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The Arab Time Capsule: Once You Were the Leaders of Islamic Civilization

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"It is highly probable that but for the Arabs, modern European civilization would never have arisen at all; it is absolutely certain that but for them, it would not have assumed that character which has enabled it to transcend all previous phases of evolution. For although there is not a single aspect of European growth in which the decisive influence of Islamic culture is not traceable, nowhere is it so clear and momentous as in the genesis of that power which constitutes the paramount distinctive force of the modern world and the supreme source of its victory-natural science and the scientific spirit." Robert Briffault (The Making of Humanity).

This week (January 25, 2010), the London Museum of Science is displaying the historical achievements of the Muslim world. But the time period is not the 21st century but the golden age of Islamic civilization in Al-Andalus (Arab-Muslim Spain) from the 8th century to 16th century. Many Western scholars describe the scholarships and scientific contributions of the Arabs of the time distinctively as "people of the Quranic age." While the Europeans lived in dark ages of barbarism, Muslims were the most advanced civilization in Southern Europe. The BBC news cast made me think deep and reflect on what I wrote two decades earlier "Why Muslims are a Divided People?" and "Towards Muslim Unity" widely published in English and Arabic versions in the Arab world (the Muslim World League Journal, Makkah Al-Mukarramah, Al-Muslimeen, and Al-Mujtamah (Kuwait) and a weekly from New Delhi. The rationale of that article rekindled great deal of concerns to remind the Muslims - who they were, where they are, and where are they going to?

Once upon a time, the Arabs were the leaders in knowledge and human progress and the Islamic civilization was the pioneering civilization across Europe to become a role model for centuries to come. For eight hundred years, the Arabs evolved the most advanced civilizations- the longest period that any civilizations is known to have flourished in human history. The London Museum of Science is facilitating the past, not celebrating the present or making the future to happen. Why? Simply put, Muslims have not been part of the progressive movement for change and development into the 21st century. They appear more like Muslims without Islam. The achievements over the centuries were the outcome of Islam as a system of thinking and living and nothing else. After the forced collapse and eviction of the Muslims from Al-Andulasia, they misconceived the future challenges and preferred to live in a time capsule of borrowed time and money. They continued to be dispersed, arguing about the past not THINKING about the present or the future, and remained "Scattered like Seeds" as Dr. Shaw Dallal ably describes in his book.

Two decades earlier, the Muslim masses were primarily concerned with the Palestine problem and to see it resolved peacefully into an independent Palestine state. But now their worry horizon has been extended to include Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Arabian Peninsula and its future. The Western strategy is at work to create new problems so that the original real problem will be sidelined. Nobody seems to care how much more Muslims have lost on all the major frontiers of human survival. How many more forcibly been made homeless and refugees in their own homes and shelters. The UN estimate indicates 90% of the world refugee population is of Muslim origin. No one thinks or questions as to WHY? Leaderless Muslims are more divided now and ruled by ex-colonial masters than at the time of formal imperialism. Analyzing the affairs of the Muslims two decades later, some of the egoistic and self-made Muslim rulers are caught in global trades-in, selling the Muslims and their interests to foreign powers for money and political favors to manufacture the myth of "Islamic extremism" and "terrorism." Many petro-dollars surviving rulers call themselves "moderate" Muslims – an innovative way to give meaning and purpose to wickedness and treachery to the cause of Islam and the interests of the living Muslims across the globe, unthinkable in an Islamic system of ethics, laws and accountability. Masses are boxed-in at loss, helpless captives unable to think about themselves with all creative energies drained-out except worrying for the

human survival, not knowing how to replace the dummies and cruel leaders imposed and aided by the colonial masters. If you will compare the contemporary Muslims to the time of Al-Andalusia Muslims, you could end up in painful disgust and on-going mental torture. The London Science Museum does not and cannot encompass this reality. The exhibition represents material, scientific and intellectual progress but not the reason for the decline, defeats and surrender at Cordoba, Granada and other Al-Andalusian locations and continued downfall of the Muslims to this day. If the present of the Muslim Ummah is mismanaged and uncertain or complete failure, how could we be optimistic of the future?

The Arabs created a pioneering culture of tolerance embodying varied ethnicities, faiths and linguistic convergence giving shape and form to knowledge and human development, invented mathematics, algebra, geometry, discovered new sciences, developed technology, astronomy, libraries, sense of civic society, medicine and hospitals, centers of learning that modern world cannot match, and they fought for Islam to establish the divine system of human success. "What Went Wrong" often Bernard Lewis contends, what he believes in, not what the Arab world or Muslims did in reality. At the beginning of 21st Century, it seems, the world has gone terribly benign and out of focus – the Western perceived reality has no reason for reality. If it is an absurd one-sided viewpoint – what the world should look like: Arabs and Muslims as "terrorist" while the real terrorist are called "men of peace". Moderate Muslim spectators prefer ambiguity and silence as the body language to avoid standing for Islam in public and end up losing the official status and financial aid package.

Leaders create leaders. When Muslims were the leaders in faith and human values, they articulated a unique civilization tolerant of diversity and varied cultural ethnicities and built upon the unity of Islamic faith to embody peace and human growth. If you enlist the scholarly discoveries and contributions of the Muslim scholars, they are countless. Do you know any scientists or scholars whose contributions were used as text books for continuously six centuries in the European medical schools? Yes, that is Mohammad Hussein Bu Ali Sina's Cannon of Medicine. The Europeans changed his name to Avicenna so that nobody would recognize that he was a Muslim scholar. It is said that Ibna Sina alone discovered and authenticated 36 pharmaceutical formulas which are used to this day. Marai Rosa Menocal (A Golden Reign of Tolerance: The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain), explains more: "The lesson of history, like the lessons of religion, sometimes neglect examples of tolerance. A thousand years ago on the Iberian Peninsula, an enlightened vision of Islam had created the most advanced culture in Europe....In Cordoba the library housed some 400,000 volumes at a time when the largest library in Latin Christendom probably held no more than 400." The contemporary Western ruling elite have many functional problems; they do not know what peace means. If they had peace and they consciously knew about it – why would they be striving to attain it throughout the recorded history? Do you struggle for the goals that you do not have, or the ones you already possess? Arabs exponents of peace do speak but are unable to reach the majority of the media controlled humanity. The Arab religious scholars see the light just in mosques, whereas people live in darkness. What went wrong with the succeeding generations of the Muslims? Foremost, they ignored Islam and tried to copy the age of ignorance "Jahilliya." Is it a crime or mismanagement of the human affairs?

Arab people are ancient, tolerant and enjoy credible history of civilization, whereas, Americans are new in civilization and rush to hasty conclusions, only to THINK after the facts and feel guilty for misleading the world to wage bogus wars on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. Islam disciplined the Arabs to THINK in advance, not just the self, but good of the whole of the humanity. The Al-Qura'an identifies them as "the best people chosen to invite the humanity towards goodness and forbid evil." When Arabs left the universal mission of "goodness", they were defeated and continued to be so to this day. Could they regain the global leadership thru Islam? AbdulHamid Abu Suleyman (Crisis in the Muslim Mind), believes so: "the basis of Muslim strength and ability as well as creativity stems from faith....the early generations of Muslims understood this, and the result was that they were successful."

Al-Qura'an stipulates, "Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful."

Muslims have a mission - a God given duty to invite the humanity towards goodness and real success – the consciousness of that they ignored under the disguise of oil based economy and oil-fed superficial prosperity - a naïve Western concept of prosperity that drained out the Arab cultural values, intellectual

creativity and truism for One Ummah - One People, committed to the DEEN of Islam. Now, they appear divided between solid walls not mud-made huts, air conditioned edifice, chemically prepared unhealthy villas and dust built palaces, big automobiles polluting the environment, packed foods, foreign housemaids symbol of sex and exploitation and mind mapping via satellite dishes right into Arab homes and heartland. Consequently, the oil-based consumable “prosperity” of the Arabs, degenerated the will of the people by eliminating their inborn capacity to THINK and act like Muslims and to undertake a sustainable global mission – a futuristic Islamic goal for the best of humanity. Despite so many in numbers and countless resources, what have the contemporary Muslim leaders done for the interests of the Muslim Ummah? Opportunism is the hallmark of the 21st century smart moderate Muslims capable of consuming bread and butter without much effort. Building palaces on moving sand does not facilitate human progress. The Western strategists created an innovative time capsule to entrap the oil producing Arab leaders into the fantasy of a honeymoon bubble manufacturing an illusion of oil-linked economic prosperity. Its cultural impacts both short and long terms are shockingly unknown to the Arab captives replacing Islamic thinking, education, Arabic language and molding the Arab body and soul into a show piece of modern Arabs devoid of Islamic character and wisdom. But essentially imposing the non-Islamic thinking and values on the Arabian culture. The fantasy bubble is coming to an end with the peak oil forecasts as a visual reality. Power, prosperity and poverty are all trials in human affairs and transitory phenomenon. Was the discovery of oil a conspiracy (“fitna”) for the Arabs to change the originality of thinking, beliefs, values and passion for Islam as successful system of human life?

What went wrong with the Arab pioneers of the Islamic civilization across the European continent? Bernard Lewis (What Went Wrong) talks about the currents of history, primitive role-play, missing leadership and the impacts of political and technological advances of Europe to have curtailed the growth of Muslims influence. However, amongst many reasons, few shall suffice to explain the primary concerns:

1. Neglect of Islam as a system of life and absence of proactive transformational leadership
2. Change in the Originality of Thinking: absence of proactive vision for the good of the humanity –the role model to forbid evil and promote righteousness (“Ummah of Khair”- the nation of goodness)
3. Systematic decadence in intellectual, moral and political leadership
4. Dismantling of the Islamic institutions of thinking and political governance for change and development of One Ummah, and defiance to the role of reasoning and accountability
5. Adaptability to colonial thinking, behaviors, and social norms that drained out Islamic unity, creativity and movement.
6. Fluid and transitory prosperity – aftermath of the oil export revenues.
7. Incurable illusions of the neo-colonialist elite that oil revenues are forever and their exclusive property
8. Overwhelming materialism and consumerism: training of body and spiritual domain desperately needed training of the faith and a committed mind.

When the colonialism ended, the freedom movements ill conceived the continued role of neo-colonial leadership in Muslim societies mostly occupied by those who were uneducated feudal lords or tribal clan leaders seen as being ignorant, corrupt, and subservient to the neo-colonial master, not the much sought proactive leaders to make the future.

One wonders, if it is an accumulated disgust or considered failure of the contemporary Arab leadership? Generation after generations, Muslims have been defeated and submerged into other entities by the

Western masters. So-called liberal democracy had no listing of Muslims as suitable creatures for progressive role-play in international community. Humanity in the West shrank from intelligence to stupidity, whereas, Charles Darwin (*Origin of the Species*), was uplifted and honored, man ("insaan") was degraded from all the possible entries of making the human civilization. Whereas, Islam focused on the man ("insaan") as the primary object of change and progressive development. Alexis Carrel (*Man the Unknown*, 1936), appears to affirm the Islamic perspective on human development:

"Certain forms of modern life lead directly to degeneration....in the poor as well the rich, leisure engenders degeneration. Cinemas, concerts, radios, automobiles and athletics are no substitute for intelligent work. We are far from having solved this momentous problem of idleness created by prosperity, modern machinery or unemployment. By imposing leisure upon man, scientific civilization has brought him great misfortune. We are incapable of fighting the consequences of indolence and irresponsibility as cancer and mental diseases.....after all the purpose of civilization is not the progress of science and machines, but the progress of man."

But those Arabs and other Muslims, the pioneers of scientifically progressive civilization, became prisoners of foreign ideas – from freedom to human exploitation, just affixed on paper – phenomenon of exalted humanity – Alhambra palace to Taj Mahal, all transformed into digits and numbers to become an abstract reference in tourist guide, interpretive history full of material civilization, nothing else. The folly of deliberate pedagogy to conceal and distort the entire moral and spiritual progressive evolution of the mankind left to be interpreted in questionable terminology. While ignorance "jahiliyya" and arrogance rule across the globe, true knowledge and the Divine Wisdom live in denials.

How could the contemporary Muslims revive the cultural presence and leadership role in the global political arena? The 21st century is more enlightened and an age of information and knowledge-driven global culture of creativity, effective leadership and human progress. It is not reasonable for the ignorant to inherit kingship or a leadership role to be successful. The political imperatives call for the new generation of proactive educated and intelligent people to be in the leading role of planning of change and reformation of the old and obsolete inherited infrastructures of political governance unto new sustainable system of institutional development and nation-building and enriched to communicate effectively and represent the Islamic interests in a rational manner. The hard facts of life speak for themselves. There is not a single Muslim country to present a credible intelligent leader to the international community. Muslims are operative from a position of moral and intellectual weakness and deprivation, not of strength. To change the naïve political governance, Muslims in general and the Arabs in particular, must develop public institutions of the citizenry participation as Islam emphasizes the concept of "Shura"- consultation an important principle for societal decision making, of law, justice and accountability. Muslims as one Ummah could well have a common currency, economic productivity, an international organization - "Ummah Council" responsible to develop policies and deal with issues of security, peace and conflict resolution, and to represent the unity of the Muslim Ummah as an agent of influence to strengthen the Islamic perspectives in a challenging global politics. The powerful nations of the world have intelligent and powerful leaders to represent their national interests. Muslims are handicapped, misinformed and have failed to develop leaders like Syed Qutb, Jamaluddin Afghani, Abu al Alla Moudoodi, Mohammad bin AbdulWahab, Sultan Salahuddin Ayoubi, King Abdulaziz founder of Saudi Arabia, Dr. Soekarno of Indonesia, Dr. Allama Mohammad Iqbal, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Ayub Khan of Pakistan. The Muslim societies cannot escape the responsibility of collective failure to produce intelligent leaders. The consequences of living under authoritarian rulers and political turmoil are degenerating the Muslim's' energies, positive thoughts and creative abilities.

Leaders striving to be effective and successful must hold a vision of the future and be open to listening and learning, not rigid and hiding in remote palaces away from the people. Most often, they are aware of the best strategies to utilize their resources, of strengths and weaknesses of the people around them and a proactive vision to plan and make the future happen out of concrete ideas and ideals- facts of human life conforming to the Laws of God. When the contemporary Muslims left the assigned mission, they became victims of the modernity entrapment which led to their downfall and displacement from homes, shelters, and living habitats. Now, more and more are displaced people and refugees in their own homes and surroundings, a status never imagined but planned by the forces of "jahiliyya" to victimize the

believers. Islam emphasized the evolution of institutions in human progress but the authoritarian rulers diminished the development of public institutions of learning, administration, justice and accountability. The 21st century is marked by planned conflicts and wars of greed and political domination. Look at the Islamic world, there is not a single institution or university in any Muslim countries to deal with the important issues of international security, peace and conflict management. If you propose to the rich oil exporting Arab leaders of the imperatives of building such learning institutions to enhance the bonds of Islamic civilization, they will get offended and would never respond to your suggestions. Simply, they are not open to listening to the voices of REASON as was the Shah of Iran, General Musharaf, Colonel Nasser, Saddam Hussein and so many others unaware of their own end. The so called leaders - military dictators, authoritarian kings and presidents and political thugs gained millions and billions from the planned devastation of the Muslim masses in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan only to enrich their life style in the Western sponsored theatre of absurdity until they die in disgrace.

Being optimistic in encountering the harsh challenges of global peace and conflict management and ample opportunities to plan and change the course of somewhat backward Muslim affairs and to remake the promising future of the Muslim Ummah happen out of planned efforts, Carly Fiorina, the former CEO of Hewlett Packard ("TECHNOLOGY, BUSINESS AND OUR WAY OF LIFE: WHAT'S NEXT"), moved my thoughts and soul and fascinated me with her ideas and vision when recently I communicated to her on what she had stated years ago:

"There was once a civilization that was the greatest in the world....

And this civilization was driven more than anything, by invention. Its architects designed buildings that defied gravity. Its mathematicians created the algebra and algorithms that would enable the building of computers, and the creation of encryption. Its doctors examined the human body, and found new cures for disease. Its astronomers looked into the heavens, named the stars, and paved the way for space travel and exploration.

Its writers created thousands of stories. Stories of courage, romance and magic. Its poets wrote of love, when others before them were too steeped in fear to think of such things. When other nations were afraid of ideas, this civilization thrived on them, and kept them alive. When censors threatened to wipe out knowledge from past civilizations, this civilization kept the knowledge alive, and passed it on to others. While modern Western civilization shares many of these traits, the civilization I'm talking about was the Islamic world from the year 800 to 1600, which included the Ottoman Empire and the courts of Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo, and enlightened rulers like Suleiman the Magnificent. Although we are often unaware of our indebtedness to this other civilization, its gifts are very much a part of our heritage. The technology industry would not exist without the contributions of Arab mathematicians. Sufi poet-philosophers like Rumi challenged our notions of self and truth. Leaders like Suleiman contributed to our notions of tolerance and civic leadership.... This kind of enlightened leadership — leadership that nurtured culture, sustainability diversity and courage — led to 800 years of invention and prosperity." Are there any Muslim leaders open to listening and learning for their own good and capable to articulate a navigational change to serve the interests of the Muslim Ummah?

Al-Qura'an spells out the rationale: "intelligent people always readily accept advice."

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