

## Past glory, present gloom of scholarship among Muslims

By [DR MD MAHMUDUL HASAN](#) - March 19, 2022 @ 7:45pm



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EARLY Muslim eras were replete with great achievements in the fields of medicine, science and technology.

Muslims had enjoyed spectacular growth and successes in academic and educational realms, and their past glory in different branches of knowledge has remained a source of pride for their successors.

It is often believed that discussing the legacies of early Muslims has inspirational value to the younger generation. Therefore, many Muslims like to dwell on and rejoice in what their predecessors had achieved in the distant past.

However, currently the decline in Muslims' excellence in intellectual and artistic pursuits is steep and steady. The lacklustre performance of today's Muslims in knowledge and intellectual activities is so evident that it is difficult to reconcile their past with their present.

Mental stagnation, mimicry, confusion and rigid conformity to the status quo largely characterise the contemporary global Muslim community.

Many believe that the current crisis among Muslims derives from their intellectual stasis and complacency. Their educational backwardness has bred mental staleness and dependence on others, all of which has contributed to their collective degradation.

Despite this bleak picture, there is no dearth of smug and self-righteously complacent Muslims.

I have noticed that many of those Muslims who prefer basking in the great past of the Islamic civilisation are themselves lazy, mediocre, frivolous and visionless.

What makes it even worse is that some of them promote mediocrity and exhibit sycophancy rather than diligence, efficiency and excellence.

To my dismay, I have observed that many among the educated Muslims regurgitate the glorious past of Muslim history and the feats of early Muslim scientists and scholars only to cover their own mediocrity and swim in the sea of complacency.

All these have made me somewhat reticent and reluctant to discuss the florid and gloried past of Muslim civilisation.

While it is important that Muslims connect with their past, they should put greater emphasis on the here and now. They need to have the correct approach to history, considering whether it will help or hinder their progress.

Revelling in past splendours and showing lack of commitment to present needs and urgencies can be a recipe for disaster.

Despite my enormous respect for early scholars, I strongly believe that the responsibility of educated Muslims today is to address issues that affect us all.

We can gather guidance and inspiration from our scholarly forebears, but a total reliance on them can prove detrimental.

Stellar contributions of early Muslims to knowledge and scholarship may not compensate for the poor performance of their present-day descendants in cerebral work.

There are innumerable examples to show that, at present, Muslims in general lag far behind others in education and intellectual activities.

Here is one. Muslims constitute the second largest religious community in most western countries. However, this demographic strength has not translated into their intellectual achievements yet.

I once read two books by an Oxford academic who is also a prominent Muslim scholar. One title was published by an Islamic publisher and the other by a conventional one – both based in the United Kingdom.

The difference in quality between the two books was stark and easy to spot.

Unfortunately, the merit of the book published by the Islamic press ranged from poor-quality to average-quality and was far below the standard of the one published by the non-Islamic one.

Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that no publishing house run by Muslims is among the top 100 "Reputable Book Publishing Companies" in the world.

The same is true with the number of Muslim scholars. While there are many outstanding writers and intellectuals in the global Muslim community, their number is proportionately smaller and their influence is rather limited.

With few exceptions, in most disciplines, Muslims do not feature among the top experts.

University academics in Muslim countries include in their reading lists for their students books most of which are written by non-Muslims. High quality course materials and reliable sources in various fields of study and interest are not commonly produced by Muslims.

Presently, their contribution to scholarship (even in Islamic disciplines) is not very impressive.

For competitive academic scholarships, Muslim students have to rely on products coming from non-Muslim sources.

Hence, most Muslim countries have to spend a huge amount of revenue on importing books and other references for their learning communities.

While it incurs a huge economic cost, Muslims' poor performance in knowledge production also deprives others of the Muslim perspective on various intellectual debates.

In my humble opinion, the burden of responsibility to repair the intellectual deficit that Muslims are currently experiencing and the scholarly neglect that they are exhibiting is on the educated among them.

Their sincerity and hard work in research and scholarship can help Muslims become worthy successors of their glorious predecessors.

A desire for cheap popularity or a morbid craving for recognition and spectacle is the converse of what is needed to face this epistemic challenge successfully. Early Muslim scholars in general were not after worldly gains, adulation, attention or flattery.

Maintaining comparable sincerity on the part of today's Muslim academics and scholars is perhaps a prerequisite to excellence in scholarly practices.

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