

Subject:- PERSIAN

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Unit-II

Topic- Firdausi

Online Class Materials

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Firdausi

Background

Firdausi belonged to the class of *dehqans*. These were landowning Iranian aristocrats who had flourished under the Sassanid dynasty (the last pre-Islamic dynasty to rule Iran) and whose power, though diminished, had survived into the Islamic era which followed the Islamic conquests of the 7th century. The *dehqans* were attached to the pre-Islamic literary heritage, as their status was associated with it (so much so that *dehqan* is sometimes used as a synonym for "Iranian" in the *Shahnameh*). Thus they saw it as their task to preserve the pre-Islamic cultural traditions, including tales of legendary kings.

Firdausi received his early education in Persian and was mostly interested in history. From the very beginning he had a desire to versify the legendary history of his country. Since his father was a *Dehqan* (a village squire), he had inherited a large landed property from his father and used to live a luxurious life.

Life as a poet

It is possible that Firdausi wrote some early poems which have not survived. He began work on the *Shahnameh* around 977, intending it as a continuation of the work of his fellow poet *Daqiqi*, who had been assassinated by his slave. Like *Daqiqi*, Firdausi employed the prose *Shahnameh* of 'Abd-al-Razzāq as a source. He received generous patronage from the Samanid prince Mansur and completed the first version of the *Shahnameh* in 994. When the Turkic Ghaznavids overthrew the Samanids in the late 990s, Firdausi continued to work on the poem, rewriting sections to praise the Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud. Mahmud's attitude to Firdausi and how well he rewarded the poet are matters which have long been subject to dispute and have formed the basis of legends about the poet and his patron (see below). The Turkic Mahmud may have been less interested in tales from Iranian history than the Samanids. The later sections of the *Shahnameh* have passages which reveal Firdausi's fluctuating moods: in some he complains about old age, poverty, illness and the death of his son; in others, he appears happier. Firdausi finally completed his

epic on 8 March 1010. Virtually nothing is known with any certainty about the last decade of his life.

The modern scholars, however, accept that Sultan Mahmud had promised some reward (of 60,000 dinars, if we believe Nizami), but on the presentation of the Shah Nama he was paid only 20,000 dinars. This greatly disappointed the poet. Various reasons are ascribed to this injustice and negligence done by the Sultan.

Whatever be the motive of the Sultan, Firdausi did not accept the reward and left for Hirat and from there he went to his native land Tus. It is generally said that Firdausi visited Baghdad as well and wrote the Maanavi 'Yusuf and Zulekha, but it is quite incorrect. When he reached home might have revised the Shah Nama and added the satire on Sultan Mahmud. He was then an old man of 80 living in the extreme poverty.

According to Daulat Shah, Firdausi died in 411 A.H./1020-25 A.D. and was buried in a garden which belonged to his property.

If we believe in Nizami, Sultan Mahmud realised his mistake and sent the promised amount to the poet at Tus but the poet, Firdausi had died at that time and his only daughter also refused to accept it. The Governor of Tus constructed a Carvan Sarai(Inn) with that money called Chah which was visited by Nasir Khusraw in 437 A.H.