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Although emigration from the Iranian plateau to the Indian subcontinent is not a phenomenon specific to any particular period, the trend does seem to have grown in significance after the foundation of Muslim governments on the subcontinent (see v. and vi. above). Immigrants from the Iranian plateau, known as *tājik*, had already begun to play important roles at the court of the Delhi Sultanate (q.v.) by the 13th and 14th centuries (Jackson, pp. 75, 79, 179). It is clear, however, that the second half of the 16th century marked the beginning of a new phase in Iranian immigration. The Persians who headed for the Indian subcontinent were many and varied, and included administrators, officials, scholars, poets, Sufis, craftsmen, artisans, artists, and traders among their number. Their refined culture, which was rooted in the Persian language and lifestyle, afforded them certain advantages as they sought patronage in the royal courts of the Mughals in northern India, and the 'Ādelšāhis (q.v.) and the Qoṭb-šāhis in the Deccan (q.v.). Most were generously received by these courts and obtained important posts there. Yet it is important to bear in mind that, in marked contrast to the movements of these sophisticated elites, there is no evidence of massive and systematic immigration of either nomads or peasants to the Indian subcontinent.



Immigration to India from the Iranian plateau was mainly a concern of the elite.

The relative proportion of Persian elites bearing the name “Irani” among Mughal notables was 25.5 percent in 1575-95, 28.4 percent in 1647-48, 27.8 percent in 1658-78, and 21.9 percent in 1679-1707. We can safely say, therefore, that between 20 and 30 percent of the elite at the Mughal court were comprised of Persians. The findings of Abolghasem Dadvar indicate that, of the 461 Persians who emigrated to India during the first half of the 17th century, 187 (41 percent) came from locations in the central plateau, such as Isfahan, Qazvin, Yazd, Tehran, Qom, and Kāšān; 70 (15 percent) came from eastern and northeastern regions, such as Mašhad, Torbat, Saraḳs, Sabzevār, and Nišāpur; whilst the number of immigrants from western and northwestern regions, such as Ardabil, Tabriz, Hamadān, and Lorestān, was 64 (14 percent); 48 (10 percent) came from southern areas, such as Shiraz, Kāzerun, Jahrom, Hormozgān; 28 (6 percent) originated in northern locations, such as Astarābād, Āmol, Rašt, Lāhijān; and 9 (2 percent) came from southwestern regions, such as Ḳuzestān and Kohgiluya (Dadvar, p. 369). In other words, more than two-thirds of Persians came from the eastern half of the Iranian plateau, and this tendency remains consistent throughout the entire Mughal period (Haneda, pp. 132-33).

In general, two different types of immigration can be discerned. One was forced immigration, and this category encompassed refuge from religious persecution, flight from war or repression, and political asylum. Theoretically speaking, this kind of immigration was not restricted to any particular time or place, and immigrants who left their homelands under duress seldom returned. The immigration of the Zoroastrians and the Isma‘ilis in an earlier period certainly fall into this category. After the foundation of the Shi‘ite Safavid government at the beginning of the 16th century, some Persians were prompted by their firm belief in Sunnism to head for India and Central Asia, as Sunnite governments there were a sure and safe place of refuge for them. Yet at the same time, one should bear in mind that the royal courts of India valued talent above all else and were, therefore, prepared to receive anyone, so long as he possessed abilities in a specific field. From the Indian perspective, differences in religious belief were not of great importance.

The other type of immigration was voluntary. Those who failed to prosper in Safavid society would often relocate to India to try their luck there. In cases such as these, the immigrants might well return to their homeland, or at least



keep in touch with friends and relatives there. Sometimes these immigrants would move from one court to another within the Indian subcontinent. For Persian-speaking notables who were well versed in court life, the issue of whether they served the Safavids or some other dynasty in India was not of paramount concern. As the saying goes, “India was a source of fortune” for them (Haneda, pp. 135-37).

Sanjay Subrahmanyam insists that this phenomenon should be understood within the wider context of the history of Iranian migration to the Indian Ocean world. According to him, Iranian elite migration follows a complex, three-centuries-long cycle, which extends from the early 15th century to the middle of the 18th century. During the first phase, dispersion occurred largely across the littoral of the western Indian Ocean, although it also included migration to the Red Sea and East Africa, Gujarat, and the Deccan (qq.v.). The second phase, which commenced in the last quarter of the 16th century, saw a concentration of migration to South Asia. The third phase, which began in about 1650, witnessed a further widening of operations by the Persians, especially to Southeast Asia (Ayuthia of Narai and the Arakan court in northern Burma). Subrahmanyam’s version of events is, indeed, an accurate account of the phenomenon. Yet neither the reasons behind this broad expansion of Iranian people to the Indian Ocean world nor the apparently sudden termination of this movement in the 18th century have, as yet, been satisfactorily explained. As far as the latter question is concerned, political disorder and economic weakness in India at that time must have contributed to the decline of Iranian immigration. Nevertheless, if we follow Subrahmanyam’s argument, further explanations for the trend will have to be sought within a wider context: namely that of the history of the Indian Ocean world.

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