

CONCEPTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF INDIAN OCEAN MIGRATION: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF HADHRAMI SAYYID DIASPORA IN MALABAR

Anas Edoli
Research Scholar
Department of History
S.S.U.S. Kalady

Introduction

There are different opinions among the historians on the time and space of Hadhrami migration. Historians like Ulrike Freitag opined that the Hadhrami migration started in early thirteenth century as it is evident from the writings of the Ibn Bathuta. However in the case of Malabar, Hadhrami migration is believed from eighth and ninth century onwards and increased by thirteenth century. But the advance of European powers into the Indian Ocean thwarted the Hadhrami migration and stopped the Hadhrami trade activities in these regions.

In the eighteenth century, Hadhrami migration resumed across the Indian ocean territories like Indonesia, Singapore, Malay archipelago, Malabar and etc. The main reason behind this migration was that the political unrest and demographical pressure emerged in Hadhramaut. The majority of migrants were the traders who engaged in the trade activities in the Indian Ocean regions and sent back the remittance to Hadhramaut. Along with traders, many Sayyid communities migrated and settled at different parts of Indian Ocean rims. As the spiritual advisors of the traders during the long voyage, they got acceptance among the local rulers. Later, they influenced in the socio cultural activities of the local people with their activities. Moreover as they were descendants of prophet, local people gave due respect to them.

Pre Colonial Migration

There is no much evidence of Hadhrami Sayyid migration in pre-colonial periods. However it is assumed that the Hadhrami traders were came to Malabar in pre Islamic times along with other Arab traders. Ibn Batuta also says the presence of Hadhrami traders in Malabar before tenth century A.D.ⁱ There are some manuscripts and written documents of Hadhrami Sayyids in Malabar during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. One of the manuscripts found at Kallamala written that Abdulla Maialavi has been buried at Kallamala in the thirteenth century.ⁱⁱ The same manuscript also says about the *dars*ⁱⁱⁱ conducted by the Mailavi at the same mosque.

Besides this there are many tombs which are believed to be the tomb of Hadhrami Sayyids. Many people flowing to these tombs to get the blessings of deceased scholar and annually celebrating the *nercha*.^{iv} There are many tombs at the villages of Malabar without knowing the real name of the Sufi saints. Recent studies proves that, many of these tombs are belonged to the Hadhrami Sayyids who came along with the traders as spiritual advisors and settled here, based on the evidences available in the western coasts of India. Ulrike frietag writes “*Sayyid* historians- writing, of course, only about the *sāda* and thus leaving us at a loss with regard to the possible migration of other Hadhramis- claim that the first *sāda* migrated to India around 1220, even though there are some hints that Arab (and probably Hadhrami, although not necessarily Sayyid) migration might have occurred much earlier.^v This assumption taken by the Ulrike Frietag considering the oldness of the tombs found at Mumbai and Hyderabad where found tens of saints tombs venerated by the local people.

Sayyid Migration During the Colonial Era

In the second half of the eighteenth century many Hadhrami people started migration across the Indian Ocean region due to the political and demographical pressure in Hadhramaut. Majorities of these migrants were traders who engaged in trading activities in these regions. Along with traders many Sayyid groups migrated to

Indian Ocean territories, the major groups who migrated to the Malabar were the *Bafaqi*, *Jifri*, *Jamllayl* and etc. These groups accompanied with the Barami trading community and settled in Malabar. Zamorin of Calicut also provided all facilities to the Sayyids and arranged a residence at Kuttichira as they were the pioneers of the traders in Calicut which known as Maliyekkal house and exempted them from all kinds of taxes.

After years, Hadhrami Sayyids were appointed as the Qazi of the mosques in Malabar and the Imams. During these days Hadhrami Sayyids exhibited many miracles and extraordinary activities which attracted many people to them.^{vi} There is a history spread amongst the Mappila Muslims that Sayyid Alawi was praying in a mosque in Malabar behind an *imam* (who leads the prayer). Amidst the praaer, Sayyid Alawi quit the prayer and prayed independently. This was questioned by the people after the prayer. Sayyid Alawi answered that the Imam was not indulged in the prayer, but thinking many other material things. This was found as real fact when questioned the *Imam*. This caused to get good acceptance for Sayyid Alawi in Malabar.^{vii} In the same manner there are many other miracles and stories belonged to Hadhrami Sayyids which made them acceptable among the local people.

The spread of Ba- Alawi order was another important factor which resulted by the Hadhrami migration. This order performed as part of Mappila culture than a systematic order. Many of the Hadhrami rituals were became parts of the daily routines of Mappila Muslims. For instance, the reciting of *Haddad Rathib* is a ritualistic practice of Ba- Alawi order, but it practice by the majority of Mappilas after *magrib* prayer and it is the routine to gather at the mosque between *isha* and *magrib* prayer to recite *Haddad Rathib*.

The spread of *Shafi* School of jurisprudence was yet another influence Hadhrami Sayyid migration to the Malabar. Even though *Shafi* School was already present in Malabar, Hadhrami migration gave it rejuvenation with writing many texts and giving the teachings to the local people. These Sayyids started many *palli dars* where taught the *Shafi* jurisprudence texts and it laws. Besides these they authored many texts to propagate *sunni* ideology among the Mappila Muslims. Sheikh Jifri one of the prominent writer among the Hadhrami Sayyids authored many texts to propagate Sunni ideology and wash out the Persian/*Shia* beliefs of

Kondotty facts led by the Sha Muhammed and his followers. He wrote Irshadathul Jifri only to oppose the Kondotty beliefs and to prove authenticity of *sunni* doctrines.

Push and Pull Factors of Hadhrami Sayyid Migration

The eighteenth and nineteenth century Hadhramaut witnessed bloodsheds and bloodbath against the ruling *Yafi* families by two prominent dynasties in Hadhramaut, namely, Al Quaythi and Abdullah al Kathiri. Finally they could establish two separate kingdoms at Hadhramaut by defeating the minor kingdoms there and both these dynasties existed till the proclamation of the democratic republic of Yemen in 1968. During this long span Hadhramaut was a battlefield which witnessed many bloodsheds and massacres.

According to Friedhelm Hartwig several international factors were involved in these changes in Hadhramaut, which were part of a complex political dynamics in the second half of eighteenth century. The strategic interest of Great Britain in the Indian Ocean basin, the international relations of Hadhramaut and Hadhrami migrants, and especially the destiny of Hadhrami mercenaries in the Indian princely state of Hyderabad were important factors”.^{viii} Some historians argue that the lawless and chaotic reign of Yafi family (1750- 1850) paved the way for political unrest in Hadhramaut and the area came under continuous raid and people were shouldered with high taxes.

At the beginning of second half of eighteenth century, many Hadhrami Sayyids migrated from Tarim, Shibam, Sayun to the nearby villages condemning the socio political conditions existed in these areas. Finally, the Sada^{ix} supported the tribal people to protest against ruling families which were culminated unsuccessful. Therefore they moved to different parts of the Indian Ocean tregions such as the Malay Archipelago, Malabar Coast, Hyderabad and East Africa . The Hadhramies who migrated to Hyderabad were forced to leave, when the British established their power in Western India because of Sayyids anti- British approach.

According to Ulrik Freitag, the important reason for Hadhrami diaspora in the second half of the eighteenth century and nineteenth century were the socio political circumstances of Hadhramaut.^x In terms of political affairs, there were incessant fights between the local rulers and in case of economy, the drought and other natural calamities wrecked havoc on the Hadhrami people along with locusts made hazardous problems on agriculture. Freitag also argued that the global economic arenas also became a pull factor for the Indian Ocean migration. It was the time when British shifted from the naval power to colonial power, therefore hadhrami migrant got a golden opportunity to engage in the Indian Ocean trading networks.

The growth of global capitalism brought new opportunities to the Indian Ocean territories including the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. The opening of the Suez Canal (1869) was an epoch making event in the history of world economy, what played a vital role in increasing mobility with more frequent availability of steam ships in the Indian Ocean.^{xi} These factors attracted the Hadhrami traders to the Indian Ocean rims in order to partake in expanding capitalist market. As a result, world economy was flourished and Hadhrami traders could do some favors for the welfare of their home country through the trade in the Indian Ocean. Along with the trade many Sufi scholars also migrated to the Indian Ocean territories such as Malabar, Malay Archipelago and other parts of the Indian Ocean countries with the aim of Islamic propagation in these areas.^{xii}

Even though Islam arrived in these regions before the advance of Hadhramies, it became a new awakening for the Mappila Muslims in Malabar.^{xiii} The Sayyids from the *sisila* of Jifri and Bafaqi were the most important amongst the migrant propagators and these two communities are still present in different parts of Indian ocean regions.

In later years the economy of the poor valley of Hadhramaut began to improve through remittance sent by the traders in the Indian Ocean territories, because, traders were very vigilant about their home land. According to Der Meulen, who visited a Hadhramaut in the 1930s, “The bounties of Java gave Hureidha her chance, lifted her out of poverty and decay to the rank of a prosperous oasis”.^{xiv} It is worth mentioning that the Hadhrami migration a male centered, because, women were not included in migration and they remained at

home by nurturing their children at homes. Against this background, polygamy became very prevalent amongst the Hadhrami migrants across the Indian rims.

Yet there is a big question remaining unanswered that, how Hadhramies could migrate to the Indian Ocean regions which were under British colonial power in those days. It may perhaps Hadhrami people were very astute in diplomacy and strategy and they made alliances with colonial powers. Against this background, one can see that the Dutch colonial powers sought help from the Hadhrami migrants for their colonial expansion in South East Asia like in Brunei, Timor, etc. In the same manner Hadhramies concluded an alliance with the British people and Hadhramies does not engage in the British affairs in Aden. Thereafter the British permitted the Hadhrami people to settling in the regions which were under their control in those days. As a result, Hadhramies reached the major centers of Indian ocean territories which were under the control of the British or the Dutch.

ⁱ Ibn Batuta, *Rihla*, p. 214.

ⁱⁱ Kitabhu Mirhamul Vasaeel bi Madh Maialawi ibn Balawi bi Kallamala il Mashoor, Arabic Manuscript, p. 12.

ⁱⁱⁱ It is an Islamic educational system in which teacher gives the class to the students sitting around him.

^{iv} It is annual celebration in commemoration of a reputed Sufi saints

^v Ulrike Freitag, 'Reflection on the Longevity of Hdhrami diaspora in Indian Ocean', in Ibrahim Abu Shouk (ed), *Hadhrami Diaspora in Southeast Asia: Identity Maintenance or Assimilation?*, Brill, Leiden, 2009, p. 23

^{vi} C.K. Kareem, *Kerala Muslim Directory*, Charitram Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 2001, p. 128.

^{vii} K.K. Kareem, *Mamburam Sayyid Alawi*, Thirurangadi, p.18.

^{viii} Friedhelm Hartwig, Epantion, 'State Foundation and Freedom: The Contest for Power in Hadhramaut in the 19th Century' in Ulrieke Freitag and William G. Clarence Smith(eds.), *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s to 1960s*, Brill, Leiden, 1997, p. 35.

^{ix} It is an another honorific term to denote Sayyids.

^x Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants*, Brill Publications, Leiden, 2005, p.47.

^{xi} Engsang Ho, 'Hadhramies Abroad in Hadhramaut: the Muwalladin' in Ulrieke Freitag, William G. Clarence Smith (eds.) op.cit., p. 139.

^{xii} R.B.Sergent, *The Sayyids of Hadhramaut*, Brill, Leiden, p. 28

^{xiii} A.P. Ibrahim Kunju, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: Their History and Culture*, Sandhya Publication, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, p. 121

^{xiv} D. Vander Meulen, *Aden to South Arabia: A Journey in South Arabia*, J. Murray, London, 1947, p. 156