

Situating Sarkar

*Tantra
Macrohistory &
Alternative Futures*



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CHAPTER V

Comparing Ibn Khaldun and P. R. Sarkar: Macrohistory and the Transcendent

Introduction

In this essay, we compare and contrast the works of Indian philosopher and activist P.R. Sarkar (1921-1990) and Islamic historian and founder of modern sociology Ibn Khaldun (732-802 AH or 1332-1406 in the Western formation of time) with the intent of seeing how their theories intersect.

The key text of Sarkar's we will use is his *The Human Society, Part 11* (as compiled in the *PROUT in a Nutshell* series), initially given as a series of talks in 1967 and the key text of Ibn Khaldun we will use is *The Muqaddimah* completed in 1377. Appropriately, given both their fascination in cycles approximately 600 years separate the two writings, but exact time is not their focus.¹ Both are concerned with the long wave of history, not with specific dates or minor trends.

Let us first summarize some initial comparisons and then attempt to develop them.

Similarities

- (1) Both wrote at a time of a decline in their respective civilizations. This influenced the variables, the discourses they chose to enliven, to bring out from the realm of the prediscursive.
- (2) Both underwent persecution and long imprisonment for their ideas, and their histories of the world clearly reflect the hardship they underwent in their personal lives.
- (3) Both were considered spiritual men, especially Sarkar in his role as guru of the spiritual organization Ananda Marga. Both are fundamentally influenced by their spiritual heritage: Islam for Khaldun and Tantra for Sarkar.
- (4) Both make a separation of God and the world. Although individuals can attain various levels of spirituality, it is the tension embedded in choice that gives rise to various alternative futures, not the will of the spirit. Khaldun and Sarkar's God is, for example, not Hegel's God. Their God does not attempt to work out His neuroses and victories through men and women in history .
- (5) Both see history as predominantly cyclical, although Sarkar, like Marx, develops a theory of rupture, a theory of a vanguard. For Sarkar and Khaldun, history continues its cycles, but the suffering, the tragedy of history will end when we are able to understand and transform the processes of history.

- (6) Both see in the decline phase of history, the rise of materialism, lethargy, luxury, and generally those characteristics presently associated with the Good Life as adverse symptoms of the decline phase in history.²
- (7) Both see unity, identification as key factors in macrohistory, although more for Khaldun than for Sarkar. Sarkar present a theory of sentiments, arguing that people become united in the short term when they have a mutually shared 'anti' feeling towards a person or group. When this negative sentiment is removed, the unity of the group falls apart. In the long term only the sentiment of universal humanism – seeing the fundamental preciousness of all beings – can unite a group. Khaldun's *asabiya* group feeling is more complex and more central to his argument.
- (8) Both are concerned with the impact of external factors (in addition to internal factors) in causing social change. Neither ignores environment nor conquest and plagues. Both attempt to develop associations between the internal factors of their cycles and the external variables. For example, Khaldun reminds us that disease, pestilence are more likely to occur in urban centers than in villages and, in fact, makes a plea for decentralization.
- (9) Both attempt to write a universal history, applicable for all states, through all time, even as they speak primarily to Islamic and Indian civilization, respectively.
- (10) Both are critical of their contemporary religious traditions. Khaldun at the soothsayers that persistently try to give comfort to a civilization that is declining, and Sarkar at the dogmas, exploitation, and idol worship of India's present religions.
- (11) Both write a history *through* time (diachronic) and both are concerned with, as Galtung uses it, thin history, not the history of a particular person or state, although Khaldun's complete historical works are quite a bit more thick than Sarkar's discourses on history. In addition, neither compares various civilizations through time to each other.
- (12) Both see culture, science and art as the finer, subtler aspects of civilization.
- (13) Both men, especially Khaldun, have an incredible sense of humor in their writing (Sarkar more in personal discourses, in day-to-day organizational management). Interspersed through their writings are a variety of jokes and stories. However, they both use humor to highlight the tragic decline of their respective civilizations. Nonetheless, it gives their writing a certain flavor that many other historians are unfortunately missing.

Differences

We now examine some basic differences.

- (1) Sarkar, while not placing God in history, however, does write that besides environmental and ideational struggle, the key motivation in history is Attraction towards the Great – an attraction towards perfection, the infinite, towards the spiritual, the transpersonal. Khaldun is not that clear on this point, although certainly the spiritual pervades his work. Thus, the following end to a section titled, The Ministry of Official Correspondence and Writing is not uncommon: 'May God take care of us and of you ... in the same way He takes care of those whom, as He knows in His prescience, He will make happy and guide a right. He can do it. It is in His hand.'³
- (2) While both men led varied and fascinating life journeys (instead of using the modern word career which is not the discourse we wish to evoke), Khaldun wrote *The Muqaddimah* primarily as a work of the science of history. He begins by criticizing various other

- historiographic projects, and argues that a real history must develop the causes of the rise and decline of power. While Sarkar also develops historical laws the purpose behind his historiography is to create the possibility of modifying these very historical laws (or to justify his preferred future). Sarkar evokes the tragedy of history, the suffering women, children, peasants and others on the margin have experienced. His larger purpose is not only rewriting history but creating a new discourse, a new cosmology.
- (3) Sarkar's texts do not only focus on history; in addition, he has written extensively on languages, economics, biology, consciousness and composed over 5000 Bengali songs. Sarkar is far more missionary than Khaldun as evidenced by the numerous social movements and organizations he initiated, although, Khaldun by virtue of his participation in various coups can also be considered a political activist. However while Khaldun was engaged in the numerous conquests and battles that constituted the Islamic world then, Sarkar remained far more interested in transforming the ideas, the collective psychology of the time (as his theory of history would predict him to).
- (4) The time difference between when each one lived is critical. While Sarkar might not have read the works of Hegel, Marx, Sorokin, Toynbee or Khaldun, certainly one can find similarity in many of their ideas in his texts. Toynbee's⁴ theory of challenge and response (elites who creatively respond to the physical and mental challenges facing their civilization help the group expand, otherwise the civilization declines) is present as is his Universal Church (the intellectual-priest era) and the Universal State (the warrior era), and his vision of a spiritual future. In addition, Toynbee's creative minority is similar to Sarkar's theory of leadership, his *sadvipras*.

From Sorokin we can see the similar emphasis on the prevailing ideas as a unifying idea in understanding history. Sorokin deduces history by answering the question of the nature of reality. From the materialistic answer (reality is only matter), we have Sensate civilization, to the idealistic answer (reality is fundamentally idea or mind), we have the Idealistic era, and from the both/and response, the mystical/world response, we get the Integral civilization. In addition, the Ideational society is isomorphic to the Vipran Era and the Sensate society is isomorphic to Ksattriyan and Vaeshyan civilizations. Sarkar's Shudra era is similar to Sorokin's Age of Chaos (when Sensate civilization disintegrates).

Sarkar's dialectics are similar to Hegel's, although placed in a Tantric framework. Like Marx, Sarkar makes the critical distinction of oppressed and oppressor, especially in capitalism, when everything and everyone become commodified, or as Sarkar would say, workers, warriors, and intellectuals become the 'bootlickers of the capitalists.'⁵ (5) Finally, as a point of difference and similarity, it could be argued that Khaldun's theory is a special case in Sarkar's⁶. From Sarkar's view, Khaldun's focus is the rise of the fall of the warrior era, as well as the transformation of the warrior era into the intellectual era. Let us turn to developing the points of similarity already mentioned.

Personal factors

The first three points deal with the relationship between their personal lives, the historical era that they wrote in, their deeper values and the relationship between these and their texts.

Both would begin this essay with the evocation of the Supreme, Khaldun with 'In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Pray O God for our master Muhammad, his

Family and the Men around him' and Sarkar with 'Those who perform *sadhana* (spiritual struggle) twice a day regularly, the thought of the Supreme Consciousness will certainly arise in their minds at the time of death; their liberation is a sure guarantee.' These evocations are significant in understanding these two men as both see their ultimate project as spiritual, the beginning and the end of their works.

Now let us examine their personal lives. Wali Al-Din Abd-ar-Rahman Abu Zayd ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis on May 27, 1332. He was tutored in the Quran, the Hadith, jurisprudence, Arabic poetry and grammar. His family history was that of scholars and statesman. The Ibn Khaldun family played an important part in the civil wars in Seville in the 9th century. In the next four centuries, they successively held high administrative posts under the Umayyad, Almoravid, and Almohad dynasties. In 1248 just before the fall of Seville and Cordoba, they moved to the northern coast of Morocco. Ibn Khaldun's father was an administrator and soldier who eventually devoted himself to theology, law and letters. Ibn Khaldun's parents died in 1349 when the Black Death struck Tunis. The importance of this event was not lost on Khaldun's scholarship. Later he would incorporate this dramatic event in sociology arguing that urbanization spread diseases, and that a decentralized system of civilization was needed.

Ibn Khaldun's personal life followed the pattern set by his family. Khaldun spent time in government but by 1357 was in prison (Sarkar too spent many years in prison, not for disloyalty to a particular king or sultan, but because of a deeper systemic disloyalty to the Indian system), but once the Abu Inan died, he was reinstated. Later on, Khaldun would write of the transference of power from kings to ministers, once unity and identification in the dynasty weakened. But for Sarkar, this transition from King to minister is that of eras, from the Warrior to the Intellectual.

The next eight or nine years, which saw much strife between the Merini and Hasfid dynasties in North-West Africa, were the most precarious in Ibn Khaldun's restless career. On the fall of Abu Abdallah, Ibn Khaldun raised a large force among the desert Arabs and entered the service of the Sultan of Tlemcen. A few years later he was taken prisoner.⁷

In 1384, his family died in a shipwreck. Among the most interesting episodes, judged from the present is his meeting with Tamerlane. In 1400, Tamerlane's Tartar armies invaded Syria and while in Damascus, Tamerlane asked to meet Khaldun. 'The latter was thereupon lowered over the city wall by ropes and spend seven weeks in the Tartar camp.'⁸ Like a good scholar, he proceeded to give various lectures on his theory of history to Tamerlane. However, he did not give Tamerlane the information he needed, namely, knowledge that could be used to conquer Egypt and the Islamic West.

It is not surprising then that he chose to write about the empirical causes of the rise and fall of dynasties concluding that history follows a cyclical pattern. As with macrohistorian Fernand Braudel, who wrote while in prison and without a library and thus could write at the level of macrohistory, Khaldun too wrote without a library: 'with words and ideas pouring into my head like cream into a churn and without the use of a library.'⁹ Sarkar, too, interestingly enough did not use any specific sources in his *The Human Society* as well as his other works, for that matter.

Sarkar's life is as interesting as Khaldun's. He was born in May of 1921 in Bihar of an old and respected family that had its roots in regional leadership and in ancient spiritual traditions. Sarkar's father worked with the British Railways Office and as a volunteer worker for medical

clinics in poor areas. His father died of Kala-azar fever while aiding others in an earthquake. In his early years he frequently would expose the hypocrisy of various religious groups (believing they were parasites) and was nearly killed by a group of them. He finished two years of college but eventually left it to support his family by working as an auditor in the railways. He spent a short time in the Indian Army and then returned to the railways. In the late 1950's at the request of some of spiritual students, he formed a spiritual organization, called Ananda Marga (The Path of Bliss). Eventually by the late 1960's, it had become a popular spiritual *and* socialist, service oriented movement in India. In the late 1960's the government made it illegal for civil servants to be members of Ananda Marga. In 1971, he was charged with multiple murders and theft and imprisoned. During the Indian Emergency, all organizations related to Sarkar were banned. Schools were shut down and members, especially Ananda Marga monks and nuns, were tortured. Despite the efforts to investigate (and release Sarkar) by international organizations such as the International Commission of Jurists, Sarkar was tried and sentenced. With the removal of Indira Gandhi, a new trial was held, leading to his eventual release. In protest of an attempt to poison him by prison authorities (through an overdose of barbiturates), Sarkar fasted on liquids for five of his seven years in jail. After his release, he lived in Calcutta and conducted the affairs of his various organizations, until he passed away in 1990.

Both Sarkar and Khaldun spent a great deal of time in prison. And as Khaldun saw thousands killed, Sarkar watched while the mass media vilified him, hundreds of his volunteers were imprisoned and tortured, and Communist cadre murdered more than 30 of his unarmed workers over the years. His organization virtually disappeared in the 1970's in India (it grew outside of India). But while Khaldun was the scholar and statesman, Sarkar constituted himself differently. He was primarily the *guru*, and his purpose was not scholarship but a *mission*: to bring people to the spiritual path and create a society where that is easily possible.

The stories of these men indicate the significance of cycles within their life. Sarkar, interestingly was an intellectual, part of the business class (as an auditor), part of the warrior class (in the Army), and active in social service (*shudra*). Thus, it is not surprising that his vision of the ideal leadership is one that is based on the complete mind, the mastery of *varna*.

It is then not surprising that Khaldun and Sarkar emerge with cyclical theories. From Sarkar's view India is in ruins, controlled by the very worst in ideas and in men and women. As he writes, 'On the basis of (various) arguments a handful of parasites have gorged themselves on the blood of millions of people, while countless people have been reduced to living skeletons.'¹⁰

The infinite and the finite

However, Sarkar's theory as mentioned earlier is not entirely cyclical, for it is possible to eliminate the exploitation, the decline of each cycle. Moreover, Sarkar's response has been to develop movements that challenge the various institutions and ideologies that maintain the 'staticity' of society. Moreover, while we might expect cyclical historians to be pessimistic, both Khaldun and Sarkar are optimists.

For Khaldun, it is in the Other of God that he rests his optimism. The Grace of God is central. For Sarkar, there is divinity and there is choice; it is women and men who express this choice in their daily thoughts and worldview. For humans are thinking beings, rational beings, capable of discrimination.

For Khaldun, as well, it is men and women who are makers of history. But then what is the relationship between the Divine and history. What is the role of the transcendental in history? Lenn Goodman articulates Khaldun's perspective brilliantly:¹¹

What answer then has Ibn Khaldun to the problem of values and of God in history? . . . The laws of human and social nature (if not those of human existence) bring men into conflict, cause them to overstep. In the dialectic of history each man in his society pursues what may seem good which lead both to virtue and to vice and ... contain, their own retribution and their own reward. For societies, as for individuals, crime and punishment, virtue and reward are inextricable from one another. ... Every empire or horde [must] live the life which is in its nature and die the death which is of its nature.

But this finiteness is unacceptable to man. Man seeks to expand through 'group feelings', *asabiya*, through identification, in family, clan, dynasty and empire. While this is similar to Sarkar's attraction to the Great, it is more central to Khaldun's theory for it covers all relations, all bonds. For Khaldun,¹²

The true answer to the problem of evil (and of failure) in history was to be found in the tragic finitude of men and all that they create, a finitude at once noble and degrading, which God in His wisdom and grace bestowed upon men and nations, allowing them to *live and causing them to die through a nature of their own.* (emphasis added)

In the end it is only God that is eternal. In Khaldun's words:¹³

He is all powerful and nothing in heaven or on earth is impossible for Him or escapes Him. He raised us up from the Earth and gave us breath, let us live on earth as nations and tribes, gave us our portion and sustenance from the earth. The wombs of our mothers and our houses were our shelters. Food keeps us alive. Time wears us out, and our fate, which has been fixed in the Book, comes. But He endures. He lives and does not die.

What of Sarkar, how does he resolve the problem of the infinite and the finite in history? Sarkar moves back and forth between the language of the philosopher and the language of the spiritualist. As the philosopher, he argues that human existence is fundamentally physical, mental and spiritual. Ultimately, Supreme Consciousness is real, but the relative world is real although it changes through time and space and is perceived differently by each observer. While the purpose of life – as developed in the Tantras and the Vedas – is to achieve union with the Supreme Consciousness, creating a good society wherein individuals have the social and economic means to develop their spiritual potential is also part of Sarkar's project. However, building a good society wherein the transcendental can become available is impossible in a world of economic bondage and political slavery. In his *Neo-Humanism: the Liberation of Intellect*, Sarkar comments, 'Due to the bondage of various types of exploitation and tyranny against the intellect in the physical sphere, the human spirit bursts out, writhing in suppressed agony.'¹⁴
And:¹⁵

We should not forget even for a single moment that this whole inanimate world is a large joint family in which nature has not assigned any property to any particular individual. . . . When the whole property of this universe has been inherited by all creatures, how can there be any justification for the system in which someone gets a flow of huge excess, while others die for a handful of grains?

For Sarkar the key in relating to the Infinite is in relating to the human (as well as animals, plants, and in fact all that is) and developing a cooperative, equitable social structure.

For Sarkar, human suffering is a result of a defective and inequitable social order. He writes:¹⁶

We are all moving towards the Supreme Consciousness, both individually and collectively. But we will not be able to move ahead if we compromise with all the disparities and inequalities of collective life. We should eradicate all these inequalities, while at the same time move together towards the our spiritual goal. The progress of all would be accelerated if the inequalities were removed, if this was the motivation behind our movement towards the Supreme Being.

For Sarkar, besides the social order, also significant is the internal battle. Embedded in the universe is a constant pull and push between the mind going to the external or *avidya* (the material world of temporality – fame, power, and wealth) and the inner world or *vidya* (of bliss, compassion and love). The goal is to create a society where it is easier for mind to move towards the inner world.

Thus, for Sarkar, as we might expect, there is a clear battle between good and bad. In his words,¹⁷

. . . the conflict between *vidya* and *avidya* will continue forever. So the necessity of having police or military force in greater or lesser degree will be eternally felt. Of course with the establishment of a world government, its necessity will decrease. With the perpetual fight between *vidya* (good forces) and *avidya* (evil forces) the class rivalry is bound to persist, more or less. Hence, those who fly on the wings of imagination for sitting idle and living a life in repose on the establishment of a classless society will have to become disappointed.

While he is optimistic at the possibility of the creation of a new order, he at the same time reminds us, by definition, there will not be a perfect society. Perfection is possible at the individual level through spiritual practices but not at the social level. The forces of *vidya* and *avidya* provide the metaphysical justification for his theory of history. At the level of the material world, these basic forces lead to physical and mental struggle. The force that leads to individual bliss is that of the attraction of the Great – the search for perfection, unity, and bliss, the death of death.

This is in sharp contrast to Western thought where the goal has been to create a perfect society. However, in this pursuit of perfection, the rights of women, children those in periphery have consistently been violated whether through communism, capitalism, and fascism. The transcendent God is made immanent in history at the level of the nation or a particular race or group thus allowing nations or groups to claim that God is theirs' alone.

Hegel as a foil

But while both Khaldun and Sarkar differ in their perspective of the ability of men and women to influence the future (Sarkar with a clear vision of an alternative society, Khaldun more as a sociologist with a general theory of factors needed for a good society), when we look at the work and their reading of history, we find basic commonalities. We further see their similarities if we examine Hegel, who too is committed to the spiritual and too has a philosophy of history. For Hegel, 'world history exhibits the development of the consciousness

of freedom on the part of the spirit, and of the consequent realization of that freedom.¹⁸ History in Hegel's view works behind the back of individuals, that is, there is Providence and reason to all events, it is the spirit expressing itself in history. Moreover, this spirit expresses itself in world history through states. Thus history has a notion of progress, but it is a particular notion, one nested in the State. And every nation has a peculiar contribution which it is destined, in its turn, to make to the process of world history. Furthermore, this progress is facilitated by great individuals, the Napoleons. They are the chosen instruments of destiny. For Hegel, his Prussian State then was the will of the spirit, the finest expression of freedom. But as W. Walsh argues in his *The Philosophy of History*, 'why should the plot end then?'¹⁹ He quotes Hegel as having written, 'America is the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the world's history will reveal itself.'²⁰

Rejecting Kant's notion of perpetual peace, Hegel saw struggle as the key to history, but it is not Sarkar's struggle against the environment, or with old/new ideas, but war. War prevents stagnation and preserves the 'ethical health of nations. It is the chief means by which a people's spirit acquires renewed vigor or a decayed political organism is swept aside and gives place to a more vigorous manifestation of the Spirit.'²¹ For Sarkar, war is the darkest blot on humanity's record – it is fought with workers, for the sake of kings and ministers and capitalists. While this is not the place to look at Hegel's personal history, had he lived in a periphery, or spent years in prison, perhaps his reading of history might have been different. For as Copleston reminds us:

once the transcendent God has been transformed into the Hegelian Absolute and judgement has been made purely immanent in history itself, no escape is left from the world-historical point of view, all the events and actions which form movements in the self-manifestation of the Absolute are justifying ... moral questions are then irrelevant.²²

The philosophy of history

Fortunately neither Khaldun nor Sarkar construct their history as Hegel does. How do they then construct their histories?

First, both are critics of most historiography. Early Muslim writing was largely anecdotal and biographical in nature. This then gave way to the annalistic forms of writing covering court annals, histories of dynasties, of Muslim conquests and the such. For Khaldun, most history is simply about how 'people settled the earth until their time was up ... The inner meaning of history, on the other hand, involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth, subtle explanation of the causes and origins of existing things, and deep knowledge of the how and why of events.'²³ Sarkar is critical of most historiography as well:

During the last million years of human history, . . . a particular class . . . has been given greater importance than others. For instance, when a soldier sacrifices his life on the battlefield, his death is announced in bold headlines in newspapers, but the same newspapers do not mention anything about the great hardships that his widow faces to raise their small family.'²⁴

Moreover, 'history is always written according to the dictates of the ruling class of different eras.'²⁵ Thus, kings write histories about their conquests, intellectuals about their theories, and capitalists about their business deals and fortunes. For Sarkar, however, history should inspire

people to face the struggles of the future. History then is an asset, a tool to help face tomorrow and understand yesterday.

Both Khaldun and Sarkar search for fundamental historical patterns, basic laws. For Khaldun the central concept is group feeling, unity. The word literally means the fibre or sinew by which a group is held together. It is that which binds people into effective groups. Once this concept is understood, then we can understand history, for the laws of group identity are the laws of history.

When *asabiya* is strong, there is legitimacy, when it is weak, then dynasties fall, empires are conquered, and a new group with a stronger *asabiya* rises. But before the end, there is a final flair. In Khaldun's words:

Group feeling has often disappeared (when the dynasty has grown senile) and pomp has taken the place it occupied in the souls of men. Now, when in addition to the weakening of group feeling, pomp, too, is discontinued, the subjects grow audacious vis a vis the dynasty. At the end of a dynasty, there often also appears some (show of) power that gives the impression that the senility of the dynasty has been made to disappear. *It lights up brilliantly just before it is extinguished, like a burning wick, the flame of which leaps up brilliantly a moment before it goes out, giving the impression it is just starting to burn, when in fact it is going out.*²⁶ (emphasis added)

In his brilliant section on how dynasties disintegrate, he describes the breakdown and the loss of dynastic group feeling. With frequent in-fighting, the ruler has to eliminate and humiliate the contenders – legitimacy is destroyed. What results is a new but much weaker group feeling. This leads to the further decline. Eventually, people who do not share in the group feeling of the elite take charge, but their commitment is not as strong and the dynasty is split and can be easily overthrown.

Group feeling also decreases with imperial expansion. More funds must be paid out to the soldiers and to the masses. With increased luxury, group feeling decreases. Thus to deal with crises, rulers pay out more money, which hastens the decline. This is in sharp contrast to the beginning of the dynasty, when it had a desert attitude – with no extravagant expenditures, a sense of royal authority and with regular fasting and other spiritual practices by the leaders.

But luxury is not always the downfall. Khaldun's theory is far more sophisticated than that. For example, in the beginning of a dynasty luxury actually leads to increased group feeling and royal authority as it brings on more children. The population of the leadership expands. It is only in subsequent generations that the non-productive elite become problematic and bring on their own decline.

Dynasties, power, thus has clear stages. 'Through the conditions that are peculiar to a particular state, the supporters of the dynasty acquire in that stage traits of character such as do not exist in any other stage. Traits of character are the natural result of the peculiar situations in which they are found.'²⁷

The first stage is that of success, the overthrow of all opposition, and the appropriation of royal authority from the preceding dynasty.²⁸ Thus the new group does not have to start all over, it has learned from the previous. In this stage, the ruler is benevolent and does not claim all authority for himself. In the second stage, the ruler consolidates power and makes himself the sole executive, so as to exclude others from their various claims of royal authority. In the third stage, 'the fruits of royal authority are enjoyed: the things that human nature desires such as acquisition of property, creation of lasting monuments, and fame.'²⁹ In the fourth stage,

there is contentment and peace. He imitates the previous ruler and become conservative, not departing from tradition. In the fifth and final stage, there is waste and squandering. He loses legitimacy and there is waste and squandering. This is the stage of senility and the dynasty is destroyed.

Thus dynasties rise, consolidate power, expand, grow old, senile and then die. This rise and fall is the rise and fall of *unity*, *identity* and *legitimacy*, or in one word – *asabiya*. New dynasties emerge at the periphery among provincial governors or among rebels with a stronger group feeling. However, the new dynasty comes to power not through sudden action, but through perseverance. Battle after battle, until eventually the senility not to mention the pestilences and famines of urban centers bring it down. And of course, then, the new dynasty follows the cycle of the previous one; it will rise and fall.

The pattern of history then is a primitive-civilization-primitive cycle. In the primitive stage, through struggle, *asabiya* is built up. In the civilization stage, the bonds of unity weaken and over four generations society degenerates. Unity is then regained when the next group of desert Bedouins expand into the city and take over the declining civilization.

Can one then predict the future of dynasties? Here Khaldun resorts to astrology and talks of Jupiter and Saturn conjunctions. There are three types of conjunctions, the first indicates great events such as transference of royal authority, the second the appearance of persons in search of royal authority, and the third the appearance of propagandists. He also comments of Al-Kindi which predicted the future of Islam, but in characteristic Khaldun, we are told that we have not found any information concerning it, 'Perhaps it was lost with those books which Hulagu, the ruler of the Tatars, threw into the Tigris, when the Tatars took possession of Baghdad and killed the last caliph, al Musta'sim.'³⁰

Sarkar's approach is again similar to Khaldun's. Khaldun begins with the necessary physical and natural environment that gives rise to civilization, and then moves to *asabiya*; Sarkar too begins with the natural environment. This is developed in his discourse titled, 'The Future of Civilization.'³¹ For him, both individual and society are dependent on three factors: existence, development and bliss (*asti*, *bhati* and *ananda*). *Asti* is material existence and its requirements (shelter, food, clothing, education, and medical facilities). According to Sarkar, for the development of a group of people, the following factors are needed: (1) spiritual ideology – the philosophy of self and consciousness; (2) *sadhana* – a process by which the ideology can be empirically realized – that is spiritual practices which can provide a method to attain the goal of the ideology; (3) socio-economic theory – a theory of value and its distribution and growth; (4) fraternal social outlook – a worldview in which all are existentially equal and all come from the same Supreme Consciousness; (5) scripture – by this Sarkar means an authoritative text that can be referred to for inspiration and for self and societal knowledge; and finally (6) preceptor – here Sarkar means that each society for its development must have a founder, someone who can show the way. Khaldun would probably agree with his factors, but add group feeling and royal authority.

For true development all these factors must be there, in Sarkar's view. A socio-economic theory without fraternity is no use as it would advantage some over others; spiritual ideology without *sadhana* (spiritual effort) would be no use, as the spiritual tradition would become autocratic and colonized by a particular priestly class; moreover, without spiritual practices the personal realization of truth would remain missing. Now why does he emphasize scripture and preceptor? These two provide continuity, they provide inspiration and give a society focus – they provide a coherent center.

Civilizations die because they are missing particular factors. Other civilizations colonize them, but in the process lose their own vibrancy – thus the Islamic wave became weakened after it had overtaken the Egyptian civilization and thus was unable to overtake Europe and India. And Sarkar argues that the Roman civilization was lacking in social outlook (it included slavery), the lack of ‘proper socio-economic theory had generated a kind of a fascist mentality. Those rolling in luxury from free labor became indolent. Naturally, they were defeated by a stronger and more strenuous force.³² This appears very similar to group feeling, especially when defined as unity, identity and legitimacy, the way I interpret Khaldun to mean it.

Those groups that have these factors will reach *Ananda* or Bliss, that is a society where individuals live in peace and justice, and where spiritual development is possible. He uses the term bliss to denote not only a bright future, but to denote the spiritual. The real progress is only spiritual. In the spiritual field, due to the absence of reactive momenta (desires and past experiences which impact the mind) there is no clash, there is only forward movement, and this is the nature of true progress.³³

Now instead of dynasties, Sarkar's follows the development of mind. But this is not a metaphysical development, for mind emerges from the clashes and cohesion of history. Thus, it is through history that Sarkar's fourfold division emerges – the worker, the warrior, the intellectual, and the acquirer. Obviously, the roots of this division go back to India's history. However, Sarkar points out that it is only in the intellectual era that these divisions become instituted as the caste system, for it was the intellectual parasites who reified the divisions in order to achieve wealth without work – a parasitic non-productive elite.

For Sarkar, history is the evolution of these types of minds, with each coming into power and bringing massive (some good, most exploitative) changes and then eventually out of each perspective, paradigm, the new one emerges. Out of the struggle with the environment, the warrior class arose. The mightiest became the leaders. To devise ways to continue their expansion, they resorted to the help of intellectual ministers and priests. In Sarkar words:³⁴

These intellectuals gradually wrested the right of controlling society from the hands of the warriors, and with the help of the warrior power they established their own sway and dominance over society. ...They (convinced) the warriors that worshipping the Brahmins or intellectuals was the chief virtue and characteristic of the powerful warriors ... They (the warriors) submitted their signatures and seals to the intelligence, shrewdness and deceit of the intellectuals.

In the warrior era, unity is the key, it is an era of gallantry and heroism, of the protection of the weak and the poor, as well as the butchery of other nations and tribes. It is this era, that Khaldun, from the Sarkarian perspective, wrote mostly about. Thus, his emphasis on group identification. But Khaldun also points to the usurpation of power by intellectuals in the decline of dynasties:

When royal authority is firmly established in on particular family and branch of the tribe supporting the dynasty, and when that family claims all royal authority for itself and keeps the rest of the tribe away from it, and when the children of (that family) succeed to the royal authority in turn, by appointment, then it often happens that their *wazirs* and entourage gain power over the throne. This occurs most often when a little child or a weak member of the family is appointed successor by his father or made ruler by his creatures and servants. . . Eventually, it becomes clear that he exercises the control, and

he uses the fact as a tool to achieve royal authority. . . All actual executive power are believed (by the child ruler) to belong to the *wazir*. He defers to him all these things. Eventually the *wazir* definitely adopts the coloring of the leader, of the man in control. . . Once a dynasty has fallen into the hands of the *wazirs* and clients, it remains in that situation. Rarely is it able to escape from it, because (such control by others) is mostly the result of living in luxury and the fact that the royal princes have grown up immersed in prosperity. They have forgotten the ways of manliness [the desert ways] and have become accustomed to the character traits of wet nurses, and they have grown up that way. They do not desire leadership.³⁵

The *wazir* (intellectual) then 'even though he exercises full control ... He disguises his control under the form of a ruler's representative.'³⁶

Also from Sarkar's perspective, indicative of Khaldun's influence of the warrior era is his understanding of royal authority. Royal authority is considered a necessity so as to avoid groups fighting, to give social cohesion. Thus, the king provides a superordinate authority. According to Khaldun, 'he must dominate them and have power and authority over them, so that none of them will be able to attack another. This is the meaning of royal authority.'³⁷

For Sarkar, each era brings about developments which lead to reduced suffering and oppression as well. For example, 'running a state within the framework of laws or controlling the governmental procedures with the help of a written or unwritten constitution, instead of by royal whims and caprices, is indeed the contribution of the intellectual genius.'³⁸

But in general the intellectuals were parasites building up exploitive ideologies, enslaving females, and starting religious wars. While the birth of new philosophies led to intellectual progress, it did not lead to benevolence towards the workers, and others marginal to the system.

Thus, while the workers live in the present, and the warriors in the past and present (the stories of glory), the intellectual lives in past, present and future. But his future is not the future-oriented time of modernity, it is the transcendental future, the future of metaphysical idealism. But it is the future time of modernity that leads to the next group arising.³⁹

The bondage of the material world keeps them so viciously in its octopus-like grip, that in spite of their intelligence, they do not have courage to [challenge the acquirers]. . . The Intellectual age dies but not the intellectuals themselves. The blood-sucking acquirers get volumes of philosophical books written and truth tactfully and artfully perverted and distorted with the help of the paid intellectuals.

Neglecting the material and overconfident in their intellectual powers, they do not see the dawn of the new era, until it is too late. Thus begins the era of the acquirers. And it is in this era that although there is some economic progress, by and large the life for the masses becomes brutal and all become slaves to the capitalists. For the acquirers are 'the murderous parasites of the social tree who want to kill the main tree by sucking out all its sap'⁴⁰ until there is a worker's revolution or evolution, and then the cycle begins again. And so it goes.

Khaldun did not write a great deal of the capitalist class, except that subsequent dynasties engage in luxury and must use money to keep allegiance and that individual merchants should be protected, but again that was not his focus. From Sarkar's perspective, because that era had yet to arrive, although there had been merchant communities, by and large the prevailing ideas were those of the intellectual era, but the mini-cycle was that of the warrior (in addition the Mongols imposed the warrior era back on the Islamic world). As with any theory of cycles, there are obvious levels of sophistication – cycles within cycles, and instead of only the birth,

adulthood, senility, death metaphor, we have Sarkar's pulsation metaphor. Here there are a variety of speeds in cycles; that is, there are periods of rest and then periods of movement. Khaldun too alludes to this in his various stages of royal authority.

Conclusion

The essay has compared Khaldun's theory of the strengthening and weakening of *asabiya* (leading to the rise and fall of dynasties) with Sarkar's theory of social change. While six hundred years separate the two writers the similarities in their personal lives, theories of social change and the role of the transcendental in history are remarkable. This essay has attempted to develop some of these comparisons.

Further research might begin the process of serious deconstruction of both their theories, asking what epistemological frames are privileged by their historiography. Fascinating would be to apply Khaldun's group feeling and royal authority concepts to the modern world system. If we accept Immanuel Wallerstein's⁴¹ argument that the world system began in the 15th century and instead of breaking down into mini-systems or integrated into a world empire, it became a global capitalist system, then how would Khaldun's work better understand this evolution. How might the shift in core areas from Britain to the US and now possibly to Japan be understood using Khaldun's theoretical structure? How does Sarkar deal with these shifts? We can also inquire as to who are the emerging Bedouins? Which groups have *asabiya*. The Pacific Rim nations? The social movements? But these are questions for another day. In the meantime we are thankful that *The Muqaddimah* did not disappear in a sand dune, and thus instead of being our meal, was the cause of a camel's indigestion or fuel for the sacking of a civilization. We are equally thankful that Sarkar's discourses were written down and thus available to all instead of to any particular *varna*.

Notes

1. Interestingly, both were the same age when they completed their contributions to the writing of history – around 46. What this says about the life cycle of an individual is unclear except that to write a macro history, it might be better to have lived a good deal and had a variety of experiences but not lived too long such that one's perspective becomes further clouded by one's history.
2. As one doctoral candidate wrote in his comprehensive questions when asked what various philosophers such as Aquinas and Kant thought about the nature of the good life of: 'They never wrote about the good life, only of the moral life.' Personal communication by Harold McCarthy. September 1976, Honolulu, Hawaii.
3. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*. Translated by Franz. Rosenthal. N.J. Dawood, ed., New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1967, 206.
4. See, for example, Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah, *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians* (forthcoming). Also see Ravi Batra, *The Downfall of Capitalism and Communism*. Dallas, Venus, 1990.
5. P.R. Sarkar, *PROUT in a Nutshell*. Vol 5. Translated by Acarya Vijayananda

- Avadhuta, Calcutta, Ananda Marga Publications, , 1987, 64.
6. Ravi Batra has made this argument. See his, *Muslim Civilization and the Crisis in Iran*. Dallas, Venus Books, 1980.
 7. Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, viii.
 8. *The New Encyclopedia Britannica – Micropaedia*, 15th edition, 1988, s.v. 'Ibn Khaldun,' 223. For more on this encounter with Tamerlane, see Walter Fischel, *Ibn Khaldun and Tamerlane*. Berkeley, 1952.
 9. Lenn Goodman, 'Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides,' *Journal of American Oriental Society* (Vol. 92, Number 2, 1972), 251.
 10. Sarkar, *Namah Shivaya Shantaya*, Calcutta, Ananda Marga Publications, 1982, 165.
 11. Goodman, 269-270.
 12. Goodman, 270.
 13. Quoted in Goodman, 270.
 14. P.R. Sarkar, *Neo-Humanism: The Liberation of Intellect*. Calcutta, Ananda Marga, 1983, 70.
 15. P.R. Sarkar, *Problem of the Day*, Calcutta, Ananda Marga Publications, 1968, 2-3.
 16. Sarkar, *Neo-Humanism*, 38.
 17. Sarkar, *The Supreme Expression*, Vol. II, 87.
 18. W. Walsh, *Philosophy of History*, New York, Harper and Row, 1960, 143.
 19. W. Walsh, *The Philosophy of History*, 143.
 20. *ibid.*
 21. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol VII, London, Burns and Oates, 1963, 218.
 22. Copleston, 224.
 23. Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 5.
 24. Sarkar, *Neo-Humanism*, 92.
 25. Sarkar, *A Few Problems Solved*. Vol. 4. Trans. Acarya Vijayananda Avadhuta, Calcutta, Ananda Marga Publications, 1987, 67.
 26. Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 246.
 27. Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 141.
 28. *ibid.*
 29. *ibid.*, 142.
 30. *ibid.*, 261.
 31. P.R. Sarkar, *PROUT in a Nutshell*. Vol. 6. Translated by Acarya Vijayananda Act, Calcutta, Ananda Marga Publications, 1987, 25-31.
 32. Sarkar, *The Supreme Expression*, Vol. II, 99.
 33. *ibid.*, 105.
 34. Sarkar, *PROUT in a Nutshell*, Vol. 5. Translated by Acarya Vijayananda Avadhuta. Calcutta, Ananda Marga Publications, 1987, 16-17.
 35. Ibn Khaldun as quoted in Ravi Batra, *Muslim Civilization and the Crisis in Iran*. Dallas, Venus Books, 1980, 114-115.
 36. *ibid.*, 116.
 37. Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* , 47.
 38. Sarkar, *PROUT In a Nutshell*, Vol. 5, 51.
 39. Sarkar, *PROUT In a Nutshell*, Vol. 5, 65.
 40. *ibid.*, 78.

41. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Politics of the World Economy: the States, the Movements and the Civilizations*. London, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

