractions of history seem to do justice to the complex web of historical causes that in their multiplicity affect the growth and the decline of the state. Ibn Khaldun's only serious omission seems to be his failure to recognise tyranny as an important cause of the decline of the state.

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END NOTES

[i] Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Vol. III, as quoted by Charles Issawi, *An Arab Philosophy of History*, Paragon Book Gallery, Ltd., New York.

[ii] George Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, Philadelphia Bailliere, Tridall and Cox.

[iii] Ibn Sina (980-1037), known to the West as Avicenna was a physician. His Cannon of Medicine established him as a leading medical authority in Islam and most medieval European Universities.

[4] Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) known in Europe as a bold user of reason and knowledge even where it contradicts religion. Averroism was a pervasive dogma at most medieval European Universities.

[v] It seems Ibn Khaldun's theory of the rise and decline of the state is particularly derived from the study of the establishment, growth and decline of the Islamic State, beginning from Muhammad (May Peace Be Upon Him) becoming well-established during the reign of the 4 Caliphs, the Ummayads and Abbassids and its decline during and after the Abbasids.

[vi] Wallbank, Taylor, Bailkey, Mancall, *Civilisation Past and Present*, Book I, 6th Edition, Scott, Foresman and Company, p. 128-129.

[vii] From Ibn Khaldun's perspective, the Abbasid Caliphate falls in the second stage of the development of the state.

[viii] Perhaps Nixon's "autocratisation" during his presidency is explicable on the basis of similar reasoning.

[ix] Not in the Marxian sense.

[x] Fazlur, Rahman, *Islam*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1966, p. 182.

[xi] Ibid.

[xii] Tertullian, concerning the soul, quoted in S. Katz, *The Decline of Rome and the Rise of Medieval Europe*, I thaca, New York, Cornell University press, 1955, p. 7.

[xiii] Wallbank, *Civilisation Past and Present*, Book I, p. 144

[xiv] Wallbank, *Civilisation Past and Present*, Book I, p. 202

[xv] Particularly since he was well versed in the understating of the Quran.

[xvi] *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, M. M. Pickthall, Mentor, p. 235, Surah XXI, verses 11-15.

[xvii] Mazheruddin Siddiqui, *The Qur'anic Concept of History*, Karachi, Central Institute of Islamic Research 1965, p. 21