

Subject:- PERSIAN

B.A.(Hons) Part-III

Paper- VIII

History of Persian Literature

Topic- Ghaznavid Period

Online Class Materials

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Ghaznavid Period

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The Ghaznavid dynasty was a Persianate Muslim dynasty of Turkic mamluk origin at their greatest extent ruling large parts of Iran, Afghanistan, much of Transoxiana and the northwest Indian subcontinent from 977 to 1186. The dynasty was founded by Sabuktigin upon his succession to rule of the region of Ghazna after the death of his father-in-law, Alp Tigin, who was an ex-general of the Samanid Empire from Balkh, north of the Hindu Kush in Greater Khorasan.

Although the dynasty was of Central Asian Turkic origin, it was thoroughly Persianised in terms of language, culture, literature and habits and hence is regarded as a "Persian dynasty".

Sabuktigin's son, Mahmud of Ghazni, declared independence from the Samanid Empire and expanded the Ghaznavid Empire to the Amu Darya, the Indus River and the Indian Ocean in the East and to Rey and Hamadan in the west. Under the reign of Mas'ud I, the Ghaznavid dynasty began losing control over its western territories to the Seljuq dynasty after the Battle of Dandanaqan, resulting in a restriction of its holdings to modern-day Afghanistan, Pakistan (Punjab and Balochistan). In 1151, Sultan Bahram Shah lost Ghazni to the Ghurid king Ala al-Din Husayn.

Two military families arose from the Turkic slave-guards of the Samanid Empire, the Simjurids and Ghaznavids, who ultimately proved disastrous to the Samanids. The Simjurids received an appanage in the Kohistan region of eastern Khorasan. The Samanid generals Alp Tigin and Abu al-Hasan Simjuri competed for the governorship of Khorasan and control of the Samanid Empire by placing on the throne emirs they could dominate after the death of Abd al-Malik I in 961. His death created a succession crisis between his brothers. A court party instigated by men of the scribal class — civilian ministers rather than Turkic generals — rejected the candidacy of Alp Tigin for the Samanid throne. Mansur I was installed instead, and Alp Tigin prudently retired to south of the Hindu Kush, where he captured Ghazna and became the ruler of the city as a Samanid authority. The Simjurids enjoyed control of Khorasan south of the

Amu Darya but were hard-pressed by a third great Iranian dynasty, the Buyid dynasty, and were unable to survive the collapse of the Samanids and the subsequent rise of the Ghaznavids.

The struggles of the Turkic slave generals for mastery of the throne with the help of shifting allegiance from the court's ministerial leaders both demonstrated and accelerated the Samanid decline. Samanid weakness attracted into Transoxiana the Karluks, a Turkic people who had recently converted to Islam. They occupied Bukhara in 992, establishing in Transoxania the Kara-Khanid Khanate.

After Alp Tigin's death in 963, Abu Ishaq Ibrahim, followed by his slave Sabuktigin, took the throne. Sabuktigin's son Mahmud of Ghazni made an agreement with the Kara-Khanid Khanate whereby the Amu Darya was recognised as their mutual boundary.

The foundation of Persian literature, which had been laid down under the Samanids, became sound and got enriched by the most eminent poets like Unsuri, Farrukhi, Asjadi, Firdausi, Minuchihri, Asadi, Azaeri Razi and scholars like Abu Rehan Alberuni and Abu Ali Sina (popularly known as Avicenna in Europe) of the ghaznavid period. Thus it can be safely said that the Ghaznavid period was an age of the development and perfection for Persian literature.

Though the span of the Ghaznavid period was short, yet so far as the importance and development of Persian poetry and number of Persian poets are concerned, this was one of the most illustrious and magnificent period of Persian literature. In the whole range of the literary history of Iran no such work of the height of the epic Shah Name of Firdausi was produced.

Alptagin was a Turkish slave of Ahmad son of Imail, the Samanid, By dint of his ability and special interest in administration he was made Governor of Khorasan by Abdal-Malik I, the Samanid ruler. Later on the Government of Ghazna also came into his hand. He was followed by his son-in-law Subuktigin who in his turn was succeeded by his illustrious son Mahmud. Prior to the establishment of the Ghaznavid dynasty in Iran, several other courts were extending their whole hearted support for the development of Persian language and literature. Among them were Sahib Ismile bin Abd, the Buwaihidi at Isfahan (936-99 A.D.) the courts of the Samanids at Bukhara, Shamsul Mali Qabus bin Washmgir, the Ziyarid at Tabaristan (976-1012).

Persian literary culture enjoyed a renaissance under the Ghaznavids during the 11th century. The Ghaznavid court was so renowned for its support of Persian literature that the poet Farrukhi traveled from his home province to work for them. The poet Unsuri's short collection of poetry was dedicated to Sultan Mahmud and his brothers Nasr and Yaqub. Another poet of the Ghaznavid court, Manuchehri, wrote numerous poems to the merits and advantages of drinking wine.

Sultan Mahmud, modelling the Samanid Bukhara as a cultural center, made Ghazni into a center of learning, inviting Ferdowsi and al-Biruni. He even attempted to persuade Avicenna, but was refused. Mahmud preferred that his fame and glory be publicized in Persian and hundreds of poets assembled at his court. He brought whole libraries from Rayy and Isfahan to Ghazni and even demanded that the Khwarizmshah court send its men of learning to Ghazni. Due to his invasion of Rayy and Isfahan, Persian literary production was inaugurated in Azerbaijan and Iraq.

The Ghaznavids continued to develop historical writing in Persian that had been initiated by their predecessors, the Samanid Empire. The historian Abu'l-Fadl Bayhaqi's *Tarikh-e Beyhaqi*, written in the latter half of the 11th century, is an example.

Although the Ghaznavids were of Turkic origin and their military leaders were generally of the same stock, as a result of the original involvement of Sebuktigin and Mahmud of Ghazni in Samanid affairs and in the Samanid cultural environment, the dynasty became thoroughly Persianized, so that in practice one cannot consider their rule over Iran one of foreign domination. They also copied their administrative system from the Samanids. In terms of cultural championship and the support of Persian poets, they were more Persian than their ethnically-Iranian rivals, the Buyid dynasty, whose support of Arabic letters in preference to Persian is well known.

Historian Bosworth explains: "In fact with the adoption of Persian administrative and cultural ways the Ghaznavids threw off their original Turkish steppe background and became largely integrated with the Perso-Islamic tradition." As a result, Ghazni developed into a great centre of Arabic learning.

With Sultan Mahmud's invasions of North India, Persian culture was established at Lahore, which later produced the famous poet, Masud Sa'd Salman. Lahore, under the Ghaznavid rule in the 11th century, attracted Persian

scholars from Khorasan, India and Central Asia and became a major Persian cultural centre. It was also during Mahmud's reign that Ghaznavid coinage began to have bilingual legends consisting of Arabic and Devanagari script. The Persian culture, established by the Ghaznavids in Ghazna and Eastern Afghanistan, survived the Ghurid invasion in the 12th century and endured until the invasion of the Mongols.