Chapter 2

THREE IRANIAN TRAVELLERS AND THEIR BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

In this chapter we are going to focus attention on the lives and experiences of three Iranians of some eminence. The lives of our protagonists show that they were familiar with the idea of travelling from their youth. This preoccupation with travel emanated mainly from their zeal for scholarship. Muhammad Ali Hazin Lahiji, Abdul Latif Shushtari and Ahmad Bihbahani, all three, commenced their intellectual life looking for renowned teachers, and this led them from one town to another. They had other aspects in common. All of them were brought up in scholarly family, and their ancestors were endowed with learning. The talent of poetry and interest in writing was yet another similarity in their characters. This shaped their personalities, enriched their experiences and influenced their opinions. Finally, they all wrote travelogues, which was not an unusual thing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Iran.

Muhammad Ali Hazin Lahiji (1692-1766)

The description of Hazin’s life can follow the sequence laid out in his autobiography: ancestry, education and travels. The adventures of Hazin’s life, like links of a chain, are so connected to each other that the elimination of any of them is difficult to justify. He was born in 1692 AD in a family known for scholarship. Another important aspect of his lineage was that he descended from a distinguished mystic, Shaykh Zahid Gilani who was the ancestor of the Safavids, from their mother’s side. The first thirty two
years of Hazin's life were spent in a politically peaceful environment, enabling him to travel in different parts of Iran and derive utmost benefit from many renowned scholars. Hazin had the advantage of a father who had a well stocked library. Among the five thousands books in his possession at least seventy were transcribed by him, with marginal notes written on many of them. Hazin's father's migration from his ancestral land Lahijan to Isfahan at the age of twenty was also on account of education. He was concerned about his son's education and encouraged him to read at the age of four. After obtaining elementary education, the first books read by Hazin were of Persian poetry and prose and treatises of Arabic grammar and syntax.

When Hazin was about ten years old, his father taught him advanced books in Arabic rhetoric, logic, traditions of the Prophet and Imams, jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence. Hazin soon developed a strong passion for learning:

I was so much interested in debates and learning that I was not inclined towards the comforts of life. When my parents discovered that I was not having enough sleep, they implored me and advised rest, but to no avail. While studying books, all by myself, I sometimes asked my father to help me. I read a large number of books on different subjects and arts in such a short time as only a few scholars would be able to do.

Hazin's journey to Shiraz familiarized him with some outstanding scholars there. He took a long tour of Shiraz and the neighbouring cities. When he visited a mystic near

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42 Hazin introduces himself in this manner: "I, a implored to the giver of all good gifts, Muhammad, called Ali, am the son of Abu Talib, son of Abdullah ... son of Jamal ud Din Ali, son of the most illustrious sheikh, and model of the learned, Taj ud Din Ibrahim, known by the title of Zihid Gilani."

43 Tazkirat ul Ahwa/, p. 148.

Kazirun, Shaykh Salamullah Shulistani, who lived in a mountain, Hazin demanded the Shaykh to permit him to stay there, but the Shaykh persuaded him to continue with his routine life. Some times after this meeting, while Hazin was still in Shiraz, he wrote that he decided to "abandon associating with people and living in town and preferred isolation in a mountain." Possibly this tendency originated from the meeting with the Shaykh.

Hazin's father persuaded him to come back to Isfahan, where he concentrated on his studies once again and especially on the philosophy of Muhammad Sadiq Ardistani who was a famous scholar of philosophy of illumination (ishraq).

The death of Hazin's father in 1714 AD and of his mother two years later, distressed him and he wrote that he had no further desire to live and enjoy life. His intellectual pursuits were adversely affected too as he became less inclined towards reading and writing. There was yet another factor which slowed down the pace of his scholarly pursuits.

The income of Hazin's family came from their estates in Lahijan. When his uncle, who attended the estates, passed away the income decreased, and after the Russian invasion of Gilan, it stopped altogether. The hardship increased further when in consequence of the siege of Isfahan by the Afghans in 1721-22 AD, a lot of scholars perished because of famine. Hazin's grandmother and his two brother also died. Trying to keep his relatives alive, Hazin sold all his possessions, among them two thousand books. The rest of his books were plundered during the Afghan invasion. Finally in order to rescue himself from that catastrophe, he left Isfahan in disguise on 21 October 1722. He went to Khurramabad,

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45 Tazkirat ul Ahwal, p. 190.
where the governor of the city and some nobles entertained him. He described his state of mind as follows:

I had a strange condition because of the harshness of sufferings. I lost my mental faculties and did not remember any thing of what I had learned. My mind was blank and I was not able to speak.\[47\]

However, he struggled to revive his interests in learning. Hazin resided for two years in Khurramabad and engaged himself in discussions with scholars.

**Scholarship**

The best proof of Hazin’s erudition lies in his works. Although most of his works are extinct, their titles known from other sources show his proficiency in different branches of learning. Due to the extraordinary circumstances of Hazin’s life, extinction of his works was only natural.

After the Afghan attack of Iran and the disturbance arising from it, Hazin left Iran for India looking for a peaceful life. But what happened was not according to the Hazin’s expectations and he was compelled to move from one place to another. The constant dislocation along with illness deprived Hazin of the opportunity to write. Nevertheless, wherever he resided, writing still became his sole preoccupation.

Hazin has listed and discussed most of his works in an Arabic treatise, *Risala dar fitrīst-i asatid wa tasnifat-i khud* (Dissertation on the List of Teachers and Works) that has survived in a rare manuscript in the collection of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.\[47\] *(Tazkirat al Ahwal, p. 202.)*

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(RASB). The book is in two parts; the first describes the genealogy of the author, and the second the author’s teachers and the books which he read during the course of his studies. A list of his works, appended to the text, is divided into two parts: books in Arabic and in Persian. 48

A part of Hazin’s work has been recorded in *Nujum us Sama fi Tarajim ul Ulama* (*Stars of the Heaven in the Biography of the Scholars*) by Muhammad Ali Azad Kashmiri. This book has recorded the biography of 530 Shiite scholars from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, and by inscription the list of Hazin’s works has facilitated the reading of the RASB manuscript. Hazin’s list includes eighty Persian and eighty two Arabic works. Some of his works are major treatises, and some are minor works.

The multiplicity and variety of Hazin’s works indicates the spread of his knowledge across different branches of learning. Yet he was not an isolated intellectual. His concern for Iran and it’s people drove him to offer opinion on contemporary political issues. This caused Nadir Shah to suspect Hazin as a pro- Safavid scholar and the fear of persecution drove Hazin towards India.

**Religious views and Intellectual Curiosity**

Hazin was a devout Shia, and this is reflected in his views and writings. He went on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1733, where he wrote a treatise on Imamate after receiving a “vision”. 49 The abundance of Hazin’s panegyric verses of Imam Ali and other Shiite Imams

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48 It seems that the scribe of this treatise did not have an adequate knowledge of Arabic, hence the manuscript has many errors and it is also not complete.

49 *Tazkirat ul Ahwal*, p. 243.
shows the level of his devotion. He devoted his biographical dictionary, *Tazkiratul Muasirin*, to Shiite poets alone.\(^{50}\)

Despite his devotion to Shiism, Hazin was eager to learn about other religions. He became familiar with some Christians in Isfahan, particularly the Armenian, Khalifa Avanus. Hazin learned the Bible under him and they discussed several religious issues. Avanus’ desire to learn about Islam tempted Hazin to convert him, but he was not successful.\(^{51}\)

In order to learn about Judaism, Hazin made friends with one of their ministers, Shuaib. Hazin learnt the Torah from him and translated it for his own use, but he believed that Jewish clerics were extremely blockheaded and far away from pondering. He was curious about other sects of Islam too, and studied their books.\(^{52}\)

Travelling to Pars, Hazin came in contact with a Zoroastrian priest, Dastur, in Bayza and inquired about his religion. Hazin wrote regarding him that he had a perfect piety. Hazin was interested to know about Sabeans also. When he was leaving Khurramabad for south of Iran, he met Sabeans in Huwayza and Shushtar, but he did not find a learned person among them to converse and answer his questions. Although Hazin lived almost eighteen years in Banaras, the center of Hinduism in India, he did not refer to this religion in his works. Since he referred to India, in some of his verses as “the unclean land” it could be speculated that did not consider Hinduism as a divine religion, and in the same league as the Semitic religions.

Hazin’s life shows that he was a faithful Shia, but his creed did not prevent him from knowing about other religions. His interest in learning, led him to have a detailed

\(^{51}\) *Tazkirat ul Ahwal*, pp. 171-172.
\(^{52}\) *Ibid*, p. 172.
inquiry of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islamic sects. Although he was a religious person the foundation of his belief was somewhat placed on knowledge and inquiry.

**Socio-Political views**

Hazin wrote a book entitled *Dastur ul uqala dar adab-i muluk-o-umara* (*Instruction of the wise on the manner of kings and governors*). The title suggests that his political views would appear in this book, but unfortunately the book is lost.

Hazin’s life coincided with significant political transformation in Iran and India. The Afghan invasion of Iran and destruction of Isfahan, the Ottoman attack on the western regions of Iran, the overthrow of Shah Tahmasp by Nadir were significant political events of eighteenth century Iran. The conflict between the Mughal rulers for power, disputes between nobles and courtiers for their interests, the rise of the British power in Bengal and other regions of India and Nadir’s invasion of Delhi were destabilizing political events in India.

Hazin was a contemporary of two Safavid kings and four Mughal Emperors. For many reasons, Hazin was devoted to the Safavids. We have noted that his sixteenth ancestor Shaykh Zahid Gilani was the ancestor of the Safavids from their mother’s side. However, more than the kinship, Hazin’s attitude towards the Safavids was shaped by two considerations. First, he, like many other scholars (ulama), saw the Safavids as renewers

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55 From the Safavid dynasty Hazin was contemporary to Shah Sultan Husain Safavi (1694-1722) and Shah Tahmasp II (1722-1732) and of Mughal Emperors, to Muhammad Shah (1719-1748), Ahmad Shah (1748-1754), Alamgir II (1754-1760) and Shah Alam (1760-1788).
(mujaddid) of Shiism. Second, he saw them as saviours of Iran from anarchy and disorder. Although he could see no strong safavid king before his eyes, he was willing to place his hopes on the effete Shah Sultan Husain. To save him from harm when Mahmud Afghan besieged Isfahan in 1721-2, he suggested the Shah to leave the capital. The idea was to go to a safe place from where he could regroup his military force and launch a counter attack.

It was advisable for the king to move from Isfahan, because resistance against enemy was not possible and he could go out with his relatives, governors and the treasury. The Safavids held all parts of Iran except Qandahar and if he went out of that blocked region, all commanders and troops throughout the country could join him and he could recover the lost ground. 56

The Safavids, especially Shah Tashmasp, held Hazin in high esteem as a prominent scholar and a distinguished poet. Nevertheless nowhere does he mention that he had a formal position in the Safavid court, and it seems he remained independent of the court circle.

Even though he had a reputation, Hazin’s advice was not considered perhaps because the exit of the Shah from Isfahan could have been seen as fleeing, and this may have reinforced the might of his enemy. What happened then was not entirely to the liking of Hazin. During the siege, Prince Tahmasp Mirza was sent to Qazvin and after the deposition of Shah Sultan Husain by Afghans in October 1722, the prince was enthroned in Qazvin as Tahmasp II.

56 Tazkiratul Ahwal, p. 198.
Hazin explained the reason for the failure of Shah Sultan Husain against the Ghilzai Afghan. He argued that competent Safavid kings brought peace to Iran for hundreds of years which made the subsequent rulers negligent, so much that their enemies became bold against them. Moreover disagreements among the commanders of troops weakened them. Hazin’s devotion to Safavids did not let him to foreground their incompetence; while the main reason of the fall of this dynasty was their imprudence. The review of the reign of Shah Abbas I, the most powerful Safavid king, shows that he was responsible for incarcerating the princes in the *haram*, and this policy led to degeneration of the dynasty:

The policy of incarcerating the royal princes in the *haram* may in the short term have relieved the ruler of the fear of plots against him, but in the not so long term it resulted in the marked degeneration of the dynasty; it also led to undue influence of the women of the *haram*, and of the court eunuchs and other officials associated with the *haram*, in political life and in succession problems.  

The second part of Hazin’s analysis about the causes of Safavid decline, i.e. disagreement among the statemen is supported by other sources like the travelouge of Krusinski.  

Hazin believed in resistance rather than surrender and flight. While the central part of Iran was captured by the Afghans, the Ottomans seized the opportunity to invade Azarbajjan and Kirmanshah from the west. When Hazin was in Khurramabad, that town was exposed to danger. The governor of the city wanted people to seek refuge in the mountains, but Hazin encouraged them to stay in the city.

I emboldened them so much that even unskilled people became brave and in the case of war, they were able to fight against a powerful army. People became calm and the town found its normal condition. I accompanied people with guarding at night and mounting in the day.\(^{59}\)

Yet another event shows Hazin’s social commitments. During the Ottoman invasion of Iran, Hamadan was occupied, and a lot of people were killed in the war. Hazin knew some of those killed and their families captured by the enemy, and he worked for their release. Hazin’s efforts with some nobles of Kirmanshah caused the freedom of the captives.\(^{60}\)

Due to turbulent political conditions in Iran Hazin decided to go abroad. His first choice was the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala but he later decided to go to Mecca for pilgrimage. The voyage made him ill. Unsuccessful in his travel, he stayed sometimes in Yemen, and then via Basra came back to Iran. Chaotic condition of Iran did not let him stay there for a long time, and he was obliged to travel to Iraq. He lived for three years in Najaf and then left Iraq for Iran in order to reside in Mashhad. At this time Shah Tahmasp also was in Mashhad and he came to Hazin’s residence to visit him.\(^{61}\)

When the Safavid king and Nadir Quli Khan, a chieftain of the Afsharids of the Turkoman tribe who had joined Shah Tahmasp in Khurasan and had received the title of Tahmasp Quli Khan, (servant of Tahmasp) were preparing to fight the Afghans near Khurasan, the Shah demanded Hazin to accompany him. Hazin first moved along with the army, but after some times excused himself. He watched the battle from a short distance in

\(^{59}\) Tazkirat ul Ahwal, p. 212.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 214.
\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 225.
which the Iranian army pushed the Afghans to Isfahan. Perhaps the companionship of Nadir with the young king prevented Hazin to accompany them, at the same time his interest in the outcome of the war motivated him to watch it from a distance.

The Safavid king continued his march to Isfahan in order to retake the capital. He succeeded in making the Afghans flee to Qandahar under the leadership of Nadir. Hazin met the Safavid king in Isfahan and advised him several times on the affairs of his kingdom.\(^{62}\) Considering Hazin’s future fear from Nadir, it is not unlikely that a part of Hazin’s advice to Tahmasp was regarding the containment of Nadir’s power who was fighting Ottomans as a strong commander in the west of Iran.

When Tahmasp II was campaigning to suppress a rebellion in the suburbs of Hamadan, he asked Hazin again to accompany his army, and Hazin excused himself once again, he then left Isfahan for Shiraz.\(^{63}\)

Hazin had visited Shiraz during the time of peace, but now it was under the Afghan domination and had turned ruinous. None of Hazin’s old friends was alive, and due to severe depression he decided to leave Shiraz for Lar. He found the condition of Lar also chaotic and disappointing.

The country is ruined and the administrative rules are abolished. A powerful and competent ruler is needed to pay attention to the condition of different villages and small towns in order to recover the country.\(^{64}\)

\(^{62}\) Ibid, p. 237.
\(^{63}\) Ibid., p. 238.
\(^{64}\) Ibid, p. 240.
Hazin’s statement shows that he was dissatisfied with the Safavid king. This line of criticism was carried even when he was writing in 1741/1154 in Delhi. After his journey to India, he became more familiar with the circumstances of political rule in the European countries, and compared European rulers with other rulers:

It is a calamity that there is no competent ruler throughout the world, and I found all rulers more ignoble than their subjects, except some European rulers, who are firm in performance of the rules and management of their territory, but since their policy is in contrast to the interests of the people of other countries, is not useful for them.65

Hazin has a brief description of the political relations of the Safavid and Mughal Emperors before writing the account of his travel in India. He believed that Shah Ismail Safavi had a significant role to play in Babar’s domination over India and considered this to be the basis of Babar’s friendly relations with the Safavids. Hazin wrote that Babar’s successors too sought help from the Safavids during adversities. But when their problems were over, the Timurids behaved indifferently and with pride and vanity.66

Hazin took the view that a country can be ruled with political stability and prosperity only by a strong monarch. He also believed that even though scholars may not be apart of the political apparatus, they had some responsibility towards their country.

Abd ul Latif Shushtari (1758-1805)

Abd ul Latif was born in 1758AD in Shushtar in the Nuriyyeh Sayyid family. He was the third grandson of Sayyid Nimatullah Jazayeri (1640-1700) a renowned scholar of

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., p. 270.
the Safavid period. Nine years of education in Shiraz and eight years in Isfahan, under renowned scholars like Aqa Husain Khansari and Muhammad Baqir Majlisi had fostered Jazayeri’s scholarly rank. He collaborated with Majlisi in the compilation and editing of *Bihar ul Anwar*, the great encyclopaedic collection of the twelver Shiite traditions.\(^67\) Due to the Ottoman invasion of Basra, Jazayeri was compelled to move first to Huwayzeh and then to Shushtar, a town in Khuzistan, near Iraq. Jazayry received the post of Shaykh ul Islam from Shah Sulayman Safavi (1666-1694) and he was appointed as judge and the leader of Friday prayers (*imam*) by the Shah.\(^68\)

According to his father’s will, Abdu Latif started education from childhood. After obtaining primary education, he decided to go to Isfahan, the center of Islamic learning in Iran. During his journey, he met all prominent scholars of the towns he went through. This extended journey delayed Shushtari from reaching his destination in time. While he was in the midst of his journey, he received a letter from his father calling him back.\(^69\)

After his father’s death, financial stringencies plagued Shushtari, and a famine aggravated his penury. Looking for a better situation, he departed to the shrine cities in Iraq, while his close relatives accompanied him. Two years of stay in the shrines gave another opportunity to Shushtari to continue his education under prominent scholars. However, family considerations compelled him to leave education in 1780 and join his elder brother, Muhammad Shafi, who was working in Bushihr as a trader.

The company of his brother reared Shushtari as a professional trader, and he gradually excelled in business. He left for India on a trading venture in 14 Shawwal 1202.

\(^{67}\) *Tuhfat ul Alam*, p. 100  
\(^{69}\) *Ibid*, p. 181.
Family Tree of Abdul Latif Shushturi

Sayyid Nimatullah Jazayeri (1640-1700)

Sayyid Jamalud Din  Sayyid Muhammad Shaft  Sayyid Habibullah  Sayyid Nurud Din

Razi  Talib  Murtaza  Muhammad  Husain  Nimatullah  Abdullah

Abdul Latif Shushtari (1758-1805)

Nurullah  Sadiq  Muhammad Jafar  Muhammad Shaft
Shushtari's close friend, Abu Talib Khan wrote regarding the success of his friend in commerce in India:

His brother Mir Muhammad Shafi send him money in the first year of his residence, to purchase merchandise in Bengal and since the trade was profitable, the traders of Basra send him a huge sum in the next year and asked him to purchase merchandise for them on commission. He (Shushtari) continued this business and earned great profits out of it.\(^{70}\)

Abd ul Lati's life was different from Hazin's in many respects. He was neither a prominent scholar nor a distinguished poet. His literary production were his travelogue and his daily notes taken in a diary entitled Waqaye-'i Hind. Moreover Shushtari was bereft of the cautious approach which Hazin had towards the British. So he served the British in India and praised them profusely.

Ahmad Bihbahani

If Hazin honored his great ancestor, Shaykh Zahid Gilani, and if Shushtari was proud of his great grand father Sayyid Nimatullah Jaziyeri, Ahmad Bihbahani too can be found to be boasting about his ancestor, Muhammad Taqi Majlisi, a renowned *alim*, and, in the second place, his grandfather Aqa Muhammad Baqir Isfahani, also known as Wahid Bihbahani. Since Ahmad's reputation in India mainly rested on his grand father's fame, it is appropriate to give a short biographical sketch of this person as well.

Muhammad Baqir was born in 1705 in Isfahan where he spent his youth. According to Ahmad Bihbhani an uprising, very probably the Afghan invasion of Isfahan, forced him to migrate to Iraq.\textsuperscript{71} Mohammed Baqir started his education under outstanding scholars in Najaf, and since one of his teachers, Sayyid Sadruddin Qumi, was an \textit{Akhbari}, he also became inclined towards \textit{Akhbarism}, a particular ideological trend in Shiite Islam. But after sometimes he turned an acute \textit{Usuli} and propagated, \textit{Usulism}.\textsuperscript{72} In a short review the difference between the two schools is explained to understand their impact on the followers.

\textit{Akhbarism} is a school of thought in Isna Ashari Shiism which maintains that the traditions of the twelve Shiite Imams are the main source of religious knowledge. In contrast, Usulis were those scholars who introduced a methodology of jurisprudence and elements of Mutazilite\textsuperscript{73} theology into the Shiite imamology. Their readiness to allow a measure of speculative reasoning in the principal (\textit{usul}) of religious law earned them the title of Usulis.\textsuperscript{74}

There is no evidence to suggest that the terms \textit{Akhbaris} and \textit{Usulis} were in use before the Saljuq period. The earliest reference to the \textit{Akhbaris} as a distinct school occurs in the \textit{Kitab ul Mila\textbackslash wa\textbackslash mil Nihal} composed in 1127AD by Shahristani. The earliest reference to the opponents of \textit{Akhbaris} as \textit{Usulis} is noticed in an Imamite text \textit{Kitab ul Naqz} written around 1170AD by Abd ul Jalil Qazvini, who was a pro Usuli scholar.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Mirat ul Ahwal}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{73} Mutazilite was a school of early Muslim philosophy which held that reason, in addition to prophecy and revelation, can be used to understand the nature of Allah and existence, and guide man's actions to right or wrong results, and to perceive the difference between morality and immorality.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 716-717.
Family Tree of Ahmad Bihbahani

Muhammad Taqi Majlisi (1594-1659)
The founder of the later Akhbari school which is relevant for our discussion is generally considered to be Muhammad Amin b. Muhammad Sharif Astarabadi. He spent some years of his youth in Najaf and Shiraz, and later lived in Medina and Mecca, where he died in 1624 or 1622. His interests ranged from kalam and logic to medicine and adab, but centered particularly on hadith and usul ul-fiqh. It was his preoccupation with the latter which brought him both fame and notoriety. Astarabadi first adhered to the prevalent doctrine of Ijtihad or interpretation based on reasoning, but then changed his views, probably under the influence of his teacher Muhammad b. Ali Astarabadi (d. 1619) who told him that he had been predestined to revive the tariqa of Akhbaris. Muhammad Amin states that he spent several years in Medina in solitary meditation before returning to Mecca and completing his Fawaid ul Madaniyya in 1622AD. This work established Astarabadi’s reputation as one of the most uncompromising exponents of the Akhbari doctrine. Moreover this book had an effective role in promoting Akhbarism in some parts of Iraq, Iran, Bahrain and India.

The conflict between Akhbaris and the rationalist Usuli jurisprudents centered on two sets of issues. The first concerned the sources of law, with the Akhbaris restricting them to the Quran and oral reports (akhbar) from the Prophet and the Imams. The rationalists saw the consensus of the jurists as another source of legal judgment, as they did the independent reasoning (ijtihad) of the jurist. The Usulis divided all Shiis into formally trained jurists (mujtahids) and laymen, stipulating that ordinary believers must emulate the mujtahids in matters of subsidiary religious laws. The rationalists asserted that the mujtahids, as general representatives of the hidden Imam, could substitute for him in

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performing such tasks as giving legal judgments, implementing rulings, collecting and distributing alms (zakat and khums), mandating defensive holy war, and leading Friday congregational prayers. Although Akhbaris allowed the transmitter of oral reports from the Imams to perform judicial functions, they often disallowed some or all of the other functions in the absence of an infallible Imam. Akhbaris further rejected any division of believers into laymen and mujtahid-exemplars, holding that all Shiis must emulate.\textsuperscript{77}

At some unknown date Aqa Muhammad Baqir left Iraq for Bihbahan, a small town on the border of Khuzistan and Fars in the South western part of Iran. Ahmad Bihbahani does not mention the reason for his grand father’s migration to Bihbahan and also the reason for choosing it as his residence. Whether the conflict between Nadir Shah and the Ottomans in Iraq in 1732-33 forced Baqir Bihbahani to leave Iraq\textsuperscript{78} or whether the dominance of Akhbaris in Bihbahan persuaded him to choose this town in order to counter them\textsuperscript{79}, is not entirely clear. But what is clear is that Aqa Muhammad Baqir resided for thirty years in Bihbahan to earn the toponym.

After living for a considerable period of time in Bihbahan, Baqir came back to Karbala. At that time Akhbaris were dominant in Iraq and their hostility towards Usulis was so strong that they considered their books to be polluted and, in the case of an urgent need, touched them only with a handkerchief.\textsuperscript{80} The most eminent scholar among Akhbaris was Shaykh Yusuf Bahrani (1695-1772) whose students Muhammad Baqir tried to convert to Usulism. After sometimes his endeavour bore fruit and some of Bahrani’s students

\textsuperscript{80} Muhammad Baqir Khansari, \textit{Ruwzat ul Jannat}, Qum, II, p.95.
joined Bihbahani. Gradually the atmosphere of the shrine cities changed from Akhbarism to Usulism and Bihbahani was hailed as the hero who revived Usulism.

In these circumstances, Sayyid Dildar Ali Nasirabadi a young Indian scholar and a pro-Akhbari, moved from Lucknow to Iraq in 1779. He became familiar with Baqir Bihbahani and other scholars in Karbala, and studied with them. Under the influence of Bihbahani and other Usuli scholars, Nasirabadi abandoned Akhbarism and became an Usuli. When Nasirabadi came back to India he glorified his master, Baqir Bihbahani, and many Indian Shiites became familiar with this name. Ahmad Bihbahani, Muhammad Baqir’s grandson, later travelled to India under the shadow of his grandfather’s fame.

A catastrophic plague prevailed in Iraq in 1772, and Baqir sent his son, Muhammad Ali to Iran to save him from the epidemic. He stayed at the border region of Kirmanshah near Iraq and married the daughter of a city notable. Ahmad was born in 1777 AD in Kirmanshah. After preliminary education, Ahmad and his elder brother, Muhammad Jafar started learning jurisprudence (fiqh) under their father. When he was twenty, Ahmad left for the shrine cities in Iraq in order to continue his education. He studied under outstanding scholars like, Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Tabatabai, known as Bahrul Ulum and Shaykh Muhammad Jafar Najafi. Ahmad married his cousin in 1795 in Iraq.

The Wahabis invaded Karbala in 1801 and a lot of people were killed during this invasion. The fort of the city was also destroyed. The invasion made the city so insecure that Ahmad Bihbahani, after obtaining certificates from his teachers, Shaykh Jafar Najafi and Sayyid Muhsin Araji, left Iraq for Kirmanshah. These certificates testified his education as a scholar under his teachers. Bihbahani returned to Iraq again in 1804 and it

81 Dawani, Ustad-i Kul, p. 123.
was now that he decided to travel to India. Overcoming initial opposition from his family, he put his plan into practice and reached Bandar Abbas in September 1804. Since voyages would only take place in the sailing seasons, he did not want to wait at Bandar Abbas. He went to Qishm to look for travel equipments and spent eight days in harsh conditions before moving to Suhar in order to go to Masqat. Instead, he kept waiting for forty five days in Masqat, and finally found a decrepit ship which was leaving for Bombay. Some Iranian traders were travelling to India and Bihbahani accompanied them.

82 Mirat ul Ahwal, p. 166.