

Ghaznavid and Ghaurid Rule in the North-western Peripheral Regions of India

2.1 Rise of Turkish Militarism in the Abbasid Empire, and Expansion towards India

The Umayyad Dynasty was uprooted by Abbasid Revolution in 749, and replaced by the Abbasid Dynasty, which ruled for the next five centuries. During the first century of its rule, which is called the golden era, the Abbasids ruled their Empire with extraordinary ability. Nevertheless, after the eighth Abbasid Caliph al-Mutasim Bi-Allah (r. 833-42), who is considered to be the last effective ruler of the dynasty, signs of decline and disintegration started appearing in the Empire. This era was also marked by the rise of the Turkish military commanders in the Abbasid Empire. In fact, during Caliph Mamun al-Rashid's reign (r. 813-33), Mutasim, the then Governor of Syria and Egypt, started recruiting people for the army from Eastern provinces of the Empire, who later came to be known as the 'Turks'.¹ Coming from nomadic backgrounds, they were known for their military skill, toughness, bravery and loyalty. These non-Arabic speaking military recruits from diverse ethnic backgrounds were predominantly Turk, so they came to be referred to as such. The word 'Turk' was generally used more in political and/or linguistic sense than in a racial meaning, since many non-Turk groups and clans had adopted Turkish language, and were thus regarded as Turks.

The Central and West Asian region was the home of these Turks, having sedentary or settled as well as nomadic population. The Umayyad conquered their lands quite early, but conversion to Sunni Islam among Turks generally took place in the tenth century under the Abbasids. These Turks were imported from these regions as military slaves, and hence, came to be known as *mamluk*, literally meaning the slaves. However, the social position of these slave-soldiers varied, since the slave of the Sultan or king could be a military commander or minister of state, while the slave of a military general could be an officer in the army or civil administration.² These slave-soldiers were often manumitted by their masters, and became freedmen. These new military recruits later became commanders, and also received governorships and other administrative responsibilities as well. Gradually, the Abbasid Caliphs became mere puppets in the hands of their generals-turned-*wazirs*, who came to dominate the state affairs in the Abbasid Empire.³

Owing to political disintegration and instability at the centre, many semi-independent regional kingdoms sprang up in the peripheral provinces of the Abbasid Empire. Some of these regional dynasties were founded by Turkish slave-soldiers, such as the Ghaznavid Kingdom. It was the Ghaznavid Kingdom, and later its successor state, the Ghaurid Kingdom, which paid attention to expansion towards India.

2.2 Ghaznavid Rule in the North-western Peripheral Regions of India

¹ Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) Appendix I, 326.

² Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 rpt., first published 1988), 122.

³ Osman Sayyid Ahmad Ismail al-Bili, *Prelude to the Generals: A Study of Some Aspects of the Reign of the Eighth Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mu'tasim Bi-Allah (218-277 AH/833-842 AD)* [sic] (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2001), 105.

One of the semi-independent kingdoms in the Abbasid Empire was the Samanid Kingdom. With its capital at Bukhara, it stretched to parts of Central Asia, Persia (including Khurasan) and Afghanistan. Alptigin was a Turkish slave of the Samanid King Abd al-Malik. In those days, the slaves usually became free after the death of their masters. So after the King's death, Alptigin became free and founded his own semi-independent Kingdom in Afghanistan. The city of Ghaznah (also called Ghazni or Ghaznin) was made the capital of the kingdom after its conquest in 962, and so the state came to be known as the Kingdom of Ghaznah. Later, Alaptgin's slave and later son-in-law, Subuktgin, who was a military commander and a provincial governor, became the King of Ghaznah in 977. Subuktgin followed an expansionist policy, and added Lamghan (near modern Jalalabad) and Peshawar to the Ghaznavid Kingdom. In those days, the Hindushahi Dynasty of Raja Jaipal was ruling over some parts of Afghanistan and north-western India. Subuktgin also attacked the territory of Jaipal for the first time in 986-87. Subuktgin died in 997 and after a war of succession between his sons, Mahmud finally ascended the throne of Ghaznah in 998.

Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznah (r. 998-1030) soon got the confirmation of his rule from his contemporary Samanid King. The Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad Al-Qadir Bi-Allah gave Mahmud a robe of honour and the titles of *Yamin al-dawlah* (the right hand of the Empire) and *Amin al-millah* (custodian of the faith/Muslim community).⁴ The robe and the titles represent the symbolic recognition of the rule of Sultan Mahmud as a legitimate ruler. However, the Kingdom of Ghaznah was still subservient to the political authority of the Samanid Kingdom, which owed allegiance to the Abbasid Caliph. In fact, in premodern times, there existed multiple layers of kingly authority or multiple sovereignties. Soon Sultan Mahmud declared himself as an independent ruler of Ghaznah, and assumed the title of Sultan, and became directly subservient to the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad. His Kingdom now included Balkh, Herat, Tirmiz, Khurasan, Lamghan and Ghaznah.

During 1001-1026, Sultan Mahmud led nearly seventeen expeditions to India, and conquered a number of areas including Peshawar, Lahore, Kashmir, Bhera (in Salt Range), Nagarkot, Thaneswar, Qanauj, Kalinjar, Gwalior, Somnath (Gujarat), Multan and Lahore.⁵ However, he did not annex all these conquered areas to the Kingdom of Ghaznah. He only annexed parts of Sindh, Multan and Punjab to it.

The causes and real motives of Sultan Mahmud's invasion of Indian territories is a subject of controversy among the various groups of historians.

- (i) One group of historians asserts that the Sultan was a religious fanatic and a greedy plunderer, who repeatedly attacked India to plunder its wealth. They argue that he collected a huge booty from the temples of India, which were the repository of wealth in those days. He spent this wealth on Ghaznah—the capital of his Kingdom, and added to the splendor and glory of the city by constructing buildings in it. To these historians, the economic factors were the most important cause behind the repeated military expeditions. Renowned historians who advocate this view include, among others, Muhammad Habib⁶ and K. M. Munshi.⁷

⁴ Abu Said Abd al-Haiyy ibn al-Zahhak ibn Mahmud Gardazi, *Kitab Zayn al-Akhbar*, (comp. about 440 A.H.) ed. Muhammad Nazim (Berlin: Iranschähr, 1928 A.D./1347 A.H.), 62.

⁵ S. M. Jaffar, *Medieval India under Muslim Kings*, Vol. II, *The Rise and Fall of the Ghaznavids* (Peshawar: S. Muhammad Sadiq Khan, 1940), 49-83.

⁶ Muhammad Habib, *Politics and Society during the Early Medieval Period (Collected Works of Professor Mohammad Habib)*, ed. K. A. Nizami, Vol. 2 (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1981), 77-80.

- (ii) Another group of historians asserts that he was an idol-breaker, a champion of faith, whose chief aim was to spread Islam in India. These historians argue that Sultan Mahmud was a devout Muslim, who led a holy war or *jihad* against the Hindus, as he had once said: "I'm an idol-breaker, I do not want to be called an idol-seller." Moreover, it is said that he was appointed by the Abbasid Caliph to lead a campaign to India every year. In addition, the Sultan was not a fanatic or a religious bigot. He was tolerant towards the Hindus living in his Kingdom, and he built separate residential quarters for them in his capital Ghaznah. He also employed a large number of Hindus in his army. He also attacked and defeated the Qaramati ruler of Multan named Abul Fateh Daud. In short, to these historians, the religious or ideological factors are the most important ones, and not the economic factors. Moreover, the Sultan has been portrayed as an ideal ruler. This view is generally espoused by the textbook histories in Pakistan, and advocated by Muslim nationalist historians such as S. M. Ikram.⁸
- (iii) A third group of historians, who have paid attention to the study of the political and strategic causes of the invasions, argue that he was an adventurer, who ambitiously pursued expansionist policies. He was not interested in eastward expansion of the Ghaznavid Kingdom; rather he wanted to build a Central Asian Empire. The Abbasid Caliph, who had asked the Sultan to lead a campaign in India annually, in fact wanted to keep him off from expansion in the territories of the Abbasid Empire in Central Asia. Moreover, the parts of Sindh, Multan and Punjab, which he permanently annexed to his Kingdom, in fact, formed the second line of defense in the East. He repeatedly invaded the Indian territories in the East in order to keep the eastern frontiers of his kingdom safe. In this group of historians, the most prominent name is that of Muhammad Nazim.⁹

In a nutshell, it must be remembered that monocausal explanations (insisting on only one factor or cause and ignoring other factors) cannot be given for historical events. All historical events are multi-causal in nature, and Sultan Mahmud's Indian invasions were no exception. There were a host of factors including economic, religious/ideological as well as political and strategic factors responsible for his military expeditions. For a student of history, it is not necessary to brand Sultan Mahmud either as an idol-breaker or as a plunderer. Moreover, it was not only religiously permissible for Muslim conquerors to collect booty (*mal-i-ghanimat*) after defeating the enemy, it was also a norm in premodern times. All conquerors, the Muslims and the non-Muslims alike, used to collect booty. Every age in human history has its own spirit, its own values and norms, which might be very different from the present day values and norms. An abhorrent or hateful practice in the past might become desirable in contemporary times, and vice versa.

Moreover, it is also important to note that the Muslim armies in Persia, Iraq, Central Asia, Africa and Spain did not damage any place of worship of the non-Muslims including the churches of the Christians, synagogues of the Jews and temples of fire-worshippers. However, in India, the Hindu temples were the store-house of huge wealth, and were therefore, attacked by the Muslim armies.

⁷ K. M. Munshi, "Foreward", in R. C. Majumdar, ed. *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. V: *The Struggle for Empire* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1957), vii, xi-xii.

⁸ S. M. Ikram, *Aab-i Kauthar* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1952), 59-62.

⁹ Muhammad Nazim, *The Life and Times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna* (Lahore: Khalil and Co., 1973; first published 1931).

2.3 Impact of the Ghaznavid Rule

The Indian expeditions of Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznah had their impact on north India as well as the Ghaznavid Kingdom.

- Politically, the Ghaznavid Kingdom expanded the region of Muslim settlements after the annexation of some parts of Sindh, Multan and the Punjab to it.
- Strategically, these annexed regions served as a buffer zone between the heartland of the Ghaznavid Kingdom and the Rajput states in north India.
- Financially, these expeditions caused a heavy drain on the wealth of some Indian states, though they added to the glory of the city of Ghaznah, where the Sultan constructed splendid palaces and buildings. Moreover, the attack on Hindu temples in India also caused de-hoarding of temple wealth, and the centuries-old accumulated wealth came into circulation.¹⁰
- Intellectually and culturally, these invasions led to mutual exchange of ideas between the Hindus and the Muslims. A famous eleventh-century scholar and traveler, Abu Raihan al-Biruni (d. 1050), who was a contemporary of Sultan Mahmud, visited India and met Hindu scholars and sages. This exchange of knowledge enabled him to write *Kitab al-Hind* (The Book of India), in which he discussed the Hindu religion, society and customs of the Hindus as well as the geography of India. Al-Biruni considerably benefited from the Hindu religious scholars, scientists and philosophers. Moreover, the city of Lahore emerged as a centre of Muslim learning.
- Socially and religiously, the Indian invasions of Sultan Mahmud indirectly facilitated the growth of Islam in the Indian sub-continent, particularly in the annexed regions. It must be borne in mind that the premodern Muslim states generally had an indirect role in the spread of Islam, since in many cases, political expansionism had facilitated it. Before and after the Ghaznavid invasions in India, many Muslim scholars and Sufis migrated to Sindh, Multan and the Punjab, and settled there. Most famous among them were Shaykh Isma‘il al-Bukhari al-Lahauri (d. 1056), who settled at Lahore, and Saiyyid ‘Ali ibn ‘Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri (d. 1077), popularly known as *Data Ganj Bakhsh*, who migrated from Ghaznah and also settled in Lahore in the eleventh century. He authored the first treatise on Sufism in Persian language titled *Kashf al-Mahjub* (The Revelation of the Hidden).

Sultan Mahmud is considered to be one of the greatest military leaders of India owing to his courage, military strategy and astuteness. He was also a great patron of arts and literature. Abul Qasim Firdausi (d. 1020), the famous Persian poet and the author of *Shahnama* (The Tales of Kings) lived in the Ghaznavid Kingdom. The Sultan breathed his last in 1030, and was succeeded by weak successors, who could not effectively rule the Ghaznavid Kingdom, which lasted till 1151 with its capital at Ghaznah. However, the house of Subuktgin continued to rule in Lahore till 1181 when Sultan Muhammad Ghauri conquered that city. Like many other kings, Sultan Mahmud had some capable successors and some incompetent ones. The Seljuqids, the Ghaurids and the Ghuzz Turks decimated the control of the incompetent successors of Sultan Mahmud in Persia, Khurasan, Ghaznah and other parts of Afghanistan from 1075 to 1175, though Lahore and its dependencies remained under the control of the successors of Sultan Mahmud. It must be remembered that after the death of Sultan Mahmud, his successors steadily continued to loose control in the west and the north.

¹⁰ Andre` Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, Vol. II, *The Slave Kings and the Islamic Conquests 11th–13th Centuries* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

However, they retained control of most of their territories in the east. They were occasionally able to push eastward, but these extensions were neither persistent nor permanent.

2.4 Ghaurid Rule in North India

In Afghanistan, the successors of Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznah could retain control till 1186, when the political power shifted to the local mountain chieftains of Ghaur in Afghanistan. Ghaur, situated in the north of Kabul, was once a tributary province of the Ghaznavid Kingdom. However, after the death of Ghaznavid King, Sultan Mahmud, the chiefs of Ghaur became independent, and established their own Kingdom. The ruling house came to be known as Shansabaniyyah. After some time, there started a struggle for power between the rulers of Ghaznah and Ghaur, in which the latter emerged victorious. Sultan Ghiyath al-Din, the Shansabani King of Ghaur, captured Ghaznah in 1173 and entrusted it to his brother Prince Shihab al-Din Muhammad, who was also his deputy.

The Ghaurids are credited with undertaking systematic conquest of India in the twelfth century. In those days, Lahore, Peshawar and their neighbouring territories were ruled by the Ghaznavids, and Multan and Uch were under the control of Isma‘ili rulers. A local dynasty of Sumers had established itself in Sindh, whereas the coastal areas of Makran were being ruled by the Kharijis. As for north India, it was under the authority of different Rajput states. Prince Shihab al-Din Ghauri crossed the Gomal Pass and led a number of expeditions in the north-western India. In 1175, he conquered and occupied the territories of Uch and Multan, in 1178. He led an unsuccessful military expedition in Gujarat (the capital of Anhilwara) in 1178. Next year, in 1179, he occupied Peshawar, and later Sindh in 1182 and Lahore in 1186, where the last Ghaznavid ruler, Khusrau Malik, was defeated which ended the Ghaznavid rule in India. The Prince was, however, defeated by the Rajput ruler of Delhi and Ajmer, Prithviraj Chauhan (Rai Pithura), in the first battle of Tara’in in 1191. But next year, in 1192, he defeated the Rajput confederacy led by Prithviraj in a decisive battle in the second battle of Tara’in. This victory laid the foundation of the Muslim rule in the Indian sub-continent.

Prince Shihab al-Din’s loyal Turkish slave general, Qutb al-Din Aybeg, conquered Delhi in 1193-94 and Qanauj in 1194, and was made in-charge of the Indian territories, while Shihab al-Din went back to fight against the Turks in Central Asia. In north India, another general Ikhtiyar al-Din Khalji conquered Bengal and Bihar in 1195-96, and was made in-charge of these regions.¹¹ The Turkish slave generals of Shihab al-Din Ghauri, who are credited with the expansion of Muslim rule in the Indian sub-continent, were given free hand in running the affairs of their respective territories, and extending them by further conquest and annexation.

Upon the death of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din in 1203, his younger brother Prince Shihab al-Din Ghauri became the King of Ghaznah, Ghaur and Delhi. He had been given the title of ‘Mu‘izz al-Din’ by his elder brother, and he continued to use the same title when he became the Sultan. Three years later in 1206, Sultan Mu‘izz al-Din (Shihab al-Din) Ghauri was assassinated at Damyak near Jhelum. Since he had no male issue, he was succeeded by his nephew, Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Mahmud Ghauri, who manumitted the slave general Qutb al-Din Aybeg, and also bestowed the title of ‘Sultan’ on him with Lahore as his capital. Thus,

¹¹ Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Hasan Nizami, *Taj al-Ma’athir*, Eng. trans. and ed., H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *The History of India as told by its Own Historians*, Vol. II (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1976 rpt., first published 1869), 212-35.

the foundation of Muslim rule in India, practically independent of any higher political authority, was laid in 1206.

2.5 Impact of the Ghaurid Rule

The Ghaurid occupation of north India had a number of political, administrative, military, social, religious and economic impacts:

- Politically, before the Ghaurid conquests, the north India was divided into many small independent states, mostly ruled by the Rajput rulers. After the Ghaurid occupation, a single Empire was established in north India.
- Administratively, Persian became the language of administration.
- Militarily, previously only the Khashtris (the caste of the warriors among the Hindus), which included the Rajputs, were religiously allowed to participate in battles, but after the Ghaurid conquests, the monopoly of one group over fighting was ended, and now all people could be recruited in the army without any discrimination. Moreover, the Ghaurids introduced horsemen (*sawar*) in warfare, since the Indian armies only used elephants and foot soldiers or cavalry (*pa'ik*). In addition, a strong standing army at the centre was created after the establishment of the Ghaurid Empire.
- Economically, as a result of Ghaurid conquests, trade and commerce flourished in India since a uniform law was introduced in the whole Ghaurid Empire. Moreover, the law and order situation was good, which facilitated the traders and merchants in traveling.
- Socially, the outlook of the Hindu society was changed. The Islamic ideal of equality inspired many people. Although initially, the Hindu caste system became rigidified for self-preservation after the advent of the Muslims, later it was softened. The cities which were exclusively inhabited by the people of high castes now became open to the people of other castes and ethnic groups, where all could live together. According to Mohammad Habib, the Ghaurid conquests brought an 'urban revolution' in north India.¹²
- Religiously, the propagation of Islam got impetus in the Ghaurid Empire, where the environment was conducive for it. Many scholars and Sufis migrated and settled in the north India for spreading their faith. Islam also affected the beliefs of Hinduism to some extent. The most important influence of Islam on Hindu religion was manifested by the Bhakti Movement, which started in the early thirteenth century. The central ideas of this Movement were direct approach to reality, universal love and brotherhood. The Movement had borrowed these ideas from the Sufi traditions in Islam.

There were a number of factors responsible for the success of the Turkish Muslims against the Hindu Rajputs. Owing to restrictions of the Hindu caste system, the people of only one caste, i.e. the Khashtris, took part in fighting, whereas among the Muslims there was no such restriction. The Turkish cavalry played a crucial role in winning the battles as the swift movement of horses ensured Turkish victory.

2.6 Comparison between Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznah and Sultan Muhammad Ghauri

As a general and military commander, Sultan Mahmud was far more successful than Sultan Muhammad, as the former suffered no major defeat in his entire military career, while the

¹² Muhammad Habib, *Politics and Society during the Early Medieval Period (Collected Works of Professor Mohammad Habib)*, ed. K. A. Nizami, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1974), 74-84.

latter was defeated many times, such as in Gujarat in 1178 and in the first battle of Tara'in in 1191.

As a statesman and empire-builder in the Indian region, Sultan Muhammad Ghauri was far more successful than Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznah since the former annexed his conquered regions in north India and laid the foundation of Muslim rule in the heartland of the Indian sub-continent. On the contrary, Sultan Mahmud, who conquered large territories in north India, annexed only parts of Sindh, Multan and the Punjab to the Ghaznavid Kingdom. Sultan Muhammad Ghauri had a vision about establishing an Indian Empire, while Sultan Mahmud was chiefly interested in setting up a Central Asian Empire.