Chapter I

Introduction

Mahmud Ghaznavi is associated with an important phase of Indian history. India has known him as a regular invader and he had an important bearing on the history, politics and culture of India. R.C. Majumdar has commented that “nevertheless, it would be a mistake to assume that his invasions had no permanent political results in India. He drained the wealth of the country and despoiled its military resources to an appalling extent”.

The focus of this research work is not on examining and assessing Mahmud as a king or a statesman. Mahmud invaded India more than a dozen times. He introduced himself as a raider, an invader, and a military general. An effort has been made in this study to analyze, examine and evaluate the military actions of Mahmud from the point of view of his generalship. Mahmud was successful in all his campaigns. It is, therefore, important to find out as to what were the special techniques of battles employed by him. This is the main theme of this thesis and the succeeding chapters are merely an elaboration and elucidation of this theme.
Mahmud Ghaznavi was originally the Sultan of the kingdom of Ghazna (998-1030 AD) which comprised modern Afghanistan and northeastern parts of modern Iran. Through his subsequent conquests he eventually included north-western India and most of Iran in his dominion. He transformed his capital of Ghazna into a cultural centre rivalling Baghdad.

Mahmud Ghaznavi (November 01, 97 AD-April 30, 1030 AD), properly named as Yamin-ud-Daulah Abdul Qasim Mahmud Ibn Sabuktegin, was an Afghan of the Turkish origin. Mahmud was the most prominent ruler of the Ghaznavite dynasty which ruled from 997 AD until his death 1030 AD, in the eastern Iranian territory. Mahmud turned the former provincial city of Ghazni into a wealthy capital of an extensive empire which covered most of today’s Iran, Afghanistan as well as Pakistan and Northwest India. He was also the first ruler to carry the title Sultan (“Authority Holder”) signifying the extent of his power while acknowledging the nominal suzerainty of the Caliph of the day.

Mahmud was the son of a Turkish slave, who in 977 A.D., became ruler of Ghaza, when Mahmud ascended the throne in 998 AD at the age of 27 and showed remarkable administrative ability and statesmanship. At the time of his accession Ghazna was a small dominion. The young and ambitious Mahmud aspired to become a great monarch, and in more than twenty successful expeditions he amassed the wealth with which to lay the foundation of a vast empire that eventually included Kashmir, the Punjab,
and a great part of Iran.

During the first two years of his reign Mahmud consolidated his position in Ghazna. Though an independent ruler, for political reasons he gave nominal allegiance to the ‘Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad’ and the caliph, in return, recognized him as the legitimate ruler of the occupied lands and encouraged him in his conquests.

Mahmud is said to have vowed to invade India once a year and, in fact, set out to such expeditions. The first large-scale campaign began in 1001 and the last ended in 1026. The first expeditions were directed to the Punjab and northeastern India while in his last campaign Mahmud reached up to Somnath on the southern coast of Gujarat.

In spite of their initial success the Arabs had not been able to extend their dominion beyond Sindh and Mutan. In fact, their rule dwindled into insignificance by the middle of the 9th century AD. It was left to the Turks to complete the work begun by the Arabs. The Turks had, a short time before our period, embraced Islam and possessed all the zeal of the neophytes. They were intrepid, brave, full of boundless energy and push and thoroughly materialistic in their outlook. They were inordinately ambitious and their qualities and faults combined to make them eminently fit for founding a big military empire in the east.

The Turks who first came into contact with India belong to an upstart
ruling family of Ghazni. “A Turkish adventurer, named Alaptigin who was originally a slave and vassal of the Samanid King of Khurasan and Bukhara, established himself as an independent ruler at Ghazni in 962 A.D.”¹

One of his successors, named Pirai, signalized his rule by undertaking an invasion of the Indian Territory in the possession of the king of Punjab. This king, who belongs to the Indushahi dynasty, ruled over an extensive territory, extending from the river Chenab to the Hindu-Khush Mountain, and including Kabul. The Hindu Shahi kingdom had once embraced the whole of modern Afghanistan which was geographically and culturally a part of India, politically, too, though not continuously; it had been a province of our country since the days of Chandragupta Maurya in the third century B.C. The royal house of this kingdom of Kabul and Zabol had manfully resisted the Arab aggression. In 664 AD, however, the latter succeeded in encroaching upon a part of its territory and converting 12,000 of its inhabitant to Islam. For more than 300 years the Shahi kings fought bravely and with considerable, success though single handed in self-defence, against their aggressive Muslim neighbours, first the Arabs and then the Turks. The nascent kingdom of Ghazni wanted to blot the Shahi kingdom out of existence, for it had barred its path of progress to India. Accordingly, Pirai’s foreign policy was followed by his successor,
“subuktigin, who was a slave and son-in-law of Alaptagin and became king of Ghazni in April 977 A.D.”2 Sabuktigin Mahmud Ghaznavi’s father was a powerful and ambitious chief in spite of his constant occupation in Central Asian politics, he got interested in India and raided the frontiers of India. Jaipala, the then king of Punjab, being conscious of the danger of the existence of a rising kingdom in his immediate neighbourhood, persuade the policy of trying to nip the evil in the bud. So he invaded Ghazni with a large force in 986-87 AD. The parties were well matched and neither side seemed to give in. Unfortunately, however, owing to a great storm, which disorganized Jaipala’s army the king had to agree to a peace by which he promised a large indemnity and fifty elephants and some territory to Subuktigin. But on his return to Lahore, he repudiated these humiliating terms. Subuktigin now retaliated by an invasion of the king’s territory and plundering Lamaghan. Jaipala called to aid a number of rulers of the Indian principalities and marched on Ghazni at the head of a powerful force. In the contest that followed Sabuktigin was again victorious and he captured Lamaghan and Peshawar.

References

2 Ibid., p.58.