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Abstract

The history of human society is the history of change and there are many different theories which look at change and development. This paper intends to investigate the history of the Great Seljuk Empire (1037-1194 CE), the events that led to its rise and decline in light of the cyclical theory, especially those propounded by two sociologists: Ibn Khaldûn and Vilfredo Pareto. The former is a medieval thinker while the latter a contemporary. In doing so, the paper aims to make a comparison between Ibn Khaldûn and Vilfredo Pareto. The principles of thematic content analysis are followed on the translated works of the authors to achieve the objective. The rise of the Seljuks is understood with the concept of ʿaṣabiyyah in the nomadic pastoral society (ʿumrân baddawi) and its disappearance in the sedentary society (ʿumrân ḥadari). Similarly, the struggle of power within the Seljuk Empire is deconstructed with the understanding of the concepts of ‘lions’ and ‘foxes’ as propounded by Vilfredo Pareto in his explanation on the circulation of elites.

Keywords: Cyclical theory; Ibn Khaldûn; Vilfredo Pareto; the Great Seljuk Empire; and Islamic history.

Introduction

Change is an ever-present phenomenon, irrespective of time and space. Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, hinted at this fact by this emphatic statement, “There is nothing permanent except change.” Every society, whether primitive or modern, goes through change as it is the law of nature. Change could be both positive or negative, and it should be understood within the context of a society. In the study of social change and development, there are many theories that one could adapt to understand change, such as evolutionism, cyclical theory, historical materialism, or modernization theory. The focus of this paper is on cyclical theory. The basic premise of the cyclical theory is that social and historical change is not recorded in a linear line but rather in a cycle; and like any other theory, it consists of various analogies or metaphors such as the biological cycle or astronomical cycle (Sztompka, 1993, pp. 3–4).

However, before proceeding any further, it is essential to mention about an old argument that has existed between the sociologists in the study of ‘social change and history’ as this will be the tacit theme of the paper. Robert Nisbet, in his book, social change and history (1969), argued that the study of social change could not be distinguishable from the intellectual activity we call ‘history’ (Nisbet, 1969). He argued that the theories of social change are not a legitimate discipline, while history is a legitimate discipline (see Boudon, 1986, pp. 5–9). However, today, we find that in every textbook of sociology, there is a dedicated chapter for social change and development, including the theories. While Nisbet’s book has been praised by many, it has also received considerable criticism, most notably from Gerhard Lenski (Lenski, 1976). It should be noted that the founders of sociology laid the theories of the
new discipline based on the organic metaphor indicating the importance of theories in the study of social change (see Sztompka, 1993, pp. 99–125).

The need to mention the old argument is because this paper views the history of the Great Seljuk Empire from the perspective of the cyclical theory of social change. The literature used to understand the rise and fall of the Seljuk Empire is from the domain of ‘history,’ while the literature on the cyclical theory of social change is from ‘sociology.’ Hence this paper has two main objectives. The first is to analyze and compare the theories of two cyclical theorists of social change namely Ibn Khaldūn and Vilfredo Pareto. The reason these two theorists are taken for comparison is that one of them is a Medieval thinker and the other is a contemporary thinker (in terms of the period). Besides, both Ibn Khaldūn and Vilfredo Pareto’s ideas discussed the political factors that lead to the rise and fall of the civilization, or cyclical nature of society. The second is to analyze the history of the Seljuk Empire regarding its rise and decline. The political history of the Seljuk Empire is viewed and analyzed by considering the cyclical theories propounded by Khaldūn and Pareto.

Background

Biographical sketch of the theorists

Ibn Khaldūn was a North African scholar that lived in the 14th century. He was of Arab descent, born in Tunisia. However, his family had come to Spain during the early spread of Islam (Akhmetova, 2013). He belonged to the scholarly families of Seville. Ibn Khaldūn lived during a very troubled period when the Arab Muslim’s rule in Andalusia was challenged more than before. His book, *Muqaddimah*, was hugely influential and seminal because he was the first historian who took the scientific approach to history (Khalidun, 2015). Before him, historians usually tended to be normative. They would talk about history as drawing parables for moral guidance whereas he analyzed history scientifically and has been called the father of sociology, father of economics as his approach to history spun a whole set of social sciences (Khalidun, 2015). Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah* was first published in 1370 CE in Arabic. It was translated into English by Franz Rosenthal in 1958 in three volumes which were later abridged into one version in 1967.

Vilfredo Pareto, our second thinker, was an Italian born in Paris in 1848 to an Italian political family (see David & Orenstien, 2012, pp. 321–334). He was trained to be an engineer, but his works are more famously recognized in economics first and sociology after it. The political influence of his family and the environment he grew up in is reflected in his works. Pareto’s first sociological work was published in 1901, *The Rise and Fall of Elites*, and later, translated into English by Hans Zetterberg in 1968. In this work, Pareto sought to identify the major features of society that fluctuate cyclically, to describe the movements of the societies in equilibrium terms, and to indicate ways in which the structural features and the general forms of society emerge from the equilibrium (Powers, 1987). Pareto’s main work that explains his theory of the circulation of elites is mentioned in detail in his work *Trattato di Sociologia Generale* (1916), which was later translated into English in 1935 in two volumes. In *Trattato di Sociologia Generale*, Pareto describes in detail his concepts of ‘residues’ and derivates’ which will help us to understand his theory on the circulation of elites in the society (Powers, 1987).

The Great Seljuk Empire

The Seljuk, also known as the Türkmen or Ghuzz, were a group of nomadic tribes that came from the Oghuz peoples which dominated the steppes between the north Black Sea and the Aral Sea (Lapidus, 2002; Peacock, 2015, 2016). This central Asian nomadic tribe from the Eurasian steppe was the homeland of the Turks’. Under the leadership of their chief Seljuk, from whom the empire takes its name, crossed the Oxus river in 1025 CE and settled in a place called Jand - a remote outpost of the Islamic world situated in the northwest of modern Kazakhstan (Lapidus, 2002, p. 119). At Jand, Seljuk and his tribe converted to Islam when they came into contact with the Muslim world. After the conversion of the inner Asian people, the warriors at the frontiers of the settled states – Ghaznavids – gave up their defense, who had hitherto resisted Turkish incursion because they were protecting the Islamic world from barbarians. The nomads were eventually employed to maintain the defense of the region under the patronage of the ruling dynasty. However, as the settled lands below the Eurasian steppe were convulsed into political chaos with the fall of the Persian Samanids, the Ghaznavids and the Karakhanids
fought for the lands in the region (Peacock, 2016).

It was at this juncture that the Seljuk Chief, Tughril Beg, the grandson of Seljuk, attacked Nishapur in 1037 CE laying the foundation for the Great Seljuk Empire and by 1040 (battle of Dandanqan) seized the vast surrounding province of Khurasan – historically comprising most of modern eastern Iran, Turkmenistan and northern Afghanistan – from the Ghaznavids (Peacock, 2016). The established political order of the central Islamic lands would be swept away for more than a century with the Seljuk takeover of Khurasan (Peacock, 2015). Tughril, later, expanded his empire westward into Iran with Nishapur as his base. The height of Tughrill’s rule and the Seljuk Empire’s wider recognition came when Tughril conquered Baghdad in 1055 ending the rule of the Shi’ite Buyyid dynasty and liberated the "protectorate" of the caliphate and brought it under the Sunni Seljuk sultan (Donner, 1999; Peacock, 2016). Tughril took over the title of ‘Sultan,’ which roughly translated to ‘holder of power’ (Hourani, 2013). Baghdad was the seat of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate, and keeping in line with the predecessors, Tughril recognized the religious leadership of the Caliph in Baghdad while maintaining the political and military power (Peacock, 2015).

Alp Arslan (1063–1072 CE), the nephew of Tughril, took over the throne after the death of his uncle. His reign was characterized by almost constant campaigning, that it was difficult to find a center of gravity in the empire during his rule. The most famous campaign during his rule was the great expedition that culminated in the defeat and capture of the Byzantine Emperor Romanus Diogenes at the Battle of Manzikert in eastern Anatolia in 1071 CE (Peacock, 2016). The defeat sent the Byzantine Empire into a civil war, which allowed the Turkic tribes to move into Anatolia. Most notable of them was the rebel Seljuk Prince Sulayman ibn Qutlumush, who tried to establish his rule in Anatolia in 1081 CE in which eventually leading it to the formation of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum (Peacock, 2016).

After the reign of Alp Arslan, his son, Malik Shah (1072–1092 CE) took over the empire as the Sultan. Malik Shah’s reign was marked with peace and stability, most notably due to the effort of the Khurasan bureaucrat Nizam al-Mulk, who dominated the political scene (Peacock, 2016). Malik Shah tried to control over Syria by sending his brother Tutush, whose descendants formed a separate branch of the Seljuk family in Syria. The Seljuk state reached its apogee during the reign of Malik Shah, as the Great Seljuk Empire spanned from the Caspian Sea in the North, to the Indian Ocean in the South; from the slopes of Tian Shan Mountains in the East, to the shores of the Red Sea in the West (V.M. Zaporozhets, 2012). The death of Malik Shah brought the country into a protracted civil war over the issue of succession, as his sons, palace elites and the military commanders (amirs) were all trying to seize power (Peacock, 2015).

Many independent dynasties were established by the members of the Seljuk’s royal family in Iraq, Anatolia, Azerbaijan, Mesopotamia, Syria, Khuzestan, Fars, Kirman, and Khurasan (Lapidus, 2002). When Berkyaruq emerged victorious in 1094 CE and later appointed his half-brother Sanjar as the governor of Khurasan in 1097 CE, the formal split of the Empire began into the East and West Seljuk State (Peacock, 2016). The end of the Seljuk state in the end came with the rise of a the non-Muslim nomadic
Kara-Khitans (Liao) Empire which had arisen in Manchuria and started encroaching into Sanjar’s territory and eventually brought about the destruction of the eastern Seljuk state as a result of nomadic incursions from Inner Asia (Lapidus, 2002). The final Sultan Tughril III, death in 1194 CE, marks the end of the Seljuk Empire, which was a coalition between the caliphal forces and their allies that aimed to seize the political and military power back for the Caliph (Lapidus, 2002; Peacock, 2016).

The Seljuk Empire reunited most of the former Abbasid Empire and rekindled the dream of Muslim unity and universal empire, especially as they were posthumously known for the revival of Sunnism from the Shi’ite dominance of the Buyyids (Lapidus, 2002). The first two crusades were fought on behalf of the Muslims by the Seljuks.

The Study

The methodology adopted in this paper to achieve the objectives is thematic content analysis. The main works of the thinker’s, Khalidun and Pareto, are in Arabic and Italian respectively. The translated works of the authors in English are used and constitute the primary sources in this context. Other secondary sources, including books and journal articles, are also utilized to understand the thinker’s ideas. Apart from the content analysis, to conduct the study methodologically, comparison and synthesis were done on the works of the theorists. The two theorists and their theories were developed in a different time and a different space, their concepts while bearing a similar notion might not share a similar root indicating the limitation of this study.

It should be noted that in the development of the theories, the social environment of the thinkers was entirely different. Ibn Khalidun’s cyclical theory is based on the history of the Berbers up until the 14th century while Vilfredo Pareto’s theory on the circulation of the elites is based on the political climate of Europe, especially Italy in the 19th century. The scope of comparison between the theorist is on the broad concepts between the theorists in which similarity is found, but the nuances involved in the understanding of the concept are indicated in the discussion, a limitation of this paper. Based on the theories, themes are developed, and data extrapolated to explain the history of the Seljuk Empire.

Ibn Khalidun on the Rise and Fall of Civilizations

Ibn Khalidun gave us a science of history, laying down the fundamentals to analyze history correctly. To overcome the history of the early Arab historians like Al-Mas’udi and Al-Tabari, the famous chroniclers, who wrote history by merely describing the accounts of the events without analyzing them; and these accounts were sometimes farfetched (Khalidun, 2015, pp. 11–32). Ibn Khalidun’s history was a cyclical history, where he saw small and simple beginnings with things becoming complex as a civilization is established with all the luxuries of the sedentary life and eventually resulting in decay and downfall. This cycle is habitual, and there is no way of escaping it.

Ibn Khalidun laid down the principles of what he called ‘umrān or civilization, i.e., the way a community builds up and comes to a higher standard of living. Ibn Khalidun sought to understand the rise and fall of the states in the dialectical relationship between two types of social organization, i.e., nomadic pastoral society (‘umrān badawi) and sedentary society (‘umrān ḥadari). Alatas (2013) noted that differences between these two societal types are explained in terms of the differences in the mode of making a living (al-ma‘āsh). “The badawi adopt agriculture or animal husbandry as their principal mode of making a living and live in desert areas” (Alatas, 2013, p. 530). There is a correspondence between the mode of making a living and wealth. The badawi possess only the necessities for their survival, but when the social group starts producing luxuries, they are characterized as ‘umrān ḥadari. “The principal
mode of making a living for *hadari* society was commerce and trade, but also includes agriculture” (Alatas, 2013, p. 530). Sedentary people live in urbanized centers such as cities, towns, and even villages.

Ibn Khaldun looked at history as deeply sociological with following a cyclical pattern and does a thorough analysis of human nature. Like Aristotle, Ibn Khaldun thought of man as political in nature, meaning forming groups was both necessary and inevitable. At the heart of this was the concept of ‘*asabiya*, which roughly translated to social cohesion or social solidarity (Khalidun, 2015). ‘*Asabiya* is a bond of fellowship, that binds a community together, and it exists in different forms. It is strongest as the blood bonds between people who are related together. It also binds people together with alliance and client-ship. ‘*Asabiya* is strongest in primitive societies (*umman badawi*), like many tribes that lived during the pre-Islamic times. They relied on ‘*asabiya* to fight off beasts and tribes as well as to provide food and water for their kin. In this setting, ‘*asabiya* encompasses affection and the willingness to self-sacrifice. It also fostered a certain hierarchy. The core of the tribe was formed by a family or a handful of families that shared a blood bond while the other members of the tribe fell in the wider circle of ‘*asabiya* as allies or clients (Khalidun, 2015, p. 98).

‘*Asabiya* became the basis for government, typically monarchy, whose main function was to maintain stability or peace and to impose justice. This fostered an increase in civilization, as it allowed humans to move from tribal areas to founding cities and even building empires. Ibn Khaldun believed that a strong civilization could be built when the ‘*asabiya* is based on religion, as “religion gives the additional power to ‘*asabiya* and unites people under one strong leadership” (Akhmetova, 2013, p. 3).

In the early stages of the tribe or nation-building, ‘*asabiya* is like a glue holding the tribe together, and it is based heavily on sacrifice for the sake of the tribe, threats are external and ‘*asabiya* allows the tribe to be fierce and allows tribes to conquer other tribes. However, as the tribes become a nation, the situation begins to change as ‘*asabiya* is steadily eroded in sedentary life (*umman *ha*dar*). The reasons for this are, one, threats are no longer external but also internal. The leader, when challenged by his kind, might have to turn on them and rely on others such as mercenaries to maintain and consolidate his power.

The second reason is that the leaders live a luxurious life which corrupts them. On the other hand, they lose their warrior spirit and become obsessed with wealth. The leadership becomes a burden on the state, incapable of proper rule and endlessly burdening the citizens with higher taxes because of their lavish and luxurious lifestyle. Justice to injustice. In short, its beings exploit its people, which inevitably leads to its downfall. The central leadership is either taken over by another tribe with stronger ‘*asabiya*, or its power is fragmented and flows to regional authorities effectively breaking up the states. The full cycle is completed.

*The Ascent and Decline of the Seljuk Empire*

Recounting the Middle Eastern history from a central point of view was no longer possible, when the ‘Abbasid Empire started to lose its centralized form of governance in the 10th century, effectively breaking up the Empire into small states (Lapidus, 2002). The turbulent history that followed in the Muslim world is divided into two regions: the Western part and the Eastern part. The Eastern part included Iran, Iraq, and Transoxiana; while the Western part included Syria and Egypt. In the East, after the fall of the ‘Abbasid Empire, the regimes that succeeded were the Buyyids in Iraq and Western Iran, the Samanids in Eastern Iran and Transoxiana, and the Ghaznavids in Khurasan and Afghanistan. With political and economic struggle in the region after the break-up of the ‘Abbasid Empire, these regimes allowed for a succession of nomadic empires in the region from the settled parts of the Middle East to the Central Asian steppe.

First, it was the Qarakhanids in Transoxiana in the 10th century followed by the Seljuk Turks in Iran and Anatolia in the 11th century and finally the Mongols in the 13th century who eventually conquered the whole of the Muslim World (Lapidus, 2002). Ira Lapidus (2002) noted that in the region, “no matter how numerous and ephemeral, Middle Eastern states came to be built around similar elites and institutions. Everywhere the old-landowning and bureaucratic elites lost their elites and were replaced by nomadic chieftains and slave-solders” (Lapidus, 2002, p. 114). The
cohesion of the state during the period depended on the semi-feudal form of administration and the slave armies which the nomads brought with them.

The history of the Seljuk Empire could be divided into three stages: expansion, division, and decline. These stages are in line with the cyclical theory of Ibn Khaldūn. In the first stage, the political chaos that ensued in the Islamic world after the fall of the ‘Abbasid empire made it easier for the nomads to break down the barriers between the steppe and the sown. The Oghuz people united under the Seljuk family migrated from the central Eurasian steppe and settled at the frontiers of the Islamic World, where they converted to Islam. With the fall of the Persian Samanids, the Ghaznavids and the Karakhanids were fighting for power in the region when Tughril Beg attacked Nishapur and in three years, they took control of the entire region of Khorasan.

Ghaznavid historian and bureaucrat, Bayhaqi, noted how the nomadic Seljuk had taken over the Ghaznavid State by surprise, and it took a few years for the Sultan Mas’ud to shift his attention from his campaigns in India to the Seljuk attack (Peacock, 2016). However, though his attention came at the right time, it could not overcome the solidarity that the Seljuk army had under Tughril Beg. The Ghaznavids were never united as each faction within the State had a different priority. Expansion of the Seljuk Empire continued under Sultan Alp Arslan, who attacked Baghdad to take control of the Buyyid Empire and brought the region back under the Sunni rule. Alp Arslan’s attack of the Byzantine Emperor, Romanus Diogenes, at the battle of Mazinkert in 1071, caused a civil war in the Anatolia, paving the way for the nomadic Turks to penetrate Anatolia. The Byzantine Empire, like the Ghaznavids, realized their fixed fortress and the military on their frontiers was incapable of posing any real challenge to the influx of nomadic tribes (Donner, 1999).

Another characteristic feature during the expansion period was the movement of the Turkic tribes from central Iraq, whose ecology was harsh and inhospitable to the lifestyle of the Turks (Peacock, 2016). They sought to move to broad greener pastures of Anatolia and Syria. The purpose of expansion during this period was to move towards greener pasture and plunder rather than the acquisition of territory. This indicated a shift in the lifestyle of the Seljuks who were, by now, used to luxurious living. The Turkic tribes had shifted their life from al-badawah (Bedouins) to al-hadarah (sedentarization). The Seljuks made energetic efforts to sedentarize nomadic groups. They favored the sedentary economy by building caravansaries and encouraging ocean traffic from Seljuk controlled seaports on the Black Sea, the Aegean, and the Mediterranean (Lapidus, 2002).

The second stage starts in the history of the Seljuk Empire started after the death of Sultan Malik Shah. The Seljuk Empire reached its peak during the reign of Malik Shah, in whose period was when the Empire had reached its apogee and was at peace. After his death, the Empire erupted into a civil war, beginning the division of the empire. The family members of the ruling Seljuk family all challenged the throne, with each claim the Empire began to split into independent dynasties being established in Iraq, Anatolia, Azerbaijan, Mesopotamia, Syria, Khuzestan, Fars, Kirman, and Khurasan. It was during the political division of the empire that the crusades took place. The Crusaders took over eastern Anatolia and the holy lands from the Seljuks and drove them back. The characteristic feature of the second stage was ineffective governance. There was no central government in the Seljuk Empire after the civil war, especially after the split of the Empire in the east and west. The Seljuk, like any nomadic tribe, had their government system in which the ruling monarch would grant territory to his younger brother or next-in-line to the throne an appanage state so that he would have no claim to the throne under the system of primogeniture. The Seljuk Turks did not recognize the system of primogeniture (Peacock, 2016). As a result, the military commanders owed their allegiance to their
essential in maintaining power. An elite of lions lacks the imagination and cunning to maintain its rule and will be forced to admit foxes from the masses to make up for the deficiency. Gradually the foxes infiltrate the entire elite and transform its character. However, the foxes lack the ability to take forceful and decisive action, which at times is essential to retain power. A small minority of lions committed to restoration slowly infiltrates and eventually overthrows the foxes. For Pareto, nothing ever really changes, and history is, and will always be a ‘graveyard of aristocracies’ (Haralambos, 2013, p. 128).

The Power Struggle Within the Great Seljuk Empire

There is a struggle for power in every dynasty; in fact, the origin of any dynasty can be traced to the initial power struggle of the individuals. The Seljuks were no different. They had individuals who aspired to the throne during the reign of the Great Seljuk Empire, while some succeed others failed. The struggle over the succession of the throne is characteristic of any monarchy irrespective of which form of succession the monarchy follows. In the case of The Great Seljuk Empire, apart from the individual aspiration of the governing elites, inherent in the system of governance, was a loophole that allowed the governing elite to seize power. The Seljuks inherited from the ‘Abbasid, two practices in their governance system. They were the use of slave-military forces and the iqt’ form of tax-administration (Lapidus, 2002).

The ‘Abbasids, especially caliph Al-Mutasim (833-42), had assembled a bodyguard of mercenaries – mostly made up of Turkish slaves – that would protect the throne and the ruler (Donner, 1999). The idea behind the use of slave soldiers (mamluks) was that they would have immense loyalty to the ruler, who had raised them, and they had few ties to the families, tribes, or institutions of the capital and central lands of the empire. These slave soldiers were more effective fighters than the local recruits and occupied higher ranks in the military flanks of the empire. The other practice was the iqt’ system of tax administration, in which, the ruler assigns a piece of the land to the military leader who acts as the governor and collects the taxes from the peasants on behalf of the ruler. Iqt’ is loosely translated to ‘fief’ (Lapidus, 2002, p. 123). The short-term advantage of the institution of iqt’ was that the troops were paid if there was a shortage of money in the royal treasury and cutting down of the unnecessary bureaucracy. However, the long-term disadvantage was that the military leaders could exploit the peasant and rule over the land as independent rulers leading to the possible loss of the territory. With the system of governance that the Seljuks had inherited from the region coupled with the nomadic concept of family and state authority set the stage for the political fragmentation of the Empire.

In the initial stages of the Seljuk Empire, the Oghuz people owed their immense loyalty to the Seljuk family who has proved themselves to be successful in establishing their power and might against the Ghaznavids (Peacock, 2016). However, when the Turkmen realized that the Seljuk family was more oriented towards the sedentary lifestyle of Iran, Iraq, and central Asia, they wanted to move towards greener pastures of Anatolia, Georgia, and Armenia. The early Seljuk sultans, while very successful in the empire building, realized the nature of the Turkmen and often employed mercenaries (slave troops) to serve in the army (Donner, 1999). With the help of slave-soldiers the Seljuk kept the Turkmen away from the prosperous regions of the empire that generated income to the state like, Baghdad, Hamadan and Isfahan, among others, and encouraged the Turkmen to raid the kingdoms of Armenia and Georgia (Donner, 1999). We could over here assume that the early sultans, Tughril Beg and Alp Arslan, possessed the characteristics of the ‘lion.’ However, after the battle of Manzikert in 1071 CE, Alp Arslan was unable to use his force when the rival branch of his family established the Sultanate of Rum in Anatolia despite his will (Donner, 1999).

Two important development took place in the Empire during the period of Alp Arslan: one, the use of the slave armies to protect the prosperous districts of the Empire, and second, the appointment of the Khurasani bureaucrat, Nizam-al-Mulk, as the vizier (Donner, 1999; Peacock, 2016). Nizam-al-Mulk dominated the political scene in the Seljuk Empire from the accession of Alp Arslan to the first half of his son’s reign, Malik Shah. He created a series of immense patronage that installed his fellow Khurasani elites in the senior positions throughout the empire and adopted the Persian arts and religious schools (madrasas). The early Seljuk sultans, Tughril Beg, Alp Arslan, and
Malik Shah, made serious efforts to centralize the government in which the role that Nizam-al-Mulk played was paramount (Donner, 1999). The domination of Nizam-al-Mulk in the political scene exacerbated the division of between the Seljuk Sultans family on the one hand and the Turkmen on the other hand (Peacock, 2016). After the death of Malik Shah, the State went into a civil war.

The institution of Atabeg (guardian), which was a Seljuk innovation, sheds some light to understand the civil war. The Seljuks did not recognize the system of primogeniture, meaning all the members of the royal family had a claim to the throne. The Seljuks would appoint an atabeg for a young Seljuk prince (Malik) and grant him a territory where he would serve as the governor of the state (Peacock, 2016). The atabegs would teach the young princes the art of governance and collect the iqtad on his behalf. In theory, the atabeg would rule on behalf of the young prince; however, in practice, it was the atabeg who yielded real political power. Atabeg were usually drawn from a senior rank of the military. If the atabeg challenges the throne on behalf of his malik, he will end up being the most powerful man in the government. During the civil war many of the members of the royal families with their atabegs challenged the throne, while some succeeded in attaining the throne, the empire was divided. By the end, the twelfth and first half of the thirteenth centuries the territories once claimed by the Great Seljuks were held by more than a half-dozen small atabeg states, including the Urtuqis of Amida and Mardin and the Mongols of Mosul and Aleppo (Donner, 1999). The Seljuk domain initially consisted of the atabeg states, however, as each state started to challenge for the throne when the centralization of the government took place during the era of the early Seljuk sultans they started to rebel which eventually led to the political fragmentation of the state into small principalities which later turned into large-scale states.

In this short period, we can observe that the early Seljuk Sultans possessed the characteristics of a ‘lion.’ However, with time, they could not use their force and had to employ the ‘foxes’ to govern the Empire. The lions realizing the inability of the foxes to assert their dominion over the Seljuk States seized the opportunity to takeover power by force. Hence, the vicious cycle of power was circulated among the governing elites asserting the statement of Pareto that, ‘History is the graveyard of aristocracies’ (Mozetic, 2007).

Discussion

The cyclical theories propounded by Ibn Khaldun and Vilfredo Pareto share a few similarities and dissimilarities. Looking at the similarities first, the fundamental basis of both the theories lies in the innate human function or emotion, that describes the characteristic of humankind. While Pareto looked at ‘sentiments,’ Ibn Khaldun looked at ‘asabiyah.’ Second, a dialectic approach is adopted by both the theorist. Ibn Khaldun’s theory looks at the dialectic relationship of social organization between ‘umrân hadâwî and ‘umrân haḍârî, while Pareto’s theory revolves around the dialectic nature of the lions/foxes. However, it should be noted that there is an inbuilt contradiction between ‘umrân hadâwî and ‘umrân haḍârî as with the conquest of the sedentary society by a tribal society, the social institution of the tribal society goes through a process of destruction. The same contradiction could also be seen in between the lions/foxes. In both the theories, each stage is culturally stronger, and it becomes politically weaker, setting the stage for the change. There is one dissimilarity between the two theorists. Ibn Khaldun’s cyclical theory is inclusive of the whole society, while Pareto’s theory gives emphasis only to the governing elite.

The cyclical theory is adopted in the explanation of social change by both Ibn Khaldun and Vilfredo Pareto. However, the scope of the theorists and the context in which they were developed differ greatly. Ibn Khaldun’s cyclical theory is based on his knowledge of the history of the North African Berber tribes and civilizations. While Ibn Khaldun’s cyclical theory is centered around ‘asâbiya and politics of the government, it also includes other factors which are part of the process of social change like the climate and ecology of the region, the sciences, commerce, taxation and the development of arts among others. On the other hand, the cyclical theory of Vilfredo Pareto was based on the political climate of Europe, especially France and Italy, which Pareto himself observed during his lifetime. Also, Pareto’s theory is limited only to the circulation of the elites and not on the change in society as a whole.
Conclusion

The cyclical theory explains the change in terms of a cycle as opposed to linear evolutionary growth. The theories of two proponents of the cyclical theory of social change, Ibn Khaldūn, and Vilfredo Pareto, are used to understand, and the deconstruct the history of the Great Seljuk Empire. Ibn Khaldūn’s theory is based on the concept of ‘asabīyāh and the dialectics between nomadic society and sedentary society. The Seljuk were a nomadic tribe from the central Eurasian steppe who migrated from their grasslands into the sown region and established a dynasty before its eventual political fragmentation and the incursion from nomadic bands of central Asia. Vilfredo Pareto explained his cyclical change between governing elites based on the characterizes of the elite, i.e., lions or foxes. The initial sultans were able to establish the Empire through their lion-like characteristics and needed the help of the foxes in their administration. However, the system of governance in the region was based on the slave-military forces and the iqta’ system of tax-administration coupled with the Seljuk institution of atabeg led to the drastic fragmentation of the political power and the substitution of small principalities into large-scale states, asserting the statement of Pareto that “history is a graveyard of aristocracies.”

References


