CHAPTER III

LIFE OF IBN TUFAYL

The full name of Ibn Tufayl was Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Tufayl al-Qaisī. He was an 'Arab by origin and had descended from the famous 'Arab tribe of Qais, as the last part of his name indicates. De Boer, however, tells us of another version of his name, i.e. Abū Ja'far in place of Abū Bakr.¹ This information is based on the M.S. in the British Museum (Tr. by Pocock). It is possible that the second name, Abū Ja'far may have been derived from the name of one of his sons. But we have no corroborative evidence for it. In any case, Ibn Tufayl is the more widely known name, and it is by this name that we will refer to him in these pages.

Ibn Tufayl was born at Wadi Ash, which is now known as Guadix and is about forty miles North East of Granada. His date of birth is believed to be somewhere between 1100 and 1110 A.D. The details of his early life and education are not fully known. But it is certain that he absorbed all the scientific and philosophical knowledge available to that age. He made
special studies of Medicine, Mathematics, Astronomy and Philosophy. He was also a poet and some of his poems have been preserved to us in some histories of the period.\(^2\) According to the statement of Ibn Khaṭīb, Ibn Tufayl got his medical education at Granada.\(^3\) It has also been stated that he practiced medicine at Granada for some time.\(^4\)

Nothing is known with certainty about his teachers. Al-Marrākushī represents him to be a pupil of Ibn Bājja.\(^5\) De Boer also accepts this version.\(^6\) They are led to this view perhaps by some apparent similarities in their philosophies or simply by the fact that Ibn Bājja was an elderly contemporary of Ibn Ṭufayl. But it appears that the holders of this view did not care to read the full text of Ibn Ṭufayl's book. In his Introduction, Ibn Ṭufayl has made some unfavourable comments on Ibn Bājja's philosophy and has unequivocally stated that he had never had an opportunity of meeting Ibn Bājja personally.

His official career bears testimony to his versatile genius. He first acted as Secretary to the Governor of Granada,\(^7\) and, according to one version,
also acted as Governor of the place at some stage of his career. Then he became the Vazîr of Abū Ya'qūb Yusuf and also served as his Court Physician. But the French orientalist, Leon Gauthier doubts that Ibn Ṭufayl ever held the office of the Vazîr. B. Carra de Vaux, supporting the point of view of Gauthier, relies on the argument that Al-Bitrûdji, who was a pupil of Ibn Ṭufayl in astronomy, calls him Qâdî. But in the presence of more positive evidence of others the negative argument mentioned above does not deserve much credit. Much force of this argument is lost when we consider that very often a great personage is not referred to by his official designation among his intimates but by his more homely titles.

Ibn Ṭufayl, as the Grand Vazîr of the Caliph and also as his personal friend, had great influence over the Caliph. According to the statement of 'Abdul Wâhid al-Marrâkushî Ibn Ṭufayl was so beloved by the Commander of the Faithful that he used to stay successive days and nights with him without leaving the place. The Caliph used to pass most of his leisure time discussing different problems of philosophy with Ibn Ṭufayl.
Ibn Tufayl was a man of retiring nature, "more fond of books than of men." He spent most of his time in the great library of Abū Ya'qūb, which, according to some estimates, was nearly as big as the once famous library of Al-Hakam.

Ibn Tufayl used his influence with the Caliph in introducing and recommending men of learning to the favours of the Caliph. Once the Amīr expressed the wish to find some philosopher who could analyse and explain the works of Aristotle. Ibn Tufayl recommended Ibn Roshd for this purpose. This reflects not only the nobility of his soul but also his confidence in his own scholarship. A man of superficial learning will never recommend a real scholar to the favours of his patron.

In 1182 he resigned his post as Royal Physician due to old age and was succeeded by Ibn Roshd.

After the death of Abū Ya'qūb Yusuf, his son Abū Yusuf al-Mansūr became the Caliph. He was also a great scholar and a great patron of learning. But he was even more orthodox and more strict in religious policy than his father. It is said that he had been guilty of some indiscretions in his youth. Moreover, for the safety
of his empire he had to kill his uncle and cousin. Though he had repented afterwards yet these incidents had cast a gloom over his nature, and had resulted in making him more severe and harsh. The treatment that he meted out to Ibn Roshd is a sad page of Spanish history. However, Ibn Tufayl continued to enjoy Caliph's favours and to hold his official position at the court.

In 1185 he died at Morocco and was given a ceremonious burial. The Caliph himself attended the funeral.

Ibn Tufayl, no doubt, was a man of encyclopaedic learning. He was a many-sided genius. He had made extensive studies in literature and his style of writing showed great literary beauties and artistic qualities. According to the testimony of 'Omar Farrukh, in sweetness of expression and charm of diction his style resembles that of Al-Ghazālī. He was also distinguished for his knowledge of medicine, and according to the evidence of Ibn Khaṭīb, had written two books on medicine. Ibn Abī Asiba'a tells us, on the authority of Ibn Roshd, that Ibn Tufayl had written a book, نب البق السكنة والشعر السكنة and had some special views about the heavenly bodies. Ibn ʿIshāq Bitrūdjī, who was a pupil of Ibn Tufayl and a specialist of Astronomy, informs us that
his teacher Qādī Abū Bakr Ibn Tufayl had told him that he had discovered a new system to explain the movements of heavenly bodies and that system was different from and superior to that of Ptolemy. De Boer doubts the validity of this statement and interprets it as implying merely Ibn Tufayl's inclination to adhere closely to Aristotle rather than to Ptolemy. But the opinion of De Boer is merely based on his guess and is not supported by any reasons.

Ibn Tufayl's command of scientific knowledge is also an established fact. In tracing the development of 'Hayy Ibn Yaqzān' he gives sufficient glimpses of his knowledge of Anatomy, Physics, Mathematics, Astronomy, Geography, etc. Some of his ideas are strikingly modern. But we will have occasion to say more about it in the last chapter.

The greatest contribution of Ibn Tufayl, however, is in the field of philosophy. It is rather surprising that a great philosopher like Ibn Tufayl should have left only one work, i.e., 'Hayy Ibn Yaqzān'. But Ibn Roshd, while discussing Aristotle's Logic in his commentaries on Aristotle, states that Ibn Tufayl had also
written a book on that subject. George Sorton informs us that Ibn Tufayl had written a commentary on Aristotle's *Al-Marzikushī* speaks of another book of Ibn Tufayl on Soul, which he claims to have seen in Ibn Tufayl's own handwriting. Al-Marrākushī sometimes bases his opinions on insufficient or unreliable evidence. But in the present instance, he refers to his own personal observation. Moreover, he was not unfamiliar with ‘Hayy Ibn Yaqqān.’ He refers to it elsewhere as a book of "intended to explain the origin of human species." It shows that he had read at least the first few pages of the book. So it is unlikely that, coming across the same book for the second time, he should take it for another book dealing with Soul. Al-Marrākushī also tells us that he had seen several works of Ibn Tufayl on Philosophy, Physics & Metaphysics, etc.

Ibn Tufayl had some correspondence with Ibn Roshd with regard to the latter’s book. But unfortunately, no work of Ibn Tufayl except ‘Hayy Ibn Yaqqān’ is available to us. But even this one work is sufficient
to give him an immortal place in the history of philosophy.

Ibn Tufayl's greatness as a scholar and a philosopher is also proved by the fact that an eminent thinker like Ibn Roshd was his pupil.\(^{30}\) 'Omar Farrukh includes Abū Bakr Bundūd Bin Yahyā al-Qartabī also among his pupils.\(^{31}\) He bases his statement on the evidence of Al-Marrakushi.\(^{32}\) But Luṭfī Jum'a refers to Abū Bakr Bundūd as a pupil of Ibn Roshd.\(^{33}\) His source of information is also the same i.e. Mohiuddīn 'Abdul Wāhid al-Marrakushi.\(^{34}\)

The second version, as given by Luṭfī Jum'a, seems to be more reliable to us, and the following considerations lead us to this view:

Abū Bakr Bundūd was distinguished for his knowledge of Theology and Islamic Jurisprudence. He had no fame for philosophy. So it is more likely that he might have been a pupil of Ibn Roshd who was an expert in these subjects also and had held the office of Qādi of Cordova for a long time. There can be, however, another explanation which would resolve the app-
arent contradiction in the two versions. The words of Al-Marrākushī are as follows: "It was related to me by one of his pupils, the Jurist and Professor (جیٰل) Abu Bakr Bundūd bin Yahyā Qarṭabī that he had heard the philosopher Abdul Walīd, i.e. Ibn Roshd), saying it on several occasions that....................". Now, the pronoun 'his', which we have underlined in the above quotation, may be taken to refer either to Ibn Ṭufayl or to Ibn Roshd. Al-Marrākushī might have had in his mind Ibn Roshd but 'Omar Farrukh understood it to imply Ibn Ṭufayl.

Another important pupil of Ibn Ṭufayl was Al-Bitrūdī, the famous specialist of Astronomy. But he too was not a philosopher.

Ibn Ṭufayl was a pious man. But it is interesting to note how he has been sometimes mis-represented in the west. It has been stated that he gained something of a reputation for magic in the west. It is another instance, like the miracle story about Ibn Tumart, of the legends woven round the figure of a great man. As Ibn Ṭufayl was a first class physician also, it is possible that some one might have described his
cures as 'magical' and this mode of description was taken on its face value by some uncritical historian and found its way in a book like Columbia Encyclopaedia.

However, more reliable sources tell us that he was a man of calm and quiet nature. He had great revulsion against the masses. He liked seclusion and had become all the more seclusive towards the later period of his life. He did not possess the courage to face opposition or to express his views openly before public. Inspite of his philosophical interests he was a pious man with a deeply religious personality. 38

Keeping in view these tempramental qualities and traits of Ibn Tufayl, and the characteristics of the period, it is not difficult to understand why he chose the medium of a story for the expression of his views.
NOTES & REFERENCES


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