

# **Comparative Analysis of the Contributions of Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte to the Development of Sociology**

## **1. Introduction**

Sociology has made a long journey since the days of Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte. The essay undertakes a comparative analysis of both scholars in sociology. The study has two objectives: (i) to recognize the contributions of Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte, and (ii) to understand their relevance even today in the discipline of sociology. Modern sociology evolved as a separate branch of sociology. Both Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte are considered the founders of sociology, but the perspectives of Auguste Comte are more popular.

Both Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte were not sociologists per se, because they were not living in the modern era and the social sciences were not demarcated into separate branches. Moreover, the contemporary canons of the scientific method were not developed. Nevertheless, they have great influence, and their writings contributed significantly to the development of the subject of sociology. Moreover, both of them are primarily philosophers and other scientists. The main areas where the thoughts of Auguste Comte and Ibn Khaldun are relevant even today are methodological contributions. Both of them were pioneers in this area. Moreover, modern sociology is a highly advanced subject, and it has gone much beyond the thoughts of the old scholars. Still, the study of the thoughts of these two scholars convinces us that the modern subject has taken its cradle in the writings of these two scholars.

Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte have been variously referred to as the beacon lights in the domain of speculative sociology. There is not an iota of doubt that sociology has been enriched by their vivid thoughts, behind which lies the working of perceptive minds. There are many features that the thoughts of these two great thinkers share with modern sociology. This has been a point of interest to sociologists, investigating which, more often than not, gives valid lessons to be

learned. In the academic analysis of sociology, the aspects spelled out in the writings of Comte and Khaldun have been repeatedly underscored, which bears testimony to the relevance that their thoughts have to modern sociology. Throughout this essay, we will have a detailed exposition on the thoughts of Comte and Khaldun, focusing on their common features, which find a parallel study in modern sociology. Despite their giant strides of original contributions, the octaves of commonality that pervade their thoughts enable us to construct at least a possibility of belonging. We will describe the ideas of Ibn Khaldun and Comte in this essay and their relevance and status in contemporary social sciences.

## **2. Historical Context**

Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte made vast contributions to the development of sociology, each fostering new directions in the field. Without an understanding of our human past, we are not able to develop an accurate sociology of the present or future. Thus, the work of Comte and Khaldun provides a valuable foundation for sociological inquiry. However, it is essential to take into account that they both looked at the world through eyes that were forged under incredibly diverse historical conditions. Khaldun developed his theories in the desperation of fleeing from empire to empire for safety. The world conditions under which Comte developed his new discipline of sociology were strikingly different. Western Europe had just come out of the innumerable revolutions that followed the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries to predate a wave of further capitalist expansion fueled by the Industrial Revolution.

Ibn Khaldun was directly involved in policy and politics of the time he lived. He was close to Tamerlane and wrote for him concerning the reign of the Berbers in North Africa. As a direct observer of several empires from the 14th and early 15th centuries, he was able to draw from real life in illustrating his views on empires and what their fate must be. Auguste Comte, on the other hand, was of middle-class French parentage and saw life in the context of a France that was coming to terms with the excitement and turmoil of the Enlightenment. Europe's age of exploration had revealed to her a host of great civilizations Africa and Asia already knew existed, like China, Japan, and countries that would become a great empire in later times such as the Americas and Australia. Such energetic experiences were bound to lend themselves to doubts concerning the sanctity of a political theology that for centuries past justified and gave strength to the great feudal order. The grip of this

order had hardly been loosened when Comte was growing up and the erosion of its hold on society was in the air and in radical newspapers all around.

### **2.1. Background of Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte**

Ibn Khaldun was a Berber scholar from North Africa who was a statesman, judge, teacher, political philosopher, historian, and sociologist of Berber descent whose family originated in Andalusia. He was born in present-day Tunisia, on the Mediterranean coast near the Algerian border. His parents, who had immigrated to Tunisia after Spain was conquered, were recognized members of the governing class on the Iberian Peninsula. He grew up in Tunisia and North Africa when it was part of the Islamic Caliphate, which is where he received much of his education. While he was still a minor, he received the excellent education that was customary for young people of the ruling class in Islamic society. He was taught the entire humanities around the age of 15 by leading scholars.

Of great importance to his thinking was his father's position as secretary to the Moroccan Sultan, the new ruler of Tunis, and the underlying education that enabled him to interact with Sunni scholars from all over northern Africa, meaning that he learned a great deal about administration, acting as an ambassador to the courts of the caliph in Egypt and Arab dynasties in Spain. He worked as an administrator, negotiating with the various powerful emirs and advisers and overseeing tax collection and transport of wheat. His work, essentially, was to govern the surroundings of Tunis. Neither a devout practitioner of Islam nor a pure scientific thinker, he was both ambitious and firmly rooted in the affairs of his age. He was a reactionary, raised with little respect for the contemporary abundance of learning in Islamic countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. His political theory and ideas were heavily shaped by both his education and his overseas experiences. He had no real hope of a legal position with his father's connections, so he concentrated on attaining high political office. His life in 14th-century North Africa was mostly spent in this ambience.

## **3. Key Concepts in Sociology**

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The perspective of each theorist in a discipline depends on key concepts that he introduces and the central tenets constituting the theoretical framework. For any theory to grow, it is in the interest of the theorist to indirectly promote the

accumulation of data. This section explores the two constructs or social structures that are the basis of sociology in documents. In his work, Ibn Khaldun introduced the terminology *Asabiyyah*, which he used throughout his text to coin an understanding of group dynamics and the origin of communities or societies. In essence, *Asabiyyah* refers to a community group because of collective identity and solidarity that also affect their affiliation and loyalty to each other.

Through his concept of *Asabiyyah*, Khaldun is said to form societies, whether through urban development or rural-urban migration. In sociology, Khaldun is currently referred to as the origin of cosmopolitan society. This is in direct contrast to the formulation of the Law of Stages proposed by another theorist. Societies that succeed or develop in Khaldun's observation are based on the moral and solidarity that hold the community together. The approach of this theorist in understanding and discussing social structures focuses on the analysis of the structure of society, the interaction among the elements that form society, the obstacles, and the mechanisms of change; and the exclusively historical approach and appreciation of the possibilities for change have become a dead end that leads, in this case, to the cessation of progress.

### **3.1. Ibn Khaldun's Concept of Asabiyyah**

Ibn Khaldun is renowned for his concept of *Asabiyyah* that may be translated as group solidarity or social cohesion. *Asabiyyah* is what holds the members of a tribe or community together; it is the basis for their unity and mutual protection. Leadership and social organization stem from *Asabiyyah*, facilitating collective action of the members of a tribe both for defensive and offensive purposes. The concept of *Asabiyyah* is useful in explaining how political order is established originally in human societies through the development of social or group solidarity.

*Asabiyyah* is essential not only for the establishment of political organization but also for the functioning and growth of political institutions. In particular, it is essential for the establishment of empires. *Asabiyyah* bonds together the people of the group who are willing to support one another. In his analysis of the establishment of empires, Khaldun explains how the ruler relies on tribal or other forms of social ties to bring together followers. The vested interests of these followers are connected to the rule and fate of the leader and therefore they are loyal to him; failure in that loyalty could result in dangers to their own destiny. These varied loyalties inevitably introduce a wide-ranging system of connections in

the body politic, positive in terms of the diversity of loyalties and negative in terms of security and stability. For Khaldun, then, the ruler needs Asabiyyah to hold the loyalties of his followers, particularly for self-preservation. Throughout his analysis, Khaldun provided an appropriate definition of Asabiyyah as mutual potentiality in nephew and action, and assistance in defense. The Khaldunian empire is organized, in part, according to the bonds of Asabiyyah; the power of the ruler and the advocates, as well as the stability of the state, thus depends heavily on it. The ruler, in theory and history, regularly works to strengthen the social and cultural ties that encourage Asabiyyah. As an important aspect of political and social levitation, then, it lends itself to the empirical study of Asabiyyah today.

As Asabiyyah wanes, the fortunes of the empire often begin to falter. The social, military, and economic energies of diverse human groups with primary or local loyalties are weakened by the empires coming to the end. In his study of the civilization cycle, Khaldun made clear how the Asabiyyah which helped build an empire could falter, and if the development of a new Asabiyyah was not initiated, the state would fall into decay. Finally, Khaldun also uses his idea of Asabiyyah as a means to analyze the struggles and outcomes of social groups. Asabiyyah is thus an important concept within Khaldun's periodization of the slow increase, height, and waning of civilizations/groups and his effects on social and political action. The concept of Asabiyyah is antithetical to the exaggeration of individualism, or economic individualism, or individual will, choice, maximization, and freedom. As such, it sets Khaldun apart from the prevailing trend of his time and, indeed, from the thinking of a major segment of Western Classicalist scholars until today. The Khaldunian concept of Asabiyyah is still a particularly relevant theme for sociological analysis, particularly as ethnic, racial, and religious group solidarity strengthens and fragments various states and contemporaneous groups throughout world history. Many scholars today measure the amount of social or group solidarity within societies for a variety of reasons, including to see how social information channels function.

### **3.2. Auguste Comte's Law of Three Stages**

Comte offered his "Law of Three Stages" as a key to his sociology. He stated his view on the development of human thought in a coherent statement in the introduction of his work. For him, there are three stages through which human thought passed and is also passing. These stages are: (1) the theological or fictitious stage, (2) the metaphysical or abstract stage, and (3) the scientific or positive stage. In the

theological stage, man explains events in terms of his animistic religion with human actors called gods. The theological stage is the lowest stage of human intellectual development. It is the stage where man is at the mercy of an unfathomable, unpredictable unknown God or gods. Comte used the term positive or positivist to mean laws of human society that are scientifically demonstrated or capable of scientific demonstration.

The test of scientific demonstration is the same everywhere. If a given conclusion holds under all known conditions (does not change), it is demonstrated. Otherwise, it is not scientific law. The positive stage is the highest stage of human intellectual development. It is the stage of intellectual maturity which enables man to determine social laws as changeless principles inherent in the structure of nature. The positivist, just like the theological thinker, believes in invisible entities. But for the positivist, the invisible entities are real and the same everywhere since they exist only outside human control. The positivist, like the theologian, does not pray with the position of causing the deities to do certain things. No; he surrenders to them and accepts the decisions (events) as their will. According to Comte, any society or institution built on theological-metaphysical principles is bound to fail because it is built on the chicken legs of fancy or speculation. In his view, the only principle that can resist the shock waves of the winds of change is the positive principle because it is based on alertly proved principles of human beliefs and actions. On the whole, like Khaldun, Comte believes in orderly progress or development. But while Comte conceives of evolution as unilinear progress, Khaldun's view was cyclical.

#### **4. Methodological Approaches**

In this section, we would like to compare the methodological approaches of Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte. Ibn Khaldun is known for his historical method. His story is about studying patterns. He studies social events as a sequence and a part of a whole and as phenomena that are constantly in transition from one stage to another. Nawawi's interpretation emphasizes his great achievement in the methodological area, and he refers to the statement that Ibn Khaldun was not aware of change in history and experience but, rather, noticed 'permanent' elements in communities and societies. Ibn Taimiya, on the other hand, presumed that Ibn Khaldun was not scientifically exact. In his opinion, such empirical observation did not lead to precise theoretical generalizations. However, more than a hundred years after Khaldun, thinkers studied certain parts of society in order to induce particular properties.



Unlike Khaldun's method that relies on narrative style that is interwoven with empirical observation and regularities, Comte's method is less narrative and more concrete. Positive scholars must work within the framework of observed facts and scientific demonstrations. At the beginning of his analytical work, Ibn Khaldun deals with tribes and analyzes the historical chronology of links between tribes and the consequent rise and fall of civilizations, investigating their rise, decline, and then regeneration in the form of new civilizations. With such a methodological perspective, Ibn Khaldun has been praised for being the first to understand the overall course of historical events from their exposure in crises. In this sense, Khaldun's outlook has not been historical, but sociological in a very early stage in the history of sociology. Comte, by contrast, focuses on the study of social units, i.e., societies devoid of emotions in order to bring to the fore accurate deductions. Comte's understanding is somewhat different: for him, the historical method consists of studying peoples and things. His generally analytical positivism views sociology as a science only when it satisfies two methodological principles, namely, observation and demonstration. Comte's is a science that insists on accuracy, facts, elementary laws, empirical data, statistical formulation, and comparison. He considers history necessary, but not in the same way that Khaldun sees it. Comte stresses experimental history, which has its principles as points of reference. Comte's methodical studies are also historical studies and are called studies of philosophical history. These studies are, as regards method, classification, and determination. Comte provides a classification of social phenomena under three headings which, by degrees, pass into each other, from the simplest to the highest. Comte also tries to organize general comparisons in the fields of philosophical and industrial history.

#### **4.1. Ibn Khaldun's Historical Method**

Ibn Khaldun's historical method constitutes one of the necessary focal points for a comparative study of his contributions with those of Comte because of the presentation of the similarities of their ideas, especially in terms of method. Ibn Khaldun relied on the narrative approach as a vehicle of his thought, a historical method which we describe as essentialist because it involved the description of instances and the classification of these instances into coherent sequences. This description is in order to illuminate the microstructure which established mutually reinforcing links between these instances. Empiricism was the basis of the theory, for empiricism, in knowledge and learning by instantiation.

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Ibn Khaldun, the historian and sociologist, for several decades of his life, traveled through North Africa and Andalusia with an eye to answering the question of why social events originated and are carried out by individuals and groups in contemporaneous social reality. He often noted the significance of the events for the social history of peoples and societies. Khaldun meticulously observed and evaluated the historical events of the societies in which he found himself. He describes the various changes of the inhabitants of the Maghrib. Almost always added to these descriptions are his interpretations of the facts, so that it occasionally seems as if he had been directly present as a contemporary witness when these affairs took place. The basis of his historiography is the narrative method. With this method, he gives a report, often the stance of which is universally valid. For example: "God opened the Western Provinces of Ifriqiya to the Muslims and unfolded its hinterland because of the wickedness of its inhabitants." He first describes, then he interprets on the basis of his analysis, always from the certitude that every people bore the seeds of its own rise and fall in its being, in the ideas it held, the kinds of habits pursued, and for necessary changes to take place, e.g., deportation of hostile tribes, dying out of families, tribe leadership, e.g., God serves his own purpose. With his method, Khaldun wants to obtain insight into the present, into actuality by penetrating into the essence of the change. He wants to give a coherent account of the transformation of one stage into another without resolution of the change in which the events themselves disappear. His method is, therefore, "an organic": what he knows and comprehends cannot be cut up, is no sum of items, but is "a real or even a world-historical process unveiling itself over the ages among peoples. It cannot be comprehended except in terms of its mainspring and in the framework of its directions and its continual interruptions, its carriers and the processual ramifications that such carry explicitly into effect."

#### **4.2. Auguste Comte's Positivism**

Originally, Comte did not use the term 'positivism,' which is believed to have been used for the first time by Vacher de la Garderdine. He rather used the term 'social physics.' But since the term 'positivism' has been commonly related to the views of Comte, the supporters or followers of Comte's ideas then accept this term. Positivism brings forth ways of acting and thinking. Acting in the sense of rectifying society's circumstances through applying the principles that the human race has experienced in order to develop that society. Meanwhile, thinking invites people



(who uphold positivism) to examine the information sources that are trusted. That is, the sources of science through data collection.

The term 'positivism' has two senses, namely a general one and a strict one. In the general sense, positivism refers to the system of philosophy and science of Comte. This is a study of the three types of phenomena: physical, biological, and social. Sociological positivism is a strict logical concept. It is an empirical product of Comte's conservative view called the religion of humanity. It is a tendency to exclude the metaphysical and theological elements, and the writings in which Comte deals are mainly with natural science, while social or sociological work is related or connected with little. In the later period of his development, namely from catechism, positivism is written down.

## **5. Impact and Legacy**

The contributions of both Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte to the discipline of sociology have been strong and long-standing. With reference to Khaldun, his emphasis on social cohesion and historical analysis is part of the foundation of what we consider nowadays as sociological thinking. The notion of asabiyyah as the key component of social cohesion seems to still be valid in the account of social identity. In the case of Comte, his positivistic model has determined modern sociology as well as its research methods. Positivism was a leading approach in sociology for more than a century. Moreover, Comte is regarded as the founder or at least the first teacher, and hence the role model of modern sociology.

Their legacies exist in the present sociological theory and the practice of sociology. Many traditionalists still rely on the scientific method of positivism devised by Comte, and in the field of global sociology, positivistic methodologies lead to nation-state obfuscation. A surging interest in Khaldun's work has remained in the last decade. Besides, beyond sociology, there has been a revived interest in Khaldun in the economics literature, in the government, and in thinking about public administration. Sudan, where Khaldun was born, regarded Khaldun as its sole gift to the world, and the French colonial period stands out for a Khaldun renaissance in France. In the United States, an interest in Khaldun grew along with an interest in cross-cultural research in organizations and public administration. Ibn Khaldun is recognized as the founding phylohistorian of sociology.

### **5.1. Ibn Khaldun's Influence on Modern Sociology**

Ibn Khaldun's Influence on Modern Sociology: 1. The Characteristics of Ibn Khaldun's Approach: The Relevance of His Work in Contemporary Sociological Discourse.

When classical sociologists such as August Comte and Emile Durkheim created the structure for a scientific sociology, they were not aware of the work of Ibn Khaldun. However, Khaldun's work is strikingly relevant to many social and political problems, which loom very large in current sociological thinking and in current social policy in many areas of the world. Ibn Khaldun is both a unique primitive source of sociological theory and an innovator at a very high level. It is this combination that probably made it impossible for sociological theorists, from the positivist period of Durkheim to the most recent structural-functionalist theories, to ignore his legacy, though this did not prevent detractors from burying him in silence for long periods.

In fact, Ibn Khaldun's theoretical approach is extremely complex, and many of his theses were so original that they had little influence either on his Arab contemporaries or later. It is only in juxtaposition to a set of doctrines apparently very different, and developed in a very different context, that their originality becomes apparent; and then it is not rare to discover that Khaldun has allocated the same terms to the same types of social organizations as his distant successors.

### **5.2. Auguste Comte's Contributions to Sociological Theory**

Auguste Comte is considered one of the founding fathers of sociology. His major contribution to sociological theory is his development of positivism. All of the other major theoretical paradigms are founded in positivism. He institutionalized the idea of sociology, first as social physics and later as sociology, making it possible to study society as we study the universe. Comte called this social physics, but we know it as sociology. Very briefly, in his works he started abstracting social phenomena, ordered them in a theoretical framework by developing an epistemological system that decrees that correct and valid knowledge can only be obtained by recognizing what we know and can test with our senses – he named this positivism.

So, positivism is mainly based on empirical evidence. He argued that society is order and progress, and he saw sociological studies as studies of social statics – social order and social dynamics – social progress and evolution. His ideas had a

significant impact on sociological practice, and despite the criticisms of his work, he made great changes in governance. For example, consensus was an ideal in social reform, and he made laws to be effective; he made laws that would benefit heirs, orphans, or heiresses in divorce. However, Comte has been criticized for offering no empirical evidence in his findings. He believed that sociology is a causality or social determinism that cannot be turned back, but rather than this, sociologists can reverse the role. As a reaction to the French Revolution, his ideas and theories changed and facilitated changes, affecting everyone in society. He is the founder of sociology, and his positive impact on society is very important.

## **6. Conclusion**

Ibn Khaldun and Auguste Comte stand as the leading figures in thinking that laid the foundation of sociology in two successive eras. In the 14th century, Ibn Khaldun carried out a scientific and causal sociological examination of the subject of social bonding and solidarity through the concept of Asabiyyah. It not only dealt with social structure but also with the historical-social phenomena among dynasties, religious groups, faiths, and differences. In the 19th century, Comte developed an empirically based social physics as a general sociology science, which adopted the historical method to study the historical social dynamics related to social integration, including his celebrated idea of the three stages of human reason.

In our study of the comparative analysis of the two, we have, on the one hand, discussed their basic approach to the study of their own society, as well as the similarities and differences in their approach. On the other hand, we have delved into the primary discoveries or contributions of each. That is, Asabiyyah explored the historical-social bonding among various groups and its evolutionary development through close historical examination. Comte studied the same type of social bonding through a scientific theory of his, historical determinism. Comte used a priori rationally derived theoretical models called historical a priori and a historical-deductive method as opposed to the empirical-inductive method. He enunciated that human ideas undergo certain necessary successions. We have further elaborated on their apparent similarities in the perspectives and approaches of Ibn Khaldun and Comte. We have found that Ibn Khaldun and Comte were the founders of several basic ideas that have a bearing on sociological thought and especially on sociological theory. For example, each in his own way severed the connections made to date between theological dogma and jurisprudence on one hand and the knowledge of social facts provided by practical experience on the

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other. Both thinkers believe that theory has to be independent of belief. Both of them think that knowledge is attained only through empirical verification. Ultimately, we have traced their legacies and how they cast shadows on many contributions in modern sociology. While we take our profound indebtedness to these two figures in our axiological apprehension of their scholarship, we portrayed above in Conclusion and critiques thereof. There, we suggested issues to be explored in more detail subsequently. (Akhter)(Deka)(Salahu2023)(Merican2022)(Mohan, 2022)(Shahidipak, 2022)(Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2021)(Blasi & Possamai, 2020)

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