

Contribution of the Muslim Historians towards Historiography:

The advent of Islam had tremendous impact on human thought, and the early Muslim thinkers and scholars greatly contributed to the production of knowledge. One of the branches of knowledge to which the Muslims paid special attention was the discipline of history. The Muslim historians and philosophers of history made great contributions to the discipline. However, before discussing their contributions, it seems pertinent to briefly highlight the Quranic concept of history.

The Quranic Concept of History Quran;

Quran is not primarily a book of history. Being a book of revelational origin, it is meant for the guidance of human beings. A sizeable portion of Quran contains the histories of ancient nations or communities, and the Prophets sent to them. Not only does it tell about the conduct, behavior and the characteristics of the people of these ancient communities, it also informs how and why God bestowed His favors upon some of them while some others were destroyed by divine Wrath owing to multiple causes. These causes which led to their decline or annihilation from the face of earth ranged from their arrogance, pride and hunger for power to extravagance, ungratefulness and, above all, injustice. Thus, Quran discusses the principles that govern the rise and fall of various groups and communities. It does not attach importance to material superiority and power, rather it is the moral and ethical superiority that is desirable. Moreover, according to Quranic principles, disbelief (shirk is not a sufficient ground for divine

punishment rather injustice and oppression become the cause of the wrath of God. The narration of stories of the ancient communities in Quran has a moralistic purpose, and therefore, the readers are invited to ponder over these stories and draw lessons from them. In this way, Quran has stressed the moral factor in history, and offered an ethical interpretation of the past. The historical consciousness of the Muslims was greatly influenced by the Quranic concept of history, and their history- Writing reflected this moralistic approach.

Origin of Muslim Tradition of Historiography;

The origin of Muslim tradition of historiography can be traced back to the process of compilation of Quran and hadith (sayings and the actions of Prophet Muhammad PBU, b. 570-d. 632) collections. During the life-time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), a group of his Companions were designated to record the Quranic revelations in written form. However, these texts were scattered, and had not been compiled. Moreover, many Companions of the Prophet (PBUH) had also-committed Quran to their memory. The need for the compilation of Quran in a single volume was felt during the reign of Caliph Abu Bakr. (RA; r. 632-34), when many of these Companions, who had memorized Quran, were killed in the Battle of Yamamah fought in 632. Realizing the need to compile Quran, Caliph Abu Bakr (RA) appointed a committee under Hazrat Zayd ibn Thabit (RA; d. 45 AH), who was the personal scribe of the Prophet (PBUH) for this purpose. Consequently, the Quran was compiled. Later, during the reign of Caliph Uthman bn Affan (RA; r. 644-56), the standard text of Quran was copied' and sent to the conquered territories.

Initially, the Prophet (PBUH) had forbidden his Companions to record and write ahadith, as he feared that people would confuse them with the Quranic verses. However, after 623 AD (1 Hijrah/AH), he allowed them to write ahadith, and thus, many of his Companions prepared their personal collections of ahadith. Later, the Umayyad Caliph, Hazrat Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (d. 718-20 AD), who is considered to be the fifth pious Caliph by many, ordered the collections of ahadith to be prepared, copied, and sent to the conquered territories.

The early Muslims had a burning desire to preserve the memory of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), including his sayings and actions. They wanted to preserve the knowledge that how he walked and talked, behaved in different situations, acted as a Prophet, as a statesman, as a military commander, as a preacher, as a friend, as a relative, as a father, as a husband, as well as how did he look like, for the posterity. The Quran and the hadith collection served as primary sources for writing the history of the early Muslims, particularly the biography of the Prophet (PBUH), called Sirah or Sirat, and the military history called Maghazi.

It is important to note that the development of hadith studies as an independent branch of knowledge among the Muslims greatly contributed to the discipline of history. The early muhaddithin (Traditionists or compilers/teachers of ahadith) developed very elaborate rules for ascertaining the authenticity of ahadith. They also classified the ahadith on the basis of their authenticity. They were not only concerned with the contents of a hadith, they also took into account the conditions in which the ahadith were narrated, as well as the 'characteristics of their narrators, especially their

reliability and trustworthiness. They also developed principles for internal and external criticism of ahadith in order to assess their authenticity. The Muslim historians derived the principles of research and historical criticism, including the internal and external criticism, from the hadith compilation process. These historians were conscious of the issue of authenticity of their sources, which they critically examined.

Development of Sirah and Maghazi Literature;

The two literary genres that were developed by the early Muslim historians were Sirah or Sira, the biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), while the military history of the Prophet's time was called Maghazi. The word maghazi was derived from ghazwah, meaning a battle in which the Prophet (PBUH) himself participated. It is important to bear in mind that in the beginning, there was no clear division between Sirah and Maghazi, since the biographical history of the life and times of the Prophet (PBUH) included the record of his military campaigns. The history of the development of Sirah and Maghazi literature can be divided into two broad phases. Its first phase was marked by the beginning of Sirah and Maghazi Writing, while during the second phase Sirah and Maghazi writing further developed in a more systematic manner.

Early Sirah and Maghazi Writers

During the first phase of the development of Sirah and Maghazi writings, a number of people contributed to it. A Companion of the Prophet (PBUH) named Aban ibn Uthman (d. 105 AH), the governor of Medinah and the son of Hazrat Uthman ibn Affan, wrote

the first book on Sirah and Maghazi. Neither the work is not extant now, nor are its extracts found in other books.

Another Companion of the Prophet (PBUH), Urwah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94 AH/712 AD), the son of Zubayr ibn al-Awwam, (the grandson of Caliph Abu Bakr), wrote a book on Maghazi, and its extracts are found in the works of other historians such as Ibn Ishaq, Waqidi, and Tabari. Later, a student of Urwah ibn Zubayr named Imam Muhammad ibn Muslim al-Zuhri (d. 124 AH/742 AD), a celebrated scholar and narrator of hadith, wrote many books on history including a book on Maghazi and the history of the Pious Caliphate. Other important historians who contributed to Sirah and Maghazi writing included Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 34 AH), Shurahbil ibn Sa'ad, Asim ibn Umar ibn Qatadah (d. 120/129 AH), Musa ibn 'Uqba al-Asadi (d. 141 AH), Mu'tamar Sulayman and Mu'amar ibn Rashid. During the second phase of the development of Sirah and Maghazi writings, the Muslim historians wrote history in a more systematic manner. These included the following:

Ibn Ishaq

First and the foremost among them was Muhammad ibn Ishaq (d. 761 AD), who was a student of Imam al-Zuhri. He composed *Kitab al-Maghazi*, which is considered to be an authentic and reliable work by later-historians. Therefore, not only later-historians relied on the work of Ibn Ishaq for history writing, the compilers of the six most authentic collections of ahadith, called *Sihah-i Sittah*, also used it. For instance, Imam Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (d. 256 AH/870 AD) in his work *Sahih al-Bukhari* compiled the chapter on *ghazwat* (the military campaigns of the Prophet PBUH), titled

Kilab al-Ghazwat, on his authority. Unfortunately, Ibn Ishaq's Kitab al-Maghazi has been-lost, but the information contained in it has been preserved by Ibn Hisham (d. 835 AD), who Wrote his book titled Sirat Ibn Hishai on its basis.

Al-Waqidi;

Muhammad ibn Umar al-Waqidi (d. 207 AH/823 AD) was another eminent Arab historian of his times. His work is also titled Kitab al-Maghazi. Waqidi was the first Muslim historian wh0 differentiated between Sirah and Maghazi as two separate fields of study. Like Ibn 1shaq's book, Waqidi's work S also considered to be authentic, and was used by the later historians as a source.

Ibn Sa'ad;

Muhammad ibn Sa'ad (d. 230 AH/844 AD) was another renowned historian, who was a student or Waqid. His work 1abaqat al-Kubra iS popularly known as Tabaqa Ibn Sa'ad. Its first two volumes were dedicated to the biography of the Prophet (PBUH), whereas rest of the volumes dealt with the life of the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH) and their successors.

Recognition of History as an Independent Branch of Knowledge

The ninth and tenth centuries witnessed further development of Muslim historiography. During these centuries, many eminent Muslim historians produced works of history. These historians did not confine their history-writing to the period of the Prophet (PBUH) like the earlier historians. Unlike the Christian historians of medieval times, the Muslim historians were able to differentiate history from religious

studies. They recognized history (including historiography) as an independent branch of knowledge. The prominent Muslim historians of the ninth century include Abul Hasan Ali al-Madai'ni (d. 225 AH/830-31 AD), Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 AH/889 AD), al-Dinawari (d. 891 AD), al-Baladhuri (d. 892 AD), and al-Yaqubi (d. 900 AD). However, the most renowned among them was al-Baladhuri, who greatly contributed to historiography. Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri (d. 892) was an Arab historian and geographer, who wrote *Futuh al-Buldan*-(The Conquest of Countries). As its title indicates, the work was largely focused on military history of the Muslims, but he also discussed the social and cultural conditions of the conquered territories in his work. In this way, he broadened the scope of history writing by including the themes and subjects not touched by the Muslim historians before him.

The tenth century was marked by tremendous achievements in the field of history and historiography by the Muslims. The two most famous historians who contributed to history-writing in the tenth century were al-Tabari and al-Masudi.

Tabari The First Muslim 'World Historian:

Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (b. 839-d. 923 AD) was a tenth-century Arab historian as well as an expert of tafsir (exegesis of Quran), hadith studies and fiqh (Muslim jurisprudence). He has been regarded as the "father of hadith historiography." He had traveled in Iraq, Syria and Egypt. It is important to bear in mind-that he was not associated with-any court, nor was he patronized by any ruler. Despite offers, he never accepted government service, and devoted his life to teaching and research. His most famous work is *Tarikh al-Rusul wal-Muluk wal-Khulafa* (The History of the Prophets,

Kings and Caliphs) in sixteen volumes, written in annalistic tradition. As its title suggests, it included the history of the ancient Prophets and kings or rulers, especially the Sasanian Emperors of pre-Islamic Persia. It also covered the history of the period of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Pious Caliphs, followed by the history of Umayyad and Abbasid- Caliphates. Tabari's work was a World history or a comprehensive history, covering the history of a vast time frame. He consciously kept a chronological scheme of events in his book. He presented the evidence of historical facts, and tried to remain as much objective as possible. He presented elaborate details on the life of the Prophet (PBUH). While writing' the history of controversial historical events, he devised a new method of narrating all the conflicting versions and then leaving the judgment to the readers.

Masudi: The First Muslim Philosopher of History;

Abu'l Hasan Ali al-Masudi (b. 888-d. 955 AD) was a tenth-century Arab historian and geographer. Among his contemporaries, he was the only historian who regarded history as well-ordered and firm science. He had widely traveled in Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Oman, Iraq, Persia, India and Sri Lanka. He wrote books on quite diverse subjects including history, politics, physics, religion, ethics and linguistics. However, most of his works have been lost. His most famous work on history, which is still extant, is *Muruj al-Zahab wa Ma adin al-Jawahir* (Fields of Gold and Mines of Jewels). In this book, the historical data is well-organized: Its themes are quite diverse ranging from geographical information to social and cultural aspects. He made a critical study of controversial historical events. He tried to establish the relationship of history and

geography, and presented a geographical interpretation of history by highlighting the effect of geography and climate on human beings, and their behavior, society, culture and political system. This theme was further developed by Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century, and later by Montesquieu (d. 1755) in the eighteenth-century Europe. Masudi is considered to be the first

Muslim philosopher of history, who discussed the principles that govern the rise and fall of cultures and nations. This theory was further developed and elaborated by Ibn Khaldûn, and then by Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee in the twentieth century. The methodology used by Masudi was based on his direct personal observation. His approach to historical causation was humanistic, and not Theo-centric.

Ibn Miskawayh and Ibn Athir:

Ibn Miskawayh (b. 932-d. 1030AD) was an eleventh-century Persian historian from Ray in Persia, He was the author of several books such as *Tajarib al-Umam* (Experiences of Nations), and *Tahzib al Akhlaq* (Ethical Instruction). Like Masudi, his approach to historical causation was humanistic, and not Theo-centric. He greatly contributed to the development of the principles of historical criticism, as he stressed on critical assessment of sources for history-writing. For writing his own work, he critically examined his sources. Ibn Athir (b. 1160-d. 1233 AD) was another eminent historian of thirteenth century, who made great contribution to the discipline of history. Like Tabari's book, his work *Al-Kamil fi'l Tarikh* (The Complete History) was also a universal or world history.

Ibn-e- Khaldun: The Founder of Social Sciences

Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (b. 1332-d. 1406 AD) was one of the greatest thinkers of medieval times. He was an original thinker, who does not seem to be influenced by any earlier Muslim historian or philosopher. His ancestors belonged to South Arabia, from where they had migrated to Spain, and then to North-west Africa, where he was born at Tunis in 1332. He not only contributed to history, (including historiography and philosophy of history), but also made tremendous contributions in the field of sociology, political Science, economics, geography, education, religion and philosophy. He is considered to be the real founder of social sciences in general, and sociology in particular.

Discussing the nature of history as a discipline, Ibn Khaldun asserted that history involves making generalizations from the findings of historical events and phenomena, which are useful for the posterity. He is the first clear-headed thinker to assert that social phenomena appear to obey laws, which are as absolute as those governing natural phenomena. Therefore, these social laws having regular and well-defined patterns can be explored and understood in order to study the development of a society, and establish cause-and-effect relationship between historical events. Thus, he implicitly called history a science, a Science of society (or a social science) in which 'social laws are explored and studied. In this way, he broke away with the prevalent or traditional "factual conception of history, which emphasizes the narration and description of events, and does not theorize them

Ibn Khaldun is credited with taking an overall and holistic view of the human society in his scientific analysis for the first time. He believed that history should not restrict itself merely for the actions of few individuals. In this way, he challenged the Great Men Theory that argues that the real focus of historical studies ought to be the role of few individuals or 'Great Men who shape historical events.

Ibn Khaldun is the author of Kitab al-Ibar, (Universal History) consisting of eight volumes. Its first volume is titled Mugaddamah (Prolegomena), in which he propounded his Social theories and his philosophy of history. The next seven volumes explain them with the help of empirical evidence from the history of various communities/societies and countries, particularly his contemporary dynasties in West Africa, Spain and Sicily.

Like Masudi, he also explored the relationship between history and geography, but he considerably expanded and elaborated it. Ibn Khaldun discussed the impact of geographical and Climatic conditions on human beings, and asserted that geographical conditions largely determine political structures, social institutions, cultural toms and religious practices in a given locale. He divided geographical locales into temperate zones (areas having moderate weather, neither very hot and nor very cold) and non-temperate zones (areas having extremely cold or hot weather). In the temperate zones, the climatic conditions are conducive for the development o arts, crafts and sciences, and people are more civil1zed and have a developed aesthetic Sense, with improved lifestyle, better tools, fine clothes and food, and good architecture. They are politically organized in states. On the contrary, in the non temperate zones, Climatic conditions

are not very conducive for the development of science and art, etc. Moreover, people have to fight against the forces of nature, and have a low living standard. Their aesthetic sense is not much developed, and they are not very much civilized. Politically, they are organized in tribes. In this way, Ibn Khaldun gave a geographical interpretation of history.

Ibn Khaldun declared history to be a science of culture and civilization-The most important, concept employed by him to explain the rise and fall of civilizations (and dynasties as well) is that of *asabiya*, which means solidarity, sense of togetherness, unity, group mind, group feeling, (binding force uniting people in a family, tribe, community, or a nation) identity, and legitimacy. etc. On the basis of the concept of *asabiya*, he propounded a theory of the rise and fall of dynasties or civilizations (It was actually generalized from the rise and fall of his contemporary dynasties in West Africa, Spain and Sicily.) The rise and fall of dynasties and civilizations depend on *asabiya*. The strengthening of *asabiya* leads to the rise of a dynasty or civilization, while its weakening causes its decline and fall. If *asabiya* disappears from a group or community or dynasty or state or civilization, the result will be its replacement by another group, or Community or dynasty or state or civilization with a stronger sense of *asabiya*. Generally, blood relationship (common ancestry or lineage) is the basis of *asabiya*, but religion may also provide a much wider basis for it. Commonality of religion may also create *asabiya* (religious identity) among the people and act as a binding force. This religious identity may also lead to the creation of a state (*daulat*). Emile Durkheim (d. 1917), a famous French sociologist, borrowed the concept of social

solidarity from Ibn Khaldun. In order to explain the strength and weakening of asabiya, Ibn Khaldun divided the life span of a group or community or dynasty or state into the following five stages or phases;

- (i) conquest
- (ii) consolidation
- (iii) blossoming (with accumulation of wealth)
- (iv) lavish expenditure of wealth but with some restraint, and
- (v) waste and squandering

According to him, the cycle of rise, growth, decline and fall generally takes 120 years on average, and three to four generations of people complete this cycle. He also used the analogy of life cycle of living organisms, especially the human beings, and argued that just like an individual, a dynasty or state or civilization also goes through the cycle of birth, growth, maturity, senility/old age, and finally decay/death. His theory of the rise and fall of dynasties and Civilizations presumes time to be moving in a recurrently cyclical manner.

Ibn Khaldun discussed the historical evolution of state. He argued that historically the social institution of family led to the emergence of a tribe that included the extended kith and kin. Tribe, as a social institution and a social organization, was based on common ancestry, and all the tribe members had blood relationship with each other. The tribe chose a leader a tribal chief, who was responsible for managing resource capture, resource allocation or distribution, and arbitration in case of conflict. Tribal

chieftainship led to the emergence of royal authority, and eventually to the emergence of a state.

Ibn Khaldun applied sociology to history, and presented a sociological view of history. While explaining the historical evolution of society, he traced the origin of society from family to tribe, and from nomadic to sedentary urban life. For this he used the concepts of badawa (nomadic culture) and hazara (urban or sedentary culture). He discussed the characteristics of both the groups. The nomads are physically strong-built, and are more courageous and tough; their profession is hunting or farming. They are less interdependent on others and enjoy freedom. They have a survival economy (an economic order/system that merely fulfills the basic needs of the people), and have fewer needs. There exists tribal egalitarianism (equality), and their asabiya is strong. On the contrary, the urbanites are coward, less courageous and physically weak. They become lazy and indolent owing to comfortable and luxurious way of living they are more dependent on others for fulfillment of their needs. They have time to aesthetic pleasures of life such as music, art and poetry. They also accumulate wealth, and also create their own needs among these urbanites; asabiya is weak as compared to the nomads. Ibn Khaldun's comparative analysis of the characteristics of the nomads and urbanites has given birth to rural and urban sociology, two branches within the discipline of sociology.

Regarding historical causation, Ibn Khaldun asserted that the causes of historical change are generally endogenous (internal/from within), though at times there might be some exogenous (external) factors as well, which bring about a change, e.g. foreign

invasions. As a historian, Ibn .Khalidun stressed the importance of historical criticism. He believed that a historian should not uncritically accept historical data; rather he should subject it to scrutiny in order to assess whether the given information is reliable or unreliable. Furthermore, a historian should not be partial or biased against or in favor of someone or something. Ibn Khalidun also contributed to the development of the principles of historical criticism, such as the-critical study of authorship and sources.

Ibn Khalidun mentioned the role of divine factors in history, but he refused to take refuge in the fatalistic dogma like other medieval historians. He believed in the omnipotence of God, and considered Him to be the ultimate cause of all things and phenomena, but his beliefs did not impede his historical investigation in humanistic and rational paradigm. His dominant paradigm was rational-anthropocentric, and as a historian, he subscribed to a rationalist philosophy. He raised and answered many historical questions and inquiries in a secular and rational manner, and employed rationalism as a method of investigation and deduction, notwithstanding that he assigned some role to the divine factors in history as well. However, he did not apply his Scientific-rational method while studying the spiritual and intellectual life of societies. None the less, the historical explanations offered by him are predominantly rationalist and Anthro- centric.

The relevance of Ibn Khalidun's theory for today is somewhat restricted in terms of application. However, it is more coherent, plausible and comprehensive than Augustinian theory. It can beneficially be applied to interpret and explain the dynastic

shifts in case of monarchical polities. In particular, the theory amply explains the shifts in power structures during the medieval times, when there was dynastic rule, and the monarchs belonged to one particular tribe or clan, and their members used to extend loyalty, allegiance and legitimacy to the ruling families. For instance, the rise and fall of various dynasties during the Sultanate era (1206-1526) in medieval Indian history can befittingly be explained and appreciated with the help of Ibn Khaldun's theory of asabiya.