

HOARDED WEALTH LOOTED BY MUSLIM INVADERS DURING EARLY MEDIEVAL NORTH INDIA

KHALID HAMID*

**Research Scholar AIHC & Archaeology, Vikram University Ujjain M.P*

Introduction

The devastating raids of the Muslims during our period enabled them to have a peep into the hidden wealth of India. The Muslims did not at first make raids with the intention of a permanent settlement or occupation, but to plunder her wealth. Sultan Mahmud, as is well known, led several expeditions into India. In the course of these invasions, Muslim leaders came to know directly that her temples and forts contained large amounts of hoarded wealth. Apart from the religious impulse, their frequent raids of the great temples of India were motivated by greed which was satisfied for the time being when they succeeded in carrying off through this process whatever they got. Muslim accounts give exciting details regarding the wealth, preserved in the temples and forts which were subjected to furious attacks.

The first Muslim ruler of Ghazna, who came to India, was Sabuktigin. He came to the throne about 977 A.D. and then after a year or two turned his attention to India. Sabuktigin was succeeded by his son Mahmud, who followed the footsteps of his father, whom he outrivalled, devastating country after country and town after town.

It is now generally admitted that Mahmud did not come to India to establish a permanent empire. Within a short time he came to know about the secrets of hoarded wealth in India. This aroused his temptation, which was the main motive of his subsequent expedition into India. Mahmud led his first expedition to India in A.H.390, and his second after a year when he met Jaipal in the battle-field, and defeated him. According to Nazim,ⁱ the spoils captured by him after the defeat of Jaipal during his second Indian expedition, exceeded his "fantastic expectations" these included fifteen necklaces of pearls, one of which was valued at 80,000 dinaras and other booty, beyond all bounds of calculations fell into their hands. Ferishta's account,ⁱⁱ which is somewhat different, says that the price of one of the sixteen necklaces, which came into the conqueror's possession, belonging to Jaipal, was estimated to be 180,000 dinaras in value. The Muslims after this were naturally convinced that India

was a land of fabulous wealth. The expeditions that followed were to a large extent actuated by the desire of appropriating this wealth as far as possible.

In A.H.395 (1004-5 A.D.) Mahmud came again to take the city of Bhera, situated on the bank of river Jhelum. When its ruler Baji Raj, after his defeat by Mahmud took shelter in his fort, surrounded by a deep and wide ditch, it was attacked by the enemy and immense booty ultimately fell into his hands. The invader got huge amounts of gold, silver, as well as other things of immense value.

Subsequently, after this expedition Sultan Mahmud marched and crossed the river Indus near Peshawar and defeated Anandpal. When the Sultan next marched to the garrison of Mutan the citizens appealed for protection in return for which they “offered to pay a fine of 20,000,000 dirhams.” In A.H.398 Mahmud captured the rebellious Sukhpal. He took from him a fine of 400,000 dirhams. In A.H. 399 Sultan Mahmud again met the Hindus organized under the leadership of Anandpal. On this occasion also valuable spoils were obtained by the conqueror.

The Sultan afterwards proceeded to capture the fort which was supposed to be a very ancient one. There was a temple in this fort, which was held in great veneration, and was famous for the wealth that had accumulated in its vaults.’ After the surrender, spoils ‘beyond the limit of calculation’ were captured by the conquerors. These consisted of 70,000,000 dirhams of coined money, 70,000 mans of gold and silver ingot and costly apparel, besides a folding house made of silver, measuring 30 yards by 15 yards, a canopy of linen measuring 40 yards by 20 yards which was reared on poles of gold and silver and a richly decorated throne reputed to be that of the Raja Bhima of the Pandava dynasty. Soon after this great victory the Sultan returned to Ghazna and ordered these spoils to be publicly displayed in the beginning of A.H.400 (1009 A.D.)

At Mathura, again, Mahmud destroyed a number of temples, whose massive beauty impressed him. From these temples he obtained huge booty including five idols of gold. According to Utbiⁱⁱⁱ one of these was set with two rubbies of the value of 50,000 dinaras. The other articles seized included 200 idols of silver and a sapphire of unusually large size.

From all his expeditions in the Ganges Doab, Sultan Mahmud collected a vast booty, the total value of which being reckoned at about 3,000,000 dirhams, besides 55,000 slaves and 350 elephants.

Shortly after the return of Sultan Mahmud to Ghazna from his expedition against Kanauj, in A.H. 409, Trilochanapala is supposed to have entered into an alliance with Ganda, the Raja of Kalinjar. The Sultan came to India again and defeated Trilochanapala. Rich spoils were captured, the share of the Sultan alone including coffers full of precious stones.

The power of Ganda was not broken during this expedition. So the Sultan determined to invade India again in A.H.413. On his way he captured the fort of Gwalior and besieged Kalinjar. Some estimate of the wealth

of the rulers of contemporary India can be formed from the account of the fort of Kalinjar, supplied by Muslim writers. It is reported that this fort had sufficient accommodation for 500,000 men, 20,000 head of cattle and 500 elephants and contained sufficient provisions, weapons and other requirements'.^{iv}

By far the most impressive account of the wealth of India, preserved in temples, is the one which Muslim historians have given in connection with Somnath that fell a prey to the greed of the invader (416 A.H.). The account, given by Ibn Asir of the Somnath expedition of Sultan Mahmud, furnishes a glimpse into the splendor and magnificence of the temple, its vast material resources and almost incalculable wealth. The temple and the sacred image, worshipped in it, attracted pilgrims from all parts of India, who sometimes numbered about a hundred thousand at a time. Thus it is evident that a substantial part of the temple's wealth was derived from the offerings of the pilgrims who used to congregate there periodically. The temple had a permanent endowment consisting of more than 10,000 villages, the income derived from which formed the chief source of its revenue. In the temple were amassed almost inexhaustible stores of precious jewels. About a thousand Brahmanas belonging to the permanent establishment of the temples were employed in the daily worship of the image. About three hundred barbers were employed, attending to the pilgrims visiting the temple. There were in the service of the temple dancers and singers, each of whom received a fixed daily allowance. The shrine was lighted by the most exquisitely jeweled chandeliers. Near the idol was a chain of gold in which bells were attached, weighing 200 mans. The treasury contained many idols of gold and silver. Over it there were veils hanging, set with exceedingly precious jewels. The value of all that was plundered and carried off by the invader exceeded two millions of dinaras.

India's fabulous wealth was one of the greatest causes of her misfortune. Legends about this wealth spread to distant countries and attracted raiders and plunderers who created havoc in her political, economic and cultural life.

The early Muslim invaders did not completely drain away her wealth, for the Sultans of Delhi are also known to have captured enormous booty during the expansion of their power. There was enough left in the land to be carried away by Timur at the end of the 14th century, but his activities were confined only to a small part of the country.^v

Internal trade did not come to an end and those who took part in this and also acted as intermediaries between the people of this country and the Muslim traders, who monopolized a large part of India's external trade, were able to maintain their prosperity, although the riches, with which the country still abounded, appear to have been in possession of some cases of people only. It was usually large cities and towns where traders and bankers, kings and princes and high officers lived, which contained elements of prosperity but there is nothing to show that the population as a whole was prosperous. Poor people peasants, small dealers and craftsmen,

agricultural labourers, with or without land, working on hire, lived in villages which do not appear among the places raided by the Muslims. Only a portion of accumulated wealth seems to have invested in current trade or industry. It appears that the practice of hoarding cash in the shape of coins was also widely resorted to. Metallic currency had to be withdrawn in many parts of the land, and it was being largely replaced by cowrie shells. This was an unmistakable symptom of decline of large scale trade and commerce.

References

1. Nazim, The life and times of Sultan Mahmud.
2. Briggs, Vol. I, pp. 37-38.
3. Utbi, p. 308.
4. Nazim, The life and times of Sultan Mahmud, p. 113.
5. Nazim, The life and times of Sultan Mahmud; Habib, History of India as told by its own Historians, Vol. II.