

LAHORE DURING THE GHANAVID PERIOD

A SOCIO POLITICAL AND CULTURAL STUDY

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Abstract

Most of the historical documents and books are quiet about the art and craft produced in the early Muslim period of Lahore except for some sketchy information that we glimpse in different accounts. Before the arrival of Islam, Raja Jai Pal ruled Punjab. Mahmud of Ghazna conquered Lahore in 1021 AD. Hazrat Ali Hujveri, Husain Zanjani and Syed Ismael Muhaddis are worth mentioning scholars who lived in Lahore during Ghaznavid period. The city was full of cultural and artistic activities but the information about them is very scarce. An interesting source of information is the poetry written in that period by the poets of Lahore. These literary accounts give us references of architecture, painting, calligraphy, music and dance of Lahore.

Keywords: Lahore, Syed Ali Hujveri, Husain Zanjani, Mahmud of Ghazna, Jai Pal, Abul Fatah, Multan.

Whenever the historical accounts are written, their focus is mainly on the wars and intrigues of the courts, the victories and defeats, what regions were being conquered and how much booty was looted.

City of Lahore is no different in this regard. Most of the historical documents and books are quiet about the culture, traditions, literature, poetry and other arts except for some sketchy information that we glimpse in different archival materials. Not much conscious effort was made to give any detail about the lifestyle and art produced here. But no matter how small, we do get evidence of the grand architecture, art, artisans and the performing artists of Lahore with different cultural influences that helped to formulate their expressions.

During the quest for knowledge about Lahore, it was observed that the early Muslim Period was one of the most productive in this regard. This was an era of achievements and a time when artists gained great heights. But to find any information about them was next to impossible. Visual references of this era are again very rare but a few such examples have been discovered. Some evidence was explored in the poetry produced during that era. Although it does not fall under the category of true research methodology but in this case, it is very useful.

Political Scenario During Ghaznavid Rulers of Lahore

Except for the fact that some Rajput prince founded Lahore, there is not much of a political history available about the city, as late as the later part of 7th century when we find Lahore ruled by the Hindu Chauhan prince of the Ajmer family.

Before the arrival of Muslims, Raja Jai Pal ruled Punjab. His territories extended from Peshawar to Lamghan and from Kashmir to Multan.(1) At that time Alpatagin, who was a slave of Mansoor Samani, established an independent kingdom. After Alpatagin's death, his courtiers elected his slave, Sabuktegin as a king. Sabuktegin and Raja Jai Pal encountered each other many times and mostly it was Hindu Raja who lost. Sabuktegin died after a reign of 20 years(2) and his son Ismail inherited the throne but his brother Mahmud overthrew him in 997. For the next 4 years he put his kingdom in order and in 1001 AD, attacked Hindustan for the first time.(3)

Raja Jai Pal thought that he could defeat the young prince, but lost the war again. After so many successive defeats from the same enemy, Raja was so humiliated that he performed the Hindu act of *Jauhar* by burning himself to death right outside the wall of the city of Lahore that was also his capital.(4)

Anand Pal, the son of Jai Pal and successor to the throne, faced the immediate challenge of Mahmud. He called the rulers of Hindustan and they joined their forces to get rid of Mahmud once and for all. They fought in the vicinity of Peshawar. Anand Pal lost the battle but Lahore was left untouched for the next 13 years and the Raja became Mahmud's tributary.(5)

Abu al Fatah, the ruler of Multan, was against Mahmud so the Afghan decided to punish him. He asked help from Raja Anand Pal who not only refused but also allied with Abu al Fatah. After defeating the Multan ruler, Mahmud turned around and attacked Raja Anand Pal who ran to Kashmir. Mahmud had the chance to conquer the area but instead he appointed Jai Pal II, the son of Raja Anand Pal, as the next ruler.(6)

Mahmud kept on expanding his territories in Hindustan. In Lahore Jai Pal's grandson tried to create problems for Mahmud. In 1021, the Afghan stormed down from the mountains of Kashmir valley and seized Lahore without any resistance from the ruler.(7)

By that time politically and geographically, the city of Lahore and its rulers had become very important. Muslims fought for 200 years to control this region and once they were successful in Punjab, it put the seal of confirmation to the fate of the Subcontinent. From then onwards Islam spread slowly but persistently among the non-Muslims of the Subcontinent. The change was gradual. Punjab and specially Lahore played a vital role in this regard. The liberal attitude of the inhabitants of Lahore helped in strengthening the newly found Muslim government in Punjab. This broadmindedness also played a key role in the formation of the arts of the coming centuries. In *A Brief Account of the History and Antiquities of Lahore*, it has been reported, "Even now (1863) Mohammedan of the Punjab is perhaps less bigoted, and the Hindu less grossly superstitious, than elsewhere and it is remarkable that two of the boldest reformers which India has produced Goraknath and Nanak were natives of the Punjab."(8) This attitude of acceptance of foreign ideas and influences was important in the configuration of art forms in Lahore.

Mahmud of Ghazna conquered Lahore in 1021 and it is a common belief of many historians including Kenhya Lal(9) that he immediately appointed Malik Ayyaz (his favourite slave) as the ruler of Lahore. But this is not true. Initially he wanted the local Bhats of Rajput tribe to rule(10) but when it became necessary only then he appointed his courtiers to govern Lahore. No prince was appointed as the ruler of Lahore but it was given under the control of the officials

called *Salars*. The very first name that we find in records is *Salar* Abdullah Qratgin. We don't know his date of appointment but he governed Lahore till 1030. The next name found in the history is *Salar* Uriarug who ruled till 1032. *Salar* Ahmad Nial Tageen replaced him but he was killed in 1034 when he rebelled against the Ghaznavid rule.(11)

For the next two years there seems to be no one in Lahore to represent the Ghaznavids. But now only after 15 years of Muslim rule, the city had become a significant military base and a commercial hub for the traders around the region. It was treated parallel to Ghazna and the main cultural and artistic streaks were shared by both the cities.

Sultan Muhammad Bin Mahmud Ghazni had to hand it over to a member of the family, he appointed his son prince Amir Majdood as the ruler of Lahore in 1036. So for the first time in Muslim history a prince ruled Lahore. He was accompanied by Abu Mansoor as notary, Saad Salman as Finance Minister and Abu al Najam Ayyaz as the *Ataliq* and counsellor of the prince.(12) From then on Malik Ayyaz played a very important role in the development and progress of the city. Most of the Lahoris declare him the founder of modern Lahore. He rebuilt the fort and strengthened the wall around. But this walled city was not so big and it had a maximum of four or five gates.

Cultural Activities Under the Ghaznavid Period

Lack of evidence about the cultural, social and artistic life of the rulers and citizens has also been pointed out in the preface of *A Brief Account of the History and Antiquities of Lahore*, "The general histories of India, such as those of Farishta, Nizam ul Din Ahmad, Abdul Qadir, the Tarikh-i-Alfi, the Iqbalnama Jahangiri, are little more than a chronicle of wars, court intrigues and murders, and seldom descend to local details."(13) One has to pick pieces from here and there, put them together to complete the picture of social and cultural life of that era. Same principle applies to the Ghaznavid Rule in Lahore.

The Ghaznavid rulers were very hospitable to the men of merit. Learned personalities were highly appreciated, as a result, scholars from every corner of, not only Hindustan but also from the Muslim world started pouring in and they found respect, employment and money in Lahore. Muslim families settled here. At the same time many local Hindus embraced Islam and very soon a Muslim society was established, which was one of the first in the Subcontinent. Makhdoom Ali Hajvery, Fakhar ul Din Husain Zanjani, Sayyad Ismail

Muhaddis, Masood Saad Salman, and Abu-al-Farj Runi(14) are worth mentioning scholars who lived in Lahore during Ghaznavid period.

For the first time in the known history of Lahore, it got the status of a cultural hub and it was said that if Shiraz and Isphahan were united, they would not make one Lahore of the Ghaznavid period. It had a huge population because at one time the citizens of Lahore provided an army of forty thousand soldiers. There were many foreigners in the army (*Lashkar*) also. Soldiers who came from Ghazni, Ghor, Turkistan and other countries, did go back after earning lots of riches but some of them stayed back and this factor added another dimension of cultural life to the city.(15) In fact this mixture of locals and foreigners gave birth to the language of Urdu in Lahore that was called *Lashkari Zuban* (language of army) at that time.(16)

The city as old as Lahore had a tradition of arts and crafts since ancient times. Evidence was found during the excavation carried out at Lahore Fort in 1959 in the lawn in front of *Deewan-i-Aam*. The digging went on for three months and a trench measuring 180 by 60 feet was dug for this purpose. It was stopped only when the archaeologists encountered virgin soil. In the report printed in Pakistan Archaeology Number 1-1964, it was written, "In all, twenty stratified cultured layers were encountered which represented, from top to bottom on the natural soil, four distinct periods: the British and Sikh, Mughal, pre-Mughal, and what is more important the pre-Muslim periods."(17) In the Pre Mughal layer a coin was discovered that is of Ghaznavid period with beautiful Kofic script. Some other pottery pieces and sculptures were also excavated in other diggings as well that belonged to 11th and 12th century.

Abu al Fazal Baqhi gives a detail account about the cultural life of Ghaznavid Dynasty in Lahore.(18) Here we see a glimpse of the glories of Ghazni of that period and it is written that both Lahore and Ghazni were identical in style and splendour in those days so we can visualize the life of Lahore by studying social and cultural life of Ghazni. It was mentioned that Ghaznavid kings built huge palaces and the court had grand throne with sculptures in four corners to hold the crown with their hands. They were famous for elaborate functions in both cities. The food was served in an extremely formal manner. The kings wore dresses of intricate thread work, loaded with gold. They used to have lovely boys around them to serve them wine and entertained the royal guests.(19)

To get more information about the cultural life of Lahore of the Ghaznavid period, the tactics of traditional methods of research

were discarded and information was extracted from other sources rather than typical history books and memoirs, the poetry of that period was explored. Although poets are not a very reliable source of information with their high flights of imagination, so in this process the researcher had to be extra sensible to filter the facts and leave out the poetic exaggerations but a lot was discovered in old verses that was otherwise lost in the mist of time. Here if you find some poetic delicacies in the paper, that will be mainly due to the sources used primarily for the research.

We find many laudatory poems (*Qaseeda*) in praise of the king and courtiers and in those poems; the social and artistic life of Lahore is also highlighted. The most famous poets of this era were Abu-al-Faraj Runi and Masud Saad Salman.

An early Persian poet, Abu-al-Faraj Runi was senior to Masud. Nothing is known about his birth and early life, except that he was born in Rūna, a village near Lahore. Abu'l-Faraj's claim to fame rests largely on his delicate panegyrics. He was praised and imitated by Anwari (d. 585/1189-90), considered by many to have been the greatest master of the panegyric Qasida. The other notable Saljuq panegyrist, Zahir Faryabi (d. 598/1201-02), seems also to have been influenced by Runi. According to Awfi, both Anwarī and Zahir Faryabi constantly perused Runi's *divan* and tried to imitate his style. Not only Anwari and Zahir but also Orfi Sirazi (d. 999/1590-91) and Fayzi (d. 1044/1595), the two great Indo-Persian poets at the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar, expressed their indebtedness to Runi. His surviving *divan* comprises 2,000 verses including, besides panegyric *qaidas*, fifty-seven quatrains (*rubaiyat*), eighteen fragments, and three incomplete *gazals*.(20)

His poetry has details of the city, its people and monuments. He wrote about the grand dwellings built by the rich of the city and how beautifully they were designed. He appreciated the modern palaces of Ala ul Dola and mentioned the construction of *Qasar i Aad*, which was the name of the palace, built by Masud Saad Suleman and congratulated both of them for decorating the city with lovely buildings. (21)

In another poem, the poet praised a latest palace built by Abu Alrashad Rasheed and says that the grand style of the house has enlightened Lahore.(22)

There is a detailed account of a grand mosque, which is named "*Urus e Falak*, Bride of the Sky" by Abu-al-Faraj Runi. According to the poet it was a great source of learning, with a big library as well.

The marble used in the mosque was brought from the far off lands of India so were the trees.(23)

Another important poet of Lahore was Masud-e Saad-e Salman, Persian poet of the later Ghaznavid period. The first major Indo-Persian poet, Masud-e Saad-e Salman is best known for the poetry he wrote in prison and in exile. Although later traditions about his life are unreliable, his *divan* provides a considerable amount of information.(24)

He was active both as a poet and diplomat who accompanied prince Amir Majdood as finance minister when he came to Lahore. As a result to his political affiliations, he enjoyed a high status but had to suffer many hardship due to the changes of governments. But in all these years he produced wonderful poetry. He also wrote about the beauty of the buildings and the city, in his poem *Shehar-i-Ashob*.(25)

In this poem Masud Saad highlights the fact that people of Lahore were always fond of grand festivals. He mentions one of these festivals when Lahoris gave a huge reception to welcome Sherzad who came to Lahore as its ruler. This event was celebrated for many days and nobody slept for two weeks.(26)

Although there is no direct reference of any artistic or social activity but the city was full of interesting personalities, artists, musicians, singers and dancers. Masud mentioned them and their occupations in his laudatory poems in an extremely intriguing manner. Particularly he wrote about one function that was hosted by Sherzad at his palace with details of the individuals present there. He describes their habits and the qualities, which they possess.

He writes, “Khawaja Abu Nasar Parsi, Ammer Behman is a well-known courtier who is famous for his good manners. But on the other hand there is Sayyad Abu al Fazaail who has a look of a wrestler and warrior. He is a party man and prince enjoys his company a lot but he is a gambler, cheats in the game and he is involved in bar fights.

Abu al Qasim Dabeer is a youth exceptionally good in grammar and official letter writings but he cannot handle his liquor and sometimes vomits even in the sleeve of his dress, if he cannot find an appropriate place. Ten servants wait for him when he collapses and feels so embarrassed that avoids meeting the prince for days afterwards. May be the noble company of the prince will make a better man out of him.”(27)

Then the poet writes about himself that I am a useless man but still the prince loves me. I request the cup bearer (*Saqi*), not to give

me anymore wine but he never listens to me and does not stop until heavily tipped.” (28)

After a detailed account of courtiers, Masud writes about the entertainers that include musicians, singers and dancers who were there for the amusement of the guests.

He gave the names of Awwal Muhammad - *Nay Nawaz* who plays the flute so beautifully that it fills a sad heart with happiness. In his troupe there is a female dancer and many musicians. He beats them with twigs. Old *Nay Nawaz* Ali hates him who was famous for his singing 20 years ago but now he has given up and has become very religious.

Usman Khawaninda is a great singer, who mesmerises the audience with his singing but he is a youth of no character, an alcoholic who wanders in the streets and sleeps in the gambling houses.

Asfand Yar Changi who used to play Chang and always received prizes of high value from the king but ends up gambling even his clothes. Sold his Chang to gamble. Masud has used a very insulting language for Asfand Yar when he writes:

He wanders like a vagabond dog and mumbles to himself that one should spend the life free of every kind of sadness and with lots of happiness and in drunken state.

He also writes about Mutraba Pari, a singer whose voice resembles the singing of a ringdove that brings life to the flowers of the court.

Bano Qatal was a brilliant dancer who is tall and has a long neck. She is clever and of gay disposition.

Then he wrote about a male dancer Maho who danced with such grace and style that Lahori elites were crazy about him.(29)

The detailed description of all these individuals, take us back in times when Lahore was enjoying its first taste of art and culture under the influence of Ghazni. We can visualise these individuals, their faces and their lifestyles, all becomes so lively, thanks to the highly descriptive poetry of Saad Suleman who at the end of the poem apologises if he has been rude or hurt anyone’s feelings with his humour.(30)

By the end of the 11th century Lahore and Ghazni were the two most important cities in Ghaznavid Sultanate. Their society and culture were almost identical but the advantage Lahore had over Ghazni was that when the former city faced its destruction, all the important families migrated and settled near and around the river Ravi. When the Ghaznavids were thrown out of Ghazni, Lahore was made the capital of Ghaznavid territory.

Ghaznavid ruler Khusru Shah died in Lahore in 1160 and his son Saraj ul Dola Khusru Malik was the next king. He was not only

the last king of Ghaznavid family but we can also call him the one and only king of Lahore who ruled India.(31) He was not a very competent ruler and Ghoris were taking over one city after another but he was a man who appreciated arts and crafts. People from Khurasan, Ghargistan and Ghazni were migrating to Lahore because it was peaceful here. Even in those days of severe turmoil, the king was patronizing scholars like Shahab ul Din Muhammad bin Rasheed Mohtaj, calligrapher Yousaf Ibn-i-Nasar, Zia ul Din Abd ul Rafih Sabeeb, and a remarkable poet Nasarullah Farqadi who was later imprisoned and murdered by the same king.(32)

Lahore Under the Ghoris

Last Ghaznavid rulers were not as capable as their ancestors. Another Afghan lineage, Ghoris started taking over Ghaznavid cities. Their leader Ala-ul-Din Ghori took possession of Ghazni, massacred its citizens and put it on fire thus earning the name title of *Jahan Soz*. The city burned for days. In 1180 AD, Ghoris besieged Lahore for the first time but the city was too big for an army of 20 or 30 thousand men. After three years the invaders came again but failed to capture the city. At last in 1186 AD Sultan Muizz-ad Din Sam Muhammad Ghori was able to finish the Ghaznavid rule in Lahore when he snatched the city from Khusru Malik.(33)

Ghaznavid is the period when Lahore fully bloomed. Its people showed their attitude of accepting foreigners openheartedly. Personalities related to poetry, literature, music, dance, calligraphy, art and craft started coming from different places and settling here. Grand buildings were erected and decorated but unfortunately no visual record is available of them. But by the study of local literature we can assume that the city acquired its taste of high aesthetics in this period because there is no evidence of such activities in previous centuries. The city learned to appreciate art and good things in life and this encomium is still found in its people.

Lahore of today has the cultural roots that were watered by so many regions and individuals. All added some tint to an already colourful cultural mosaic of the city. This was a process that went on for many centuries and it is still going on, good or bad, only a future historian or anthropologist will be able to judge.

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