INTRODUCTION

The existence of three travelogues belonging to three Iranian travellers to India, viz. Muhammad Ali Hazin Lahiji, Abdul Latif Shushtari and Ahmad Bihbahani, paved the way for this research. The travelogues preserve distinct perceptions of India, Indian literary culture and Shiism held by their authors during their visit to India. Iranian have been travelling to India and living in this country for centuries. In addition to other things, Shiism acted as somekind of a bridge between India and Iran. It is therefore natural to expect that Iranian writers would have some understanding of India and Indian Shiism. Their perceptions of India and Indain Shiism also reflected their own personalities and views about themselves and their country.

Hazin was a prominent scholar. In a certain sense he was unique among the Iranian travellers to India insofar as he combined three qualities in himself: scholarship, poetry and devotion to Shiism. He had demonstrated his humanism during the socio-political crisis of Iran, when contrary to the tradition of the elites; he had joined people in their calamities and tried to help them. But this versatile scholar behaved differently in India and became largely passive and politically inactive. Moreover he was critical of Indians in general; courtiers and literary men in particular. An examination of Hazin’s perception of Indians and the responses he got constitute an important component of this work.

The other writer Abdu Latif came from a renowned family of Shushtar and held views about India and Indians which were different from Hazin. It will be interesting to examine his views and place them in the context of his time and personality.

The third traveller Ahmad Bihbahani too travelled to India as a Shiite, and his critical assessments caused some tensions between him and the Indian scholars. An
analysis of Bihbahani’s perceptions of Shiism in India forms the final part section of this work.

Pursuing Hazin’s and Bihbahni’s views of India and of Indian Shiism leads us to two valuable works, viz. *Tanbih ul Ghafilin* by Siraj ud Din Ali Khan Arzu, and *A’ina-i Haq Numa*, by Najaf Ali Faizabadi, Nasirabadi’s pupil. Although these books were written in two separate fields, and seem unrelated to each other, they are similar in one significant particular. The first book, as a critique of the literary achievements of Hazin, tries to prove the proficiency of Indian literary men, and the second work, through a refutation of Bihbahani’s remarks, aims to show the higher achievements of an Indian Shiite scholar and his contribution to Shiism in India.

Since the journeys of our protagonists took place happened in the context of long standing relations between India and Iran it is proper to examine the causes of Iranian travels and migrations to India, particularly in medieval times. The first chapter deals with this matter.

It is obvious that the cultural upbringing of a person is effective in forming his social outlook and his views of others. The three characters of our story lived in different times and grew up under various circumstances. Hazin passed his life in the Safavid period, Shushtari grew in the Zand regime, and Bihbahabi lived in the Qajar period. A biographical survey of the three personages, especially their intellectual life is the theme of the second chapter. In a separate chapter (chapter3) the motives of their travel to India are also examined.

The three Iranians arrived in India at different points in time. To follow their itinerary in the new land and map their travel geography give us access to the condition of
India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as allow us to see the circumstances which shaped their outlooks.

The last chapter deals with the opinions of the three Iranians of India, Indians and Indian Shiism. Central to the discussions is the polemics between Hazin and Indian literary personalities, as well as the dispute between Bihbahani and Indian Shiite scholars.

This dissertation is based largely on primary sources, notably the travelogues cum memoirs of the three Iranians. There is very little by way of secondary literature that one could consult specifically on the theme of the dissertation. There is a good deal of modern writings on commerce as well as Shiism in India and Iran. They have been indicated in appropriate place in the chapters. It is worthy of mention that specifically in this field and to my knowledge no research has been done so far.