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10

Mahmud Gawan: Wazir of Bahamani Dynasty

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Introduction

Abul Muzzafar Alauddin Bahman Shah Hasan Gangu was the founder of Bahamani dynasty.¹ Thus was launched into history the famous Bahmani dynasty which lasted from 1347-1527. The Bahmani dynasty replaced the old Chalukya and Rashtrakuta dynasties in the Deccan. The Bahmanids ruled the Deccan for nearly 200 years. They were as great predecessors and firmly laid the foundations of a mixed Hindu-Muslim Deccanee culture which grew during the period of Qutub Shahis and Asif Jahis.

The Bahmanids were in all 18 kings. They initially chose Daulatabad as their capital and subsequently moved to Gulbarga, where they remained till 1429 A.D. The first three Bahmani Kings consolidated their dynasty while during Firoz Shah's reign the Bahmani Empire grew to its full stature and blossomed out in all directions, more in educational and cultural fields.² In the Deccan, the Bahmani dynasty provided a continuous rule which besides giving security to the people and stability to administration, helped all-round growth of the people in the Deccan. Unlike the Muslim Kings in the Northern India the Bahmanids adopted the Hindu system of succession which was neither challenged by the nobles nor the people any time.³

The Bahmani kingdom stretched roughly from Berar in the north to the Krishna river in the South and constituted the nucleus of the Muslim power in the Deccan. It produced eighteen sultans whose rule lasted 180 years from 1347 to 1527; some of them were capable rulers.⁴ Mahmud Gawan was the great Wazir of Bahamani dynasty in Deccan.

Sources: The sources of the Bahmani dynasty and Gawan's life history, as of all other dynasties during the middle ages, are far and few.

Persian Sources of Bahamani dynasty

- Gulshan-i-Ibrahim by Mohammad Qasim Ferishta.⁵
- Siraj-i-Tarikh Bahamani by Mulla Mohd. Lary.
- Tohfat-us-Salatin Bahamani by Mulla Daud Bidri.
- Fath-us-Salatin by Agha Mehdi Hasain.

- Burhan-i-Maasir by Syed Ali Tabataba.
- Tazkirat-uk-Muluk by Rafiuddin.—King and their Warfare.

Foreign Travellers Accounts

- Alberun's India, Translated by Edward Schare-2 Vols. , Trubuers Oriental Series, London).
- Ibn Batuta's Travels in Asia and Africa (1325-1524) Trans by Gibb HAR.
- Nicolo'Conti, Marcopolo, Abdur Razzaq, Durate Barbosa---general conditions of people.
- **Russian traveller Nikitin** visited Bahamani kingdom in 1470 and visited all the important centers. He gave an account of the court, the army, men, women and the Bahamani officials etc.

Other sources of Bahamani dynasty:

- Riyaz-ul-Insha -148 letters by Mahmud Gawan.
- Urdu sources—1. Abdul MajidSiddqi- Saltanat-i-Bahmania
- .Zahiruddin Ahmed –Ahmed Shah Wali Bahmani.
- Yazdani-Antiquities of Bidar, Bidar Its History and Monument
- Swell –A forgotten Empire about Vijayanagara and Bahmani.

Mahmud Gawan

Mahmud Gawan's personality has assumed some historical importance. In the dark, cloudy sky of medieval history, he shines like one of those few stars that brightened their limited world with their effulgence. His was the personality that gave light to a generation which had lost its way in the labyrinth of insipid jealousies and strange conspiracies. He was essentially a hero of his times—a "Livinglight fountain" like Malik saifuddinGhori.

Mahmud Gawan was by common consent the greatest of the Muhammadan administrators of the Deccan. He belonged to the village of Gawan in Persia. He was very Capable and efficient. At the age of 45 Gawan went to Deccan for trade. Greatly impressed by his military genius. Alauddin II made him an Amir of his court.⁶ His son Humayun conferred upon him the title of Malik-ul-Tujjar. After the murder of Khwaja Jahan, Mahammad Shah II made Mahmud Gawan the chief authority of the state.

He was not only given the title of Khwaja-i-Jahan but henceforth addressed in official documents as " Lord of the habitants of the Globe, Secretary of the Royal Mansion Asaf of the Marks of Jem, Amir of Amirs, Deputy of the Realm" and was allowed to have 2000 Mughal troops as his body-guard.⁷

Mahmud Gawan served as the Prime Minister. He was a competent general and efficient administrator. He efficiently put an end to the havoc wrought on pilgrims of Mecca and on merchants by the fleets of Rajas of Khelna(Visalgarh) and Sangameshwar. He captured Goa, the best part of the Vijayanagar Empire.

In 1474, there was a terrible famine which divested the Deccan. Large number of people fled to Gujarat and Malwa. This was known as famine of Bijapur because it first began in that state. For two years the rains failed and when they came in the third year scarcely any farmers remained the country to cultivate the lands. Mahmud Gawan served the State most faithfully. He fought many successfully wars against the rulers of Konkan, Sangameshwar, Orissa and Vijayanagar. But in 1481 A.D, he fell a prey to conspiracy and was executed the same year.⁸ His death caused division of Bahmani state in five kingdoms. Namely the ImadShahi dynasty of Berar; the NizamShahi of Ahmadnagar; the Adil Shahi of Bijapur; the Barid Shahi of Bidar; and the Qutub Shahi of Golkonda.⁹

Mahmud Gawan's Reforms: Administrative Reforms

His administrative reforms aimed at curtaining the excessive powers of the provincial governors or Tarafdars and introducing a stricter system of control and supervision. He divided the big provinces into two and thus deprived the governors of the control of the fortresses by entrusting them to officers directly appointed and paid by the Sultans.

Military Reforms

Mahmud Gawan revolutionized the whole system of military administration. He made it the rule that there should be only one fortress under the direct command of the Tarafdar in the whole province while the Qiladar or commandants of all the central government and be responsible to it. The grand fortresses of Ausa, Parenda, Sholapur, Dharur and many others attest alike his military skill and science".¹⁰

Land Reforms

Mahmud Gawan was one of the first ministers in medieval India to have ordered a systematic measurement of the land, fixing the boundaries of different villages and towns and making a through enquiry into the assessment of revenue. This helped the government determining the income of the state. These reforms curbed of the power of the nobles and raised the status of central government.

Cultural Contracts

It was in a large measure due to the versatility and literary aptitude of Mahmud Gawan as well as to his love of learning that the Deccan came in for the closest cultural contact with the outside world. He himself was scholar of some merit and by his great treasure of vocabulary wit and knowledge; he was widely recognized as one of the most prominent Persian writers of the period. By the power of his pen he left no stone unturned to make the Deccan known in other countries and the collection of his letters, the Riyaz-i-insha and Diwan-i-Ashr, testifies to his sincerity and eagerness in this direction.¹¹

Among those with whom the Mahmud Gawan was in constant communication and the closest touch was Maulana Nuruddin Abdu'r-Rahman Jami, he was kept informal of the progress of Emani arms, and when the Khwaja heard that he was thinking of going on a pilgrimage to Mecca he begged him to come to the Deccan en-route. We find him writing to the celebrated biographer Sharafu'd -din Ali-al-Yazdi, the Sufi saint Khwaja'Ubaidu-lah el-Ahrar, Jalalu-d-din Dawani and a number of others well-known in the realm of knowledge. We also find the Deccan making liberal provision for the 'Ulama of Turkey and Iran'.

Besides the Sultan of Turkey he was also writing to the Sultans of Gilan, Iraq and Egypt as well as to the rulers and ministers of Gujarat, Jaunpur and Malwa and there is not one letter written by Mahmud Gawan on his own behalf or on behalf of his master in which he does not extol the greatness, might or learning of his adopted country or the dynasty which he deemed it an honour to serve.¹²

Educational Reforms (Gawan Madrasa)

Mahmud Gawan's greatest legacy is Bidar's college or Madrasa, whose construction, completed in 1472,¹³ he personally commissioned. Only three quarters of the damaged monument now survives, as does just one of the its two original minarets. And only traces remain of the brilliantly colored glazed tiles that once covered its walls and minarets. Yet the college's original splendor is unmistakable even in its present state, its arches and colourful glazed tiles recalling Timurid Central Asia, and its minaret and domes reminiscent of Mamluk Egypt.

Gawan's prodigious correspondence with over seas scholar, namely that he was determined to put Bidar on the map of the Persian speaking world as a major center of learning. Its library originally held 3,000 volumes. Thirty -six suites of rooms on three storey's accommodated more than a hundred students and in six suites of rooms resides some twelve professors, who lectured in four vaulted halls measuring forty feet by twenty-seven feet.¹⁴ This extraordinary place where the

chief minister himself passed many hours in study and discussion remains the most visible legacy of Gawan's cosmopolitanism and his devotion to scholarship.

Fazlullah Inju and Mahmud Gawan were the pillars of the State who provided intellectual base to the military possessions of the foreign adventures and transformed the Bahmani kingdom into a great seat of Islamic learning and culture. Mahmud Gawan's Madarsa at Bidar for the promotion of Persian and Arabic studies.¹⁵ He himself was a writer of great merit, his work, the *Manaziru'l -Insha* show the mastery he had over Persian and Arabic literature.

Patronage to Bidriware

Bidar district is the home of the Bidriware industry. This craft was introduced in Bidar during the rule of Bahmanis¹⁶ and patronized by their successors. E.E.Speight dates back nearly "four hundred years to the Bahmani and Baridi Dynasties under whose patronage it flourished, and towards the end of whose rule it reached its greatest perfection and beauty".¹⁷ Even today this art is alive and products rare specimens of art and skill.

Cultural contribution of Bahmani Sultan's and Mahmud Gawanto Indian History:¹⁸

- 1) Bahmani Sultans enriched Persian, Arabic and Urdu Literature.
- 2) They tried to ensure stable government at Central, Provincial and Local.
- 3) Bahmani art received new colour and shape at the hands of Firoz Shah Bahmani as Saracenic i.e., Indo-Muslim art.
- 4) The area emerged as the bedrock of Hindu-Muslim culture.
- 5) Muslims and Hindus lived with great harmony.
- 6) Mahmud Gawan's Madrasa at Bidar was the highest centre of learning and Literature.
- 7) Construction of Roads, Fort and Fortification modernized society and promoted Agriculture and Industry.
- 8) Socio- economic conditions and ascetic values contributed to the growth of Sufi movement under the Bahmanis.

Gawan's Philosophy of Life (Devotion)

The Gawan's philosophy of life and action can be gathered from his letters and clearly shows the man he was. The whole life of Mahmud Gawan can be summed up in the word "devotion". He was devoted to the interests of Bahmani kingdom. He was devoted to the ideal of territorial expansion. He was devoted to administrative reforms. He fought wars and brought glory to Bahmani kingdom. Although he was at the helm of the affairs of the state he lived a very simple life. His wants were very few. He slept on a mattress. His food was cooked in earthen vessels. On Friday night, he went from one parish of the city to another and gave help to the poor and the

needy.¹⁹ He loved scholar. He loved the company of learned men. He was well –versed in Mathematics, literature and medicine. His private life was pure and simple. The one defect of his character was his incorrigible bigotry. His orthodoxy prevented him from perceiving other points of view in religion. He also persecuted other points of view in religion. He also persecuted the Hindus vigorously.²⁰ The murder of Gawan at the age of 78 was a calamity which accelerated the downfall of the Bahmani kingdom.

The contribution of the Bahamanis to bring the heterogeneous elements together is truly a great achievement. Thus the pioneer work of Gawan ,a Deccani culture came into existence which integrated people in every field of life and thoughts still this day living in this region.

Conclusion

The above sketch of Mahmud Gawan's personality will show that he excelled as a diplomat, as a soldier, as an administrator and as a man of letters-in all the walks of life in only one of which it is generally the fortune of any man to enter and perhaps to excel on the whole Gawan was a great Bahmani wazir as well as a reformer of the dynasty.As far as the architecture is concerned there is an intermixture of Hindu, Turkish and Persian artisanship. Some of the designs and decorative patterns seen in the monuments of Bidar are unique in India.

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Gawan Madrasa



Bidriware