RECONQUESTA: THE MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN CONFLICT IN SPAIN

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Abstract: “Reconquesta” was the continuous struggle of the Christians of Spain against the Muslims throughout the Muslim rule there from 711 to 1492. In this struggle various dynasties of Northern Spain like Castile, Leon, Aragon, Navarre and others got united but also got support of the Christian rulers of France. Earlier they were not so powerful to drive the Muslims out the peninsula but later, with the passage of time, they strengthened their power and succeeded in establishing their rule especially in Northern part of Spain. As a result of their increasing power and civil wars among the Muslims Yusuf bin Tashfin, the ruler of North Africa had to come to Spain and establish the Murabit dynasty there after defeating the Christian forces. During the rule of the Muwahhids there these Christians again became very powerful that resulted in the conquest of Muslim dominant areas by their unified power. The Muslim glory in the country ended after the defeat of Muwahhid ruler, Muhammad al-Nasir in 1212 at Las Navas de Tolosa by the joint army of the Christian states led by Alfonso VIII. After the downfall of Muwahhid rule there remained no Muslim control over Iberian Peninsula except at Granada and some petty Muslim principalities like Cordova, Murcia, Valencia and Seville. These Muslim principalities, after one another, went under the Christian control by 1260. The Nasrid rule remains in existence from 1232 till1492. Many rulers of Nasrid state tried their best to defend their territory and develop their dominant areas during their rule. Unfortunately these Nasrids proved to be very weak before the unified power of Castile and Aragon. As a result they had to pay tribute to Castile. The final blow to the Nasrid rule took place after the marriage of Ferdinand, the prince of Aragon and Isabella, the princes of Castile in 1469. The last Nasrid rulers could not resist before the continuous pressure and attacks of the unified power of Castile and Aragon and with this the Muslim rule over Spain finally came to an end.

Keywords: Reconquesta, Visigothic, Iberian Peninsula, Baptize, Umayyad Emirate, Germanic Prince, Abbasid Caliphate, Muwallad, Mozarab

Introduction: The conquest of Spain in 711-12 AD was one of the most important military achievements of the Muslims. This was in continuation of the conquests made by the Muslim army in different directions in three continents of the world. At the time of this conquests Spain was being ruled by Visigothic ruler Roderick. As per different narrations this campaign of the Muslims was not merely as a result of the greed to capture the Iberian Peninsula but there were many other reasons of this conquest. A reason of this was the shift of power to King Roderick who snatched the throne from the son of Witiza and become Spanish ruler in 709. As a result he and his family became strong opponents of Roderick and Bishop Oppas, the brother of Witiza helped the Muslims against the Visigothic ruler. Count Julian of Ceuta was also an enemy of Roderick who is said to invite Muslims to fight against Roderick and provide the ships to cross the Strait between North Africa and Iberian Peninsula. As per the reports, the hostility between Roderick and Julian Started when the daughter of Julian was either misbehaved or seduced by King Roderick. The Jews that was the oppressed community of the country, was also waiting for some saviour. Sometimes they
were brutally persecuted as a result of their refusal to be baptised. They also helped the invading Muslim army to conquer Spain. The Slaves were also the oppressed and deprived people in Spain under the Christian rule. Their condition was also miserable. It is evident from the fact that with the advent of Islam in Spain they started embracing Islam. The Muslim army not only conquered the whole of Iberian Peninsula but also, many times, crossed the Pyrenees between Spain and France and defeated the French in many encounters. Although a number of Christians, including some nobles, embraced Islam genuinely and adopted the Muslim culture, but from the beginning until the downfall of the last Muslim state in Granada in 1492 the hostility between the two religious communities continued. The French rulers helped the Spanish Christians continuously in fighting against the Muslims. It may be genuinely be concluded that the overall condition of Spain under the Gothic rule was very pathetic as the subject class that included the farmers, traders, labourers, Jews, slaves and other common citizens was not only being misbehaved but harassed and persecuted also by the ruling and religious class. The Jews of the country were not only persecuted but their properties were confiscated after their denial to obey the royal decree of 612 to be baptized. They were continuously targeted by the ruling and religious classes. In such unfortunate condition the Spaniards themselves wanted to get rid of that tyrant government and therefore they appealed Musa bin Nusayr to invade Spain. So it may rightly be said that the Muslim conquest of Spain was more the need of the Spaniards than the Muslim policy of expansion. This may be certified from the fact that the deposed son of Witiza was given the region of Toledo and Achila after they were conquered by the Muslim army. After giving the crushing defeat to Roderick in July 711 on the bank of Barbate river Tariq, headed an army of 12000 Muslim soldiers, marched forward and captured many major towns like Ecija, Toledo, Seville, Archidona, Elvira, Granada, Malagha and their neighbouring areas. Some of them surrendered before the Muslim army and some offered some resistance. Before Musa bin Nusayr entered Spain in June 712 Tariq is said to have conquered almost the half of Spain. Many towns that Tariq did not capture were taken in his control by Musa who was heading an army of about 10,000 Muslim soldiers. Medina Sidonia, Cordova and Merida included these important cities. The Muslim conquest of the remaining Spanish cities continued after Musa met Tariq near Toledo. In this campaign the Muslim army conquered Saragossa, Aragon, Leon, Asturias and Galicia. Within the period of about two and a half years until the end of 713 the whole of Spain came under Muslim control and became a part of the Muslim World. Throughout the period from the advent of Islam in Spain until the establishment of Umayyad Emirate in the peninsula in 756 the country remained under the direct control of the Governor-General of North Africa. Under him many governors were appointed under Spain who not only managed the administration of the region but also defended their conquered areas. Musa appointed his son, ‘Abd al- ‘Aziz after he was summoned by caliph Walid bin Abd al- Malik to Damascus. So ‘Abd al- ‘Aziz became the first governor of Muslim Spain. Since Spain passed a period of disturbance the first two governors of this Umayyad province could not divert their attention towards France although after the conquest of Spain, Musa wanted to conquer it but according to the reports Caliph al- Walid did not permit him. It was during the governorship of al- Hurr bin Abd al- Rahman al- Thaqafi that the conflict between the Muslims and Christians resumed. He crossed the Pyrenees, fought against the Franks and got huge wealth there. The Muslim raids into France continued even after his deposition in 718 under his successor al- Samh bin Abd al- Malik al- Khawlani in which Septimania and Narbonne were conquered in 720. In the following year (721) the battle of Toulouse was fought between al- Samh and the Germanic Prince of France in which al- Samh lost his life and the Muslim army suffered a huge loss. The Muslim raids into France and the encounters between the two continued in later years. Under Anbasa bin Sahim Kalbi, the successor of al- Samh, the Muslims captured Carcassonna, Burgundy and Atim upto 725. He also died while fighting against the enemy on the soil of France and succeeded by Abd al- Rahman bin Abd Allah al- Ghafiqi in 730. Although he was an efficient administrator and a good statesman he could not be succeeded against Franks in the battle of Tours. This battle was fought by him in 732 against Charles Martel, the Mayor of Merovingian court Palace in which he met his martyrdom. Moreover this Muslim campaign proved to be last as no further advance by the Muslim army could be made on the Frankish soil. Rather, Muslims had to lose one area after the other in southern France. Before the establishment of Umayyad Emirate in Spain in 756 there became many governors of the peninsula but due to the tribal and racial jealousies Spain passed through civil disturbances and infightings. Only Aqaba bin Hajjaj could resume the Muslim raids to conquer the southern France in 734 when he seized Avignon. However he could not gain more success as he was recalled by the governor of North Africa amid these campaigns.

A brilliant era in the history of Spain started when an Umayyad prince, Abd al- Rahman entered Spain and established his rule there in 756 after the downfall of Umayyad Caliphate in 750. Escaping himself from the massacre by the founder of newly established Abbasid Caliphate, Abul Abbas al- Saffah (750-754) he reached Spain where he had to fight the than governor of the peninsula, Yusuf al- Fihri (747-
756) in May 756 for the sake of power. After Yusuf fled from the battlefield Abd al- Rahman found no hurdle in establishing his rule there. This rule of the Umayyads continued from 756-1131. Throughout the rule of the Umayyad Emirate the Muslim-Christian relation remained hostile in Spain in spite of the fact that a section of Christian community either embraced Islam, called Muwallads or adopted the Muslim culture who are known in the history with the name of Mozarabs. The hostility between Muslim Spain and Christian France was also due to the friendly relations of France with the Abbasids of Baghdad as the Abbasids were traditional and bitter enemies of the Umayyads of Spain. However Muslim rulers of Spain proved to be secular and tolerant in the religious matters as their rule was supposed to be a punishment to the Gothic rule sent by the God for its corruption, persecution, harassment and torture of the subject class.

The Spaniards became so much influenced with them that they started abusing Prophet Muhammad and cursing Islam. Although they were dealt severely but this tradition of cursing Islam continued in Spain that resulted to the silent hostility between the two religious communities. The establishment of a Christian state in the southern Spain by Omar ibn Hafsun was another result of this enmity. He not only made a series of campaigns against the than Umayyad ruler but proclaimed to be a Christian assuming the name of Samuel. During the rule of Abd al- Rahman III (al-Nasir) there were four Christian states namely Aragon, Castile, Leon and Navarre on the Spanish soil. As the rulers of these Christian states were great opponents of the Muslim rule, Abd al- Rahman had to fight against them. After the defeat of the Muslim army by Ordano, the king of Leon at the town of San Esteban Abd al- Rahman decided to take the field by himself. He gave a crushing defeat to the joint army of Leon and Navarre that were being led by Ordano and Sancho respectively in 920. In 924 he again attacked and invaded Navarre and destroyed its capital, Pamplona. To maintain peace and to save the Muslim land he continued his campaigns against the enemy Christian states that ended in 939. Unfortunately when he was not prepared for the combat the allied army of Leon of King Romero and Navarre of Queen Tota defeated his army. His encounter resulted in a treaty between the two religious communities and as a result the hostility between them came to an end for a time. However the encounters continued between the Umayyad rulers and the Northern Christian states but the Umayyad rule continued with its glory. The Muslim-Christian conflict became severe during the rule of Hajib al- Mansur who proved himself, to be more able than his predecessors after Abd al- Rahman III. During his rule he not only took the field against internal enemies, the North African rulers but the Christian States of North Spain. So he saved his boundaries from the Christian invaders by capturing many of their important strongholds like Zamora (981), Barcelona and its nearby areas (985), a strong fortress of Leon, making this Christian kingdom a part of Umayyad rule and at the same time threatened Galicia also. With this he proved the might of the Muslims over the enemy Christian kingdoms. After the death of Hajib al- Mansur most of his successors proved themselves to be able rulers and good administrators. It was Abd al- Malik, son and successor of al- Mansur that he bravely fought against the Christians and defeated them.

After the downfall of the Umayyad rule in 1031 a new era in the history of Muslim Spain started that is known in the history as Tawâ'if al- Muluki. In the period from the downfall of Umayyad rule till the establishment of Murabit rule in Spain many petty principalities established in different regions of the peninsula but they were incapable to give a tough fight to the more powerful Christian states of the south. Of these al- Mutamid, the ruler of Cordova had to accept the suzerainty of the ruler of Leon and Castile, Alfonso VI. It was Alfonso VI who overran and destroyed the Banu Dhu al- Nun rule of Toledo in 1085. Inspite of this alliance his rule was continuously threatened by the Christians. This forced him to seek help
of Yusuf bin Tashfin, the Murabit ruler of North Africa. After Yusuf entered Spain and defeated Alfonso VI at Zallaqa in 1086 the might and glory of the Muslims revived there. In 1090 he again came to Spain and made the whole of Muslim Spain, excluding Toledo and Saragossa, a part of his kingdom and ruled there with the title of Amir al-Muslimin. Here it is worth mentioning that the Spanish Christians, both the ruling and ruled classes, were so much impressed by the Muslim culture that the Christian ruler Alfonso VI of Castile and Leon and the champion of Christianity in Spain used Arabic language on his coins. Moreover, the Christians of urban areas used to write and speak the Arabic language fluently alongwith their own local Spanish language. Sometimes the Mozarabs made conspiracy against their Muslim rulers and were punished for their treachery but most of the time their relations were cordial to an extent that one can see the intermarriages between the Muslim settlers and local Spaniards.

During the rule of Muwahhids in Spain that started in 1145 after Murabit rule was overthrown by the forces of Abd al-Mumin the power of the Christians arose as a result of their unity and alliance among the Christian states of Aragon, Navarre, Castile and the Knights of Portugal. In the battle fought at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 between the joint forces of Christians led by Alfonso VIII and the Muwahhid army led by Muhammad al- Nasir the Muslims had to face a severe defeat that led to an end of Muwahhid power. With this defeat the Muwahhid rule in Spain almost came to an end as al- Nasir could not stay for more on the Spanish soil. From there he fled to Morocco where the Muwayhids rule continued upto 1269. Under the Muwahhids Spain flourished, various sciences were patronised and developed and arts and architecture were contributed to a higher extent.

After the downfall of Muwahhid rule there remained no Muslim occupation in Spain except a state known as Nasrid Dynasty at Granada and few petty principalities. Although the Nasrids ruled their dominant areas for about two and a half centuries from 1232 to 1492 but this rule continuously passed through ups and downs as they always faced threatened from the Christian powers. The rulers of these petty kingdoms continuously tried to defend themselves from the Christians aggression for a long period but due to their weakness and the might caused by the alliance of many Christian states these Muslim states were occupied by Christians and annexed to their states. However the glory of Muslims continued there for a time. Being a small and less powerful state the Nasrid rulers had to pay homage and tribute to the Castilian Christian state. It is noteworthy that inspite of all odds this state flourished where trade and commerce, science and arts and architecture developed. A number of world renowned scholars like Ibn Khaldun and Ibn al- Khatib flourished there and were patronised by the Nasrid rulers. The castle of al-Hamra that became one of the most important monuments of Spain is an example of their glorious rule.

As the crusade wars were fought for about two centuries between the Muslims and the Christians in the East, the reconquesta started on the Spanish soil by the Christians of both Spain and France. The battle of Covadonga fought in 718 against the occupation of their land by the Muslims proved to be first and with the passage of time the hostility between the two communities became more severe. This reconquesta resulted many severe battles fought between the Muslims and the Christians who, sometime were assisted by the French armies. Although earlier, there made an alliance of among the Christian states of Castile, Aragon, Leon and others against Muslims and succeeded in different battlefields but the alliance of Castile and Leon made in 1230 proved to be more disastrous for the Muslim rule This alliance became so powerful that the Muslims had to lose their control over Cordova in 1236 and Seville in 1248. Discussing the weakness and disunity of the Muslims Prof. Masudul Hasan states, “The Muslims had not learnt anything from history and even whatever little of Spain was left to them, they made no efforts to unite, and face the enemy as a solid block”.

It is noteworthy that throughout the Iberian Peninsula, except the state of Granada, where Christian rule was established in place of Muslim rule the Christianization of Muslims, both the settlers and the locals was started. As the Muslim subject of the Christian state they adopted the Christian culture and their language. However they continued to be Muslims and followed their religion. Like the Christians who lived in a Muslim State in Spain were called Mozarabs, the Muslims living under the Christian rule were known with the name of Mudejars.

The Christian states of Spain consolidated their power during the entire rule of Nasrids and made their efforts to destabilise the Muslim state of Granada. Because of the weakness and disunity among the Muslims the small principalities of Cordova, Murcia, Valencia and Seville went under the control of the unified power of Castile and Aragon between 1238 and 1260. This consolidation took the final shape when Ferdinand, the crown prince of Aragon married the princess of Castile, Isabella in 1469. Their
troops used to raid the outskirts of the Nasrid State. During this period, the internal condition of the state was not good and stable that helped the Christian forces to harm the Muslim rule. The hostility between the Nasrids and the alliance between Castile and Aragon reached its height when Sultan Ali Abu’l Hasan refused to pay tribute to the Christians and attacked the Castilian territory. This incident proved to be the cause of final blow of the Nasrid rule. As a result Ferdinand marched to the Nasrid land and captured al-Hamrah, the important and strategic place of the state of Granada. At this crucial moment Sultan Ali Abu Abd Hasan had to face another serious problem when his son Muhammad Abu Abd Allah rose into revolt against him and controlled the region of al-Hamrah in 1482 and declared himself its master. Abu al-Hasan, later, reinstated himself as the Sultan of Granada state when his son was made captive by the Castilian army. He ruled there until 1485 when the power was passed to his brother Muhammad XII al-Zaghall. Unfortunately Muhammad Abu Abd Allah again played a destructive role for Nasrid state when he was released by Ferdinand and Isabella from the prison and helped him in occupying some parts of the capital in 1486. In this way the civil war started in the state that proved to be very destructive for the state of Granada of which there appeared two Sultans of this small kingdom. The Christian army took the advantage of this civil war and started a campaign against this last Muslim state. In this campaign the Christian army captured many areas including the city of Malaga. Although Muhammad XII al-Zaghall made many attempts to counter the Christian forces but could not be succeeded. Finally he had to surrender and retired to Tlemcen in North Africa.

As the state was, now, in the hands of Abu Abd Allah, he was asked to surrender the city of Granada before the Christian army in 1490 but he refused to comply. Resultantly Ferdinand marched into the remains of the kingdom and besieged the city. Finally Abu Abd Allah found no other way but with certain conditions. As per the agreement Abu Abd Allah had to take oath of obedience before the Christian king and he would be given the estate in al-Basharat and the Muslim population would be secure and free to exercise their religious duties. Finally the Castilians entered the city and took charge of the city in 1492. In this way the Muslim rule that was established in Spain in 711 came to an end in 1492. After staying in his newly granted estate, al-Basharat for some time Abu Abd Allah left it and migrated to Fas in North Africa.

After the downfall of Muslim rule in Spain there started the period of uncertainty for Muslims in the country as the Christian rulers did not respect the agreement made between the last Nasrid ruler and the Castilian king. They started to force the Muslim community either to baptize or to leave the country. It is noteworthy that the Spaniards who or whose ancestors embraced Islam during the Muslim rule and who were, then, called Moriscos, more or less, abandoned their language and their Muslim way of life but continued practicing Islam secretly. They even changed their Muslim names and adopted the Christian names. The Christian rulers not only destroyed the Muslim religious books but also issued decrees against the Muslims and Islam time and again that included the decrees of 1501, 1525, and 1556. Of all these, the law made by Phillip II in 1556 was severe and more destructive that directed the Muslims to abandon the use of Arabic language, stop their religious practices, close their institutions and leave their Muslim life style. Finally, in 1609, Phillip III drove about five hundred thousand Muslims from the Spanish soil and most of them migrated to Africa and some to other parts of the Muslim world.

Throughout the period of Muslim rule in Spain (711-1492) the Muslim community lived there in friendly atmosphere with the Christian masses but on the other hand there continued hostility between the Muslim rulers and Spanish and French ruling class and nobility. The good relations between the invaders and local Christians became an important cause of large conversion from Christianity to Islam. The tolerant attitude of the Muslim rulers towards the native Christians played a vital role in these conversions. The Muslim rulers gave them complete freedom to worship, restore and built their churches, ride on horses and mules, establish their courts of law and resolve their disputes according their religious laws and the monks were made free from the payment of tribute. Such good behaviour and relaxations attracted the local masses towards the Muslims and Islam. It is, because of their good relations the Christians got benefited with the scientific, literary, philosophical and other academic contributions of the Muslims. The Christians and Jews learnt the Arabic language and translated their works into various European languages especially Latin and Hebrew. For the purpose they established various academies, translation bureaus and educational institutions. Toledo is an example of such translation centres where the Muslim works of different sciences including music were translated into Latin and from where these works were introduced in the educational institutions of various European countries.
After translating the Muslim scientific, philosophic and other literary works along with the Greek works and their translations and commentaries preserved in Arabic language the Christians and Jews of the peninsula because well versed of all the existing sciences. These Muslim works were included as the textbooks in the curriculum of most of the educational institutions established in about all parts of Christian Europe. Mentioning the contribution of Muslims, more particularly of Muslim Spain, to European renaissance Prof. Masudul Hasan quoted the book of the Western scholar, Robert Briffault entitled \textit{Making of Humanity} in which the author says:

\begin{quote}
It is highly probable that but for the Arabs Modern European civilization would risen 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 Islamic culture not traceable, no where it is so clear and momentous as in genesis of that power which constitutes the permanent distinctive force of the modern world and supreme source of its victory natural science and scientific spirit.
\end{quote}

Prof. Masudul Hasan further quotes \textit{Intellectual Development of Europe} of John William Draper who remarked, "The Arabs has left his intellectual impress on Europe. He has indelibly written it on the heavens as anyone may see who reads the names of starts on a common celestial globe." So it may, beyond doubt, be said that the modern and enlightened Christian world is due to the Muslim contribution to all existing sciences and their translation into European languages. Before this transformation of sciences to Europe the whole Christian Europe was passing through ignorance, illiteracy and lying in dark.

So, in the enlightenment of Christian Europe, Muslim Spain had played the vital role as they remained the main torch bearers of the culture and civilization throughout the world for about five centuries. Even after the downfall of Muslim rule in Spain the Muslim poetry and dances remained popular in both the royal courts and among the Christian masses for long. It is evident from the fact that the Muslim musicians and dancers continued to entertain in the courts of Castile and Aragon States. With their talent and beauty, the Muslim poets, singers and dancers remained influential over both the ruling class and the common Christian masses of the peninsula.

\section*{References:}

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5. Musa bin Nusayr was the governor of North Africa under the Umayyad Caliph Walid bin Abd al-Malik (705-715)
6. P.K. Hitti, op. cit., p. 496
8. P.K. Hitti, op. cit., p. 499
9. Prof. Masudul Hasan, \textit{op. cit.}, p.79
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid. , P.K. Hitti, op. cit., p. 501
12. P.K. Hitti, op. cit., p. 510
13. Ibid., p. 515
14. Ibid., p. 507
15. Thomas Arnold, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 132-133
16. Ibid.
Al- Dakhil was the first Abd al- Rahman of the three who entered the Iberian Peninsula and established Umayyad Emirate in Spain in 756, the other two who are called Abd al- Rahman Thani and Abd al- Rahman al- Nasir ruled Spain later.

Sayyid Fayyaz Mahmud, op. cit., p. 179

Ibid, p. 181

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