CHAPTER - VI

AN ASSESSMENT OF SULTÄN MAHMÜD

SHAH'S REIGN & POLICIES

We have no clear information about the administrative system of Sultan Mahmud 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 Sultan Ahmad Shah for Gujarat, remained as it was during the reigns of his successors. Sultan Mahmud, 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 Sultan punished the highway robbers severely and theft was so rare that the people could keep their houses unlocked and sleep at ease. 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." In some cases where the peasants had to fetch water from the distance and the Sultan ordered well to be dug nearby.

After the conquest of Junagadh, 1470, Sultan Mahmud 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:

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

2. MS - Trans, (F) pp. 45-48
3. Ibid pp. 45-48
purposing, 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 Niẓām-ud-dīn to show the Sultan's love for justice. In the year A.H. 892/1486, some merchants from Delhi, complained to him at Champagner, against the ruler of Abu, who had robbed them of their horses. The Sultan 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 Sultan's love for impartial justice. The opinion of Sikandar "No other Sultan equalled Sultan Maḥmūd 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
That is the Sultan 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. Sultan Mahmud 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-

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-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 Sultan sent the army of 12,000 horses to assist Mizān Shāh against the Sultan of Mandu. Also it has been that the Sultan 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 Sultan 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 Sultan'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 Sultan in his expedition to Champaner as an army commander. Similarly in the army elephants also was
included. The Sultan 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 Sultan was not powerful to act by itself. It was not a navy in the modern sense of the term. However, Sultan Mahmud employed Malik Ayaz 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 Sultan 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 Sultan 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 Sultan was probably the first Indian Prince who used guns in the naval battle." It is believed that in the naval battle at Chaul, the Sultan used guns only with the help of the Egyptian fleet.

Rules for military personnel and soldiers:

The Sultan 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 Sultan 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 Sultan Mahmud 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 Sarkhia, 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. 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, Nizam-ud-din, the Qazi 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.

Religious Policy:

Sultan Mahmud 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
also spread it in Gujarat. So great an attachment to religion might be due to his early life with Şāh ʿAlam, the Bukhari Saiyyid.

According to Sikandar, he was taught the lessons of "detachment" by Şaikh Sirāj-u'd-dīn, a disciple of Hadrat-i-Qūtb-i-ʿAlam. The author of Mā'athir-i-Mahmūd Šāhī also depicts the Sultan as the true follower of Islam. He used to do every day prayer and followed the decrees of Islam. The Sultan's love for Islam was so great that the author of Mā'athir-i-Mahmūd Šāhī goes to the extent of comparing his court as "Gate way of Islam" or "Dār-u's-Salām." 14 and to the Sultan 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 Sultan 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 Sultan these two things should be clearly distinguished.

14. MMS - (Hik. Bey Lib. - Madina) - MSS - FOL. 68
15. Ibid- The author has addressed the Sultan 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 Sultan in trouble. Hence, it was necessary for the Sultan 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 Gopi, who acted as an intermediary, when the embassy sent by Affonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese viceroy at Goa, arrived in Gujarat. Bāy-‘l-Rāyān, was another Rajput noble, a trusted friend of “Ismā‘īl Bahlūl and acted as a faithful friend at the time of Khudawand Shāh’s conspiracy in 1480.

Jazīyah which was imposed by Ahmad Shāh in Gujarat,
seems to have been continued during his reign. The Hindus were generally not encouraged by the Sultan 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.

'Ulama' 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 'Ulama' were employed by the state. Patan became a great centre for the Islamic studies and number of learned people visited it.

The Sultan was a staunch Sunni and he disliked Shi'as. When he was on death bed, an embassy from the Safavi king of Persia came to Gujarat. The Sultan 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 Sultan Muazzam Shāh.

Thus, we may say, that Sultan Mahmūd's religious policy was essentially intolerant, but at the same time, it was moderate and not oppressive like Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor.
Greatness of Sultan Mahmud's reign:

Sultan Mahmud ruled over Gujarat for fifty-four years in uninterrupted 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 Sultan Mahmud, forced the neighbouring princes to remain friendly with Gujarat. Also the prestige of the Sultanate was raised to such an extent that Lodí Prince fled in Gujarat after a rebellion against Ibrāhīm Lodí.

The prestige of Gujarat was equally high in Persia and Egypt. The Safavī King Ismāʿīl Shāh, sent an embassy to the court of Sultan Mahmud, as a token of friendship. The Sultan of Egypt had sent Amir Ḥusain 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
to have reached its golden age during the reign of the Sultan. Himself a great patron of architecture, the constructions at Sarkhiz 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". 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 Sultan's special interest in Horticulture and Arboriculture :-

The Sultan 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

result of Sultan Mahmud'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 Khudawand Khan Malik‘A lim, 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 Bagh-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 myrabolam 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 Khan, who had accompanied him to Khandesh, at Baroda. In Chilhaj 916 A.H./1510, after a short stay, at Champaner, the Sultan went to Patan passing through Ahmedabad and summoned Maulana

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17. MS - Trans (F) pp. 87-88.
18. Ibid p. 47.
Moin-ud-din 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 Sultan left for Ahmedabad. On reaching Ahmedabad, the Sultan fell ill. This illness continued for three months, when the Sultan called Prince Khalīl Khān from Baroda. This was the last meeting of the Sultan with his son and heir apparent. 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.