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MUSLIMS' CONTRIBUTION IN THE EUROPEAN RENAISSANCE

Whenever I was puzzled by a problem or was unable to establish the middle term of sylogism, I would go to the mosque, pray, and beg to the Creator of All to reveal to me that which was difficult. Then at night, I would return home, put a lamp in front of me, and set to work, reading and writing. Whenever sleep overcame me, or when I felt myself exhausted, I would drink a modest cup to restore my strength and then go on reading. When I dozed, I would dream of the same problem, so that for many problems the solution appeared to me in my sleep. I went on like this until I was firmly grounded in all sciences and mastered them as far as humanly possible'.—(Ibn-i-Sina, *Autobiography*)

Anthropologically speaking, the different parts of the world have always been mutually interdependent. The diffusion and propagation of cultural norms through the epochs of known human history have given rise to a more 'internationalistic' culture. The growth of human consciousness towards basic equality and a mutual sharing of these cultures is a recent phenomenon, where diversity in human experience now seems to be a more natural and rational process. The evolution of a more mobile, modern and technologically advanced world of today's West is not a more development in isolation; it is rather the result of so many international factors and forces which anthropologists, sociologists and cultural historians have come to accept as a *fait accompli*. The growth of modern Western civilization since Renaissance and Reformation is an unparalleled historical reality due to its mobility, inherent growth and internationalic cross-currents in almost every sphere of human society. Modern Western civilization brought forth a jargon of movements, which resulted into a complete transformation of the European society, and its off-springs elsewhere. Simultaneously, the very civilization since its inception, was spearheaded by a more mobile and ambitious middle class, mainly consisting of manufacturers, entre-

preneurs and traders—the Bourgeoise.[2] The rise of the Protestant Revolution, commercial expansion, colonialism and industrialism, or for that matter the evolution of the entire capitalistic hodge-podge owes its origin to this very ambitious middle class, which brought Europe out of its medieval past into a modern era. With enlightenment and its posthumous, Europe became the most developed part of our planet and its mighty cultural values became the accepted common norms of the countless generations in the East. Though during this very period of isms and revolutions, certain philosophers felt disappointed about its future,[3] yet the material progress of the West continued unhindered.

The entire saga of modernization and material progress in the West started with Renaisance, which became a focal point in the European history. Renaissance closed the Middle Ages and initiated a new era in the Western civilization. Renaissance infused Europe with a new wave of self-reliance. Such a historic and pivotal movement covering a span of two centuries, owed its evolution to a number of factors and forces. European travellers, the Crusades, sense of competition with the Muslim neighbours, role of the Muslim Spain, fall of Constantinople, waning of the feudal age, invention of the printing machine and many other factors strengthened European quest for identity.

Besides acknowledging the due importance of other factors in the inception and development of Renaissance, the fact goes beyond challenge that the Muslims had much to do with the origin of Renaissance, and the ensuing destiny of the West.

Before visualizing the role of Muslims in Renaissance it will be appropriate to have a theoretical estimate of this intellectual movement itself. 'Renaissance' is a French word which literally means 'revival' or 'rebirth'. In Italian, it is 'Renascenza' or 'Renascimento'.[4] In European history, it is the mainspring of a new era, when feudal age started vanishing from the European scenario. Petrarch, the famed 14th century poet, classical philosopher and an early humanist believed that Renaissance was 'a time of revival not of Latin studies alone but of all man's intellectual and creative powers.'[5] In its classical meaning, Renaissance stood for a quest for antiquity which regenerated an interest among the Europeans to reorient themselves with the Graeco-Roman heritage.

Starting from Italy it spread to other parts of Europe and equally influenced all the socio-cultural spheres including literature, art and politics. High Renaissance, which occurred around the beginning of the 16th century, was contemporary to the Protestant Revolution.

Humanists like Erasmus, Thomas More, Castilogne; master creators like Michaelanglo de Vinci and Raphael; scientists like Copernicus, Galelio and Kepler; and political theorists like Machiavelli, heralded a new era in the Western culture. Imbued with the more mundane and individualistic precepts of Renaissance, reformers like Luther, Calvin and Zwingli challenged the traditional hierarchy of the Catholic Church and Europe entered a new threshold of scientific and geographic discoveries. Renaissance, with its emphasis on individualism and a more rational life infused a new self-reliance amongst the Europeans, and they very ambitiously embarked on the reorganization of their societies with a bourgeoise character.

The importance of Renaissance was properly acknowledged during the mid-19th century, when Jules Michlet, a French historian, titled the seventh volume of his *History of France* as 'Renaissance'. In 1855, he theorized it as an antithesis to the Middle Ages. Jacob Burckhardt, the conservative Swiss historian, while writing during that very period, called it a distinct epoch which started in 14th century and ended in 16th century.[7] Renaissance became a root-cause of a conglomeration of new isms in its European context where the tantrums of the Age of Chivalry seemed shattered. Under its protegee a new Europe emerged. Since long Renaissance has become synonymous with optimism and a positive change.[8]

As mentioned earlier, Renaissance owes its existence to a number of factors and forces which rigorously refashioned life in the West. Along with a multitude of internal causes and reasons, Europe felt the tremours from the outside world. The decisive role of the Muslims in the evolution is an undisputed reality. The Muslims, who, during the Middle Ages, had been able to establish magnificent institutions and traditions in politics, philosophy, academics, sciences, arts, architecture, and a number of other fields were themselves harbingers of a new age for the contemporary Christendom. The Muslim centres of power extending from Spain to Central Asia and from North Africa to South Asia were simultaneously the fountainheads of the above mentioned realms in human life. They presented a dynamic challenge to the contemporary Europeans, whom they constantly and unflinchingly reminded them their by-gone past. The Golden Age of the Muslims influenced the European mind and endowed it with a positive and more definitive curiosity to dig out its own place in the sun.

The Muslims did not build up their cultural heritage in a vacuum, rather they inherited many of its traits from the preceding human

generations. The Judeo-Christian morality, Greek philosophy, and Indo-Chinese sciences were a great asset for the Muslim scholars who not only preserved this valuable human heritage from a total decay, but also rendered yeoman additions to it. Simultaneously, the Muslims with a missionary zeal refined the inherited scholarship, and, with their own innovations presented an alive synthesis for the succeeding human generations. The Muslim libraries and schools in Damascus, Kufa, Baghdad, Nishapur, Bokhara, Qayarawan and Cordova boasted of rare manuscripts and with a continuum of patronage for further researches, the creative activities went on endlessly and incessantly. The Islamic emphasis on education, travel and mutual sharing created mobility among the scholars who would work endlessly and laboriously to enhance learning and scholarship. The regular patronization of the scholars, researchers and the artists by the Ummayyids and then the Abbassids resulted into the golden era of Islamic arts and letters.

The Muslims not only preserved classical heritage of the Greeks, Persians, Romans and the Indians, but with their improvisations and additions caused a dynamic synthesis in different branches of knowledge. They preserved the classical human heritage for the posterity and due to the strategic location of the Muslim world, the socio-cultural under-currents in the adjoining areas were influenced enormously. The libraries in Baghdad and Cordova consisted of rare collections under the guidance of quite a few enlightened and gifted sovereigns.[9] The non-Muslims equally contributed and benefited from the world of academics and spent their life-time in translating the original works from science and philosophy. In other words, the Muslims proved a vital channel in the continuity of an all-transcending and all-pervading cultural inheritance by its preservation, addition and diffusion, which otherwise would have been lost, since Europe "had itself become fragmentary, 'medievalized' and unproductive".[10]

The Arabic language revived the antiquity, and quite assuredly other Muslim languages like Persian and Turkish maintained this intellectual suzerainty. However, Arabic remained the predominant *modus vivendi* for the classical learning and arts. As an author opined :

> Its geographical diffusion in three continents enabled it to leave important traces on several non-Islamic literary traditions; for Europe and the Mediterranean region it became, along with the other two classical literatures, Greek and Latin, an integral part of the medieval complex.[11]

Muslim Near East was the earliest cultural centre of Islam after the Hejaz and posthumously, Andalusia[12] emerged as a culminating point where East and West met more dynamically. This process continued on until the hey-days of the Ottoman Empire, when Constantinople evolved as a new cultural bridge between both the Worlds. Actually, it was through Muslim Spain that Europe was endowed with a new self-consciousness and a new age started in the West: "Here (Spain) the cultural contacts between Islam and Christendom, which began in the days of the Cordova amirate, were carried on intensively by the Mozarbic and Jewish elements throughout the period of Arab domination, and it yielded its best fruits at the time when this domination was declining".[13] The eminent orientalists acknowledge the Muslim contributions in the evolution of a modern Europe.[14]

The Muslims in Spain, like their counterparts in Sicily, were destined to play a vital role in the transfer of the new ideas and institutions to the contemporary Europe. The Moors produced men of ultra-intellectual forbearings in almost every discipline of learning. This galaxy of intellectuals and inventors included Christian as well as Jewish scholars who used Arabic as a medium of expression in their works, along with Latin and Hebrew. But still Arabic remained the *lingua franca* of the time for all the talents.

The Muslim scientists included well-known inventors like Hasan b. al-Hatham, whose discoveries in the field of optics helped the future studies completed by Roger Bacon and Witelo. Similarly, Hunayn b. Ishaq, al-Farabi, Ibn-i-Rushd and al-Razi were the other leading innovators of the time, who rendered multifarious services in the disciplines of natural and medical sciences. Ishaq b. Sulayman was another physician with the Jewish ethnic background, who rose to the highest pinnacle of fame. Ibn-Zuhr and Maimondas—the latter also being a Jew—belonged to the category of the scientists who mainly dwelt on the scientific discoveries of Ibn-i-Sina and al-Farabi. This was the age of inter-disciplinary learning, where an individual dealt in philosophy, sciences and literature simultaneously. Such individuals spent a major portion of their lives in gaining knowledge through travels to far away places and spent rest of their lives in transmitting it to others. They would attend the *daras* of some eminent scholar in religious or mundane academies and then would move on to the farthest corner of the Muslim world to resume teaching and research. Quite frequently such talents were patronized by the rulers, but still these scholars were the most mobile people of their age. They worked as the agents of trans-

cultural and trans-intellectual values in far away regions. Like al-Beruni and others, these people travelled with the Muslim armies to the new places and with their observation and participation acquired a practical form of knowledge. They wrote in Arabic mostly, which was the Latin of the Muslim world. Ibn-i-Sina and Ibn-i-Khaldun are some of the best case-studies of this mobile Muslim intelligentsia of the Middle Ages: "With Ibn-i-Sina, Muslim medicine reached the peak of its achievement. While less of a clinical physician than al-Razi, he was more philosophical, more systematic; he tried to rationalize the immense accumulation of medical science which has been inherited from antiquity and enriched by his predecessors". He was very much influenced by early Greek scientists like Hippocrates and Galen, and himself discussed the favourite contemporary philosophical themes like soul, mind and ego, so much a popular subject with Read Descartes the father of the European rationalist school of thought.

The European philosophical development was hastened to a large extent under the influence of the findings of Ibn-i-Tufail, Ibn-i-Rushd, al-Farabi, Ibn-i-Hazm, Ibn-i-Arabi and Ibn-i-Bajja. Ibn-i-Rushd, generally known as the commentator in the West was an original thinker, while Ibn-i-Arabi introduced Oriental mysticism in the Occident. Ibn-i-Khaldun, with the *Muqqadama* reinterpreted the philosophy of history in quite an innovative way and became the pioneer sociologist in the realm of academics. In the fieid of astronomy al-Battani became the focal point, while al-Khawarizimi combined Greek and Indian mathematical ideas to create algebra: "And it is a fact that during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Greek philosophy was studied in the West on the basis of Arab re-elaboration, rather than through direct transmission and translation. The logic, physics and metaphysics of Aristotle were studied either in re-translations from Arabic or in the works of Ibn-i-Sina"[16].

The European scholars flocked to the Muslim Spain and re-translated manuscripts into Latin. The earliest translation of the Holy Quran was done by Adelard of Bath and Robert of Chester; the two Englishmen studying in Muslim Spain. During the 12th century, quite a few European scholars residing in Spain were engaged in such research pursuits. For example, Lombard Gerard translated more than seventy works from Arabic into Latin. Leading exponents of the European Scholasticism like Thomas Aquinas owed enormously to the Muslim philosophers like Ibn-i-Rushd. This inter-relationship between the Medieval Europe and the world of Islam was manifold. The earliest European universities in Italy, France and England emerged as a result

of this intellectual and cultural intercourse between the East and the West. The Muslims influenced the European mind through their rich Arabic literature which stood for romance, courtly love and an austere life[17]. Similarly, the Muslims enriched the other subjects like history, geography and travel accounts, as a modern authority on the Muslim Spain observed: "The Hispano-Arabic scholar was not a professional in the strict sense of the word, but rather a man of erudition and diversified learning. He was more often than not a religious scholar, grammarian, poet, jurist, scientist, or statesman. As such he was prolific writer who tried his hand at writing on the various disciplines".[18] Ibn-i-Hazm, al-Razi, Ibn-i-Khaldun and al-Maqqarri were the leading historians like al-Babri, al-Idrisi, and Ibn-i-Battutah, the known geographers and travellers of that period.

In the world of architecture, minor arts and music, the Muslims in Spains excelled their contemporaries in Europe. Their beautifully ornamented mosques, palaces, bath houses in and around Cordova, Saville or Granada testified a unique artistic taste cultivated by the Muslims in Spain. The suburbs of the metropolitan centres with sprawling orchards, flowing streams and ornate vine-covered villas embodied the aesthetic sense of the Moors. The architectural designs of the great Mosque in Cordova with its decorated arches, carved gates and scenic walls symbolized the zenith of the Muslim arts destined to influence Barouqe Art of the 17th century Europe. Similarly, the ruins of al-Zahara or al-Hamara are still great architectural monuments of the world and represent the genius and refined culture of the Andalusian Muslims sufficient enough to provide exotic themes to the known Western writers like Washington Irwing.

In the social life of the Muslims in Spain, women enjoyed comparatively more freedom and a better status than their counterparts in the adjoining territories. Some of them proved to be of great literary and artistic excellence, something not much enjoyed by the contemporary European women.

The Muslim rulers vied for the best talents in poetry, fine arts and music. The richness and eloquence of Arabic introduced many new words, similes and metaphors in the European languages which were hitherto unknown. In the sphere of music, the greatest musician of the Muslim Spain was Ziryab, who had migrated from Baghdad to Spain under some official compulsion. His pupils carried on his musical legacy successively and introduced Europe with many instruments:

In sum, music, singing and dancing were widespread both in rich circles and among the general populace. These arts were so deep rooted that the judge Ibn al-Arabi of Seville defended music against the strictures of the religious scholars. More significantly still, it was in al-Andalus that popular poetry as embodied in *Zajal* and *Mawashahat* was set to music and sung in all places and for every occasion.[19]

Andalus was a cultural bridge between the Muslim East and Christian West. Through the transmission of the classics, arts and literature, the Muslims endowed Europe with their technology which was to play a decisive role in its commercial expansion. The prevalent notion of earth, extensive travel accounts, better technical know-how in ship-building and devices like the compass quite ludicrously enhanced European dream to reach the fabulous East.

The Muslims had their impact on Europe not just through Spain, certain other events in the Middle Ages also helped in buttressing such cross-cultural contacts. The pilgrimages to the Biblical places in the Middle East, and, most of all the Crusades afforded the Europeans with prolonged opportunities to witness the socio-cultural progress of their adversaries. No doubt the Crusades enunciated a new phase in the East-West relationship, where despite political rivalries and warfare, the natural process of acculturation continued on unhindered. The fall of Constantinople happened at the time when the Muslim rule in Spain was on a steady decline and a new channel of this international relationship was emerging.

In short, the Muslims influenced the European thought and life enormously and rendered gigantic services in the evolution a modern age in the Western civilization, Dante, Marco Polo, Aberlard, Chaucer, Machiavelli, Erasmus, Columbus. Vasari, Michaelanglo, Rabelais, Montaigne, Thomas Maon More and so many others who highlighted European Renaissance were beneficiaries of the classical heritage reintroduced to them by the Muslims. What did the Muslims lose or gain from this relationship is in itself a separate story, no doubt, equally grim and sardonic one. However, their services in the re-birth of Europe cannot be overlooked while studying the beginning of a modern phase in the Western Civilization. "In short, during these centuries no aspect of Western European civilization escaped the subtle influence of the East. It is a debt often forgotten today, when the West has so far materially outstripped the peoples of the Near East".[20]

NOTES

1. Quoted in Bernard Lewis, ed., *Islam: From the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, New York: Harper & Row, 1974, p. 179.

2. R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. New York: Penguin Books, 1964.

3. Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West*. London: Allen, 1932, also see, Henry David Thoreau, "On Civil Disobedience" in *Walden*, New York: The New American Library, 1960.

4. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, v. xv, Chicago. the Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 660.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 660. "The twin movements of Renaissance and Reformation tore apart the fundamental fusion between Hellenic and Judaeo-Christian elements in the cultural history of Europe. The extreme champions of each, by insisting upon the sole validity of their chosen outlook rejected the delicate compromise between this world and the next, reason and faith, sense of enjoyment and spiritual cultivation which had been struck by the thinkers and artists of the high Middle Ages". William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West; A History of the Human Community*. Chicago, the Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 585.

6. For detailed study of Renaissance see John A. Symonds, *The Renaissance in Italy*, 2 vols., New York: Modern Library Inc., 1935: Frederick Hartt, *Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, Englewood Cliffs, N. J. Prentice-Hall Inc., pp. 280-92; Wallace K. Ferguson and Geoffrey Bruun, *A Survey of European Civilization*; Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958; for study on Renaissance Art see Raymond S. Stites, *The Arts and Man*, New York, McGraw Hill Company Inc., 1940, pp. 548-605; Also, Donald Weinstern, ed., *The Renaissance and the Reformation* 1300-1600, New York; the Free Press, 1960; John R. Hale, *Renaissance*, New York; Time-Life Inc., 1965. For Islamic view point on Renaissance Reformation see, Abdul Hameed Siddiqui. *Main Springs of Western Civilization*. Lahore: Islamic Book Centre, pp. 104-152.

7. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, New York; Albert and Charles Boni, 1935.

8. Dr. Iqbal the great poet-philosopher of the East writing in the 20th century emphasised the need for an Islamic Renaissance, which he named *Nishat-i-Sania*. In its Islamic sense, Renaissance has been defined by a contemporary Muslim scholar in the following words : "A renaissance in its traditional context is identified with the function of a renewer or *Mujaddid*".—Seyyed Hossein Nasir, *Islam and the Plight of the Modern Man*, London: Longmans, 1975.

9. For further study see, Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, London: Routledge Kegan Ltd., 1975.

10. G. E. Grunebaum, "The sources of Islamic Civilization", in P. M. Holt, Ann Lamton & Bernard Lewis, ed., *The Cambridge History of Islam*, V. II, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970, p. 474.

11. Irfan Shahid, "Arabic Literature", in *Ibid.*, p. 657.

12. There are quite a few works on the Muslim Spain covering different periods and aspects of the Islamic Civilization in that part of the West. See Reinhart Dozy, *Spanish Islam, A History of the Moslems in Spain*, translated by Francis Griffin Stokes, London, Frank Cass, 1972. It still stands the pioneering and an authentic treatment of the Muslim Spain. Also see, S. S. Ahmad, *The Moorish Spain*, Karachi,

Farooq Kitab Ghar, 1972. Duncon Tewnson, *Muslim Spain*, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1973 and titles Burckhardt, *Moorish Culture in Spain*, translated by Ali Jaffa, London: George Allen Univ Ltd., 1972.

For nearly eight centuries, under her Mohammadan rulers Spain set to all Europe a shining example of a civilised and enlightened State....Art, literature, and science prospered, as they prospered nowhere else in Europe. Students flocked from France and Germany and England to drink from the fountain of learning which flowed only, in the cities of the Moors. The surgeons and doctors of Andalusia were in the van of science: Women were encouraged to devote themselves to serious study, and the lady doctor was not unknown among the people of Cordova. Mathematics, astronomy and botany history, philosophy, and jurisprudence were to be mastered in Spain, and Spain alone. Stanley Lane-People, *The Moors in Spain*: Lahore: Publishers United Ltd., p. iii.

13. F. Gabrieli, "Transmission of Learning and Literary Influence to Western Europe", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, v. ii, p. 853.

14. These people have a long list which includes a variety of scholars belonging to a number of academic disciplines working in numerous languages. Along with Rosenthal, one can include some other known contemporary figures like Bernard Lewis, W. C. Smith and Sir Montgomery Watt.

15. G. Anwati, "Science", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p. 772.

16. F. Gabrieli, *op. cit.*, p. 857.

17. For further details see, Anwar C. Chejne, *Muslim Spain: Its History and Culture*, Minneapolis, the Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1974, pp. 182-263.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 374.

20. John B. Harrison & Richard E. Sullivan, *A Short History of Western Civilization*, New York; Alfred A. Knopf, 1971, p. 273.