

A Study on the Reasons for the Declination of Bahmani Sultanate

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ABSTRACT

The Bahmani Kingdom was founded by some nobles of the Deccan who revolted against the repressive policies of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the Sultan of Delhi. Alau'd-din Hasan Bahman Shah (1347-1358), became the first Muslim ruler of Deccan and founded the Bahmani Sultanate with his capital at Gulbarga (in Karnataka, India) in 1347. The Kingdom was situated on the northern Deccan region up to the river Krishna. The rulers of the Bahmani Kingdom were often at war with the neighboring Hindu Kingdom of Vijayanagara on the South. The current article highlights the declination of Bahmani empire.

KEYWORDS:

Bahmani, Empire, Declination

INTRODUCTION

Muhammad Shah (1358-1375) succeeded his father Alau'd-din Hasan Bahman Shah in 1358. He built two great mosques in Gulbarga, the Jama Masjid and Shah Bazar Masjid. He was followed by Alau'd-din Mujahid Shah (1375-1378), Daud Shah (1378), Mahmud



Shah (1378-1397), Ghiyas-ud-din Shah (1397) and Shams-ud-din Daud Shah II (1397).

Taju'd-din Firuz (1397-1422), also known as Firuz Shah of Bahmani, the next Sultan, was a learned man, who had the knowledge in religious and natural sciences. He defeated Devaraya I of Vijayanagar and married his daughter. Firuz was succeeded by his brother Ahmad Shah Wali (1422-1436) who was considered to be a saint because of his connection with the Sufi saint Hazrat Gesu Daraz. He shifted his capital from Gulbarga to Bidar. Alau'd-din Ahmad Shah (1436-1458) succeeded his father and he gave preference to *Afaquis (foreigners who came from over-seas and had become the natives of Deccan)* over the Deccanis. During his reign the quarrel between Deccanis and Afaquis began to grow and that weakened the Kingdom. He was followed by his eldest son Alau'd-din Humayun Shah (1458-1461) also known as Humayun, the Cruel.

In august 1347 AD, the Bahmani Kingdom rose to power under the Turkish Governor Ala-ud-din Hassan Bahman Shah, who revolted against the Sultan of Delhi Sultanate, Muhammad Bin Tughlaq and was favored by Nazir uddin Ismail Shah (who had revolted against the Delhi Sultanate). The success of the revolt led to the establishment of an independent Deccan state with parts of the current day's Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh which were within the territory of



Delhi Sultanate. Setting up the capital between 1347 AD and 1425 AD, in Ahsanabad (gulbara), it was later moved to Muhammadabad (Bidar).

Constantly contesting the Vijyanagar Empire of Hindus, in the south, the power of sultanate reached its peak under Mahmud Gawan (serving as a prime minister and General to several sultans) during 1466-1481. He extended the empire by reconquering Goa which was under the Vijyanagar Empire. He also introduced administrative reforms and controlled many districts directly. His execution was ordered by a sultan and the Empire began collapsing after the sultan drank himself to death. The rampant Bahmani power was disintegrated by Krishna Dev Raya of Vijyanagar Empire and the Governors of important provinces like Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, Berar, Bidar and Golconda, started declaring their Independence from Bahmani rule

Bijapur as an expansive successor states captured Bidar and was joined by Ahmadnagar and Golconda in struggle against Vijayanagar. All the Deccan sultanates together pooled their resources against the might of Vijyanagar and it suffered a crucial defeat in 1565 AD. At the same time the Deccan sultanates had to succumb to the Great Mughals, and were totally vanquished by Aurangzeb in 1686–7 AD.

The Bahmanis were enthusiasts of architecture and art and encouraged distinct styles with architects from different parts of the Muslim world and blended these with the local styles.

Ala-ud-din Bahman built a large number of buildings including the *Jama masjid* and the *Bala Hisar*. The monuments of Gulbarga were also built and when the capital was shifted to Bidar a d a large number of buildings were constructed which include the forts, palaces, mosques and tombs prominent among which are the *Rangin Mahal*, *Gagan Mahal*, *Chini Mahal* and *Nagin Mahal* (currently are in broken form).

The Persian scholar Mahmud Gawan (minister of Muhammad Shah III), built the well-known *Madrassa* in 1472 AD (building with three stories and has lecture halls, a library, a mosque and residential houses) which stands as a specimen of Bahmani architecture.

The Bahmanis got many forts rebuilt and *modified for their suitability in case of military requirements*. These included the covered passages and bastions as an addition. Few forts were built at strategic places, keeping this structure in mind; some among these are the *Gulbarga*, *Daulatabad*, *Gawilgarh*, *Narnala*, *Parenda*, *Raichur*, etc

DECLINE OF THE BAHMANI SULTANATE



Khawaja Mahmud Gawan, the great Wazir of Bahmani Sultanate (1466-1481): Mahmud Gawan was a Persian merchant and he came to Bidar in 1453. Due to his honesty and simplicity, Alau'd-din Ahmad Shah offered him the post of a mansabdar in his court. During the reign of Humayun, Gawan was made his minister with the title of Malik't-tujjar. After Humayun's death, Gawan became the guardian of his eight-year old son, Nizam Shah (1461-1463).

Muhammad Shah II (1463-1482), brother of Nizam Shah, made him the Prime Minister. Mahmud Gawan was a scholar and also a great administrator. The Sultanate reached the peak of its power during Gawan's ministry; the Kingdom extended from the Bay of Bengal in the East and the Arabian Sea in the West, including Goa and Kanchipuram. He built the famous Madrassa, the center of Islamic learning at Bidar in 1472, which attracted scholars from all over the world. Gawan improved the administration, organized finances, encouraged public education, reformed revenue system, disciplined army and removed corruption. By these excellent rules, the government acquired much strength, and justice was done to all; but on the other hand, gave offence to many ambitious chiefs, who entertained hatred to the minister. Muhammad Shah had once congratulated him, *"the Almighty hath bountifully conferred upon me two incalculable blessings; a great kingdom,*



and such a servant as Mahmud Gawan!" the King then took off his upper robe, and put it on the shoulders of Mahmud, took his in return, and put it on his own person.

Envious of the king's favour shown towards the minister, a number of Deccanis and Abyssinians executed a plot against him; They obtained a blank sheet of paper with Gawan's seal affixed on it and wrote a letter inviting the king of Orissa to invade the Kingdom. When this letter was presented to the Sultan, Gawan was called to the court. The minister's friends warned him against going, and to wait till the King's temper became lessened; by that time the authors of the forgery might be detected, and brought to punishment.

Gawan repeated the following verses in reply, "*He who dies a martyr in the fullness of devotion has his reward here and hereafter; happy, then, would it be for me to meet with so enviable a destiny*". Many of the chiefs sent messengers to him saying that they had heard alarming reports, and that if he chose to fly to Gujarat, they would attend him and sacrifice their lives for him. Gawan replied, he had for many years enjoyed an honourable station in his master's service, during which he had been guilty of no crime; that he relied with confidence on the justice of the King, who would certainly not punish a faithful servant on the bare accusations of his enemies; but if impelled by Providence to do so, it was



befitting in him to submit to the decree. He also said that the measure they proposed out of duty and friendship, would on his part be ingratitude and rebellion.

Gawan went to the court. Muhammad Shah asked him, "*When any one is disloyal to his sovereign, and his crime be proved, what should be his punishment?*" The Khwaja replied, "*Let the abandoned wretch who practices treason against his lord meet with no mercy*".

The King then showed him the letter; upon seeing which, the minister, after repeating the verse of the Koran, "O God, verily this is a great forgery", said, "*The seal is mine, but not the letter, of which I have no knowledge*". He concluded, by repeating the following verse: "*By that God whose commands have been fulfilled by the just, even at the expense of their blood, false as the story of Yusuf and the wolf is that which my enemies have forged against me*". Muhammad Shah, who was at that time intoxicated with wine, ordered his Abyssinian slave Jauhar to put the minister to death on the spot. Thus died the loyal minister, at the age of seventy eight.

Muhammad Shah, hearing reports of the vast wealth of his minister, sent for the treasurer, and demanded the money and jewels of the Khwaja. The treasurer said, "*my master had two treasuries, one of which he called the King's, from which were issued the expenses of his troops,*



stables and household: in this there are now ten thousand larees and three thousand hoons; the other he called the treasury of the poor, and in this there is a sealed bag containing three hundred larees". The king wondered and again asked the treasurer, "how come it that the Khwaja, whose revenues equalled that of many kings, should only have so small a sum?". The treasurer replied, "Whenever money came from his jagir, having taken for the King's treasury the pay of his troops and stables, he gave the remainder, in your Majesty's name to the poor, not reserving a cowrie for his own use.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A sum of forty thousand larees, which he brought with him from Persia to the Deccan, he employed in trade, and preserving always that capital, he expended two larees daily for his own kitchen and apparel out of the profit, the remainder of which was carried into the treasury for the poor, and issued from thence in sums remitted to his mother, his relatives, and worthy persons, with whom he had made acquaintance in his travels, and who would not come to Hindustan". The King then assembled all the late minister's servants and questioned them. He got replies that, the Khwaja always slept on a bare mat and the eating for him were always prepared in earthen pots.



The King now became melancholy, and the treasurer took courage to say, "O King! may many thousands such as Mahmud Gawan be a sacrifice for your safety; but why do you not regard his claims and ascertain who was the bearer of the letter to the Ray of Orissa, that his treason might appear manifest to us and to all mankind". Muhammad Shah sent for the accusers of the minister to bring the bearer of the letter before him. None could be produced; and the real truth now flashed in the King's mind: he trembled with horror at the act that he had committed, and retired to his harem full of remorse and sorrow. Ferishta records that Muhammad Shah, a thousand times in an hour regretted the loss of Mahmud Gawan, till he died in 1482.

CONCLUSION

The death of Mahmud Gawan in 1481 marked the decline of the Bahmani Kingdom. Muhammad Shah was followed by his son Mahmud Shah II (1482-1518) and during his reign, five powerful governors declared their independence: Malik Ahmed (*Nizam Shahis of Ahmadnagar -1490*), Fathullah Imad Shah (*Imad Shahis of Berar -1490*), Yusuf Adil Shah (*Adil Shahis of Bijapur -1490*) and Quli Qutub Shah (*Qutub Shahis of Golconda -1518*). Qasim Barid (1492-1505) became the de facto ruler of the Bahmani Sultanate (*Barid Shahis of Bidar -1492*). In 1504, his son



Amir Barid (1504-1542) succeeded him. The last of the Bahmani Sultans: Ahmad Shah II (1518-1520), Ala-ud-din Shah (1520-1523) and Wali-ullah Shah (1523-1526) were mere puppets in the hands of Amir Barid. Kalim-ul-Lah Shah (1526-1528), brother of Wali-ullah, was the last Sultan of the Bahmani Kingdom.

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