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

by Mahboob A. Khawaja
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"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?"

"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-Andulus (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-Mujahtamah (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.

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