

CHAPTER - VI

AN ASSESSMENT OF SULTĀN MAHMŪD SHAH'S REIGN & POLICIES

We have no clear information about the administrative system of Sultān Mahmūd and it is difficult to form a satisfactory picture of it. However certain stray references, help us in having an idea of it.

It seems that the administrative system which was set by Sultān Ahmad Shāh for Gujarat, remained as it was during the reigns of his successors. Sultān Mahmūd, therefore, was not an innovator but at the same time he should be given credit for administrative efficiency.

The Persian historians inform us that the people were happy and prosperous under his administration and culprits were punished severely.

Sikandar states that the Sultān punished the highway robbers severely and theft was so rare that the people could keep their houses unlocked and sleep at ease.¹ For the comfortable journey of the travellers of his state, the Sultan, constructed inns and encouraged tree planting on both sides of road. The magnificent mosques and

1. MS - Trans (F) pp.45-48.

colleges were constructed to stand witness to his religious zeal.

Sikandar writes "If in any town or village, he saw an empty shop or a house in ruins, he would ask the reason, and if necessary would provide what amount was needed for its restoration." ² In some cases where the peasants had to fetch water from the distance and the Sultan ordered well to be dug nearby. ³

After the conquest of Junagadh, 1470, Sultān Mahmūd divided his empire in five "Thanas", appointing deputies to each. It seems that the reorganisation of "Thanas" was politically and strategically beneficial.

These divisions besides the administrative efficiency were important for defence of Gujarat, both on land and sea coast.

Administration of Justice :-

Sultān Mahmūd is praised by the Persian chroniclers for justice and they mention several instances, which ^{may} be quoted. Bahā-u'd-dīn, an influential noble in the court of the Sultān killed an army officer. He escaped by

2. MS - Trans, (F) pp. 45-48

3. Ibid pp. 45-48

pursuading, two of his servants, to plead guilty in his place, and thus they were sentenced to death. When the Sultan, afterwards came to know the real murderer he ordered him to be executed.⁴

Another story is given by Nizām-ud-dīn to show the Sultān's love for justice. In the year A.H. 892/1486, some merchants from Delhi, complained to him at Champa-ner, against the ruler of Abu, who had robbed them of their horses. The Sultān ordered the price of the horses, to be paid to the merchants. He held himself responsible for this robbery which had taken place within Gujarat.⁵

However, no instance is given which might indicate his treatment of the Hindus in such situation. Hence, it is difficult to form any idea of the Sultān's love for impartial justice. The opinion of Sikandar "No other Sultān equalled Sultān Mahmūd in matter of justice even before and after him", cannot be accepted as whole truth.⁶ Jote has quoted certain adjectives to show the Sultan's love for justice, from certain Sanskrit documents.

4. MS - Trans (F) p. 72

5. TA - Trans (De) pp. 277-278

6. MS - Trans (Guj.) pp. 78-79

They are :

३० न्याय बुद्धोन्मुखन मन्त्रिप। अन्यायान्धकार
मार्तण्ड न्यायै कनिज प्रदिर। ७

That is the Sultān was like an intoxicated elephant in uprooting the tree of injustice. Sun for (removing) the darkness of injustice. And lastly, justice alone being given in his court.

Mr. Jote believes that the Sanskrit documents are the proof of the Sultan's love for justice. There is not even a stray instance with which we may compare the adjectives used for the Sultan and the truth therein.

The Military Administration :-

The army was the first object of attention, for on the efficiency of the ^Soldiers depended the power of the Sultan. Sultān Mahmaūd spent most of the years of his reign, in the military expeditions. He waged wars against the petty and formidable Rajputs and was victorious, almost in all of his military engagements. The Sultan must have employed a large army for this.

Only a few details are available, however, regard-

7. Jote - Op.cit. pp. 472-473

-ing the army administration. In stray references we are given the approximate strength of army employed by the Sultan during his expeditions but this number is not reliable because this number is given very differently at different places.

For instance, the Persian chroniclers state that the Sultān sent the army of 12,000 horses to assist Nizām Shāh against the Sultān of Mandu. Also it has been that the Sultān carried with him a cavalry of 40,000 against the Ra' of Junagadh. Therefore it is difficult to find out the exact number of the army that Sultan Mahmud had employed.

The Sultān used to order his nobles in charge of various "Thanas" to accompany him, with their force, in these expeditions. It seems, therefore, that the army was divided in various divisions, placed under different nobles, and the Sultan had a unit under his direct control.

From the information available, it appears that the Sultān's forces were of following categories, cavalry infantry, elephants and navy. These units were not independent of each other, but functioned in co-operation. For example, Malik Ayāz, who was in charge of navy, accompanied the Sultān in his expedition to Champaner as an army commander. Similarly in the army elephants also ^{were} ~~was~~

included. The Sultān used the elephants to put down the insurrection of nobles, in the beginning of his reign.

For the navy, we have to rely on the description of certain campaigns. The navy of the Sultān was not powerful to act by itself. It was not a navy in the modern sense of the term. However, Sultān Mahmūd employed Malik Ayāz to protect the sea coast of Gujarat. Regular fleets were stationed at three different parts viz. Cambay, Thana and with Div as the headquarters. The clash with Portuguese at Chaul (1507) reveals that the navy maintained by the Sultān was primarily for the protection of trade and commerce of Gujarat at sea. The vessels were comparatively small in size and poorly equipped. Therefore, the Sultān had to rely on the Egyptian naval unit in driving out the Portuguese from the coastal line of Gujarat.

Use of weapons in War :-

Daggers, spears, swords, bow and arrows were normally used in fighting. "The Sultān was probably the first Indian Prince who used guns in the naval battle"⁸ "It is believed that in the naval battle at Chaul, the Sultān used guns only with the help of the Egyptian fleet."

8. Majumdar A.K. Delhi Sultanate (Bhavan) p. 461.

Rules for military personnel and soldiers :-

The Sultān cared greatly for the interest of soldiers. In case a noble or a soldier was killed or died during campaign, the "Jagir" was given to his son and if there was no son, half of it was given to his daughter and in case of no issue necessary provision was to be made for the widow. Some of the nobles were of the opinion that the rule should also be applied only to deserving heirs of the deceased persons. The Sultān did not accept this and said, "The position will make him (the heir) worthy." ⁹

Secondly, he discouraged borrowing of money at interest by the soldiers. He ordered, "none of his soldiers should ever borrow money at interest". A special officer was appointed in treasury to make advances to the soldiers on agreement and to recover the amount subsequently.¹⁰ He considered money lending as against the law of Islam. He believed that "If Musalmans borrow money at interest, how shall they fight?"¹¹

Several stories are also related to show the interest taken by Sultān Mahmūd in the families of those who had been killed. About 1473, on his return journey after the

9. MS - Trans (F) pp. 45-47

10. Ibid pp. 45-47

11. Ibid pp. 45-47

successful expeditions against Junagadh, Dwarka and Shankhodhar the Sultan halted for three days at Sarkhiz, to visit the tomb of Shaikh Ahmad Khattu, and summoned to his camp the sons of the nobles and soldiers, who had been killed in the campaign. For three days the Sultan's eyes were filled with tears and his face marked with sorrow. His courtiers remonstrated for exhibiting so much sadness, when he had returned after such signal victories. The Sultan replied that a ruler must be utterly devoid of humanity if, after himself returned safe, he could not spare three days to meet the widows and families of those who perished and to console and comfort them.¹² Though this story may not literally true but the reputation so gained must have had some basis in facts.

Similarly, for his brilliant success in Saurashtra Nizām-ud-dīn, the Qāzī of Ahmedabad, came out to congratulate and welcome him back. The Sultan sadly said to him that if he had been at his home for these five years, he would have saved the number of men.¹³

Religious Policy :-

Sultan Mahmūd like most of the medieval Muslim rulers was a staunch follower of Islam. He not only protected but

12. MS - Trans (B) pp. 199-200

13. Ibid pp. 199-200.

also spread it in Gujarat. So great an attachment, to religion might be due to his early life with Shāh 'Alam, the Bukhari Saiyyid.

According to Sikandar, he was taught the lessons of "detachment" by Shaikh Sirāj-u'-d-dīn, a disciple of Hadrat-i-Qutb-i-'Alam. The author of Mā'athir-i-Mahmūd Shāhī also depicts the Sultān as the true follower of Islam. He used to do every day prayer and followed the decrees of Islam. The Sultān's love for Islam was so great that the author of Mā'athir-i-Mahmūd Shāhī goes to the extent of comparing his court as "Gate way of Islam" or "Dār-u's-Salām." ¹⁴ and to the Sultān as "Hadrat-i-Khilāfat Panāhī" or "the Protector of a religious state"¹⁵

Attitude towards Hindus in General & Rajputs in particular :-

It is true that the Sultān favoured Islam but at the same time in certain cases, he followed a liberal policy towards the Hindus. His religious attitude towards Rajput rulers was the result of political considerations and therefore while evaluating the religious policy of Sultān these two things should be clearly distinguished.

14. MMS - (Hik.Bey Lib. - Madina) - MSS - P41. 68

15. Ibid- The author has addressed the Sultān as above everywhere in the book.

His dealings with the Rajput rulers of Junagadh, Dwarka and Champaner, is the proof of his harshness. This was not mainly or solely due to religious fanaticism. Political forces also played an important role in this. These Rajput rulers were powerful and they were in position to put the Sultān in trouble. Hence, it was necessary for the Sultān to subjugate and thereby assure his own safety and furnish the task of consolidation begun by Ahmad Shāh.

We may state that the Hindus were not debarred from enjoying the highest position in the state service. So far possible Mahmūd Shāh rewarded the persons of ability without any distinction of class, or creed. Hence the nobles of his court came from different origins. Rulers or their sons, who submitted, were employed in the military services and at other positions according to their abilities after their conversion to Islam. His wazīr was a Brahmin, Malik Copl, who acted as an intermediary, when the embassy sent by Affonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese viceroy at Goa, arrived in Gujarat. Rāy-i-Rāyān, was another Rajput noble, a trusted friend of "Imād-ul-Mulk Bahā-ud-dīn and acted as a faithful friend at the time of Khudāwand Khān's conspiracy in 1480.

Jaziyāh which was imposed by Ahmad Shāh in Gujarat,

seems to have been continued during his reign. The Hindus were generally not encouraged by the Sultān in the matters connected with their religion. However, we do not have any historical evidence to prove this but this we could judge from the attitude of Sultan towards the Rajput rulers.

'Ulamā' had a great influence in administration. Important decisions were taken after consulting them. The teaching of the tenets of Islam was given an important place, for a number of 'Ulamā' were employed by the state. Patan became a great centre for the Islamic studies and number of learned people visited it.

The Sultān was a staunch Sunnī and he disliked Shi'ahs. When he was on death bed, an embassy from the Safavī king of Persia came to Gujarat. The Sultān ordered his attendants not to bring them before him. Accordingly, as stated by Sikandar, the embassy was kept waiting outside the city till the accession of Sultān Muẓaffar Shāh.

Thus, we may say, that Sultān Mahmūd's religious policy was essentially intolerant, but at the same time, it was moderate and not opperessive like Aurangzib, the Mughal emperor.

Greatness of Sultān Mahmūd's reign :-

Sultān Mahmūd ruled over Gujarat for fifty four years in uninterupted glory and prosperity. He is perhaps the greatest, as he is certainly the most popular of the Sultans of Gujarat, and even at present time his name appears in local traditions as a zealous Musalman King.

The military achievements of Sultān Mahmūd, forced the neighbouring princes to remain friendly with Gujarat. Also the prestige of the Sultānate was raised to such an extent that Lodī Prince fled in Gujarat after a rebellion against Ibrāhīm Lodī.

The prestige of Gujarat was equally high in Persia and Egypt. The Ṣafavī King Ismāil Shāh, sent an embassy to the court of Sultan Mahmud, as a token of friendship. The Sultān of Egypt had sent Amīr Ḥusāin to help the Gujarat Sultan in driving out the Portuguese menace from the Indian ocean. The joint effort of both the Sultāns brought them success at Chaul but unfortunately the alliance between them did not last long, as a result of which Portuguese gradually became powerful in the sea.

Architecture :-

The Indo-Saracenic architecture of Ahmedabad, may

be ^asaid to have reached its golden age during the reign of the Sultān. ^{The Sultān was} / Himself a great patron of architecture. The constructions at Sarkhīz during his reign are the proof of beauty of the Ahmedabad architecture. Bai Harir's step-well in the suburb of Asarwa and Ruda Devi's step-well in the suburb of Adalaj in Ahmedabad are also the beautiful pieces of architecture of his age.

The coins of the reign :-

"As in the history of the Sultanate" says Dr. Taylor, "it is his figure that bulk largest, and round him most of the glory gathers, so also in the numismatic record of the dynasty, it is his coins that are of all the most abundant and distinctly the most beautiful".¹⁶ To Mahmud also belongs the honour of giving his name to the silver coin that was in current use throughout the province during his own and subsequent reigns.

The Sultān's special interest in Horticulture and Arboriculture :-

The Sultān showed special interest in plantation of shady trees and fruits of different kinds. We are told that abundance of fruit trees in Gujarat, such as the Khirni, the Jambul, the Gular, the Mahuda etc. is the

16. G.P. Taylor "The coins of the Gujarat Sultante
JBRRAS XXI (1900-03) p.289.

result of Sultān Mahmūd's efforts. He encouraged the plantation of fruit trees and shady trees by rewarding the planters in proportion to the number of trees they planted. We are further informed that Khudāwand Khān Malik¹⁷ A¹lim, a noble, brought with him the seeds of Kharbuzah (melon), saplings of the fig and the solid bamboo from Deccan. ¹⁷

Sultan Mahmud laid out gardens like Bāgh-i-Firdaus or "The garden of Paradise", in the vicinity of Ahmedabad, beyond the village of Rajpur, near Wastral. The Sultan here planted a large number of mango, khirmi and myrabolan trees. The garden was in ruins by the middle of eighteenth century, nothing of it was left, except a portion of the enclosure and the gate. ¹⁸

Close of the reign :-

After the successful intervention in Khandesh, Sultan Mahmud returned to Muhammadabad Champaner, leaving his son Prince Khalil Khān, who had accompanied him to Khandesh, at Baroda. In Chilhajj, 916 A.H./1510, after a short stay, at Champener, the Sultān went to Patan passing through Ahmedabad and summoned Maulānā

17. MS - Trans (F) pp. 87-88.

18. Ibid p. 47.

Moīn-ud-dīn Kazrūnī and Tāj-ud-dīn Sayuti, the noted theologians there. He told them, "I have come this time to take leave of you, for I know that the measure of my life is full; pray for me. "

After four days the Sultān left for Ahmedabad. On reaching Ahmedabad, the Sultān fell ill. This illness continued for three months, when the Sultān called Prince Khalīl Khān from Baroda. This was the last meeting of the Sultān with his son and heir apperant. The prince was allowed to go back to Baroda, when some improvement was found in his condition. The improvement was short lived, for the illness grew more severe and the Sultan died on November 23, 1511, before Prince Khalīl Khān could return from Baroda.¹⁹

He was buried in Sarkhiz, opposite the tomb of Shaikh Ahmad Khattu, popularly known as Ganj Bakhsh.

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