

Ibn Sina and the Theory of Management of Household

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Abstract

A good household can ensure the emergence of a good community. Muslim philosophers give more attention to this matter as it is the most important pillars in the establishment of perfect country. Ibn Sina wrote a book “Kitab al-Siyasa” to discuss the household issues. He did touched regarding self management, financial, family, servant, child education and other related matters. This article aims at explaining the Ibn Sina’s theories of family and household based on his book “Kitab al-Siyāsa”.

Introduction

The Islamic philosopher Abu ‘Ali al-Husain ibn ‘Abdallah Ibn Sina, known as Avicenna, was a Persian by birth. He was born in Afshana near Bukhara in the year 370/980 during the reign of Amir Nuh Ibn Mansur al-Samani, and died in Hamadhan in 428/1037. (Ibn Khalikan 1972, 214-217). He was familiar with both the Persian and Arabic languages, and composed his works in these languages. His contemporaries, in acknowledgement of his extraordinary learning, often referred to him merely as *al-Shaikh al-Ra’is*. (Courtois 1956, ix).

Ibn Sina’s father, ‘Abdallah originated from Balkh, which now falls in Afghanistan. He was appointed by Amir Nuh ibn Mansur as governor of the district of Kharmaythan, and married a local woman called Sitara (Gohlman 1974, 17-19). Ibn Sina was a prodigy. By the time he was ten years old, he had memorized the Qur’an and many works of literature. In his autobiography, Ibn Sina mentions that his father and brother had Ismaeli sympathies and that they used to discuss philosophical issues. This may have aroused his interest in philosophy, in which, later, he began to study systematically under the guidance of Abu ‘Abdullah al-Natili, a man from Tabiristan, near the Caspian Sea, (Courtois 1956, ix) who was a philosopher. With him Ibn Sina learned Porphyry’s *Eisagoge*, Euclid’s *Geometry*, and some elements of logic. (Gohlman 1974, 21-25) When al- Natili left him, Ibn Sina devoted himself to studying natural sciences, metaphysics, medicine, logic, mathematics, and other disciplines, and when he was eighteen years old, he ‘graduated in’ all of these sciences.

Ibn Sina’s literary output, which spanned a period of approximately forty years, was immense. He produced numerous works on logic, physic, mathematics, psychology, astronomy, metaphysics, ethics, politics, medicine, music, etc. Anawati’s *Bibliography of Avicenna* published in Cairo in 1950, lists some 276 titles - consisting of *kutub, rasa’il, ma’ajim* etc. attributed to Ibn Sina. (Courtois 1956, xiii).

The *Siyāsa*

Apart from books, Ibn Sina also produced treatises, of which Afnan comments, “There are a good many minor treatises attributed to Ibn Sina not all of which are authentic. One of these, the authenticity of which has been reasonably established, is entitled the *Book of Politics (Kitāb al-Siyāsa)* (Afnan 1958, 230).

The date of the composition of this treatise is unclear. This obscurity, according to Gutas, happens to most of his work, involving “their number, nature, transmission, present state, and most important, their relationship to each other, both in time and subject matter, and to Avicenna’s work in general,” (Gutas,1988, 2). Gutas blames Ibn Sina himself and also history for creating these problems.

“Responsibility for this lies partly with Avicenna himself - he rarely kept second copies of his commissioned pieces - and partly with history: a number of his works were lost in fires or damaged.” (Ibid). The record of Ibn Sina’s work offered by al-Juzjāni is also very general. He stated that when his master was in Juzjan, “he wrote many works there, such as the first part of his *Qanūn* (Canon) [of medicine], his summary of the *Almagest*, and many treatises (*al-rasā’il*).” (Gohlman 1974, 45). The phrase “many treatises” here may include *Kitāb al-Siyāsa*. Since he does not mention this treatise, the later bibliographers such as al-Qifti (Ibn al-Qifti 1903, 412-426), Ibn Khallikān and Ibn Abi ‘Usaybiah (Ibn Abi Usaybiah 1965, 3-302) have ignored it. Nevertheless, this work has been recorded by Carl Brockelmann, Anawati and Osman Ergin. According to Fu’ad ‘Abd al-Mun’im Ahmad (Ahmad 1982, 72), this treatise has not been lost as is believed by some scholars, and he reports that there are at least two manuscript copies of it available:

- (i) The original text which Ibn Sina himself sold to Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad in 408/1018. It was compiled in one collection which contains thirteen treatises of Ibn Sina. *Kitāb al-Siyāsa* is the fifth treatise and this collection is kept in Leiden University Library in Holland (Ahmad 1982).
- (ii) A manuscript in the Library of Sultan Ahmad in Istanbul. The text appears on the margin (*hamish*) of pages 70-94 of a book entitled *Nuzhat al-Arwah* by Shahruzuri (Ahmad 1982).

The *Siyāsa* has been edited by Louis Cheikho (Cheiko 1911), Taysir Sheikh al-Ardhi al-Ardhi 1967, 485-501), ‘Abd al-Amirz Shamsuddin (Sham al-Din 1988 232-260), Fuad ‘Abd al-Mun’im Ahmad (Ahmad 1982, 61-108) (whose published text we use for this writing), and Kamal Yaziji (Yaziji 1963, 485-490). Some scholars have discussed the text. Among them are Omar Farrukh, Afnan (Afnan 1958, 230-232), Hanna al-Fakhury *et al*, (al-Fakhury 1963, 485-490), Erwin I.J Rosenthal (Rosenthal 1968, 143-157), Ridwan al-Sayyid, Hisham Nashabat (Nashabat 1981, 157-174), and Fauzi M. Najjar (Najjar 1984, 92-110).

The Siyasa and the Management of Household

This book is arranged in six chapters as:-

***Ikhṭilaf Aqdar al-Nas wa Tafawut Ahwaluhum Sabab Baqaihim* (The Difference among Men as a Cause of their Survival)**

Ibn Sina fully accepts the differences among men as a cause of their survival. For him this is the proof of the existence of God, of His creation and His governance and grace. God also has established ranks of superiority (*fadl*) between the artisan (*al-sani*) and the product (*al-masnu’*) between the master (*al-malik*) and the slave (*al-mamluk*), and between the leader (*al-ra’is*) and the followers (*al-mar’sus*). With these differences, men manage to establish cooperation and create good management for their survival.

The idea of differences among men that enables them to survive is worth considering in relation to the *Shifa’* and other works. In the *Shifa’*, Ibn Sina does not stress the differences in the way that he does in the *Siyasah*. What he states there is that man cannot live in isolation to help him satisfy his basic wants. He needs to be complemented by another of his species, the other, in turn, by him and one like him. Associated in this way, they become self-sufficient within association and then form cities. The *Siyasah* begins with the differences among men that enable them to survive and lead them to form associations. Even though Ibn Sina sets out his theory from a different angle, the end of both cases is the same. Ibn Sina argues that man is not born self-sufficient he needs to establish what we can call associations for mutual-help to satisfy his needs and to enjoy a perfect life.

How does this notion work? Ibn Sina offers examples to illustrate his point. According to him, the rich man, indifferent to intellectual matters and devoid of culture, who has accumulated his portion of worldly assets by his effort, if he considers the intellectual man who has no wealth, and if he considers the vicissitudes of time, will be sure that the wealth he possesses is a substitute for the intellect he lacks. The cultural man (*dhu al-adab*), if he considers the ignorant rich, has no doubt that he is better and superior. The skilled artisan (*dhu al-sina’at*), who makes a living from his skills, will not be jealous of one with great power or wealth. Ibn Sina also mentions four groups of people for whom it is most right and most fitting that they contemplate the good management and good order (*tadbir, siyasa*) of the world: firstly, the kings (*al-muluk*), to whom God has given the responsibility to guide man’s lives, organizing the country and look after the people; secondly, the governors (*al-amthal fa al-amthal min al-wulat*) who have been given the leadership of nations and the management of cities and provinces; thirdly, owners of flocks, lords with followers and servants, and; finally, owners of houses and children.

Each of these, says Ibn Sina, is responsible for those under his protection, for each of them is a shepherd (i.e a ruler) in his own sphere. His followers are subject to his command and prohibition. They are his flock.

Fi Siyasat al-Rajul Nafsah (On Self-Management)

In the above chapter, Ibn Sina told us that man as master has heavy responsibilities to govern his followers. How does he begin his task? In this chapter, Ibn Sina asserts that among the first things that man must do is management of his self (*siyasat nafsah*), for the self is the nearest thing to him, the most noble thing to him and the most worthy of his attention. When he is perfect in managing the self, he will not fail with other tasks that lie beyond himself like the management of cities (*siyasat al-misr*). He stresses here that man must realize that he has intellect, which is the ruler (*inna lahu aql huwa al-ra'is*) and a lower soul (*al-nafs*) that commands evil (*wa nafs ammara bi al-su'*) and blemishes (*al-ma'ayib*) and is the source of vices, which is the ruled. Then he also must realize all kinds of defects he has in order to make reformation.

In doing this man needs psychological approaches. Ibn Sina also states that man's knowledge of the self is not to be trusted. He fails to understand it for various reasons such as his natural lack of knowledge of his own vices, of his excessive indulgence toward himself and his intellect is not free from the mixture of passion (*al-hawa*) when he thinks of himself.

Therefore, man needs the help of a faithful and companion who will serve him as a mirror reflecting truthfully his friend's virtue and vices. The rules, according to him are most in need of a faithful friend. This is because they are not subjected to any external control or authority.

Fi Siyasat al-Rajul Dakhlah wa Kharjah (On Man's Management of His Income and Expenditure)

This chapter focuses on the notion that people need sustenance (*al-aqwat*). Man must work to get it. There are three types of profession which are practiced by the so-called people of honor (*dhu al-muru'a*). Firstly, the type belonging to the sphere of the intellect (*al-aql*) including good management, sound advice and skillful management. This is the profession of ministers, administrators, politicians and kings. Secondly, the type that is related to the sphere of *adab*, which is manifested in creative writing, eloquence, astrology and medicine. There are the men of culture (*al-udaba'*). Finally, the type that is related to the sphere of physical strength and courage (*al-aiyad wa al-shaja'a*) which is the profession of the army, cavalrymen and others.

Ibn Sina stresses here that whatever profession that man chooses, he must train himself until he becomes expert by following its rules (*ahkam*) and progressing (*al-taqaddum*) until he becomes one of its masters (*hatta yakuna min ashabi-ha*). Once a man has his income, he must fulfill his social responsibility such as *sadaqa* and *zakat*.

Fi Siyasat al-Rajul Ahlah (On a Husband's Management of his Wife)

Ibn Sina discusses a quality of a good wife in this chapter. He states that a good wife is she who can act as a husband's partner (*sharikat*) in managing his property and guarding his wealth, should also take care of the household when he is away (*fi rihlat*). With this position, a wife must be a good woman.

A good woman according to Ibn Sina is she who has characteristics such as a wise and religious woman (*al-aqilat al-dayyinat*) intelligent and bright (*al-hayiyat al-fatana*), lovely and fertile (*al-wadud al-walud*), cooperative (*al-mutawi'a al-inan*), a good adviser (*al-nasihah al-jaiib*), faithful woman (*al-aminah al-ghaib*), nice woman (*al-khafifah*), a good manager of the house (*tuhassinu tadbiraha*), she relieves her husband's anxiety through her gentleness (*tusalli humumahu bi latifi madaratihah*), etc.

Ibn Sina also states here that a husband must fulfill his duty toward his wife. He also must use his intelligent and psychological approaches to educate his wife. A wife must constantly be occupied with the important matters of life such as managing her children, handling her servants and cooking after her house.

Fi Siyasat al-Rajul Waladah (On Man's Management of His Children)

Ibn Sina shows his seriousness on education in this chapter. He discusses duties that should be carried out by parents. Parents according to him must choose a good name for their children followed by the provision of wet nurse for them. On education, Ibn Sina says, the first step must be on *akhlaq*, then comes the religious teaching, followed by the study of literature and poetry, mathematics (*al-nisab*), engineering (*al-handasah*) and medicine (*al-tibb*).

The last three subjects are comparable to undergraduate education where students could prepare to work after finishing their study. Ibn Sina does not explain physical training in his system. He concentrates only to develop moral, religion and knowledge in order to create a good family.

Fi Siyasat al-Rajul Khadamah (On Man's Management of His Servants)

This is the last chapter of the *siyasat*. Ibn Sina deals with the management of servants. He begins by stating that the relationship of the servants and assistants to their master of the household is like that of the limbs to the whole body. Man needs servant. He must select a suitable servant by using assessment, estimation or observation. Avoid taking any servants who have different appearances and confused morals and also disabled people.

Ibn Sina also describes some of the practical ways to conduct servants. They must be provided with training and exercises. The relationship between the master and the servants must be in good manner. The servant can be punished only to realize his position and responsibility. If the servant clearly commits a crime and repeats his sin or rebellion, to save the system and the rest of the servants, he must be dismissed.

Conclusion

The *Siyasa* is not a philosophical work. It cannot be compared to the *Shifā'*, *al-Najat* or *al-Isyarat wa Tanbihat*. This material, as mentioned by Gutas presents in brief a traditional approach to ethics, economics and politics, the last mentioned subject being heavily influenced by the elaboration of *al-Farabi* (Gutas 1988, 39, 258). The reader however is able to understand the theory and the description of household during that time.

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