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# *The End of History: A Postcolonial Study of Ali's Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*

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## **Abstract**

The present study attempts to analyze *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* written by Ali in the light of Fukuyama's notion 'The End of History' to highlight the way the Muslims achieved and concretized the notion of the end of history during their reign in Spain. The study also aims at finding out the reforms through which the Muslims achieved this glory as well as how the glory and harmony were destructed by the Christian colonizers. It takes a postcolonial stance for the analysis of the data. The method employed for the collection and analysis of the data is Textual Analysis. It has been found through a systematic investigation that the Muslims during their rule in Spain achieved the idealized harmonic state in the social order where people of various religions and classes were equal and prosperous. Moreover, it also finds out that the Muslims achieved the ideal state through good governance and democratic principles. They gave women due rights in various spheres of life. It has also been examined that the Christians, after occupying the land, destructed the whole system of peace and prosperity in a planned manner to confine the power to the center, prolong their rule and justify their conquest.



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**Keywords:** The end of history, idealized, state, social order, democratic principles, confine, power.

## 1. Introduction

Tariq Ali is a renowned British-Pakistani novelist, journalist, historian and activist. Ali and his works are putatively placed in the leftist category. He was born in Lahore in the house of a journalist namely Mazhar Ali Khan. He was born in an educated family; his parents broke the feudal conventions of his forefathers. As a writer, his works are placed under the postcolonial writings as the term 'Postcolonial' encompasses "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. . . because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression" (Aschroft, Griffith & Tiffen, 2004, p. 2). He wrote a series of novels namely Islam Quintet which artistically fictionalizes the Muslim regime in Spain by narrating the history of rise and fall of Islamic civilization.

It is a bitter fact that human history is full of bloodshed and violence. The world has never experienced a period in its known history that may be termed as the span of peace, prosperity and harmonious mutual coexistence. The world has always been divided into multiple and opposite poles which were and still are engaged in constant opposition against each other. The same is the case in the contemporary era. Every nation tries to dominate the other ones for specific purposes. Today's world politics is a very complex phenomenon that cannot be easily understood. Various writers have tried to explore and present the nature of global order more comprehensively. Tariq Ali is one of those writers who has tried to put his share for the betterment of humanity. In his writings, he has tried to divert the attention of the most important players of world politics toward the idea of the end of history. Ali aims to make them conscious that the confrontations and clashes between civilizations can cause horrible consequences. The conflicts between civilizations and nations result in collective damage to mankind (Huntington, 1998).

The focus of the current study is to analyze Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1993) through a postcolonial perspective to investigate how the Muslims during their rule in Spain achieved harmonized ideal society full of peace and prosperity. In this way, the study aims to give new meanings to the novel. The study has been conducted in the light of Fukuyama's notion *The End of History* (1992). Fukuyama, a deputy director of the US State Department for policymaking, borrowed the notion of the end of history from Hegel and Marx. By the concept of the end of history, Fukuyama does not mean that the occurrence of events has come to an end rather it is the idea that societies are in the process of evolution and this evolution is not something open-ended. According to this idea, it will be the end of history when a society has achieved a state where the entire

needs of people are satisfied. The idea has been, further, explained in the review of the literature.

### **1.1 Research objectives**

The objective of the study is to find out the nature of the reforms the Muslim empire brought to Spain, as represented by Ali in his novel *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, during their reign as well as the measures taken to implement the reforms in the state and achieve harmony which, later on, the Christian colonizers destroyed. Further, it finds out the reason

### **1.2 Research Questions**

To achieve the research objectives, the following research questions have been devised:

1. What reforms did the Muslim rulers bring in the state to achieve an idealized harmonic social order as represented in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* by Ali?
2. How did the characters of different classes and religions live in the milieu?
3. What are the reasons narrated by Ali of the destruction of the Muslim empire in Spain?

## **2. Literature Review**

Fukuyama gave the notion of the end of history in his work *The End of History and Last Man* (1992). Most people misinterpret this notion by considering that, perhaps, he says that the occurrence of events has come to an end. But he makes it clear when he says “What I suggested had come to an end was not the occurrence of events, even large and great events, but history: that is history understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process...” (p. xii). Here, Fukuyama makes his readers clear that by ‘the end of history’ he means the process of evolution, not the occurrence of events but the evolutionary stages of development. He, further, states that the notion was originally expressed by Hegel and was generalized by Marx. According to Fukuyama, both the philosophers are of the view that “... evolution of human societies was not open-ended, but would end when mankind had achieved a form of society that satisfied its deepest and most fundamental longings. Both thinkers thus posited an ‘end of history’: for Hegel, this was the liberal state, while for Marx it was a communist society” (p. xii).

In this way, Fukuyama's concern is an ideal state in which there is harmony and peace as well as all the needs of people are satisfied. For Fukuyama, such an ideal state is still beyond human access and even today’s welfare states cannot meet the criteria imagined by those thinkers. Therefore, now it is evident that the end of history is a state in which all the grave and deepest needs of its subjects are satisfied; a state within the society where there is harmony, peace and prosperity. All the people belonging to various religions and classes are equal before the law.

Talking about the novel which is the objective of the current research, one finds little research on this issue. Though neglected by critics and researchers, there are some researches on it such as King (2011) says that it is a fiction that has a subject matter like an epic and it also reminds us of history seen from the perspective of a non-European. The underlying idea of King' view is that Ali has tried to rewrite history from the perspective of the colonized 'Other' and has tried to subvert the existing portrayal of the colonized. According to Nicol (2009), the novel does not try to overthrow history rather it is its alternative version. He, further, states that the novel provides a chance to focus on the events that were neglected over time. It opens such events for understanding and analysis. The novel contests Eurocentric versions of history; it is evident in the novel when one witnesses the use of Arabic names in the text. Novel enhances the non-Eurocentric version of historiography. Moreover, the choice of inquisition and religious harmony was intended to confiscate the properties of Muslims. In this way, colonialists were determined to reinforce the power to the centre to marginalize their subjects so that they may never rise again. There is a majority of people who think that discussing history in fiction is purposeless and irrelevant but such is not the case as Ghosh (2011) points out that the burden of history is carried by the novel heavily in the sense that it tells in another place, another time the past which was intentionally buried and was not easy to tell. Ghosh suggests that the potential of the novel with relevance to history is significant. Fiction tells us the real history which historians intentionally left out because history is always written with partiality. Such an interpretation of Ali's work is further reinforced by Stiersdorfer (2007) who says that Ali's approach is characterized by his belief that there is an underlying potential in literature. It is a force capable to bring change in social and political realms. According to Gamal (2010), history that is told by the colonizer is always linear which moves towards progress but Ali reverses the narrative of the colonizer by telling that it moves from advancement to devastation. Christian colonizers came and destroyed the whole culture built by the Muslims. This non-progressive movement of history has been courageously highlighted by the author. What Gamal implies is that Ali has subverted the claims of colonizers that they came there to make them civilized and progressive. Ali shows the mirror to the colonizers how they destructed and burnt the civilization and whole body of knowledge.

The brief literature review justifies the need for probing into the topic under discussion. The research gap which is ever-present in every research has been highlighted that though researchers and critics have tried to interpret this postcolonial novel, the underlying potential of the novel has not been properly highlighted. Most of the research revolves around the idea of historiography. Some critics have talked about the reversal of colonial discourse. But no work has been found that talks about the notion of the end of history, which has been employed for the analysis. It has not been explored how the Muslims reached the end of history in Spain. It happened before the conception of the idea. Even Hegel and Marx propounded the idea centuries after the Muslim era.

Moreover, it has also not been explored how colonizers destroyed that achieved harmony brutally and irrationally just for the satisfaction of their colonial pursuits.

### **3. Research Method**

The present study has been conducted in the light of Fukuyama's *The End of Civilization*. The study draws largely upon the hypothesis of civilizational rise and fall and thus is purely analytical. The technique of Textual Analysis has been employed to analyze and frame the interpretation of the selected work. Textual analysis is one of the various approaches which are used to conduct qualitative research in various fields.

### **4. Discussion and Analysis**

*Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* is essentially a postcolonial writing dealing with themes that are of much interest. The novel shows the fact that colonialism from its very beginning is unjust. Whatever the form colonialism takes it is unacceptable and unconvincing because it is always the aim of the colonizer to make his subjects slaves in the name of civilization, knowledge and scholarship (Said, 1978). Ali's masterpiece deals with history in such an artistic manner that its account of history becomes acceptable for every reader. The present study tries to highlight that novel is an attempt to show how Muslims achieved the end of history, a stable and progressed society that was satisfying the needs of every person so completely that it does not need any further developments. Further, tries to find out how the Christian colonizers destructed the whole stability, prosperity and harmony which was the result of the hard work of centuries.

The opening chapter of the novel illustrates that the libraries of Granada are put on fire. But still, some books are spared because these are essential for the progress of Westerners as says the narrator “[t]hey represented the major advances in these [astronomy and medicine]<sup>1</sup> and related sciences since the days of antiquity” (p. 2). It reflects how Muslims were advanced in learning. Muslims made progress in the fields of knowledge such as medical and astronomy at that time when Europe was under the shadows of the dark ages. This advancement in these fields was unmatched as Ali writes “here was much of the material. . . which paved the way for renaissance” (p. 2). The westerner's progress and the renaissance are an edifice built on the labour of the Muslims. Such was the state of development in Muslim Spain when Christian colonizers came with their nasty ambitions. They burnt the whole history and culture of Muslims except the body of knowledge in various fields of science. It is also stated in the text that the scholarship of Muslims was so superior that scholars of Europe became envious of

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<sup>1</sup> Researchers' addition.

Muslim learning. In this way, it is evident that the Muslims achieved the idea of the end of history that is, a harmonious society that was based on their learning.

The readers have also been informed about the stability and peace in the Muslim Empire of Granada through the words of a Christian. Don Inigo who has been appointed as the captain-general of Granada, is convinced that the Muslims achieved that idealized state in their society and "They have ruled over a large portion of our peninsula. They did so without burning too many Bibles or tearing down all our churches or setting synagogues alight in order to build their mesquitas" (p. 63). This sentence narrates the way the Muslims established a tolerant, just and prosperous society in which people of different religions were living in peace without disputes. Muslim empire in Spain never forced people of other religions for conversion. People of various religions such as Christianity and Judaism were allowed to practice their religious beliefs. Muslims neither marginalized nor oppressed them. They were free in that society. Now it becomes clear to a person how learned, developed and free that society was. The same idea which was imagined by Hegel, and Marx, now made famous by Fukuyama in the twenty-first century was achieved by Muslims at that time when the whole world was living in ignorance. Moreover, the words uttered by a Christian who is the representative of the queen and the captain-general of Granada authenticate that the Muslims reached the height of a just and peaceful society.

Real-life Islamic principles find expression again and again throughout the novel which presents the idea of how the learned and developed Muslim society was at that time. Ibn e Khaldun is one of those thinkers who introduced the philosophical grounds of history. His secular model of history is revered by most of the characters in the novel. He introduced the secular version of history at that time when Europe was under the strict constraints of religion. His philosophical assumptions on history made the Muslim society an epitome of peace, prosperity and stability. Further, there are free thinkers such as Averose, Al Maari and Al Zindiq who questioned the fundamental principles of Islam. But still, they were not killed rather they practiced and preached their heretical doctrines freely. They were neither killed nor imprisoned because Muslim society has achieved this state in history which gave space to everyone. The notion of the end of history is evident as the Muslims created a free society where everyone was given freedom and the right to self-expression. At that time, Europe was still under the constraints of fanatic religious doctrines. The Muslims gave space to every individual regardless of religion, race, or class.

The place of women in Spanish Muslim society is also of considerable importance. It gave its women the right to speak. They were not marginalized and oppressed like other societies of the world. They were allowed to influence the process of decision-making. The women of Spanish society are represented by the female members of the Bnu Hudayl family. In contrast to other societies of the world at that time, this society was

liberal and tolerant. Society was so developed and learned that one cannot find gender stereotypes. Muslims have achieved the notion of the end of history in such a magnificent way that women openly question religious beliefs but still are not accused of blasphemy. Equality in gender roles and liberal philosophy is the core aspect of the novel. Zubayda, the wife of Umer is the representative free woman liberated from religious orthodoxy. She "*thanks to free-thinking father*" (p. 170) who brought up her in such a manner. She is a strong advocate of women rights even centuries before the wake of Feminism. She wants her daughters not to be "subjected to the Straitjacket of superstition or made to confirm to any strictly defined role in the household" (p. 170). Such thoughts of a lady at that time seem strange to the reader. One is astonished at how liberal the Muslim society was at that time. It also reveals that the Muslims achieved that state in history which Fukuyama terms as the end of history. Muslim society was so progressed that it needed no further development. Even the younger daughter Hind who has just reached the age of eighteen is free to such an extent that she questions religious stands. Her conversation with an Egyptian young man, Ibn Daud, exhibits her liberal views. She is outspoken and strong enough to question anything which does not make sense to her. She says to Ibn Daud, "The only true nobility I can accept is that conferred by talent. . . The preachers...say that ignorance is a woman's passport to paradise" (p.164). It is a point to ponder that if Hind had been a member of European society she might have been sentenced to death for questioning the religious beliefs. But, here, society has reached an end requires no further development.

The systematic investigation of the data reflects that the Muslims, then, paved the way for today's so-called champions of human rights. The dream that Fukuyama sees in the present day was realized at that time of history.

The issue to ponder over is what happened to that society after the arrival of the Christian colonizers. Undeniably, they destroyed everything which was the Muslim and the Moorish. The colonial and imperialist strategies are condemned by the writer skillfully. From outset of the novel, it is evident that the religious fanatics came there and burnt the libraries of Granada. Their act of burning was only meant to deprive Muslims of their history. The achieved harmony was destroyed in a planned manner.

The colonizer was not unaware that how rich the civilization of Muslims is where there are no disputes among different religions or classes. They know that the Muslims have reached the culmination where no further developments are required. All the grave and the deepest needs of people are being satisfied perfectly. But it is the strategy of colonizers that first rob their subjects of their history, culture, language and everything which makes them superior to claim that these are the people who are living in ignorance. These are the people who have no history, culture, language and civilization of their own that is why we have come here to educate them and make them civilized (Said, 1994; Rasool, 2009). It is the white man's burden to introduce the people to

civilization and all sorts of learning (Said, 1994). They burnt the libraries of Granada to wipe out Muslims civilization and justify their conquest. Ali writes that Ximenes always "believed that the heathen could only be erased if their culture was completely erased" (p. 4). Strategically, he did the same. He destructed that state of the end of history in a typical colonialist manner. The state which Fukuyama wants to realize today was destroyed by the west at that time. He burnt the Muslim history and, then, started a forced conversion. He gave three options to his Muslim subjects, either convert to Christianity or meet death or leave the country. Moreover, the letter which he wrote to Queen Isabella, further, testifies the proposition of the study that they destructed that state of the achieved harmony, peace and prosperity intentionally. In his letter, he gave some suggestions to the queen such as the Arabic language, Moorish clothing, religious festivals, music and marriages should be banned. Moreover, public baths should also be destroyed. Their properties should be confiscated and Muslims should be forced to convert to Christianity. Thus, the Christian colonizers destructed the whole advancement of the Muslim society to justify their conquest and prolong their rule in the peninsula. The archbishop wrote in his letter "I plead for your help to fulfill my vow and to be given all the powers necessary to execute my mission" (p. 115). This quote indicates the mindset and vows of the colonizers to wipe out the civilization of the opponent. It has been proved how the achieved advancement, which Fukuyama says the end of history, was destructed by the west with planning. They destructed that state to form a totalitarian regime of their own.

## **5. Conclusion**

In short, Muslim society in Spain was so developed, civilized, learned, prosperous, peaceful and free at that time when the whole Europe was under the shadows of the dark ages. The dream of the end of history that Hegel and Marx saw in the previous century and Fukuyama proposes was realized by Muslims at that time in history when the world was alien to all forms of tolerance. The Muslim society at that time was so just, liberal, democratic and free that people of various religions and different classes were living together without any dispute. They were allowed to practice their beliefs and rituals according to their religions without any restrictions. The multi-religious society was so tolerant that Jews and Christians were even allowed to sit in the mosques when some sort of public matters were discussed. Moreover, women were free. They influenced important decisions and their opinions were respected highly. Even centuries before the wake of the Feminist movements, Muslim society gave all forms of liberty to their women and there were no gender stereotypes. Women in that society were allowed to choose husbands of their own choice. Hind is the best example of the kind of liberty conferred to women. Of course, it is notion of the idea of the end of history that state in a society where all the necessities of the people are satisfied and there is no need for further development. It has been proved through systematic investigation that Muslims achieved that idealized state during their rule in Spain.



It has also been found that Christian colonizers used colonial strategies to destruct the whole advancement; they burnt the libraries of Granada and robbed Muslims of their history, language and culture. The strategy of forced conversion was employed by colonizers to ensure their victory. The letter of Ximenes written to the queen testifies to their brutality. They employed all the strategies to eliminate Muslims and their traces from the history of Spain. All the brutalities and barbarous acts were only to justify their conquest and prolong their rule in Spain. So that they can justify latter on that these people have nothing of their own, neither history nor culture. They came to educate them and make them civilized so that they may become better human beings. They were of course jealous too of the learnings of Muslims so they intended to wipe Muslims out from history.

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