

Notes

The Ghaznavids: An Overview

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Rise of the Ghaznavids

The emergence of the Ghaznavid principality took place within the framework of the disintegration of the Abbasid caliphate. A modern interpretation by M.A. Shaban II¹ gives the specifics. According to him two factors superimposed themselves. Firstly in eastern Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia, trade had become as important as agriculture. When the Buyids captured Rayy (near modern Tehran) they gained a control over the foreign trade route. With the bottling up of this route the finances of the Samanid kingdom suffered a set back. To overcome this loss of income, the Samanids took recourse to taxing the trading class even more stringently, causing large scale migrations to the west. The Buyids did offer generous peace terms to the Samanids including a 10 year truce, but they were not prepared to give up Rayy. Local overlords were reluctant to give battle to the Buyids and the Samanid kingdom burst at the seams. Local overlords tried to capture as much territory as possible, and it was in this situation that the Ghaznavid amirs could assert their independence from the Samanids. In the wider context the following observation of Andre Wink needs to be taken into account:

To all appearances this was an age when linkages between the nomadic steppe populations of Central Asia and the sedentary civilizations of the Middle East, China and India crossed a critical threshold whereby a series of conquests was set off which climaxed with the 'Mongol Storm' in the thirteenth century.

The disintegration of the Abbasid caliphate began with the induction of these steppe dwellers and culminated in the Mongol invasion. The foundation of the Ghaznavid empire proceeded from the vortex of these movements. In this manner the Muslim world had

¹ M.A.H Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation*, Vol.II, Cambridge, 1976.

undergone a structural change since the Arab conquest of Sindh. The universal caliphate had given way to regional sultanates; and Arab caliphs to Turkish sultans, providing a new cultural framework where Turkish was the native language of the rulers and Persian became the cultural and thereafter the official language. Arabic was retained for religious purposes. The first step towards the change was the establishment of three rival caliphates at Baghdad, Cordova and Cairo – ruled by Abbasid, Ummayyad and Fatimid caliphs respectively. The Abbasid caliphate remained the most extensive but it was also the first dynasty to encourage fragmentation, first the Aghlabids in the west (800) and then the Tahirids in the east (820) became hereditary governors. When the Abbasid caliphs themselves became prisoners of their Turkish guards the far flung principalities asserted their independence more and more, paying only formal homage to a caliph for religious constitutional requirements. In time these hereditary governors were supplanted by dynastic rulers who styled themselves sultan. Sultan is an abstract Arabic term meaning power but became a personal title of Muslim rulers who did not formally claim the caliphate.

The Tahirids were supplanted by the Saffarids (873), the Saffarids by the Samanids (892) and the Samanids by the Ghaznavids (1005). The first of these rulers was Alaptegin, who was in the service of the Samanids as the governor of Khurasan. Later Alaptegin occupied Ghazni driving out from there Abu Bakr Laurik.

Alaptegin (d. 963) was ultimately succeeded by Pirai or Piritigin in 972. It was in Pirai's reign that Jaipal the Hindu Shahi Raja of the Punjab invaded the Ghaznavid domain in 974. Jaipal's dominions extended to the Hindu Kush mountains and included Kabul. He became alarmed by the establishment of a strong Muslim kingdom to the south of the mountain barriers. Jaipal's invasion had consequences which he could not have imagined. He again invaded Ghazni in 977 A.D. This time held by Sabuktugin, the son-in-law of Alaptegin. Sabuktugin who reigned from 9 April 977 to August 997 not only defended his kingdom from Jaipal's attack, he took the battle to Jaipal's territory in 986 and again in 988 when Kabul was annexed. Thus began the process which led to the foundation of Turkish rule in India.

In October 994 Sabuktugin was able to help the Samanid ruler Nuh II against the Ismaili warrior Abu Ali Sanjar. As a reward he was given the extensive province of Khorasan. He handed over Khorasan to his eldest son Mahmud. For his throne Sabuktugin chose his younger son Ismail. When Sabuktugin died in 997, his younger son was consequently raised to the throne in Balkh. Mahmud contested the succession, and in

the ensuing battle near Ghazni, Mahmud prevailed. Ismail was handed over by his own nobles, and Mahmud imprisoned him for life.

Mahmud's main ambition was to found an extensive Turco-Persian empire but was compelled to consider the invasion of India primarily because of Jaipal's misadventure against his father. The same strategic considerations which impelled Jaipal to attack Pirai compelled Mahmud to retaliate in depth. Secondly the fabulous riches of India would bolster his empire against formidable central Asian rivals and finally his iconoclastic zeal cannot be discounted, despite the laboured interpretation of Mohammad Habib.² Sultan Mahmud not only gained wealth and treasures but also acquired a prestige among Muslim rulers for battling against Hindus. The following quatrain written by Omar Khayyam at the Seljuq court illustrates vividly how the Indian campaigns of Mahmud passed into legend:

The mighty Mahmud, the victorious lord
That all the misbelieving and black horde
Of fears and sorrows that invest the soul
Scatters and slays with his enchanted sword.

The Seljuqs had defeated Mahmud's son to gain their kingdom and had Mahmud's ventures not been held to be sanctified, such a quatrain would not have been composed. The actual number of raids conducted by Mahmud are not known for certain, but his seventeen raids have become proverbial. We list below some of the main Indian campaigns of Mahmud:

Indian campaigns

1. The first expedition (1000 a.d.) seems to have been exploratory. Peshawar was held by Jaipal and Mahmud did not venture far from the Khyber Pass.
2. The first battle of Waihind (1001-2), the capital of Jaipal was over run. Jaipal was captured alive alongwith fifteen royal princes. Although Jaipal was released on payment of ransom, this setback was too much for his pride and he immolated himself on the funeral pyre made for his slain warriors.
3. Mahmud crossed the Indus (1006-7) to combat Biji Rai the ruler of Bhira, a kingdom on the banks of the Jhelum. On his defeat Biji Rai stabbed himself with a dagger.
4. A fallout of this expedition (1006-7) was Mahmud's invasion of Multan, which was then held by the Carmathian ruler AbuFateh

² See Mohammad Habib, *Sultan Mahmud of Gazni*, Aligarh, 2nd edition, 1973.

- Daud. Mahmud had been incensed by reports that Daud had helped Biji Rai of Bhira, the Carmathian ruler was forced to sue for peace.
5. Sukhpal the son of Anandpal had professed Islam and was given the title of Nawasa Shah (material grandson prince) and Mahmud made him governor of Bhira. This alliance did not last since seeing that Mahmud was engaged in the Battle of Balkh against the Turks, Sukhpal recanted and rebelled against Mahmud. Mahmud's absence did not make a significant difference since the amirs stationed at the frontier area captured Sukhpal and handed him over to Mahmud at Peshawar. Mahmud had Sukhpal imprisoned for life.
 6. This defeat led to the second battle of Waihind (1008). This time Anandpal was able to create a confederacy against Mahmud. The rulers of Ujjain, Gwalior, Kalinjar, Kannauj, Delhi and Ajmer gathered to the side of Anandpal. Mahmud felt the weight of numbers, as the Indian forces started coming in, in streams. As a first measure, Mahmud had trenches dug on two sides of his camp. Realizing that if he did not give battle before the troops of the confederacy had completed their formation, he sent 1000 archers to the attack, but this resulted only in 30000 Ghakkars to cross the trenches. In the thick of battle when the Ghazni army faced defeat Anandpal's elephant took fright because of naphta explosions and began leaving the field. Anandpal's allies misinterpreted his movements as flight and as a consequence deserted the field. Thus near defeat providentially became victory, and Mahmud went on to capture Nagarkot.
 7. The following year (1009-10) Sultan Mahmud headed towards Gujrat. Historians conclude that it was a move to frighten Anandpal to sign a treaty giving him right of passage through his territory and giving other types of support to Mahmud in his expeditions.
 8. Sultan Mahmud being closely allied to the Abbasid Caliph, helped him over coming allies of the rival Fatimid caliphate at Cairo. During second expedition to Multan (1010-11) a large number of Carmathians were put to the sword, though Abu Fateh Daud himself was taken alive and imprisoned.
 9. Sultan Mahmud next set his eyes on Thaneswar (1011-12). This city was known far and wide for its idol called Chakraswamin. This was a huge bronze figure of Vishnu with a wheel in one hand. Anandpal, under the terms of the treaty helped Sultan Mahmud approach Thaneswar. Unable to put together an alliance and being unable to face the Ghaznavids alone, the Rai of Thaneswar fled leaving the town to plunder. As a follow up Mahaban and Mathura were also

taken after some token resistance, and a huge amount of booty was taken away by the Ghaznavids.

10. On Anandpal's death, he was succeeded by his son Trilocanpal. He seemed reconciled to Mahmud's supremacy, but his son Bhimpal or Nidar Bhim (Fearless Bhim), as he was called, had the treaty with Mahmud abrogated. Nidar Bhim had fortified himself in the Margalla Pass but came down to give battle but was defeated. Bhim fled towards Kashmir.
11. The fortress of Lokhot (1015-16) was invested following Bhim's escape to Kashmir. This time winter snow aided the impregnable nature of the fort as well as continuing reinforcements from the valley of Kashmir. Sultan Mahmud had to lift the siege. This was his first discomfiture in India.
12. In 1018, Mahmud crossed the Ganges. At this juncture Sangram, the Rai of Kashmir despite his victory at Lokhot, sued for peace and actually led the Ghaznavid vanguard into the Doab territory. On 2 December 1018 Mahmud crossed the Jamuna as well and stood before Baran (or Bulandshahr). The Rai of Baran came out with 10,000 soldiers and professed Islam. The ruler of Mahaban, Rai Kulchand, offered resistance in the forest area which, quite against his expectations, Mahmud was able to penetrate. Seeing defeat staring in his face, Rai Kulchand put first his wife and son and then himself to the sword. Following up this victory Sultan Mahmud captured Mathura with its array of marvelously built temples which after plunder, he razed to the ground with naphta fire. The booty included 98 misqals of gold obtained by melting idols, a sapphire weighing 450 misqals and the silver was uncountable. From Mathura, Mahmud proceeded to Brindaban which also he invested and collected booty.
13. Encouraged by these victories Mahmud marched to Kannauj whose rulers had in the past supported the Hindu Shahis of Waihind against Mahmud. The reigning raja Rajyapal fled on Mahmud's approach. This created consternation in the area and Mahmud was able to take seven forts in a day. He next took Asni abandoned by Rai Chandal Bhor. The only place where Mahmud faced fierce resistance during this campaign was at Munj fort. Having first put their women and children to the sword the inhabitants fought to the last man.
14. This was Mahmud's last campaign against the Hindu Shahis of Waihind (1019-20). It is true that in the long drawn out struggle with the Ghaznavids which they had themselves initiated, there were long periods during which they seem to have wavered. Very lately Trilocanpal and Nidar Bhim counselled Rai Chand, the raja of

Sharwa, to surrender to the Ghaznavids, but when they were faced with the Ghaznavids themselves they stood their ground and gave battle at Rahib. Trilochanpal died soon after the defeat, but Nidar Bhim who had taken refuge in Ajmer, died some years later in 1026.

15. The campaign against Gwalior and Kalanjar (1022-23) proved to be an unchallenged intrusion. The Rai of Gwalior purchased peace in lieu of 35 elephants. The Raja of Kalanjar, Rai Nanda presented Mahmud with 300 elephants. The Sultan also made a present of valuable gifts and Rai Nanda composed some verses praising the Sultan which were admired for their literary merit. Mahmud a patron of Persian literature seems to have been appreciative.
16. Somnath lay near the mouth of the Sarasvati river, a holy site where, according to Hindu tradition, Krishna had breathed his last. A huge and grand temple had been erected containing a gigantic idol dedicated to Shiva. Mahmud crossed the plains and besieged Somnath (October 1025), but was himself surrounded by a relieving force put together by neighbouring Hindu rajas. He was pressed hard, harder it seems than at the second battle of Waihind. This became a fire test for both, the invaders and defenders. After praying fervently, with the cloak of the saint Abul Hasan Kharqani upraised in his hands, Mahmud led a desperate and final assault which succeeded. Despoiling the temple of its treasures, Mahmud immediately marched to Anhilwara, whose ruler Raja Param Deo had organised the force which had come to relieve the siege of Somnath. Param Deo fled before Mahmud's army abandoning his treasures to the Ghaznavids. Anhilwara was a breathtakingly beautiful place, the only one in India which kindled in him a desire to settle down; but Mahmud after all would not let aesthetical considerations outweigh the considerations of state.
17. Sultan Mahmud's final expedition to India (1027) was against the Jats who had attacked his army when he was heading back to Ghazni with the treasures of Somnath and Anhilwara.

On 30 April 1030 Sultan Mahmud died peacefully at Ghazni.

The motives of Sultan Mahmud

The motives behind Sultan Mahmud's invasions of India have been fiercely debated. Most traditional historians ascribe his expeditions to Sultan Mahmud's religious iconoclastic zeal. Modern historians, principally Mohammad Habib ascribe them to worldly ambition and greed.

In the first instance, this question is somewhat academic since it was not Mahmud who began the war, but Jaipal the Hindu Shahi ruler of

Kabul and Peshawar who attacked the Ghaznavid domain first during the reign of Pirai and then again during the reign of Sabuktugin.

Whether his considerations were purely temporal or purely spiritual is not easy to unravel. His main consideration was to make Ghazni the center of a Turco-Persian empire. This is evident that the only Indian territory he directly annexed was the Punjab, and only when his treaty with Trilochanpal fell through.

The fabulous wealth of India gave him the resources to stabilize and expand his empire. Iran, which had stagnated because of the Buyids capture of Rayy, was enlivened and received a boost with buildings and cultural activities financed by Indian war booty.

Mahmud's Indian campaigns gained for him an investiture from the Abbasid Caliph Qadir Billah and the title of *Yamin-ud-Daulah* – a privilege not afforded to his Central Asian rivals.

The character of Mahmud's expeditions

The question whether Mahmud's Indian conquests were Islamic in character or not has been revived by the destruction in 2001 of the ancient gigantic Buddha statues of Bamian by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The destruction of the Babri mosque in India (December 1991) has also become a factor in the debate.

The first modern historian to put forward the argument that Mahmud's invasions and destructions of idols was not Islamic in character was Mohammad Habib.³ His main argument was that Muslim jurists and intellectuals did not consider the campaigns of Mahmud to be Islamic. Abul Hasan the Qazi (judge) of Bust, and his son who were suffering privations had refused to accept the riches Mahmud had acquired as war booty from India. The Qazi said that he was not sure whether Sultan Mahmud's campaigns were conducted in accordance with the traditions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and would on no condition accept it. This assertion of M. Habib keeps the question open on many points.

M. Habib's second argument is to adduce the second tale from the *Gulistan* of Sa'di, in which Mahmud's entire body had disintegrated except his eyes which kept rotating ruefully viewing his empire under the rule of his rivals. Habib says that not belonging to the governing class of the Delhi Sultanate Sa'di did not consider Mahmud's empire building to be a service to Islam. Now here the point is somewhat stretched.

This tale is from the chapter Sa'di entitled: 'The Nature of Kings' and which is throughout critical of kings and monarchy as an

³ *Ibid.*

institution. Thus Sa'di's condemnation of Sultan Mahmud can not be considered in isolation nor was Sa'di's estimation universally shared. Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyi praising the iconoclastic achievement of Mahmud has been given in the main text.

Two cities

Ghazni

Ghazni was an obscure principality of Afghanistan, situated 7280 feet above sea level, when Alaptigin (961-63) made it his refuge when he defied the Samanids after the latter had dismissed him as Governor of Khurasan. It was under Mahmud that Ghazni became an architectural wonder and the cultural capital of the Ajam Islamic civilization. It was put to the torch in 1050 by the Ghurid Sultan, Alauddin Jahansoz (The World Burner).

The only architectural monument to survive is the star shaped tower built by Bahram Shah (1118-52). The tomb of Sultan Mahmud survives in a chamber of the Jami Mosque of Ghazni, and at a distance the tomb of the mystic Persian poet Haklm Sinai (d.1190) survives. It was a garrison town till before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Lahore

Lahore is an ancient habitat finding mention in Hindu mythology. It is said to have been founded by Loh a son of Ram and Sita on the banks of the Ravi. Lohor was derived from Loh and Lahore from Lohor. The Ghaznavids found it in a flourishing state. After crossing it a number of times Sultan Mahmud finally annexed this city in 1027. It became the Indian outpost of the Ghaznavids and when the Ghurids took over, it became their capital. Lahore was the cultural capital in India and Masud Shah Salman the first poet of proto-Urdu flourished here. Lahore was threatened by the neighbouring rajas. The attackers did not press the siege when they found the inhabitants alert. The last Ghaznavid, Khusro Malik, ended his reign in Lahore when he was defeated and captured in 1186.

Cultural capital

The architectural remains of Ghazni which Sultan Mahmud beautified, have not lasted. However the literary masterpieces composed under his patronage have survived. These are led by the epic *Shahnama* of Firdousi. This was the third stage of Persian literature, after the eras of Abbas and Rudaki. Firdousi presided over a galaxy of poets led by Unsuri, the poet-laureate. Other luminaries of Persian literature who

adorned Mahmud's court were Asjadi, Farrukhi and Minuchihri. Only Abu Ali Sina (Avicenna) successfully evaded the patronage of Mahmud.

Origin of the Rajputs

Rajput means the king's son and legend traces their ancestry to the Sun and Moon; the Surajbansi and Chandarbansi rajputs respectively. They were divided into 36 clans listed by James Tod. They were not from a common stock but came from two different races, the Medas and the Hunas. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya says that the evidence relating to the Medas and Hunas 'leads one to search not for the original ancestry of the clans, but for the historical stages in which the Rajput clan structure came to be developed'.⁴

The Rajput clans were united by a sense of chivalry which included rites like sati, the burning of widows willingly on the funeral pyres of their husbands; Jauhar, the self immolation of women at the menacing approach of an enemy. We have seen that some rajas cut their families to death before joining battle, and a number of them committed suicide when defeated.

The Karamiyyah sect

The Karamiyyah sect was founded by Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Karam (d. 869). He was born in Sistan, Iran, but was of Arab stock. His treatise *Adhaab-ul-Qabr* does not survive. He preached mainly in Ghur and Gharchistan where previously Mahayana Buddhism had prevailed. He drew adherents from mostly the unlettered, depressed classes. He inculcated militancy and violence among his followers quite contrary to their former belief, but he derived theological features specially anthropomorphism that is the attribution of human form or personality to God. Karam taught that a material God was to sit on His throne, a mental image close to the Buddha sitting on his lotus. Karamiyya believed in One God, otherwise their concept of God was material, having human attributes (Sifaat). The governor of Khurasan Muhammad bin Tahir had Karam jailed.

A Karamiyyah preacher Abu Ishaq bin Mahmarshad (d. 993), converted Sabuktigin to his creed. C.E. Bosworth says that Mahmud too, at least initially had been an adherent. He quotes Sabuktigin's Secretary, Abul Fateh Busti, as holding that the only true legal system (*fiqh*) is Abu Hanifa's, just as the only true religious system (*din*) is Muhammad bin Karams. The Karamiyya were violently opposed to Ismailis, because their esoteric (*batini*) belief were opposed to their exoteric belief and also

⁴ *The Making of Early Medieval India*, Delhi, 1994, p.64.

because their anthropomorphism differed from the transmigration of soul belief held by some Ismailis. This brought them the royal patronage of the earliest Ghaznavids and Ghurids. Ghasiaddin Ghuri embraced the Shafii *fiqh* and abjured the Karamiyya creed.

Personalities

1. Ayaz was the favourite slave of Sultan Mahmud. He passed into Persian and Urdu literature as the prototype of the faithful slave. He is said to have been the brother of one of Mahmud's wives. He took part in political moves after Mahmud's death. He supported the candidacy of Majdud who died suddenly before the commencement of a battle. Ayaz himself died in mysterious circumstances few days later in Lahore in the year 1042.
2. *Tilak* was the Hindu general in the army of Mahmud. A barber by birth, he first entered the service of Qazi Shirazi and thereafter Ahmad Nialtigin, who when he entered Sultan Masud's service he hunted down and captured. An example of how a Hindu could rise to the rank of general under the Ghaznavids.

The Ghaznavid state

The Ghaznavid state was headed by the Sultan, who was constitutionally subordinate to the Abbasid Caliph at Baghdad. In 999 AD Mahmud received an investiture from Khalifa Qadir billah and the title *Yamin-ud-Daulah*. Persian traditions of monarchy were also being inducted as can be gathered from Mahmud's patronage of Firdousi's *Shahnama* celebrating the Kyanid and Sassanid eras. Thus in the *Mirror For Princes* and later in the *Siyasat nama* of the Seljuqid wazir Nizamul Mulk Tusi, some notion akin to the divine right of the king to rule was being developed.

There was on the other hand strong intellectual resistance to this theory. Sadi devotes the first chapter of his *Gulistan* to the censure and edification of kings. His very second story, as noted above, concerns Sultan Mahmud.

The Ghaznavid historian, Baihaqi enumerates three forces in the state. 1. The Sultan, or the guiding intellect. 2. The Army, or the forces of belligerence and defence. 3. The subjects who Baihaqi identifies with passion and desire.

The status of the subjects is illustrated by the reprimand Sultan Mahmud administered to the citizens of Balkh, who by resisting the Qarakhanid invasion of 1006 AD, exposed royal property to despoliation. It was not the lot of the subjects, the Sultan said, to offer armed resistance to any invader.

On the other side Mahmud believed in providing justice to the people, and did not let rank impede him from punishing offenders.

Administration

Wazir was the prime minister of the realm, This was the most powerful as well as the most hazardous position. The *wazir* had to oversee all affairs, and he could be seen as encroaching on the Sultan's authority and would invite his wrath. Traditionally however, there was a division of authority. The Sultan would appoint the *Sahib-ud-Dewan* or department head but the *wazir* would appoint the deputy head.

Sahib-i-Dewan would be chief secretary of a department. Some Dewans were *Shughl-i-Ishraf-i-Mumlikat* inspection and audit; *Dewan-i-Ardh* army and defence; *Dewan-i-Rasail* or correspondence, *Dewan-i-Barid* post and intelligence etc.

Katkuda adjutants having knowledge of protocol and bureaucratic procedure.

Dabir meant literally secretary. Official routine was called *Dabiri*.

In the provinces there was an *amid* the civilian head who ruled with a *salar*, military head. In India this diarchy failed and had to be scrapped. There was no special *dewan* here, therefore income was irregular.

Fall of the Ghaznavids

It is true that the fall of the Ghaznavids took place when the political configurations of the eastern Islamic lands changed. Still it was brought upon by Sultan Masud who continuously disregarded the advice given to him, specially regarding time management in (a) the contest against the Seljuqs, and (b) shifting his treasures from Ghazni. Personally very powerful and courageous, Masud lost his western provinces to Tughril Shah the Seljuq mainly because of bad judgement. The Seljuqs won the battle of Dandanqan in 1040. Ten years later the eastern provinces were lost when the Ghurid Alauddin Suri (*jahansoz*), torched Ghazni when Sultan Bahram caused the death, one after the other of his three brothers. The last Ghaznavid ruler Khusro Malik, as mentioned earlier, was captured from Lahore in 1186.