Allama Abi Jaffar Muhammad Ibn Habib Baghdadi and His

Kitab al Muhabbar

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ABSTRACT

The third century of the Islamic era was a period of great intellectual attainments in the history of the Arabs. It was in this period that some of the brightest luminaries appeared on the horizon of Arab learning, whose light guided later writers in different branches of knowledge. One of the earliest historians of the third century was Allama Abi Jaffar Muhammad Ibn Habib Baghdadi who died in 245 A.H. He wrote nearly forty-five books but in this article his manuscript Kitab al Muhabbar is being studied. This book gives valuable information about pre-Islamic and Islamic society of Arabs. Kitab al Muhabbar is one of the earliest examples of Muslim social historiography.

Key Words: Lineage, Pre Islamic Arab traditions, Social history, Lists

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Kitab al Muhabbar

Muhammad Ibn Habib Baghdadi, the writer of Kitab ul Muhabbar, one of the invaluable manuscripts on the social history of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia, is a Muslim historian of the third century after Hijrah. Unfortunately not much is known about the life of Ibn Habib. However, in the Fihrist and Yaqût who quotes the Fihrist he named him as Muḥammad b. Ḥabîb b. Umaiya b. Ḥāmr. He was a slave of Bani Abbas Bin Muhammad. Habib was his mother’s name and she was one of the most devoted slaves. Like his father’s name his date of birth is also not known but according to Zarkali and Ibn Kateeb, he was born and died in Samrah.

Ibn Habib wrote some forty-five books mostly on tribal history included the names of Arab tribes, similarities in the names of Arab tribes, tribal verses and tribal conflicts, and family history. The paper attempts to review a remarkable book Kitab al Muhabbar of Ibn Habib.

Content of the Book

The contents of Kitab al Muhabbar are very interesting and diversified which generate great inducement to read. The contents can be divided into two major segments. The first portion contains the historical information about the time period of different Prophets throughout history, ages of these Prophets and the history of Arabs whereas the second portion contains a numerous number of lists. These lists can be grouped into three sets.

The first group of list is about the people associated with the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Such as a list of ambassadors sent by the Holy Prophet to different kings, list of Holy Prophet’s wives, a list of the Holy Prophet’s in-laws, list of Holy Prophet’s wars, list of Holy Prophet’s appointees in the government, list of spies of Holy Prophet, and list of individuals who during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet had memorized the entire Quran.

The second set of content is about the list of people associated with four Pious Caliphs. For example, list of son in-laws of Hazrat Abu Bakar (RA), of Hazrat Umar (RA), of Hazrat Usman (RA) and Hazrat

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3 Ibn Kateeb Bagdadi, Tareek Bagdadi, (Lebanon: Dar ul Fikar Beroot, 2004), p. 86
Ali (RA). Then there are lists of son in-laws of Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs.

The third set contains lists of people of various qualities and background. Such as list of sharp people of Arab, list of bloody bandits of Daur-I-Jahalia (dark age), list of bloody bandits of Islamic period, list of warrior tribes of Arab, list of those tribes whose population does not increase, list of fanfare of Arabs during Daur-I-Jahalia, list of those elites who were monocular, list of elites who were bald, list of idiot women, list of loyal people of Arabia, list of loyal wives, list of idiots of Arab, list of people with the name of Talha who were famous for their generosity, list of women who took the decision of their marriage by themselves, list of people who limped, list of people whose mothers were Christian or Abyssinian, list of persons with name of Mohammed, list of Arabic guiders, list of tribal chief names and their relationships, list of liberal and extremist tribes, list of various trade agreements, six factors on which Arab’s feel pride, list of divorces, list of domestic and social problems, list of magicians, list of policemen, list of kings of Iran and Arab with accurate duration and intellectual and scholar class, list of people’s generosity, list of ancient tourists of deserted Arab land, list of only those women who married thrice, list of chains of taking Bait from administers that is oath of allegiance, list of superstitious and myths of Arab and prayers of ancient Arab gives clear representation of social history and tribal historiography.

It can be observed that the lists are not chronologically arranged. For example, he starts from the Prophets and then suddenly switches to Umayyad further Abbasids and then again he move to the Prophet’s son. He switches to tribal then cultural and later military history so the contents are not arranged in chronological order. It shows that he does not care about traditional methods of historiography but develops his own peculiar style of history writing.

**Extraction of History through Kitab al Muhabbar**

**Social History**

*Kitab al Muhabbar* is an example of social history. The lists which are given in this book are not just the names but it gives information about the social norms of the era. For example, there is a list of beautiful male members of the society who use to wear veil to hide
their faces. It is very interesting to note that not only women but in the Arab culture men also wore veil.

Ibn Habib mentions some important decisions taken in a pre-Islamic period which continued allowed by Islam. e.g. during pre-Islamic time on the occasion of pilgrimage people from Quresh do not use to stay at Arafat and due to the darkness of the night, don't go out of Muzdalfa. A man by the name of Qasi Bin Kalab lit the passage, between Arafat and Muzdalfa with the fire so that people moving from Arafat to Muzdalfa can move easily. This practice of staying at Muzdalfa is continued by Islam. Another decision is related with the division of the property among sons and daughters. Prior to Islam Arabs use to give property only to sons and daughters have no share. Amir Bin Jasham during the Dur-i-Jahalia divided his property among his sons and daughters in such a way that the amount of son was double than the amount given to the daughter. Islam allowed this tradition also.

Ibn Habib enlighten that the geographical factors and revelation brought in different periods by various Prophets are the two main reasons for the development of different languages.

He elaborates different festivals, fairs and markets with the respect of dates of different months of pre-Islamic Arab calendar in chronological order. It tells us when the purchasing was prohibited from religious and cultural point of you. Tribal ascendency on these fairs and large amount of part was given to them and special entertainment was arranged for the visitor by dancing girls. Arab purchase goods by throwing very small piece of stones taking consensus of group of people and then seller easily sell his good in large number of people Two big fair was arranged on the ports where people especially from China, India and many other from east and west. Having trade relations with developed nations of the world is of course an evidence of the progress and civilization of the Arabs. However the question is whether all parts of Arabia had such relations with other nations or possibly the some tribes were devoid of them? Furthermore relations with Persia, China, Hind and Byzantium are seen. This indicates that author has allocated a number of pages of his book to prove the existence of an expansive

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5 Ibid., p.178
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p.266
8 Ibid., p.197
civilization amongst the Arabs of the pre-Islamic age and has placed reliance in this connection on three things namely first their having had an excellent language and established establishment by them of relations with advanced nations.

Many traditions are familiar with the proverbs and couplets of poetry. They are extremely generous people and their names are remembered because of generous act before Islam and after Islam. Book on various pages shows there was a contest between the Arabs of being most generous and record their generous actions and deeds in the history. Even after Islam they praised and admired the generosity of migrated people as stories. They used to cover head from long piece of fold cloth called Ammama and praises long heighted man.

People are divided into social classes by professions and in tribes. Social position of women is tragic. Amongst the Arabs woman was just like merchandise which could be bought and sold and did not possess any individual or social rights not even the right of inheritance. The open-minded persons among them put woman under the category of animals and for this very reason considered her to be one of the chattels and necessities of life. On account of this belief the proverb: 'Mothers are only as good as vessels and have been created to serve as receptacles for sperm' was fully current amongst them. Author describes all the genealogies from the mother relationship to the next mother because mother knows about his son rather than father so the mothers are more important figure. Her verification is essential for the personal identity. He also listed the dignified women of Arab called Munjaba who have three saint and kind sons. Arabs also revere the loyal wives and her respect is reflected in verses and stories of murderers and robbers. Many Arab challenges loathsome practice of killing the girls and infant burials.

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9 Ibid. p.115-127
10 Ibid. p.175
11 Ibid. p.176
12 Ibid. p.190
13 Ibid. p.306
14 Ibid. p.294
15 Ibid. p.122
16 Ibid p.132
Economic History

According to Ibn Habib, anarchy, lack of law and order, excessive bloodshed, hostile geographical condition and absence of an authoritative government, which might control the situation and deal properly with the rebels, are the reason for the Arabs leading a nomadic life. In this hard-hitting condition trade fairs had an important effect not only on the regeneration of the Arabian social structure, but also on shaping a certain cultural environment in the region. Mecca held important place, as it was the religious center of the pagan Arabs. Ibn Habib states that the people of Mecca succeeded in making use of these privileges in trade and contributed to the revival of the commercial and cultural life of the Arabian Peninsula with their trade agreements signed with neighboring countries. As a matter of fact, in the fairs which was regularly visited by all Arab tribes, both the Iranian drachma and Byzantine dinar were used, thus through these fairs, the cultural exchange as well as commercial transactions took place.

Employments were given according to the months and main profession were essayist (writer) which was considered the noblest profession. Among other professions were Kotwal (police officer) trade (Merchant), training of soldiers (Army), selling and buying of slaves, selling and buying of sheep, cows and goods. The slaves were sold from 20,000 Durham to 50,000 Durham which was the maximum cost of a servant.

Religious History

Kitab al Muhabbar also contains very interesting information about the religious beliefs of pre-Islamic Arabia. Ibn Habib states the time duration among Prophets, with their ages, relationship with the families, names of their sons and wives. Knowledge of campaigns of the Prophet (PBUH) as a military leader, diplomat and decision maker in various battles and tracing genealogical blood relationships which bring another aspect of history. He also informs about those religious traditions which were either continued or were discontinue after the conversion of Arabs from polytheism to monotheism. He skillfully correlates the religion with the cultural amalgamation. History is divided in epochs and period as of religious history. It set

17 Ibid.p.131
18 Ibid.p.127
19 Ibid.p.240-242
20 Ibid.p.333
itself in a pre-ordained pattern that is period of darkens and period of light. Prophet (PBUH) can be seen as a problem solver of issues like domestic, marriages, divorces, heritage, and rights of man. It is very interesting to know that most patterns of ablution and pilgrimage is borrowed from pre-Islamic Arab traditions even fulfilling of promises is essential characteristics of Arab before and after Islam.

He explains the difference between culture and religion. Firstly he jots down different prayers of several gods by paying high regards and honor to their respected gods\textsuperscript{21}. People performed pilgrimage every year. He says that they prayed and if their wishes come true they become loyal and true follower of that god and embark on the journey of pilgrims. He represents liberal picture of Islam as Islam absorbed many old customs and ritual so that followers would be contented psychologically as their habit of going on pilgrimage continued.

He very successfully wrote religious history with key element of cultural history and proved that it is an ancient historical ritual. This is most interesting skill of the author to elaborate the cultural habits of Pre-Islam and after Islam Arabic society. Islamic doctrine borrowed many rituals such as funeral prayers, answerable on Day of Judgment and sacrifices performed on 10th Zil Hajj, belief that dead people will become alive on the Day of Judgment are followed by all the Muslims of the worlds. Islam being the world religion has blended many pan-Arabic rituals in it which has the capacity to blend further with the other cultures of the world. It is because of this Islam had become universal religion in a very limited span.

He also conveyed humility, humbleness and modesty with the help of poetry taking the examples of common people like Ala Ahsha who gives prayers to drunken Christian man.\textsuperscript{22} Kitab informs that in Arab culture prayers were considered as a very important element of religion. As it is significant for the behavioral, cognitive, emotional development of human being and in Arab cultures it matters a lot. He is of the opinion that prayers have civilized the Arab as they become patient and optimistic rather than rebellious and pessimistic.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.p.222-227
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.p.22
Tribal Historiography

Another important aspect of Arab society covered by the author is the information about Arab tribes. Ibn Habib apprises that Arabs were great warriors. There is no doubt about the fact that the Arabs possessed extraordinary martial spirit and excelled many other nations in the art of warfare. The Arabs had developed the habit of bloodshed and pillage to such an extent that some time for self-glorification they counted plunder as one of their honors. This fact is quite evident from their poetry and literature. One of the poets in the book is of the Age of Ignorance while observing the lowly condition and humbleness of his tribe in the matter of murder and plunder felt aggrieved and expressed his aspirations in these words: "O' that instead of belonging to this weak and worthless tribe I had been the member of a tribe whose men whether mounted or on foot always indulged in pillage and plunder and put an end to the lives of other". There were tribal jealousies and economic power make a tribe socially powerful. He gives an example of two tribes one is radical and very strictly follows religious practices and another one is very liberal which follow activities in their religious months.

He further explains that Arabian society was tribal; based on nomadic, semi-nomadic and settled populations. The settled populations had genealogies similar to those of the nomads and semi-nomads, identifying them as either 'northern' or 'southern' through the identity of their presumed eponyms. Not only did genealogy define the individual tribe, it also recorded its links with other tribes within families of tribes or tribal federations, each including several or many tribes. Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) tribe, Qureish, for example, was part of the Kinâna, and hence the other tribes of the Kinâna were its closest relatives. The settled populations, which probably included more people than the nomadic and the semi-nomadic populations put together, do not receive a proportionate share in the literary sources because the limelight are typically on the nomads, more precisely on their military activities, no matter how insignificant. Tribal informants focused on the military activities since the performance of town dwellers in the realms of trade and agriculture were less spectacular, and hence less contributive to tribal solidarity. After the Islamic conquests the tribes underwent significant changes, but they preserved their
genealogy and their rich oral heritage that was inseparable from the genealogy.23

Myths of Age of ignorance is also reminded by the author like a camel was confined by the side of a grave, they cut off the feet of a camel near a grave, treatment of diseases and burning fire for the coming of rains. However as the Arabs who had been ruled for ages by superstitious beliefs the Holy Prophet used to say: "All the traces of ignorance are under my feet" i.e. 'by the advent of Islam all the baseless customs beliefs and means of distinction have been annihilated and have been trampled under my feet'.

Ibn Habib’s Historiography

Ibn Habib historiography is characterized by a continuous narrative and genealogical form of history. The science of genealogy has been approved by the Quran as a source of knowledge when it says: "verily we created you in tribes and clans so that you may recognize each other".

According to the Encyclopedia of Muslim Historiography with the appearance of professional genealogist in the first century Hijra, Muslim historians started patronizing genealogy in history writing. The Arabs have an age-old practice of preserving their genealogical tables, and it was a special branch of knowledge among them. It was connected with their poetry too. Since the main topics of their poetry were the pride on nobility and ancestral glory, they preserved their family history in poetical composition. Ibn Habib’s form of history supports the importance of genealogical science coupled with poetry. However, in the second century, from A.D. 719 to 816, when books began to appear; production received a definite impetus by the practice of studying genealogy, particularly in relationship to the Prophet (PBUH). It is from this point that we have the beginnings of written Muslim history from which it is possible to arrive at an authentic narrative of events.

The connection between society and history was significantly understood by him. The amalgamation of the accounts of foreign faiths and cultures in old Muslim tradition of historiography is pursued by him. As he was poet himself therefore he mentions some account of the religious beliefs and social customs of its local

inhabitants in poetry. Whenever, historical information of a social nature was required, Ibn Habib collects data from verses, wrote with its knowledge for better depiction of culture.

Ibn Habib used literature of Arab like a painted tableau which makes us visualize the life of a family as well as a chain of natural scenes and tumultuous multitudes or theatres of crimes, training of the robbers, cultural, social domestic life. The poetry of the Arabs and the proverbs more than anything else show the real character of their history.

A historian desirous of becoming fully acquainted with the real spirit of a nation should not ignore its various intellectual monuments like poetry prose proverbs stories etc. Fortunately the Muslim scholars like Ibn Habib have as far as possible recorded the literature of the Arabs pertaining to the age of ignorance which portraits the social history as in Kitab ul Muhabbar. It is a collection of a large number of poems composed during the age of ignorance and he has arranged them in ten sections as Epic poems -Threnodies Literature - Lyric poems pertaining to the period of youth - Satires of individuals and tribes - Verses appropriate for hospitality and generosity - Eulogies - Qualities natural disposition and character - Wit and humor; and Maligning women get the reader's attention. This is followed by an account of the poet's journey, with the descriptions of horse or camel and of desert scenes and events. The main theme, at the end, is a tribute to the poet's patron, his tribe, or even himself and displays poet own knowledge.

Habib Baghdadi’s main objective is to portray the Arabs ancient civilization and describe pre-Islamic Arab society through social, religious and economic aspects. Forthishe uses references of Ibn Qalbi , Ibn Arabi, Ubaid, Abu Kartab and Abu ul Qeqzan because they were considered as the most authentic in the eyes of people As a historian he discharged his duties with great responsibility.

One more important feature of Ibn Habib's writing is that he compares the condition of pre-Islamic society with the Arab society after Islam. For instance, he compares between bloody robbers of pre-Islam and bloody robbers after Islam. 24 He ponders about and wrote down about the dissimilarities and what new developments in robberies have evolved. He draws the attention of reader that crime and violence was still existed in the society in spite of Islamic

teaching. He analyzes the similarities and dissimilarities and thus his writing can be called as comparative history writing.

Ibn Habib makes his best to find out continuity of many tradition, rituals, and family norms, before Islam and after Islam. But he did not give reasons for the discontinuity and elimination.

By the help of Functionalist theory, one can analyze that as Ibn Habib from his childhood suffered from class division and inequality on the basis of wealth so probably because of his suffering and his desire to overcome his guilt he wrote *Kitab al Muhabbar* in which he focuses on culture, ethics, passed stories and morals existed in society and tries to show that how can one improve them. Ibn Habib's life was full of struggle which is evident from his writing, as very sensitive and real life issues of society is discussed by him. May be because of his sensitiveness he remained indifferent of analytical historiography and associated himself very close with genealogical historiography. His desire to get place in his society as an educated slave and scholar forced him to stick with the real values of history. His history is a mixture of genealogy and literature and his historiography is about the inquiring about real objects of social history.

Professor Marwick says, Ibn Habib’s manuscript is authentic primary source book on Muslim history. It depicts history connected with anthropology, further elaborated by literature and which is a social, tribal, economic, cultural, religious history. He gives narrative information and leave to the reader to judge. The Muslims were able to expand the scope of history from mere recording of facts into a repository of economical, tribal, administrative, and cultural experiences and made fruitful essays into the analytical field as well and one such historian is Ibn Habib.

Ibn Habib has used Isnad as the main source. Though very seldom he mentions his authority but Ibn al Kelbi seems to be the principal authority for his writing.

**Conclusion**

Genealogical science is a ground root of Muslim historiography. Ibn Habib follows the genealogical form of history which goes hand in hand with the literature. He strives to see the past and future through mirror of lineages. Ibn Habib form of history is categorized as a new and unique added with the science of genealogies and art of
Genealogy is undoubtedly very important for Arab's pride and individuality. It is one way to construct history and left reader or audience to judge by his own aspect. His writing shows strong tribal historiography with their relationship and differences. His philosophy of history is to check the gene from the sociological point of view so the origins are vital figure. He traces Prophet PBUH relationships and found the purity of blood in long chain of son and son in laws. Thus the main feature of the work is the mass of genealogical material which is not found elsewhere in such a complete manner. It is interesting to note that these genealogies are concerned with the relationship on the mother's side going back to the mother, the mother's mother and the mother's mother's mother. As the book is filled of such lists but its value and the distinctive character is not the completeness of the material but the preference shown for this way of classifying it.

His major accomplishment is skillful blending of anthropology with history which helps to define physical appearance, ancestry, their environment and social and cultural relations of people. His center of attention throughout is on the development of a genealogical nationalism and significant cultural belief. His literature contributed ideas, stories of many murderer and robbers, poetry are only to focus on identity and highlighting the method to get fame of Arabs from the eyes of readers and from ears of listeners. It is also one way to remind past in relationship of literature. Beside literature his interest is to illustrate oral tradition and historical argument, additionally in subtle reflections on the nature of truth and its relationship to poetics, textually, and authority. For instance, Arab and Iran mixed poetry and Arab robber's beautiful poetry quoted by him helps him to tell many paradigms in one line. As an expert philologist his words are not merely words they represent the ideas of locals.

For him his goal are important than following traditional historiography. For example Ibn Habib is careless while quoting his sources but his contemporaries were careful to quote their authority. In spite of this Kitab al Muhabbar provides new material which is very significant to understand the pre Islamic Arab society. He tried to fill the gaps which remained unanswered by historian/sociologist of his times. Thus it can be said that it is a social history book.
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