



Muslim Rule in Spain





Spain is the biggest country of Europe.

It is a constitutional monarchy with Madrid as its capital.

In Muslim history, Spain is also remembered by its two other names, Andulus and Hispania.

Muslims ruled Spain with full grace and glory for about eight centuries.

It is they who converted it into the most civilised and the most charming land in the world.

In 714 A.D. Spain was ruled by a tyrant Christian ruler, Roderick.

An oppressed Christian chief, Julian, appeared before Mūsā Ibn Nusayr, the Muslim governor of North Africa, and complained about the lust, greed and tyranny of king Roderick.

Mūsā felt sympathy for the oppressed Spaniards. He ordered his famed general, Tāriq Ibn Ziyād to conquer Spain and to set things straight there.





General Tāriq sailed for Spain with an army of 12,000 men.

He anchored at a place around the Spanish coastal areas which later came to be known after his name as Jabl al-Tāriq.

It is presently called Gibraltar. Soon after landing General Tāriq burnt all his ships so that his men may not think of returning or retreating.

Due to his dare and determination Tāriq defeated a far big and more well-equipped army of Roderick which consisted of more than 1,00,000 troops.

Seated majestically on his splendid throne king Roderick had come to the battlefield with an aroma of great pomp and show. His troops were wearing brand new, glittering uniforms. They were all very well-equipped with all sorts of arms and ammunition. Immediately after his defeat the king fled away from the battlefield.

This is how the Muslim rule started in Spain in 714 A.D. The Spanish masses heaved a sigh of relief on getting liberated from the yokes of Roderick's tyrannical rule. Some historians have stated that the Prophet Muhammad (sws) had foretold General Tāriq in a dream about the victory of Spain.





The long Muslim rule in Spain could be conveniently divided into three phases: Three Phases of Islamic Rule

1. First phase of confusion and chaos, 714-756 A.D. (93-138 A.H.)
2. Golden era of power and progress, 756-1036 A.D. (138-428 A.H.); and
3. Awful age of anarchy and annihilation. 1036-1492 A.D. (428-897 A.H.)





First Phase of Confusion and Chaos (714-756 A.D)

Spain was conquered during the Umayyid age in 714 A.D.

(The Umayyid rule in Spain started in 714 A.D. (93 A.H.).
It ended in 756 A.D. (138 A.H.).

‘Abd al-Azīz, the son of Mūsā Ibn Nusayr, the conqueror of Spain, was appointed the first Amīr of Spain. He had married the widow of emperor Frederick.

The wicked Christian elements of the vanquished Spain were indulging in mischief-making through the medium of that shrewd woman.

They continued exploiting her as a convenient tool to promote rift among the Muslims and to enhance their own influence.

They went on fanning the inter-Muslim differences between Arabs and Berbers, clashes among Syrian and Madinite tribes and conflicts between Shī‘as and Sunnīs.





The growing inner divisions and dissensions eventually assumed such a serious magnitude that keeping solid and united Muslim rule in Spain became impossible.

It was at this critical juncture that the Umayyid prince ‘Abd al-Rahmān managed to sneak into Spain. That is why he is known as al-Dākhil (‘the entrant’), because he entered into Spain and established his rule over there.

‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Dākhil defeated the tottering Syrian government in Spain with the help of a handful of Berber troops.

By 10th Dhū al-Hajj, 138 A.H. he had captured the whole of Spain. With that, the first Umayyid phase of confusion and chaos came to a permanent close.

The most unfortunate feature of the first phase of Muslim rule in Spain is their failure to rule properly.





Golden Era of Power and Progress (756-1036 A.D.)

The golden era of Muslims rule in Spain starts in 756 A.D. (138 A.H.) with the advent of the rule of ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Dākhil.

He ruled for about 33 years. He laid solid foundations of a sovereign and progressive Umayyid government. Instead of adopting the rather exalted title of a Khalīfah he preferred to be called as Amīr.

Abd al-Rahmān al-Dākhil overpowered intrigues and insurgencies very wisely. He displayed statesmanship of a high calibre in administering the Muslim state. He reorganised the system of law and justice.

He was extremely fond of knowledge and learning.

He invited celebrated scholars from all over the world and organised specialised debates and discussions. It was mainly due to his patronage of knowledge that Spain eventually rose to the position of the world centre of arts and sciences.

He took keen interest in constructing magnificent mosques and beautiful buildings.





Qartaba, the capital of the Muslim Spain, was turned into an extremely pretty metropolis. He raised a charming garden outside the Qartaba city.

Flower and fruit trees of a vast variety were planted in that garden. A date-palm tree, specially imported from Syria, was also planted to serve as a refreshing symbol of the great Arab civilisation and culture.

The eminent eastern poet, Iqbāl, has also penned a poem on this historic tree in his famous book, Bāl-i-Jibrīl.

Construction of the historic mosque at Qartaba was also started during the reign of ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Dākhil.

On his death his son, Hishām Ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān succeeded him in 788 A.D. as the Amīr of Spain.





Hishām Ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān

Southern France was invaded and captured again during his reign.

Arabic was made compulsory During his reign.

A pleasant effect of this measure was that the local population began to learn and gain directly from the Islamic sciences.

This opened up new visions and vistas in their thought and behaviour.

The resultant mental, cultural and professional changes then served as solid base for the Renaissance Movement to spread in the whole of Europe.





Hakam I succeeded Hishām as Amīr.

As he conquered several other areas in France he came to be known as ‘the Conqueror’. After him, many others came to rule one after the other till the famed ‘Abd al-Rahmān III became the ruler in 912 A.D.

He consolidated Muslim rule further.

In 929 A.D. he adopted the title of Khalīfah instead of the Amīr.

He earned global name and fame for his wisdom, courage, conquests and administrative ability. Many foreign countries established diplomatic ties with the great Islamic state. Mutayan Billah was the last Umayyid ruler of Spain. After him the government got transferred to Muhammad Ibn Amr Mansūr, the founder of the Amr dynasty.

Like ‘Abd al-Rahmān III, Muhammad Amr too was a great ruler in the history of Spain. He earned exceptional honour and respect for his bravery, wisdom, justice and simplicity. He ruled for 27 years. He led such a large number of fruitful Jihāds that he came to be known as the ‘the Victorious’. Mansūr died in 1006 A.D.





After a few of his successors the rule of the Mansūr dynasty came to a close in Spain in 1036 A.D. That year also marks the end of the golden era of Muslim power and progress in Spain.

Awful Age of Anarchy And Annihilation

The collapse of the Amr Dynasty ushered in the awful age of anarchy and annihilation. This dreadful period is marked by a series of intrigues and insurgencies, disorder and destruction. Starting in 1036 A.D. it culminated in 1492 A.D. with the eventual exit of the Muslims from the Spanish scene.

During this perilous period, instead of one solid and united government, the Muslims got divided into about two dozens petty states. The short-sighted rulers of these petty states were badly given to formal pomp and show.

They used to hold their courts with great grandeur and glory. Professional poets came in one after the other to sing eloquent songs in their praise and received fabulous rewards in return.





The luxury-loving rulers were utterly insensitive to the surrounding situation. Instead of uniting against the threatening Christian power, these petty Muslim states used to clash with each other quite frequently.

In a desperate bid to excel and disgrace each other many senseless rulers often went even to the extent of establishing secret contacts with their Christian opponents.

Throughout this age of anarchy, chaos and confusion while the Spanish Muslims were at daggers drawn with each other, all the Christian powers were busy uniting themselves against the disarrayed Muslims. They were hatching a variety of political and martial plots to drive the Muslims out of Spain. Their re-conquest movement was gaining momentum day by day.

It appeared as if a splendid state conquered and developed with the help of blood and brains, swords and statesmanship was about to collapse under the mounting Muslim surge of luxuries and laxities, intrigues and insurgencies, discord and disunity. The tottering Spanish state was fast nearing its logical end.





Fortunately, however, exactly at that very critical juncture a hardy man from the desert came to the rescue of the Muslims like a blissful angel.

Yūsuf Ibn Tāshfīn was the ruler of Morocco those days.

When he heard of the Christian brutalities on the Spanish Muslims he hastened to invade Spain. On 2nd November, 1086 (22nd Rajab, 479 A.H.) he gave a crushing defeat to king Alfonso, the mainspring of Christian power, in the Battle of Zallaqa. The halo of Christian might was shattered to pieces.

The jubilant Muslims celebrated their great victory.

Yūsuf created an atmosphere of unity and co-operation between all the mutually hostile Muslim states. He settled all problems with political statesmanship as well as military might. Ultimately, he succeeded in restoring the Muslim grandeur and glory once again. Unfortunately, however, Yūsuf died in 1106 A.D. (500 A.H.).

Immediately after his death, the rulers of Muslim states began cutting each other's throats again.





After Yūsuf, his sons and grandsons ruled Spain for some time.

Of all these Nasr Ibn al-Ahmar was most famous.

He did his level best to set up a solid and united Islamic state.

He kept on waging a two-pronged Jīhad:

- (i) fighting against the Christians on the one hand and
- (ii) struggling with the Muslims on the other hand for revival of unity and discipline.

He brought a vast area of south-eastern Spain under his rule.

He made Granada, instead of Qartaba, his capital.

During his reign he also got a magnificent palace built by the name, Qasr al-Hamrā.

This palace is still rated as one of the wonders of the world.

His successors ruled the Granada state for about 250 years.





Tale of Terrors and Tyranny

In 1199 A.D. (595 A.D.) Abū Abdullāh Zaghāl came to rule the Granada state. He endeavoured hard to get the state rid of the growing Christian influence. Unfortunately, however, his nephew Abū Abdullāh Muhammad established secret links with the Christian king, Ferdinand.

He usurped a considerable portion of the Muslim state with Ferdinand's support. After its division into two parts the Granada state became too weak.

Availing this opportunity king Ferdinand invaded Granada with the backing of a united army of the Christian powers.

Vexed with the painful siege Abū Abdullāh Muhammad surrendered before the Christian troops on 3rd January, 1492 (2nd Rabī al-Awwal, 897).





Abū Abdullāh left the Granada city in a disgraceful plight after losing his state. He wept vehemently. His mother looked at him scornfully and said:

‘Why do you cry now like a cowardly woman over the loss of a state you were unable to defend like a brave man?’ Fleeing from Spain Abū Abdullāh Muhammad went over to Africa. He died there in misery after a brief anonymous life.

After driving the Muslims out of Spain the Christian victors wrought havoc with the remaining Muslim population.

The savageries they committed have no match in the history of brutality. An all-out massacre was started.

Thousands of innocent Muslim civilians were murdered mercilessly. Those who escaped the inferno were forcibly converted to Christianity.

Only a handful of Muslims could manage to flee to North Africa.





During their rule, the Muslims had filled Spain with scholarly books.

The Christian victors reduced all those books to ashes, and desecration of the mosques became the order of the day.

A number of the magnificent Muslim monuments were demolished.

Indeed the wave of victors' vengeance touched the peaks of savagery.

The Muslims of Spain got an exemplary punishment for their negligence towards the Holy Qur'ān and the Prophet's Sunnah.

Review of Spain's Glory and Decline

The history of Spain is an integral part of the stimulating story of rise and fall of the Muslims. So long as the Muslims kept the Holy Qur'ān and the Prophet's Sunnah to the fore they went on flourishing in all departments of life. But when they started to deviate from the straight path disgrace and degeneration became their destiny.





Blessings of The Muslims

Sovereignty and unity of God was a refreshing feature conspicuous in the Spanish civilisation and way of life so long as the Muslims remained on that soil.

The Spanish Muslims got the local atmosphere purged of all polytheistic, idolatrous and irreligious practices. They injected the general life with sane thinking and sound behaviour.

As Islam forbids usury, the Spanish Muslims banned it in all public and private commercial transactions. They promoted the general trend to reform character and personality in the light of the fundamentals of Islam.

Their great contribution in the field of architecture makes one wonder at human creativity. Splendid cities, magnificent mosques, beautiful buildings, broad roads, gorgeous gardens, lovely fountains and refreshing pools are living monuments of their refined taste and cultural calibre.





Commerce and industry also got an unusual impetus.

Muslims' command over ship-building, their foreign trade contacts and world wide influence went a long way in promoting Spain's trade and relations with the external world.

In the sector of promotion of knowledge and learning, the Muslims established a network of educational institutions, libraries and cultural centres all over Spain. Reading and writing of books enjoyed a great privilege and priority.

The process of the spread of knowledge was further facilitated by the development of paper industry. Education being free even the common Spaniards had begun to enjoy the fruits of arts and sciences, civilisation and culture.

In fact Spain had become an international centre of knowledge, learning, research and writing.





Students and scholars from all over the world used to flock the Muslim universities in Spain. After acquiring knowledge and wisdom when the foreign learners returned to their homelands, Muslim sciences and civilisation got wider circulation through them all over the European countries.

Consequently, new concepts and ideas began to enlighten the human mind on a massive scale.

This extension in human thinking and learning ultimately formed the basis of the western Renaissance Movement. Later on, it culminated in the generation and growth of the present-day developments in arts and sciences.

Viewed against this historical perspective, there appears no exaggeration in the admissions made even by such renowned non-Muslim writers as Bacon and Dozy that the modern world owes its entire progress and development to creative contributions of the early Spanish Muslims.





Bitter Lessons of Spanish History

The Spanish chapter of Islamic History is an exemplary blend of smiles and sighs. Quite a few bitter lessons emerge out of this pathetic part of human history.

A brief review of such significant lessons appears extremely essential. All these lessons could be summarised thus: When the Muslims followed the Qur'ān and Sunnah, they made spectacular progress in all the fields of life. They got returns and rewards far above their own expectations. Even the non-Muslims and those living beyond the Spanish frontiers availed of the fruits of Muslim creativity and contributions.

But as soon as they turned their backs to the Qur'ān and Sunnah they got set on a perilous path. Muslims of Spain deviated from the right path. They violated the principles of unity and brotherhood of Islam. They gave up labour and hard work and went into the laps of lavishness and luxuries. They got caught up in the quagmire of intrigues and insurgencies, revolts and rebellions.





In fact they went too far away from the principles and practices of Islam. Consequently, they lost all grace and glory.

They were eventually buried deep under the dust and debris of miseries and misfortunes.

It is really depressing to note that the same Spain which once pulsed with the spirit of the religion, culture and civilisation of Islam is now far removed from the blessings of Islam.

The very same people whom Spanish Muslims developed and evolved now even refuse to acknowledge their gratitude to the benefactors.

On the contrary, blunt attempts have rather been made to efface all remnants of Islamic civilisation and culture from the Spanish soil.

Such a sad situation should serve as an eye-opener for the entire Muslim world.





(Extracted from 'The History of Islam' by Dr Abdur Rauf)

