Ibn Khaldun and his «Muqaddimah»

«If the works of people provide more gains than they need, members of that community spend their time and efforts on learning sciences and arts»

IBN KHALDUN (¹)
Ar. Gör. Müjdat ŞAKAR (**)”

In an ordinary day, though many people are involved in only their usual daily work, a few philosophers though limited deal with the subjects like destiny of humanity, original and future aspects of communal life and reasons for events. During depression periods, such problems also concern ordinary people. Great leaders and ideas resulting in radical changes in societies usually come up in such periods. The most important philosophic thoughts and meaningful commentaries on historical events, analysis of social and cultural changes are the result of such transition periods (²).

As a society, feeling deeply the depression of a transition period, it is important to become familiar with Ibn Khaldun and his book, titled «Muqaddimah», written in the depression period.

The 14 th century in which Ibn Khaldun lived, was the regression period for Islamic thoughts. Ibn Khaldun, having experience in working mechanism of a state and no prejudice of any kind, was interested in history in order to understand all past years, especially his own age. This was not the curiosity of a literary man, but it was the struggle of a battling man against his age (³). He, not only passed the historical facts to us, but it was he, who first claimed that societies have their own entities and if anything is to happen, the rules of

²) Pitirim A. SOROKIN, Bir Bunalım Çağında Toplum Felsefeleri (Philosophies of Society In A Depression Age), Trans. by Mete Tuncay, Ankara 1972, pp. 15
³) Cemil MERİÇ, Umrandan Uygarlığa (To Civilisation From Umran), Istanbul 1974, pp. 138
society must be obeyed. So he established the basics of a new science, sociology (\(^4\)). Many principles of social sciences were first explained by Ibn Khaldun. For instance, social changes obey some rules, but these rules are not so clear as the rules of nature. However, these rules are clear enough for an event to be included in classification. Individuals of a society can not change or disturb these invisible rules, that is to say, any individual endeavoring to change rules of society, is bound to fail (\(^5\)).

As the ideas of Ibn Khaldun are compared with the ones of his age, it is clear that they are extraordinary. So, people got the feeling that, he only followed the ideas of old Greek philosophers (\(^6\)), others claimed that the old Spanish books destroyed by Inquisition in the Middle Ages were his sources of inspiration to develop his ideas (\(^7\)). Actually, none of these claims are true. He had only two sources, his environment and moslem historians (\(^8\)).

Ibn Khaldun’s book is full of ideas pioneering «the philosophy of history», «sociology» and «political sociology» (\(^9\)). He established a very different system of ideas and it is difficult to include him in any classification of Islam philosophers (\(^10\)). He was the first person-writer, who indicated that the legal system of a society is closely related to the way of living and the degree of civilization (\(^11\)).

The political theory of Ibn Khaldun is complete and should be considered as a whole if one wishes to understand the characteristics of his method. But understanding and explaining him and his book, requires a sophisticated research by experts. I intend in this article to introduce you this outstanding Islam philosopher.

\(^{14}\) See. Yavuz ABADAN (Editor), Devlet Felsefesi (State Philosophy), Excerpts of Readings, Trans. by Nermin Abadan - Bülent Daver - Mete Tuncay, Ankara 1959, pp. 165

\(^5\) See. MERİÇ, pp. 139

\(^6\) See. ABADAN, pp. 163

\(^7\) Charles ISSAWI asserts such a claim in his book entitled «An Arab Philosophy of History» (Transferred by MERİÇ, pp. 147)

\(^8\) MERİÇ, pp. 147

\(^9\) Gaston BOUTHOUL, Siyaset Sosyolojisi (Political Sociology), Trans. by A. Türkay Yazıcı, Istanbul 1968, pp. 17

\(^10\) See. Nihat KEKLİK, Felsefe (Philosophy), Istanbul 1978, pp. 36

Ibn Khaldun's Life:

The ideas of Ibn Khaldun are closely related to his life. His environment and life full of battles, had great effects on his formation of his ideas. Therefore, it is better to have some information about his life story.

Our information source about his life derives from his own autobiography entitled «El-Tarif», which is the most detailed book, that can be found in the Islamic literature.

He was born in 1332 as the son of one of the nobles in Tunisia. In his childhood he was educated in the subjects of language, The Koran and Hadith (Prophet's sayings). When he was eighteen, he began to work with administrative authority for the ruler of Morocco. In 1365, he was in Andalusia and he received invitations from King of Castile and from some other kings to work as an advisor for them. Later on, we see him as the commander of the ruler of Becaye in the battle with the Barberians.

All these political and military experiences, helped him to become familiar with Bedouin society and to establish his system of ideas.

The appearance of his book, «Muqaddimah», follows after his resignation from administrative duties. He settled in Castle of Selame and completed this book in three years. In 1337 he submitted his book to the ruler of Tunisia, Abu Abbas. The next four years, he had been working on his history book known shortly as «Kitab-el-Iber». In 1384 he was appointed as the head of the Maliki, which was one of the many religious sects in Islam. The people against, forced him to leave this position. This created an opportunity for him to concentrate on his scientific works and lectures in Ezher Mosque. At that time, Egypt was in a political confusion which was a vivid example for Ibn Khaldun to examine.

In 1400, the Mogul ruler Timur conquered the city of Damascus. Ibn Khaldun was appointed to talk with that ruler with in a group. Timur wanted Ibn Khaldun to work for him, but Ibn Khaldun pretending that he would be back after he obtained his books, returned to Egypt.

After that date, Ibn Khaldun lived in Egypt as a famous and respected scientist. He made many researches on whole Islamic World, Turks, Moguls and many Christian cities and countries.

In 1406, when he was 74 years old, he died in Cairo. After his death he was forgotten and not appreciated for a very long time, till the beginning of the 20th century.
Ibn Khaldun’s fame comes mainly from the «Muqaddimah» (Prologue), written for his history book. Many other books of that author, names of which are encountered in historical sources, are not available today.

Ibn Khaldun’s history book consists of seven volumes and altogether is called «Kitab-el-Iber». The first volume is the one in which Ibn Khaldun explains his theoretical works. Actually this first volume was originally named as «Kitab-i Evvel», but it became known as «Muqaddimah». Later, Ibn Khaldun also used the name Muqaddimah for this volume. Although the Muqaddimah is only a single volume of the whole seven volume book, it is worth considering that part by itself as a whole.

Ibn Khaldun was fortyfive years old when he completed the Muqaddimah in the Castle of Selame, in the province of Beni Tacin, Algeria. After having finished the writing of the book, he revised it many times until his death. Therefore, different versions of Muqaddimah are available.

In order to obtain further knowledge and detailed information, the reader should be referred to the following sources: