Chapter 3

JOURNEYS TO INDIA

In medieval times the journey to India from Iran was undertaken both by land and sea. The shortest land route between Isfahan and Agra via Bhakkar and Ajmer took two months. On this route the traveller had to bear the difficulties of crossing through the Thar desert. The other route via Qandhar, Kabul and Lahore took double the time. Iranian passengers usually preferred the sea route on account of safety. For the sea journey, the travellers boarded the ship at Bandar Abbas, Bushihr or Basra and landed in one of the Indian ports in Western India.

The case of Muhammad Ali Hazin Lahiji

Hazin’s journey to India was triggered by an incident that took place at Lar. On his way back to Iran from Mecca, Hazin noticed the violence of Nadir’s officers against the people of Bandar Abbas and found that there was no one to redress their grievances. One administrator had levied a new tax on date palms and had decreed conscription. People protested when the magistrate was imprisoned and flogged by the new governor of Lar, Wali Muhammad Khan Shamlu. Due to Hazin’s previous visits to Lar, people of this town knew him and complained to him about Nadir’s agents. Hazin advised them to be patient. However, the injustice of Wali Muhammad led a group of people to attack his house and murder him.

84 Tazkirat ul Ahwal, pp. 245-6.
85 Ibid, p. 249.
After this adventure the rebels came to Hazin. The advance of the commander of Fars, Muhammad Khan Baluch to suppress the rebellion, forced Hazin to contemplate leaving Lar.

I was in deep trouble due to that event and as much as I tried to get out of it was all in vain. People implored me to stay there and worse that it was rumored that the murder of the governor was instigated by me.86

When Muhammad Khan Baluch reached Lar, Hazin was still there. People came together and fought against Muhammad Khan. Since there was a riot in Jahrum, a town near Lar he hastened from Lar for Jahrum.

Hazin decided to leave Iran for Iraq after these incidents, but the siege of Baghdad by Nadir did not allow him to go there. He then went to Oman. The pollution at Masqat and the hot weather forced him to come back to Bandar Abbas. Because he had never been to Kirman and thought that his presence would not be noticed, he decided to go there. Ali Quli Khan Waleh Daghistani (1712-1755), one of the poets contemporary with Hazin, resided in Kirman. Waleh had gone to Bandar Abbas in order to travel to India, but since the season of the voyage had expired, he could not leave. Instead, he went to Kirman to take advantage of better weather and to wait for the next voyage. According to Waleh, one of the attendants of Wali Muhammad Khan Shamlu, the murdered governor of Lar, recognized Hazin in Kirman and informed the magistrate. The magistrate wanted to arrest Hazin but Waleh intervened. Waleh then talked to Hazin and persuaded him to go to Bandar Abbas. Later Waleh wrote in Delhi that the governor of Bandar Abbas entertained them

86 Tazkirat ul Ahwal, p. 250.
and Hazin stayed with him while Waleh left for India and after ten days Hazin also followed suit.  

Hazin does not mention his meeting with Waleh in Kirman. Rather, he wrote that he tried to stay incognito in Kirman in order to live in peace, but after sometimes his identity was revealed, and he was compelled to go to Bandar Abbas again. He was looking for a refuge when he spotted an opportunity:

A vessel was setting out for India and I determined to go along with it. It was the tenth of Ramazan 1146 (14 February 1734). When an English captain was informed of my decision, he came to my residence and discouraged me from going to India. He described the disadvantages there and encouraged me to travel to Europe, but I was not interested. Leaving every thing I embarked the ship and departed for Sind.  

When Hazin was standing at the shore of the Persian Gulf, watching a vessel whose destination was India a strange thought occurred to him. He realized that he had lost all attachment to his homeland. There was a feeling of despondency which had set into his mind. His close relatives and friends had perished, Nadir’s officers were oppressing people in different parts of Iran and his beloved land was transformed into a ruined place. The Iranian king, Shah Tahmasp II, had lost his sovereignty and was now a puppet in Nadir’s hand. Hazin himself was not secure from Nadir, either for his alleged complicity in the murder of the governor of Lar or owing to his pro Safavid proclivities. Moreover his family income had stopped during the Russian invasion of Gilan and he was short of funds.

88 *Tazkirat ul Ahwal*, p. 259.
Most biographers, following Walih Daghistani have mentioned that the main reason of Hazin’s journey to India was the fear of persecution following the murder charge.\textsuperscript{89}

A junior contemporary, Shustari reported as reason for Hazin’s visit to India his intention to seek help from Muhammad Shah for the Safavid king.\textsuperscript{90} Echoing Shushtari’s remark, Azad mentions two contradictory reasons for Hazin’s voyage to India. He writes that Hazin had heard of the confused condition of the Indian people, and he came to settle their affairs. He adds that Hazin’s disagreement with Nadir, percieptated his departure to India.\textsuperscript{91} A third reason given was the attraction of wealth and a life of luxury available in India.\textsuperscript{92}

As Hazin remarked, his partnership in the murder of Lar governor was only a calumny and his conflict with Nadir was more because of his cordiality with Shah Tahmasp and also owing to the warnings he gave Tahmasp regarding Nadirs designs. When Hazin left Iran for the subcontinent, he had lost his confidence in the Safavid king, so it is unlikely that he wanted to persuade Muhammad Shah in favour of Shah Tahmasp.

The issue of Hazins interest in seeking wealth can also be questioned. All Iranians who came looking for opportunities to India first hastened to reach the capital, whereas Hazin refrained from going to Delhi for two years and passed his time in other regions, mainly in Multan. Moreover Hazin’s isolation in Delhi shows his reluctance towards the splendour of the court. What is worthy of remark is that Hazin did not have a specific plan to migrate to India when his difficulties intensified. He intended first to go to Najaf in Iraq.

\textsuperscript{89} Riyazush Shuara, p. 201
\textsuperscript{90} Tuhfat ul Alam, p. 414.
but when he was informed that the way to Baghdad was not secure, due to Nadir's attack, he changed his plan and in a critical moment decided to flee to India.

**The case of Abdul Latif Shushtari**

Contrary to Hazin, Shushtari travelled to India with a plan. Indeed travelling to the subcontinent was usual in his family because they lived near the commercial port of Basra and his family members worked as factors to big merchants. Moreover some members of his clan were acquainted with the knowledge and practice of medicine and astronomy, which had a good market in India. For instance, his second brother, Muhammad Jafar, had moved to India when Abdu Latif was a child. Later when Shushtari travelled to the subcontinent, he met his brother in Lucknow and wrote that he lived there honourably as a renowned physician. 93

Shushtari bade farewell to education in 1780 and accepted his brother's invitation to join him in commercial activities. Although they were engaged in commerce their business was not thriving. So Shushtari thought of migrating to India.

And as I explained, I was thinking about Hindustan. My friends prevented me and I continued to insist, my brother surrendered to my wish and on 14 Shawwal 1202 I with my brother, Shaykh Muhammad Ali bin Shaykh Muhammad, embarked in one of the British ships and sailed. 94

Occupation in commerce was Shushtari first motive to travel to India; but we would see that he was engaged in other works as well.

93 *Atashkada Azar*, p. 141.
94 *Tuhfat ul Alam*, p. 234.
The case of Ahmad Bihbahani

Bihbahai's travel to India was mainly rooted in Awadh's attraction for the inhabitants of the shrine cities. The founder of the Awadh kingdom was an Iranian, Mir Muhammad Amin Nishapuri (d.1739) known as Burhan ul Mulk, from Khurasan and born in a family of jurists judgment. He came to India in 1708, and his role in saving Muhammad Shah (1719-1748) from the control of the Barha Sayyids, induced the Mughal Emperor to grant him the governorship of Agra, and the title of Sa’adat Khan Bahadur. Afterwards in 1771, he was appointed as the governor of Awadh. There are two contradictory opinions offered by modern historians about his appointment. Rizvi suggests that it was a reward by Muhammad Shah to Sa’adat Khan on account of his success in the suppression of the Jat uprising,95 Cole mentions it a demotion because of Sa’adat Khan’s failure in subduing the rebellion.96 Either way, Burhan ul Mulk founded a state in Awadh which lasted for 136 years.

Muhammad Shah's weakness gave gradual autonomy to this new state; it became only nominally dependent on the Mughal kingdom. The formation of the Shiite state coincided with the decline of the Safavid dynasty in Iran.

The Shiis and Nawabs of this region sent their financial gifts to the shrine cities in Iraq. From the reign of Ghazi ud Din Haidar, the first autonomous monarch of Awadh, a huge sum entitled Awadh Bequest (mirath-i Awadh) was remitted to Iraq. Nakash explains the story of it as follows:

95 Rizvi, History of Isna Ashari Shiis in India, II, p.45.
96 Cole, Roots, p. 41.
In 1825, during a period of financial constraints by war in Burma, the British Governor General of India accepted a ten-million-rupee loan from Ghazi al-Din Haydar, the king of Oudh. The character of the loan was perpetual: The principal was never to be repaid, and the interest, fixed at 5 percent per annum, was to be applied by the government of India in perpetuity to specified objects. Among the beneficiaries from the interest were four women: Nawwab Mubarak Mahal, Sultan Maryam Bagam, Mumtaz Mahal and Sarfaraz Mahal (the first two being wives of the king) were to be paid a monthly allowance of 10,000, 2,500, 1,100, and 1,000 rupees, respectively. Other allowances amounting altogether to Rs 929 a month were assigned to servants and dependents of Sarfaraz Mahal. The agreement stipulated that upon the death of the four women, one third of their allowance would be paid to whomsoever they appointed in their wills, the remaining two third being delivered to the mujtahids residing in Najaf and Karbala for distribution among “deserving persons”. In case of intestacy, the mujtahids were to receive the entire allowance.97

The Awadh Bequest was a medium by which the British planned to exercise their influence over the mujtahids of Iraq. This was the reason for some high mujtahids to refuse their involvement in its distribution.98

We have seen that the Iranian and Shiite character of the first rulers of Awadh drew Iranians toward this region. The invasion of Karbala by the Wahabis in 1801 accelerated the process of travel from Iraq to Awadh. When this event occurred Bihbahani was in Kirmanshah, but he travelled to Karbala to obtain certificates from his teachers, Shaykh

Jafar Najafi and Mir Sayyid Ali Tabatabai. Obtaining certificates from his masters signaled Bihbahani’s decision to travel out of Iran and Iraq to places where his religious status might need certification.

If we look at Bihbahani’s motives for travelling to India more closely, we find that in addition to financial, there were other reasons. He arrived in Bombay in May 1805 (Safar 1220) and after forty five days he left for Hydarabad in order to seek monetary contribution from Mir Alam Bahadur, the Iranian governor of Hydarabad for the restoration of the Karbala fort. Initially the governor was hesitant to contribute but on Bihbahani’s insistence, he agreed. Bihbahani considered his success important and worthy of mention:

This was the highest and the greatest of the gains of my journey which proved to be a source of great satisfaction to thousand of faithfuls, spiritual men and the keepers of the holy shrines, which could be achieved only through the efforts of my humble self. God, exalted be His power, knows fully well that the main object of my journey from the Holy threshold was also aimed at this.100

Definitely one of Bihbahani’s motives for this journey was commerce. He does not talk about it explicitly, but it is clear from his notes. He chose a person, Aqa Muhammad Hasan Khurasani, as his steward at Masqat “who was very skillful and kind.” Bihbahani’s

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99 Mirat ul Ahwal, p. 163.
101 Mirat ul Ahwal, p. 177.
visit to Calcutta was also for the purpose of trade. He and his companions, all Iranian
traders, travelled from Masulipatam to Calcutta making purchases on their way.\textsuperscript{102}

The five years residence of Bihbahani, from 1805 to 1810, indicates that he had
many motives for being in India. If he wanted to settle just his financial problems, it was
possible for him to fulfil it in a shorter duration. The length of his residence in a foreign
country indicates that there were reasons other than this.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, p. 254.
The three above mentioned travellers commenced their journeys to India from two points. Hazin departed from Bandar Abbas' Abdul Latif and Bihbahani from Masqat. The destinaion of the three was also not the same; while Hazin landed in Thatta, his young compatriot, Shushtari alighted in Masulipatnam, and Bihbahani's ship docked in Bombay. It is possible to map their intineraries and contextualize their experiences and observations.

Hazin's Itinerary

After the Lar event, when Hazin was looking for a tranquil place to settle down, he thought of Kirman, the only place he had not seen. He performed the first part of his journey during the peaceful period in Iran, before the Afghan invasion, when he moved between different regions, searching for eminent scholars. The second part of his journey started after the siege of Isfahan by Afghans. He covered all the cities one by one while resting in between. Hazin's itinerary can be constructed from his travelogue; the places he visited or mentioned and the people he met.

Hazin left Bandar Abbas on 10 Ramazan 1146 (14 February 1734) for Sind and arrived in Thatta on 1 Shawwal 1146 (7 March 1734). Because of his adventures in Iran, he wished to have remained unknown in India, but some Iranian traders recognized him on the