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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 symbolic figure under many guises. In Sa’idi’s Gulistan (comp. 1258 A.D.) and Bostan (comp. 1257 A.D.) appears as symbol of true love, in the masnavi of Jalaluddin Rumi he figures as a type of perfect man with firm ethical values. 2 Fariduddin Attar (1191-1230 AD) and historian Awfī highlight Ayaz as a model of loyalty and sagacity. 3 But Nizami Arūzī hinted the worldly love of Mahmud with Ayaz and recorded an anecdote about the cutting off of Ayaz’s curly locks in a fit of passion by Mahmud. 4 Among the later literati, the poet Zulali wrote a long masnavi in 1614 AD entitled Mahmud-wa-Ayaz in which he has woven a romance around the relationship of Sultan Mahmud and Ayaz. 5 Such perceptions of the Mahmud-Ayaz relationship are, however, absent in the writings of contemporary Ghaznavid historians, Gardezi and Bahāqī, and court poet Farrūkhi, all of whom mention Ayaz as a close associate (ma’dīn-i-Khass), the noble (āmir) and commander (salar) of Sultan Mahmud and his immediate successor.

Besides Ayaz with whom we are concerned, there have been other nobles of this name or surname. Nearly contemporary to Ayaz of Mahmud was a Seljūq noble Ayaz, who died in 1105 AD. 6 In Delhi Sultanate, two families with the surname Ayaz held the highest posts of governor and Wazīr. A shāhīs slave noble Malik Izzuddin Kābīr Khan Ayaz became the governor of Sultan 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. 7 The elder of the second Ayazi family was Ala’uddin Ayaz who was entrusted with the kotwalship of Siraj by Ala’uddin Khaljī. His son Ahmad Ayaz was also inducted in the Khaljī nobility, who after the defeat of Khusraw Khan paid homage to Tughlaq and brought the keys of Siraj on behalf of his father. Later he rose to the position of Wazīr under Muhammad bin Tughlaq and renowned as Khwaja-i-Jahan Ahmad Ayaz. 8 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 Abū’l-Najm Ayaz Aimaq or Awīmaq was a Turk of humble origin with a rural background. 10 The later tradition would have us to believe that Ayaz was bought by Sultan Mahmud in Ghaznī, 11 who gave him the Turkish name Ayaz 12 (‘A‘yaz) 13 meaning ‘beast’. The Arabic ‘Abū’l-Najm’ was his kunya or patronym, again most probably, given by the Sultan as a character-name or sobriquet. Aimaq or Awīmaq is the name of a tribe or clan name. 14 Ayaz was probably a Turkoman slave of Aimaq tribe and was possibly born at Khutun, since Fīrūzī refers his origin of Khutun (Khutun’al-Asil). 15 It is worth noting that Baihaqī calls him by his name and (Kunyar, Abūl Najm Ayaz), 16 while the court poet Farrūkhi adds his clan name Aimaq. 17 Gardezi refers to him as Abūl Najm Ayaz b. Aimaq, so that Aimaq was his patronym, 18 and in this he has been followed by most later historians. 19

We do not find any direct reference to his early career and education in the contemporary chronicles; and his date of birth is unknown. Farrūkhi in his Qasida, written in 1031 AD, used the terms Sarv (an evergreen cypress tree) and gil-i-taza (young flower) for Ayaz. 20 By these terms, one may assume that by that time (1031) Ayaz was quite young. 21 When Sultan Mahmud met Qādir Khān in 1008, he received a handsome slave Naushīrgān Naubāti, whom Sultan included in his personal slaves. Baihaqī informs that at the time Naushīrgān was a boy (kidāk), and to keep him away from Ayaz, the sultan send him to Poshung. 22 If in 1008, Naushīrgān 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 992 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 Tughrīl, a Turkestani slave of fair complexion with high degree of elegance (zardafat) and intelligence (ilbāqt) was selected by the sultan to be his personal cup-bearer (satqi) and was handed over to Ayaz, who was then the chief of the eight imperial cup-bearers, for training and education. 23 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. 24 Endowed with intelligence, good physique and pleasing looks, 25 Ayaz did not find it difficult to become a favourite of the Sultan. His loyalty and devotion to his master certainty raised him high in the estimation of the Sultan. 26 He never absented himself from the sight of the Sultan and always accompanied him to all the places
outside the capital as nadim-i-Khazz. 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-Khazz.

Apart from being a devoted slave, Ayaz was a skilled warrior, reputed horseman and a master archer. He was not only capable of hitting the target but could also pierce even a stone with an arrow. Abul Faraj Rumi, a poet of Ghaznavid Panjaban, also praised him as an archer. Pakhr-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 Amsi-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 Qudar 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 raths in India. But the absence of any reference to his posting outside the capital during Mahmud's time suggests that he had the territory administered through a deputy. He lived a luxurious life by maintaining hammar 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, Hasnak. Bahaiqan informs us that after the execution of Hasnak, one of his close friends Muhail 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, Ghazairi 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 (Ghulaman-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 Saundhirai, an Indian commander, with a large contingent of Indian troops in his pursuit. Amir Ayaz emerged victorious in the battle and put to death Saundhirai 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 salar during the days of Sultan Masud. In view of his lack of experience of life outside the court, being his father's sinner (zato-pitarr), Sultan Masud considered him suitable for the governorship of Ray. However, when Sultan Masud appointed his son Amir Majdud as the governor of Panjaban, Ayaz was sent to Lahore as his advisor (Atabek). 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 an advisor, as the terms marzaban and qahram used for Ayaz by Abul Faraj Rumi indicate. During this period, Panjaban 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 Ghazniz had its adverse impact on Panjaban and other parts of India. The rulers of India took advantage of the turmoil and by mutual agreement seized Hansi and Thanesar and. When Sultan Maudud b. Masud ascended the throne (1041 AD), his brother: Majdud b. Masud, the then governor of Panjaban, 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 Maudud marched towards the Indian territory and reached Panjaban. To check the advance of Maudud's troops, Majdud along with Ayaz marched from Hansi where he was then encamped for a campaign to capture Delhi. The troops and noblemen at Lahore were deeply loyal to Majdud, thus the Indian army strongly resisted the Ghaznavid based troops of Maudud 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 Panjaban passed in the hands of Maudud.
After the death of Majeed, Ayaz did not feature in the Ghaznavid politics and retired from the court. Most probably Ayaz then lived a simple and religious life at Lahora where he died in 1058 AD. His grave still survives in the vicinity of Itang Mahal at Lahore. The tomb, made up of brick and mortar, is situated on a platform, 9ft. 10 inches by 7ft. 6 inches. The entrance door leads to a small courtyard. It is said that earlier a large garden was attached to this tomb, which has now disappeared. The later inscription of his grave reads: ‘Hazarat Pir Ayaz, Sipahsahar-i Sultan Mahmud’. This must be a late inscription, and its perception of Ayaz as a pious sam (pir) is yet another addition to the various traditional pictures of Ayaz.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

5. Zalati Khwansari, Mahmod wa-Ayaz, Nawal Kishore edition. The manuscript consisted of 4665 verses in which Zalati would have us to believe that Ayaz was the son of a Muslim king of Khurasan.

8. Zinuddin Barani, Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi, ed. Sir Syed Ahmad, Sir Syed Academy, Aligarh, 2005, pp. 278,454 etc.
10. Jalaluddin Rumi, pp. 118,122, 130-31 and 213, narrates a long story to indicate that the house on which Ayaz was first engaged as a survey. Once Khwaja Tashqan informed the Sultan that it has been observed that Ayaz goes privately into his locked chamber which indicates that he had hoarded many valuables. After seeking the Sultan’s permission, the Khwaja along with his men entered into the locked chamber in the midnight and found only a suit of old dirty garment (postina) and footwear (chabans). 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, daily practise this humiliation by putting on these old garments to remind me of my former insignificance’. Raml’s term Chitun (= charagh) means a footstep of the villagers (daghman), attests the rural background of Ayaz. Cf: Muhammad Ismael b. khalaf ‘Husain, Horuzz Quiti’, ed. Muhammad Meim, Tehran 1331 Shamsi; vol. II, p. 611.
11. Jalalud-din Ul-Urdu, p. 212; Hamdullah Mustafla, f. 285b. Both the 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 I have purchased the hundred and nineteen slaves for my own sake, but purchasing the last one (Ayaz) for the sake of God.
12. Hamdullah Mustafla, 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. Jibri Raza, Nomenclature and Titlewala of the early Turkish Sultanate of Delhi, found in Numismatic Legends International Colloquium, Medieval India Counsels: A Historical and Economic Perspective, Nashik, 2001, p. 88.
14. Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Faridfla, Ususpani- Brahmat, known as Tarikh-i-Faridfla, Nawal Kishore edition, ed. vol. I, p. 39. According to Mirza Muhammad Haider Daghli, Tarikh-i-Rashidi, Ed. Ed. E. Denis Press, A History of the Moghul of Central Asia, New Delhi, vol. II, p. 391, the people of Khuristan were divided into four classes. Out of them the third was called Aimaq who collected revenues from the peasants. Thus, it is more likely that Ayaz who belonged to Aimaq tribe was born in a village of Khuristan province.
17. Abu Hafiz b. Abdul Zaltak, Zamd-Akbar, ed. Abdul Hafiz Habibi, Iran 1347, p. 193. Habibi in his note, p. 1951, remarks that although Aimaq is the name of a tribe, which inhabited the regions of Ghur and Herat, Gardez refers to it as the name of Ayaz’s father.
19. Farukhi, p. 162.
21. Tarikh-i-Bashqi, ed. Ali Akbar Fazayn, p. 384. When Muhammad ascended the throne he called Niswanan back to Ghur and attached him to the imperial household as quality master (chasheegir) and cup-bearer (sagjalgar). Later on Sultan Mahmud raised his position and appointed him the governor of Chuggan or Juzjtan.
25. Ibid, p. 832. It tells us that Ayaz often used to shampoo the Sultan's legs. Also see Madh Khwast, Huma-i-Khuda, ed. Husaini Khanzadkam, Tehran 1945, p. 138.

26. Rumi in his Mathnawi, vol. III, pp. 293-95, relates that on a group of his rivals enquired the Sultan the cause of bestowing much favour on Ayaz that his income equals 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 caravan. Then Sultan ordered in order to enquire from where they are coming? He returned with information that the caravan was coming from Ethiopia. Then Sultan sent another noble to enquire their destination, which he enquired and informed him that they intend to visit Herat. The Sultan then ordered the third noble to enquire about the merchanties being carried by the caravan. He came back and reported his character to the Sultan. Now Sultan desired that the Ayaz should go, Ayaz made enquiries from the caravan chief (tahib-i-kravan) 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 favour on Ayaz because of his efficiency and intelligence.

27. Celestino, p. 146; Boston, p. 125; Chubor Moazogl, p. 55. Shahid Sadiq and Nizami Arewi both remark that Ayaz was not remarkably handsome (ajasaf bayz na- daran), but was of sweet expression and fine complexion, symmetrical physique, graceful in his movements, sensible and deliberate in action, and mightily endowed with all the arts of pleasing.

28. Shahid Sadiq and Arewi both noted the high estimation of Ayaz in the eyes of Sultan Mahmud on account of his loyalty and devotion. Shahid Sadiq, Boston, pp. 125-26, informs us that once the imperial council fell down in a narrow ditch which caused the breakage of a box of pearls. After ordering the scattered pearls, he was given away to those who collected them, the Sultan proceeded. Since all were engaged in collecting the pearls, no one among the horsemen and approved slaves (hindus) was left with the Sultan except Ayaz, who remained loyal to him. Likewise Arewi records that once in a hunting excursion the news of the fabulous bird (golma), whose shadow is supposed to bring good luck, had been spread. All the Turkih guards were running after the shadow of this bird, but Ayaz was content with the shadow of Sultan Mahmud. Cf. Arewi, f. 459v.


31. Farrokhi, p. 162.

32. Mathnawi-i-Tan-i, p. 239; Majalis ud-Ushshaq, p. 115.


34. In view of Elliot, it was probably made of varnished steel and was used as a protection over the most vulnerable part of the elephant. History of India as told by its own Historians, vol. E, Allgar 1952, p. 235-51.