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MAHMUD'S AYAZ IN HISTORY

S. Jabir Raza

Sultan Mahmud's love and affection for his slave Ayaz has been a popular theme in Persian literary composition in prose as well as poetry. Ayaz appears as a symbolic figure under many guises. In Sa'di's Gulistan (comp. 1258 A.D.) and Bostan (comp. 1257 A.D.) he figures as a type of perfect man with firm ethical values. Fariduddin Attar (1191-1230 AD) and historian Abu'l Fath Aluarfhi highlight Ayaz as a model of loyalty and sagacity. But Nizami Aruzi hinted the worldly love of Mahmud with Ayaz and records an anecdote about the cutting off of Ayaz's curly locks in a fit of passion by Mahmud. Among the later literati, the poet Zulali wrote a long masnavi in 1614 AD entitled Mahmud-va-Ayaz in which he has woven a romance around the relationship of Sultan Mahmud and Ayaz. Such perceptions of the Mahmud-Ayaz relationship are, however, absent in the writings of contemporary Ghaznavid historians, Gardezi and Baha'i, and court poet Farukhi, all of whom mention Ayaz as a close associate (hadith-1-Khaza) of the noble (amir) and commander (chaliqar) of Sultan Mahmud and his immediate successor.[1]

Besides Ayaz, whom we are concerned with, there have been other nobles of this name or surname. Nearly contemporary to Ayaz of Mahmud was a Seljuq noble Ayaz, who died in 1105 AD.[2] In Delhi Sultanate, two families with the surname Ayaz held the highest posts of governor and Wazir. A shamsi slave noble Malik Izzuddin kabilir Khan Ayaz became the governor of Multan but later declared himself an independent ruler, dying in 1241-42 AD. His son and successor Tajuddin Abu Bakr Ayaz brought the whole of Sind under his control. But with his early demise, the short lived Ayazi dynasty of Sind disappeared.[3] The elder of the second Ayazi family was Alauddin Ayaz who was entrusted with the khatamship of Siri by Alauddin Khalji. His son Ahmad Ayaz was also inducted in the Khalji nobility, who after the defeat of Khan Tughlaq and the keys of Siri on behalf of his father. Later he rose to the position of Wazir under Muhammad bin Tughlaq and renowned as Khwaja-i-Jahan Ahmad Ayaz. These names suggest that Ayaz was considered a suitable name or title for professedly loyal officials, and so suggests that a positive tradition existed in courtly circles about the slave Ayaz, who rose to the position of a noble under Sultan Mahmud. This study of an individual noble can also provide us with insights into the composition of the Ghaznavid nobility as well as its functioning.

Amir Abu'n Najm Ayaz Almig or Awinaq was a Turk of humble origin with a rural background. The later tradition would have us to believe that Ayaz was bought by Sultan Mahmud in Ghazni, who gave him the Turkish name Ayaz (Ayaz) meaning 'frost'. The Arabic 'Abu'n Najm' was his kunya or patronymic, again most probably, given by the Sultan as a character-name or sobriquet. Almig or Awinaq is the name of a tribe or clan name. Ayaz was probably a Turkmen slave of Aimaq tribe and was possibly born at Khutan, since Firdaosi refers his origin of Khutan (Khuttal'i-Ash). It is worth noting that Baha'i calls him by his name and (Kunya, Abu'n Najm Ayaz), while the court poet Farukhi adds his clan name Awinaq. Gardezi refers to him as Abun Najm Ayaz b. Aimaq, so that Aimaq was his patronymic, and in this he has been followed by most later historians.[20]

We do not find any direct reference to his early career and education in the contemporary chronicles; and his date of birth is unknown. Farebukhi in his Qasida, written in 1031 AD, used the terms Saru (an evergreen cypress tree) and gul-i-tuza (young flower) for Ayaz.[21] By these terms, one may assume that by that time (1031) Ayaz was quite young. When Sultan Mahmud met Qudir Khan in 1008, he received a handsome slave Naushigin Nauwani, whom Sultan included in his personal slaves. Baha'i informs that at the time Naushigin was a boy (kudak), and to keep him away from Ayaz, the sultan sent him to Pushtun. If in 1008, Naushigin was a boy of at least eight years old then by the time Ayaz must have been a little older. Thus, his birth may be placed in 998 AD, and he must have been acquired by Mahmud before 1008.

It was the custom that the ruler who bought a slave, had him trained under the guidance of accomplished man. For instance Tughrul, a Turkmen slave of fair complexion with high degree of elegance (zarnafat) and intelligence (labaqat) was selected by the sultan to be his personal cup-bearer (sacii) and was handed over to Ayaz, who was then the chief of the eight imperial cup-bearers, for training and education.[22] It is thus possible that Ayaz too received his education and training from some experienced officers, to be well versed in court etiquette.

Ayaz as a slave was expected to devote his life to the service of Sultan Mahmud. We find references to the personal services rendered by him to the Sultan.[23] Endowed with intelligence, good physique and pleasing looks, Ayaz did not find it difficult to become a favourite of the Sultan. His loyalty and devotion to his master certainly raised him high in the estimation of the Sultan.[24] He never absented himself from the sight of the Sultan and always accompanied him to all the places...
outside the capital as nadin-i-Khass. The Sultan seems to have showered upon him favour after favour and ultimately he was raised to the position of the chief of slaves in the royal establishment, with the title Ayaz-i-Khass.

Apart from being a devoted slave, Ayaz was a skilled warrior, reputed horseman and a master archer. He even showed his skill in polo (chaugan). Farrukhi, while describing his war like accomplishments alludes to his skill in archery. According to him, Ayaz was a perfect marksman and could pierce even a stone with an arrow. Abul Faraj Runi, a poet of Ghaznavid Panjab, also praising him as an archer. Fakhr-i-Mudabbir alludes to a remarkable feat of archery by Ayaz as the commander of the Ghaznavid forces during one of the campaigns in India, of shooting from the bow. During the battle he shot an arrow straight at the Aina-i-Chini (the protective mirror on the forehead of an elephant), which broke into pieces. With the very next arrow he shot into the eye of the elephant, which led to the defeat of the enemy.

Ayaz was promoted to the position of a noble (amir) by Sultan Mahmud and later appointed as Salar (commander) by Sultan Masud. Sultan Masud assigned him the revenues (kharaj) of Bust, Mukran and Quetta in lieu of his services rendered during the succession crisis after Mahmud's death. It is said that Sultan Mahmud had granted him an area extending to 12,000 (!) farsangs in India. But the absence of any reference to his position outside the capital during Mahmud's time suggests that he had the territory administered through a deputy. He lived a luxurious life by maintaining hamman of hot water (garmabah). Matrimonial relations also enhanced his position among the nobles, as one of his sisters was married to Sultan Mahmud while another was, probably, the wife of Mahmud's Wazir, Hamsak. Bahaiqi informs us that after the execution of Hamsak, one of his close friends Mikhail took the sister of Ayaz for his wife. His association with the management of imperial festivities made Ayaz a close friend of court poets Farrukhi, Ghazairai and Firdausi; the former two even wrote qasidas in his praise.

After the death of Sultan Mahmud, he could wield much influence at the court during the close of his master's reign and he was one among other nobles who supported Amir Muhammad in ascending the throne. But sensing the broader support to Amir Masud, Ayaz was the first among the Mahmudi nobles who defied the authority of Sultan Muhammad in favour of Amir Masud, and thus helped the latter in obtaining the throne in 1031 AD. Gardezi says informs that about fifty days after the death of Mahmud, Amir Ayaz in league with Abul Hasan Ali b. Abdullah, known as Ali Daya, decided to support prince Masud for the throne. He won over the royal slaves (Ghulam-i-Saray) along with the household troops to his side and then entered the royal stables in broad daylight, mounted the best horses and rode off towards Bust. Informed of this situation, Sultan Muhammad dispatched Saudhray, an Indian commander, with a large contingent of Indian troops in his pursuit. Amir Ayaz emerged victorious in the battle and put to death Saudhray and sent his severed head to Amir Muhammad. Ayaz and Ali Daya with a number of slaves then joined Amir Masud at Nishapur.

Since Ayaz had played a key role in the succession crisis, Masud showered great favours upon Ayaz. His prestige and position increased greatly as satar during the days of Sultan Masud. In view of his lack of experience of life outside the court, being his father's sneeze (otsi-piddar), Sultan Masud considered him unsuitable for the governorship of Ray. However, when Sultan Masud appointed his son Amir Majdud as the governor of Panjab, Ayaz was sent to Lahore as his advisor (Atabeg). Since Amir Majdud was of tender age, Ayaz exercised full powers civil and military, as deputy governor. But he was looked upon more as a governor than as an advisor, as the terms marzhabad and qahirmad used for Ayaz by Abul Faraj Runi indicate. During this period, Panjab remained peaceful and Lahore developed into an important city. Later traditions suggest that it was fortified at this time under the fostering care of Ayaz who built a new city and fort of solid masonry work.

After the tragic end of Sultan Masud at Marigala (1041 AD), there was a struggle among the Ghaznavid princes. The upheaval in Ghaznin had its adverse impact on Panjab and other parts of India. The rulers of India took advantage of the turmoil and by mutual agreements seized Hansi and Thanesar and. When Sultan Masud b. Masud ascended the throne (1041 AD), his brother: Majdud b. Masud, the then governor of Panjab, refused to recognize his sovereignty. He revolted in Multan and Lahore at the instigation of his advisor Ayaz. Majdud then occupied all the country east of Indus and recaptured Hansi and Thanesar.

Meanwhile, Sultan Masud marched towards the Indian territory and reached Panjab. To check the advance of Masud's troops, Majdud along with Ayaz marched from Hansi where he was then camped for a campaign to capture Delhi. The troops and noblemen at Lahore were deeply loyal to Majdud, thus the Indian army strongly resisted the Ghaznin based troops of Masud on 4th Aug., 1041 AD. The victory of Majdud was imminent, but strangely on the morning of Idul Adha Amir Majdud was found dead in mysterious circumstances in his tent. Thus, the Ghaznavid Panjab passed in the hands of Maudud.
After the death of Majidud, Ayaz did not feature in the Ghaznavid politics and retired from the court. Most probably Ayaz then lived a simple and religious life at Lahore where he died in 1058 AD. His grave still survives in the vicinity of Rang Mahal at Lahore. The tomb, made up of brick and mortar, is situated on a platform, 9 ft. 10 inches by 7 ft. 6 inches. The entrance door leads to a small courtyard. It is said that earlier a large garden was attached to this house, which has now disappeared. The later inscription of his grave reads: 'Hazrat Pir Ayaz, Sifarshah-Sultan Mahmud'. This must be a late inscription, and its perception of Ayaz as a pious saint (pir) is yet another addition to the various traditional pictures of Ayaz.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

5. Zuhati Khwansari, Mahmud-ur-Ayyas, Nawal Kishore edition. The manuscript consisted of 4665 verses in which Zuhati would have us to believe that Ayaz was the son of a Muslim king of Kashmir.
10. Jalaluddin Rumi, pp. 118, 122, 130-16 and 213, narrates a long story to the effect that being a favourite of Sultan Mahmud, Ayaz was evicted by the court. Once Khwaja Tashan informed the Sultan that it has been observed that Ayaz goes privately into his locked chamber which indicates that he had handed many valuables. After seeking the Sultan's permission, the Khwaja along with his men entered into the locked chamber in the middle of the night and found only a suit of old dirty garment (plasto) and footwear (chappai). Being astonished the Khwaja reported the matter to the Sultan, who in turn asked Ayaz about his conduct. Ayaz, thus, replied that 'when I first became your majesty's servant, this was my dress. Now by the grace of God and your majesty's favour, I have been elevated to the rank of noble, I, therefore, practise this humiliation by putting on these old garments to remind me of my former insignificance'. Rumi's term Chaurak (chaurak) meaning a footwear of the villagers (dahamun), attests the rural background of Ayaz. Cf. Muhammad Kamal b. Abul Haq Tahir, Lisan-un-Gharam, ed. Muhammad Moin, Tehran 1331 Shamsi, pp. 459a.
11. Majalis ul-Uilhaqah, p. 212; Hamdullah Mustaqua, f. 285b. Both authors mention that once the traders came with hundred and twenty Turkish slaves, one of them was Ayaz who was, by the time, ill and weak. The Sultan ordered that all the slaves be purchased except Ayaz. Dejected Ayaz left place in tears. Then Sultan called him back and said that he has purchased the hundred and nineteen slaves for my sake, but purchasing the last one (Ayaz) for the sake of God.

In Medieval India, the term Ayaz was synonymous with Ayaz. Fariduddin Attar variously refers to Ayaz as Ayaz. Cf. Monday, pp. 71, 216; Hitz Nama, p. 942.

12. Hamdullah Mustaqua, f. 285b. It was the general custom that the Turkish slaves received their names sometime between their purchase by the slave merchants and their being handed over to their patron. The master could also give a name to his slave. Cf. S. Jabir Rasul, Nomenclature and Titulature of the early Turkish Sultans of Delhi found in Numismatic Legends International Collectors, Medieval India Coinages: A Historical and Economic Perspective. Nizam, 2001, p. 88.


16. Muhammad Qasim Husain Shah Firdausi, Ghaznavi-nama, translated known as Tarikh-i- Firdausi, Naval Kishore edition, n.d. vol. I, pp. 30. According to Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat, Tarikh-i- Rashidi, 1st ed. in D. Dunkin Rosa, A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia, New Delhi, vol. II, 191, the people of Khuzistan were divided into four classes. Out of them the third was called Aindaq who collect revenues from the peasants. Thus, it is more likely that Ayaz who belonged to Aindaq tribe was born in a village of Khuzistan province.


19. Abul Fazl b. Abdul Zahabi, Zaid-ul-Arab, ed. Abdul Hayy Habibi, Isfahan 1247, p. 193. Habibi in his note, p. 195, notes, remarks that although Aindaq is the name of the tribe, it inhabited the regions of Ghur and Herat, Gardezi refers to it as the name of Ayaz's father.


23. Tarikh-i-Balaqgi, ed. Ali Akbar Fayyaz, p. 188. When Muhammad ascended the throne he called Hambach to Gaiwar and attached him to the imperial household as quality tester (chahlashik) and cup-bearer (sajqi-i- patti). Later, on Sultan Munad raised his position and appointed him the governor of Gurjuran or Kuzistan.
24. Ibid., p. 269.
25. Ilahi Nama, p. 832. It tells us that Ayar often used to shanghaize the Sultan's youth. Also Majd Khwai, Khyat-i-Khudo, ed. Husain Khediveji, Tehran 1549, p. 138.
26. Rumi in his Kushairiyat, vol. III, pp. 293-95, relates that once a group of his vassals enjoined the Sultan to be found with many favours on Ayar that his income equal to that of three nobles. The next day the Sultan arranged a hunting excursion in which only high nobles were included. At one place, the Sultan stood and watched the approach of a caravanserai. Then Sultan ordered an envoy to inquire from where they are coming? He returned with information that the caravan was coming from Ethiopia. Then Sultan sent another envoy to inquire their destination, which he enquired and informed him that they intend to visit Farsi. The Sultan then ordered the third envoy to inquire about the merchandise being carried by the caravans. He came back and reported its character to the Sultan. Now Sultan desired that the Ayar should go. Ayar made enquiries from the caravan chief of the Ayar (the caravansers) and after obtaining all information, favourable or unfavourable, their numbers, their merchandise, their profit and loss, reported in detail to the Sultan. Thus, the Sultan boasted that he showed great favours on Ayar because of his efficiency and intelligence.
27. Ghalamni, p. 146. Barun, p. 125. Chahar Meqallas, p. 55. Shahid Sayi and Nizam Avern both remark that Ayar was not remarkably handsome (sama'at sana'at nazar), but was of sweet expression and droll complexion, symmetrical physique, graceful in his movements, sensitive and deliberate in action, and mightily endowed with all the arts of pleasing.
28. Shahid Sayi and Avern both record the high estimation of Ayar in the eyes of Sultan Mahmud on account of his loyalty and devotion. Shahid Sayi, Barun, p. 125-26, informs us that once the imperial curnel fell down in a narrow ditch which caused the breakage of a box of pearls. After ordering the scattered pearls, he gave money to those who collected them, the Sultan proceeded. Since all were engaged in collecting the pearls, no one among the heavenmen and valets (hoseyns) was left behind with Ayar, who remained loyal with him. Likewise Avern records that once in hunting excursion the news of the famous bird (kafa), whose shadow is supposed to bring good luck, had been spread. All the Turkish guards were running on the shadow of the bird, but Ayar remained with the shadow of Sultan Mahmud. Cf. Avern, f. 439v.
31. Farahkhi, p. 162.
34. In view of Elliot, it was probably made of vanished steel and was used as a protection over the most vulnerable part of the elephant. History of India as told by six wise Historians, vol. II, Aligarh 1952, p. 23561.