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## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/15518  
DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/15518>



### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### NOTES ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE GHAZNAVID EMPIRE ACCORDING TO SELECTED HISTORIOGRAPHY SOURCES

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#### Manuscript Info

##### Manuscript History

Received: 19 August 2022

Final Accepted: 23 September 2022

Published: October 2022

##### Key words:-

Ghaznavid Empire, Ghaznah, Mahmud al-Ghaznawi, Historiography, Social Development

#### Abstract

The Ghaznavid Empire ruled territories of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran and northern India during its glorious era, especially during the reign of Mahmud al-Ghaznawi (997-1031AD). Such feat indirectly created societal plurality thus prompting the Ghaznavids to introduce policies which took into account national, cultural and religious diversity. Based on that reality, this study aims at analysing the development of social aspects in the Ghaznavid era as noted in a number of selected historiographical sources, among them being *Tarikh al-Yamini* authored by al-'Utbi and *Zayn al-Akbar* by Gardizi. In addition to this, this study also examined modern historiography discussing social aspects of the Ghaznavid Empire to support findings obtained from primary sources. This study applied a qualitative approach through historical study and content analysis in collecting and analysing data obtained from primary and secondary sources. Findings of this study shows that discourse on social aspects in the Ghaznavid era touched on the population in the empire's territories, encompassing societal structure, political governance, and cultural development. Such notes proved that the Ghaznavid Empire also enjoyed peaks of social achievement in parallel with the advancement of the Ghaznavid rule.

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#### Introduction:-

Racial, cultural and religious diversity took place under the rule of the Ghaznavid Empire after it seized control the regions of Central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan and northern India (Bosworth, 1973). Because of that, policies introduced by the Ghaznavids took into consideration the reality of societal diversity in those regions. Political practice of the Ghaznavid Empire eventually encouraged assimilation of new cultural influence into the empire's civilisation, such as the influence of the Persian language which became the knowledge and literary medium in Ghaznavid territories.

Among historiographical sources produced in the Ghaznavid era which later became primary source of references on the social development of the Ghaznavid Empire were *Tarikh al-Yamini* written by al-'Utbi and *Zayn al-Akbar* written by Gardizi. In addition to those, poetry collections composed by royal poet in the Ghaznavid palace, Farukhi Sistani, was also a major historiographical source in chronicling the history and development of the Ghaznavid Empire.

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Therefore, this study aims at analysing social aspects development in the Ghaznavid era noted in several historiographical sources as mentioned above. Secondary sources, among them being Bosworth (1973), Peacock (2018) and Anooshahr (2021), were also utilised to support the understanding of arguments contained in primary sources. This study used a qualitative approach through historical study and content analysis in the process of data gathering and analysis. After that, collected data were arranged and thematically presented. Themes were arranged so as to explain the development of social aspects in the Ghaznavid Empire, such as population, administrative structure in the society, economic activities and cultural development.

### **A Brief History of the Ghaznavid Empire**

In general, the Ghaznavid dynasty was founded in the city of Ghaznah (Ashari, Nor & Jamsari, 2013). The establishment of the Ghaznavid Empire was driven by actions of Alptigin who attempted to create a self-rule in the region of Ghaznah. Alptigin, who served as a general in the Samanid army, led a rebellion against the Samanid Empire and founded his own rule in Ghaznah. The rapid rise of the Ghaznavid occurred when Sabuktigin, son-in-law of Alptigin, took over the rule of the Ghaznavid dynasty. During the era of Sabuktigin reign, the Ghaznavids embarked upon territorial expansion actively in several regions, such as Khurasan, Sistan and Lamghan (or Laghman). In fact, the might of the Ghaznavid Empire caught the attention of the King Jaipal, ruler of Waihind Kingdom. King Jaipal who deemed the Ghaznavid Empire to be his strong future rival pre-emptively attacked the city of Ghaznah but failed to defeat Sabuktigin. Moreover, Sabuktigin directed King Jaipal to pay damages costs and expanded rule to Peshawar which is located close to ruled territory of King Raja Jaipal (Ikram, 1964; Hamka, 2018).

The glorious age of the Ghaznavid Empire began soon after Mahmud, son of Sabuktigin took the helm of the leadership throne in 997AD. Territorial expansion policy initiated by Sabuktigin was maintained leading to victories over territories in Iran, Transoxiana and North India (Hasan, 1996). In fact, Mahmud succeeded in defeating the Samanid Empire resulting in the Ghaznavid Empire being the one and only kingdom which rule in the immediate eastern vicinity of Baghdad (Richards, 1974). That prompted the Abbasid Caliph of that time, Caliph al-Qadir bi Allah, to bestow a robe and title of *Yamin al-Dawlah* to Mahmud. The award from the Caliph strengthened the position of Mahmud thereby recognising the Ghaznavid Empire as part of the Islamic *duwaylat* (al-'Utbi, 1858).

The golden age of the Ghaznavid Empire during Mahmud era was not limited to territorial expansion activities only. In fact, it covered civilisational progress encompassing political, economic, social and intellectual aspects. Cultural and literary development, especially in the Persian language, underwent vigorous activities with the strong backing from Mahmud in that aspect of the civilisation. The city of Ghaznah was so developed into a centre of knowledge and cultural development that it attracted scholars to carry out their work in the city, one of them being al-Biruni (Bosworth, 1973). However, the Empire suffered a decline after the death of Mahmud in the year of 1031AD. The weakness of post-Mahmud era leadership, power struggle and the emergence of a new regional power of the Ghurs caused a downturn in the Ghaznavid authority and eventually its demise in 1186AD.

### **Historiography of the Ghaznavid Era**

Among the contemporary historians of the Ghaznavid Empire were Abu Nasr al-'Utbi and Abu Sa'id Gardizi while the royal literary man was Farukhi Sistani who produced numerous epic works in the period of the final 10 years of Mahmud's rule. There were a number of other historians and people in the literary circles who wrote on the advent of the Ghaznavid Empire in their works; among them were Abu al-Fadhl Bayhaqi, Ibn al-Athir, Ferdawsi and Abu al-Qasim Hasan 'Unsur. However, discussion in this article will only focus on *Tarikh al-Yamini*, a written work by al-'Utbi, *Zayn al-Akhbar* the work of Gardizi and the epic work of Farukhi Sistani.

#### **1. *Tarikh al-Yamini* by al-'Utbi**

*Tarikh al-Yamini* or *Kitab al-Yamini* was written by Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Jabbaru al-'Utbi. He was a historian during the reigns of Sabuktigin and Mahmud (Bosworth, 2000). The book was written in the Arabic language using rhythmic and rhetorical language prose writing styles (Khan, 1978). The written work touched on the advancement of the Ghaznavid Empire during the era of Sabuktigin and a major part of Mahmud's ruling era, which was up until the year of 1020AD. In addition, the historical work also contained information related to military expeditions led by Mahmud and the history of the Samanid Empire.

Al-'Utbi was reportedly to had neither reached India nor participated in the military campaigns of the Ghaznavids in the said territories. However, his notes on the history of Ghaznavid military in *Tarikh al-Yamini* were taken from sources such as excerpts from letters of victory declaration sent by Mahmud to the Abbasid Caliph. In addition, al-

‘Utbi also had a cold relation with the ruler of the Ghaznavid Empire and used the opportunity through writing his version of the history to expose the dark sides of the Ghaznavid administration (Anooshahr, 2005).

## 2. *Zayn al-Akhbar* by Gardizi

Abu Sa‘id ‘Abd-Al-Hayy bin Zahhak bin Mahmud Gardizi was a historian of Persian origin who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. Not much information was written about the history of his life. Based on his ancestral lineage, Gardizi was believed to be from Gardiz in eastern Afghanistan and the name Zahak/Zahhak was found to be much used in and around the territory of Zabulistan.

*Zayn al-Akbar* by Gardizi which was written in the Persian language circa 1050AD was different from that of al-‘Utbi. Gardizi asserted that his writing of history was more on his own observation and experience while witnessing events related to Mahmud and the ruler after him. However, Gardizi’s work focused more on the events detailing the dates, places and individuals involved. While his writing style was frank and showed no inclination to any sides, he nevertheless did not offer any of his view, critique or his own analysis of the events.

## 3. Epic Poetry Collection

Other than historical accounts discussed above, collections of epic poetries composed in the age of the Ghaznavids were also a main source of reference in the writing of history of the empire. Some of the contemporary poets of the era were Farrukhi Sistani, Ferdawsi and ‘Unsurī.

Poetry collection authored by Farukhi Sistani was used as a main reference source as he lived during the reign of Mahmud (Dale, 2019). Poetries by Farukhi Sistani employed a beautiful language style and often praised Mahmud’s characters as the greatest Ghaznavid ruler. Observation and eye-witness account on the unfolding events, including Ghaznavid military campaigns in India, formed the backbone of his poetries. However, Bosworth (1991) characterised praises toward Mahmud by Farukhi Sistani as ones that were influenced by a tradition of myths and legends as regularly found in previous poetries taken from Persian literatures.

On stating about the Ghaznavid-era historiography, Anooshahr (2021) held the view that much has been studied upon historical texts of the Ghaznavid era, encompassing aspects of objective and motive of the writing, use of sources as well as individuals responsible for the production of the historiography. In the same article of his, Anooshahr also refuted claims made by Romila Thapar who was of the opinion that historiographical sources of the Ghaznavid era used Turkic-Persian language. Anooshahr stressed that historiographical sources of that era used Persian and Arabic languages considering that both languages were dominant in Ghaznah territories, be it from the perspectives of language use by the majority of the society or the position of the two languages as a medium of knowledge and literature.

## Social Overview of the Ghaznavid Empire in Historiographical Sources

### 1. Social Structure

Rulers of the Ghaznavid Empire were of Turkic origin. Their lineage which began as slave-guards who practiced Persian and Arabic cultures in shaping the rule and administration of the empire. High-ranking officials and soldiers of the Ghaznavids were also of slave-guards origin who taken into the fold of the administration during the period of the Samanid Empire. The practice of importing slave-guards to strengthen the army persisted in the early period of the Ghaznavid Empire (al-‘Utbi, 1858; Gardizi, 1897).

Membership of the Ghaznavid armies consisted of multi-ethnic and multi-regional society, among them from Khurasan, Transoxiana, Afghanistan and India. Majority of the soldiers were slaves (*Ghulam*) of Turkish, Indian and Tajik origins. In addition, Ghaznavid armies were further reinforced by voluntary soldiers of farmers. Therefore, the Ghaznavids who participated in expeditions to India were not foreign forces as claimed by a number of researchers but local people who were in fact of local origin and knowledgeable of the surrounding.

In addition to this, Persian communities dominated the population in Ghaznavid territories, including in the city of Ghaznah. However, society composition was more concentrated in the territories of Persia and Khurasan. Generally, the society was made up of Muslims even though there existed a number of communities who remained in their Zoroastrian belief among others. Meanwhile, people of Indian origin also made up the society protected under the Ghaznavid Empire, majority of which were Hindus. They were also recruited into the Ghaznavid army during the

reign of Sabuktigin as gifts from the Hindu Rajas as peace offering with the Ghaznavid Empire. According to Gardizi (1897), Mahmud himself possessed approximately 1,500 soldiers of Indian ethnicities under his command.

Based on notes in those primary sources, findings show that society composition under the Ghaznavid rule consisted of a variety of cultural backgrounds, religions and ethnicity. In fact, such diversity did not become a hindrance for any member of the society to get involved in the government administration, be it as government officials or in the army. Moreover, there were also among the society citizens who were self-employed such as the merchants, traders and farmers.

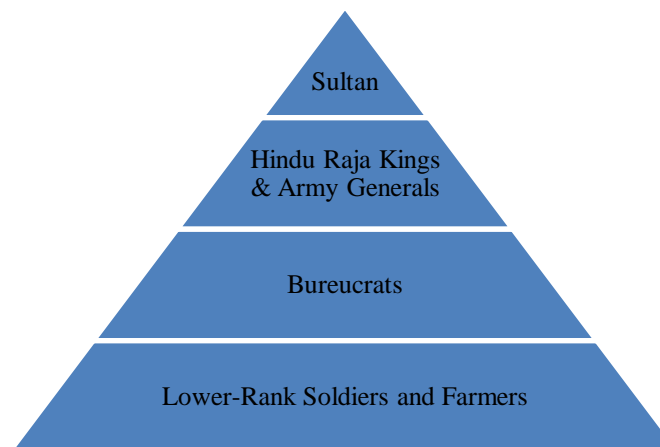
## 2. Political Governance

Based on written accounts in historiographical sources on the Ghaznavid period such as al-'Utbi (1858), the style of the Ghaznavid Empire political governance adapted much of that of the Samanid Empire. Such scenario occurred as Alptigin, the founder of the Ghaznavid Empire, formerly served in the latter empire. Hence, it is of no surprise that political governance style of the Samanid Empire became a guiding blueprint to the Ghaznavids. Some persistent practices included forging close relation with the Caliphate in Baghdad. Governance practices of the Samanid Empire were adopted by the Ghaznavid rulers out of the same motivation, which was to get recognition as part of *Dar al-Islam* (Meisami, 1990).

According to Bosworth (1962), Caliph's recognition can be of many forms, such as gift of honorary robe, titles and royal insignias which elevated the status of the recipient in the state. For example, in the context of the Ghaznavids, two rulers of the Ghaznavid Empire received gifts from the Caliph and titles such as *Nasir al-Dawlah* for Sabuktigin and *Yamin al-Dawlah* for Mahmud (Gardizi, 1897). Such bestowment elevated the reputation of the recipient ruler thereby recognising the Ghaznavid dynasty as protectorate of *Dar al-Islam*.

To ensure political continuity and sustainability of the Ghaznavid rule, its rulers implemented a number of strategies and plans, among them being peace treaties and tributes to new territories. If such measures were rejected, then military campaigns were taken as a final measure to ensure there would be no threat which can jeopardise the stability of the empire. According to Davis (1994), military campaigns were also undertaken to ensure that the sovereignty of the empire was protected and that subjects gave their undivided loyalty to the Ghaznavid Empire.

According to Anooshahr (2021), the highest hierarchy in the political governance of the Ghaznavid Empire was the Sultan who ruled in the city of Ghaznah. Next, the Hindu Rajas who ruled protectorates of the Ghaznavid Empire and army generals who acted as territory governors made up the second level of the political governance, followed by groups of bureaucrats who run the administrative duties and such as supervising constructions and tax collections. Merchants and traders were also categorised as bureaucrats. Finally, the lowest structure in the Ghaznavid political governance comprised soldiers made up by various races and society levels, including farmers who became voluntary armies. Ghaznavid Empire's political governance hierarchy can be seen in Figure 1 below:



**Figure 1:-** Structure of Political Governance of the Ghaznavid Empire  
Source: Adapted from Anooshahr (2021)

Furthermore, The Ghaznavid empire also benefited economically due to the political governance it adopted. For example, peace agreements signed between the Ghaznavid Empire and several neighbouring protectorates enabled rapid growth in economic activities, especially those along trade routes between Indian and Khurasan territories. The vitality of the commerce sector and tax collections, such as trade goods tax and tolls, constituted a major source of income to the Ghaznavid treasury (Bosworth, 1973). Moreover, peace treaties which were ratified also benefited the Ghaznavid in terms of tributary payments. The tributes were made as an acknowledgement of Ghaznavid dominion over the protected territories (Siddiqi, 1969; Anjum, 2007).

### 3. Cultural Development

Within the social aspects, the Ghaznavid Empire also enjoyed cultural progress, especially in literature. According to Bosworth (1968), Lahore developed into a centre of cultural and Persian literature development after Mahmud managed to capture the city. Apart from Lahore, the city of Ghaznah which became the administrative centre for the Ghaznavids also expanded to become centres for intellectual and cultural activities.

Dominance over India also contributed to the cultural development during the Ghaznavid era as knowledge transfer occurred from India to Ghaznah, especially in such fields as weaponry and coin minting technologies. In fact, use of elephants in military practiced by Indian soldiers was adopted by the Ghaznavid army in all their subsequent military campaigns (Anooshahr, 2020).

An important name occurs when discussing cultural development in the Ghaznavid era, which is al-Biruni. He was born in 973AD in Khawarizm and mastered a number of knowledge fields such as astronomy, mathematics, logic and history. Al-Biruni was one of the scholars who shaped cultural advancement during the Ghaznavid era by producing masterpieces such as *Qanun al-Mas'udi* and *Kitab al-Hind*. He also translated several works from Greek and Sanskrit languages into Arabic language. His cordial relationship with the Ghaznavid rulers, namely Mahmud and his successor, Mas'ud enabled him to actively work in intellectual activities in Ghaznah (Ikram, 1964). Moreover, there were other great scholarly figures who produced their work in Ghaznah after receiving invitations from the rulers of the Ghaznavids such as al-Farabi, al-Bayhaqi and Firdawsi (Yahaya & Halimi, 1993). Hence, it is important to note the importance of the role played by Ghaznavid rulers in intellectual and cultural aspects which brought about great impacts to the sociocultural reality during that age.

### Conclusion:-

Based on findings of this selective historiographical study which included *Tarikh al-Yamini* written by al-'Utbi and *Zayn al-Akbar* by Gardizi, the development of social aspect in the Ghaznavid era reached a level to be proud of, especially during the eras of Sabuktigin and Mahmud. Societal diversity composed of various nations, religions and cultures shaped political governance in the Ghaznavid administration based on the social needs and realities in the said society. Apart from that, notes on social development in the Ghaznavid era also showed social structures which consisted of various strata, namely the bureaucrats, army, traders, intellectuals and farmers. These social strata provided a mould for the shape of governance applied in the Ghaznavid administration headed by a sultan. Hindu Rajas, acknowledging the might of the Ghaznavid Empire through peace treaties ratified between them and tributes paid to the empire, were even involved in the Ghaznavid administration. Findings of this study also pointed out that Ghaznavid military campaigns were not only aimed at expanding territories but also to address and manage the diversity among the empire subjects so as to maintain peace and harmony in the society. As soon as peace and harmony were achieved, the rulers of the Ghaznavid Empire could focus on knowledge and cultural developments as many scholars of all fields were attracted to carry out their work in Ghaznah.

### Acknowledgement:-

This study was financed by Geran Universiti Penyelidikan (GUP-2022-033), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

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