

MUSADDIQ 'S MEMOIRS

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MY ENTRY INTO THE CIVIL SERVICE AND MY EDUCATION IN IRAN

1. My Admission to the Civil Service

Amongst the personalities in the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah, Hasan Ali Khan Garrusi entitled Amir Nizam was well known as a man of strong will. For several years he had been the chief administrator under the crown prince (Muzaffar al-Din Mirza) in Tabriz¹. To facilitate his affairs, he usually made use of the crown princes' two sons-in-law who were rivals to each other. These were Sultan Abdul Majid Mirza entitled Ain al-Dawleh on the one hand, and Abdul Husain Mirza entitled Nusrat al-Dawleh, my uncle, on the other. After the death of Nasir al-Dawleh Farmanfarma, my uncle became the governor-general of Kirman. With my uncle's departure, the competition was ended and Ain al-Dawleh remained in Tabriz without rival. My uncle having inherited both the status and title of his late brother, left Tabriz and came to Tehran and from there he went on to his new post in Kirman. Amir Nizam had resigned his post in mid 1269 AH solar (1890). He left office because in his view it was against the national interest to execute the government's orders concerning the tobacco concession which had been granted to foreigners. Having resigned his post in Tabriz, Amir Nizam came to Tehran. My father, who was an old friend of the Amir, was unwell and could not visit him because of his poor health. Although I was not more than nine years old, my father sent me to visit the Amir. I remember very vividly that the Amir was sitting in the garden of his residence in Tehran receiving various guests. After asking about the health of my father, the Amir ordered his keeper to bring him a copy of Hafiz. He opened that book to tell my for-



tune. This was the ghazal which came up in opening Hafiz's book: O' my heart it is much better if you are ruined by a rosy wine; It is good to have the grace without having gold or treasure. In a place where poor men are given the status of ministers, I expect that your grandeur would be more than that of any other person. En route to Laila's house which is full of risk to one's life, the first condition is to be Majnun the mad man par excellence. I read that ghazal from the beginning to end. The Amir then put a bookmark between the pages of the book and gave that book of poems to me as a present.² He also gave me a photograph of himself writing my name, and putting his own autograph underneath it. He then told me to read that ghazal for my father as well. After Amir Nizam, another gentleman Mirza Abdul-Rahim Khan Qa'im Maqam was appointed to the office of chief administrator in the province of Azerbaijan which was then by custom always governed by the crown prince. The new chief administrator of Azerbaijan came to Tehran accompanying the crown prince in the winter of the year 1273 AH solar (1894). My father had by that time been dead for two years and I was only

twelve years old. After the death of my father, my mother had fallen out with my elder brother, Mirza Husain Vazir-Daftar. So she did not wish to remain in that part of our residence which my father had given to me in his own lifetime. Thus my mother married Fazlullah Khan Vakil al-Mulk who was then the chef-de-cabinet to the crown prince, and is the father of Senator ValaTabar of today. My mother, having married this gentleman, took me with her to Tabriz. Abdul-Rahim Khan Qa'im Maqam, who was the chief administrator of Azerbaijan at that time, was a personality of good repute. However, because most of his previous appointments had been held abroad, he was not adequately informed about the internal affairs of the country. Also, because Farmanfarma, who was competing with Ain al-Dawleh, was not in Tabriz, the chief administrator could not stay long in that job. Ain al-Dawleh had been appointed to the governorship of Khuy and Salmas, but he was playing a waiting game. He was refusing to go to his place of appointment, prolonging his stay in Tabriz. It was during this period that the residence of Qa'im Maqam was looted, under the pretext of a shortage of bread in the city of Tabriz. Upon this riot, Ain al-Dawleh was appointed to the office of chief administrator of Azerbaijan.

Qa'im Maqam had seen the zoological gardens of foreign countries and become extremely attached to birds; he was keeping a large number of birds in his own residence in Tabriz. The looters killed the birds and destroyed the head and tail of the lion statue which he had made from plaster. Qa'im Maqam's residence was later repaired by order of the crown prince and he was returned to it.

When I went together with Jamshid Mirza Sa'id Nizam, my mother's uncle, to visit Qa'im Maqam he showed us the bits and pieces of one of his expensive china bowls and said, 'My dear fellow, had you not broken this beautiful bowl and had instead taken it with you intact, you could have still used it to get some yogurt from the local grocer'.

It was rumoured that a landlord had gone to Qa'im Maqam complaining that his property had been stolen. In reply he had said in Turkish to the complainer, 'My dear, go and become a dog-keeper'.

Up until 1275 solar (1896) when Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated, Ain al-Dawleh remained the chief administrator of Azerbaijan. After that he came to Tehran with the new shah, Muzaffar al-Din Shah. The new shah was quite satisfied with the services rendered by his father's last grand vazir, Amin al-Sultan. The grand vazir had prevented the occurrence of any disorder during the succession to the throne and had ensured the maintenance of internal security. Thus the new shah kept Amin al-Sultan in office. His old chief administrator, Ain al-Dawleh, who was a strong candidate to become grand vazir, was sent to the governorship of Burujird, Luristan and Khuzistan.

It was not long after the arrival of the new shah in Tehran that Farmanfarma, the governor-general of Kirman, came there. His old political rival, Ain al-Dawleh, was not in Tehran, so Farmanfarma, having managed to enlist the assistance of a number of his own supporters in the royal court, created a situation which gave him the upper hand. This led to a total change in the format of the administration and the removal of Amin al-Sultan from the post of grand vazir. Until then, the administration of the country had been conducted directly by the grand vazir. After this reshuffle, it was devolved and entrusted collectively into the hands of four ministers as follows: Ali Quli Khan Mukhbir al-Dawleh was appointed minister of the interior, Farmanfarma was made minister of war, Haj Shaikh Muhsin Khan Mushir al-Dawleh was made minister of foreign affairs and Mirza Abdul-wahhab Khan Nizam al-Mulk was made minister of finance.

In those days, when any grand personality was removed from office, his relatives and subordinates too would be made redundant. Thus (my stepfather) Mirza Fazlullah Khan Vakil al-Mulk, the private secretary to the shah, made me the official accountant (mustawfi) of the province of Khurasan. Prior to my appointment, that office was held by Mirza Fazlullah Khan Nuri who was private secretary to Amin al-Sultan, the former grand vazir.

In the old regime, the grant of a title and appointment to public office was not conditional upon full age and maturity. This is why after the

death of my father when I was not more than twelve years old, Nasir al-Din Shah gave me a title. A good many appointments were given by the shah to the children and grandchildren of people of high office, either in their own lifetime or after their death, as a token of appreciation for the services rendered to the state by the father or ancestors. If the children so appointed could not attend to the functions because they were not yet of age, their father, and in the event of his death, some other person, would attend to these functions until such time as the under-aged appointees could themselves take up their duties. For example, after the death of Mirza Yusuf Sadr A'azam, the grand vazir, his son, Mirza Hasan, who was only a few years old, was given the title of Mustufi al-Mamalik and appointed to the ministry of finance. As long as my father was alive he was responsible for attending to all the duties of that ministry for the child.

In my own case, after I was appointed the official accountant for the province of Khurasan, an experienced accountant who had been working for many years for the accountants for that province was attached to me. Before long, I mastered the job myself. I was satisfied with this appointment only for the first few years. When I realised that there were other areas of skill and scholarship which I had not learnt during my school days, I became unhappy and tried to obtain that type of knowledge.

2. My Education in Iran

My fruitless connection with some of the opponents of Amin al-Sultan, the grand vazir, made him angry towards me. This became evident to me in an instance which I shall now describe. There was a man in whose favour a salary had been instituted by the government. He refused to pay the percentage which was customarily due and payable to me as the official accountant. I therefore refused to certify his grant for payment, and he took a complaint against me to the grand vazir, Amin al-Sultan. This gave the grand vazir an opportunity to say what he thought of me and to express his wish to remove me from office. But in the end he kept me.

After that incident I refused to mix with people and sought refuge in my own home. Lack of full-time occupation had made me unhappy. The

School of Political Science had just been opened in Tehran and I wanted to enrol there. However, it was not possible for a civil servant of several years standing to be treated as a student. Thus I arranged to be taught by private tutors all the subjects which were included in the school's programme. I can never forget the memories of my esteemed masters, the late Shaikh Mohammad Ali Kashani, Mirza Abdul Razzaq Baghayiri, and Mirza Ghulam-Husain Khan Rahnama, as well as Mirza Javad Khan Qarib who was himself a graduate of the School of Political Science and the deputy principal of the German School. I consider myself indebted for the kindness of all these people.

At that time the most important matter in life for me was the opportunity to receive education. I resigned from the civil service for two main reasons. First, to get rid of the responsibility of my employment would enhance my chance of a better education. Secondly, attacks and propaganda against official accountants were becoming stronger day by day and I wished to exclude myself from their ranks. The reason for this propaganda campaign against official accountants was the popularity of the idea in the post-Constitutional era that the new regime required new organisations.

It was held that old government officials should be expelled from their office and replaced by new personnel. This idea would have been correct if our constitution had been founded on the basis of a solid background and lasting experiences. It would have been correct if the country was in a position to benefit from the services of an adequate number of individuals who were competent to run a new system. Sadly, the modern administration was supported by those people who had visited foreign countries for a while, observed the issue of constitutionality from a distance, and returned home with some superficial information.

The rest of the population had not even heard the word constitutionality and did not distinguish between authoritarian and constitutional systems. It was on the basis of this limited amount of knowledge and superficial thinking that a number of supporters of modernism began to criticise the old system. They attacked the administrative organs of the ministry of finance as a symbol of the old regime

while in practice these were the only regular and systematic organisations operative in the country at that time. Singling out the prevailing style of accounting methods and the use of the traditional system of siyaq³ for recording figures, the critics referred to the official accountants as 'long writers'. They accused all accountants without exception of being thieves. This was so universal that the terms 'official accountant' and 'thief' became synonymous. Of course, this was not true.

The standard practice of the time entitled the governors-general of the provinces and the governors of the cities to recover an additional sum from the taxpayers, in the name of differential. This was over and above the taxes fixed on agricultural properties. This differential was intended to compensate the governors for what they had paid in the name of gift or advance payments to the public treasury. The accountant of Khurasan had taken the liberty of allowing 200,000 rials to be added to this heading of credit, over and above the advance payment, so that some people whose salaries could not otherwise be paid could receive their salary. This accountant's departure from standard practice was so much against public opinion that the culprit was removed from office to deter people from circumventing administrative provisions. I also demonstrated in my previous discussion that in the old regime, even if one wanted to commit embezzlement, there was nothing to cheat on. The door for embezzlement was completely closed. The accusations made against the official accountants came often from those who had no knowledge of either the old or the new systems. By virtue of their travel to foreign countries and some superficial information they wished to hold high offices. They were not right, but many ordinary people were taken in by these speeches out of ignorance.

In the year 1299 solar (1920) I travelled back to Iran from Europe along with my elder son and elder daughter. I was received, at his invitation, by Mirza Asadullah Khan Yamin al-Mamalik who was the appointed counsel-lor of the port of Bushire. I visited a number of places of interest in that city including the Tupkhaneh Square which was in a very bad shape. Upon my return to the house, I found on a desk in my room a letter

addressed to me together with two dishes, one full of dates and the other full of eggs. I opened the letter and its contents were as follows:

'I have a watch which stopped working recently. I understand your children have completed their education in Europe. I am sending my watch to be mended. I also send you a small gift of dates and eggs, please enjoy them.'

This letter had been written some 14 years after the Constitution had been announced in Iran. After all these years, people living outside the capital still thought that anybody who had gone abroad to study, was so knowledgeable that he knew everything including even the mending of clocks and watches!

When the First World War began, Iranian people found an opportunity to air their views because of the international rivalry between foreign powers. At that time the official accountants began a struggle against Mornard⁴ who was a Belgian national in charge of the public treasury and one of the important figures in the operation of the policies of foreign powers in Iran. As a result of this struggle, Mornard was removed from office. These struggles further led to the introduction of new legislation on the reorganisation of the ministry of finance. Proposed by Mushir al-Dawleh to the third parliamentary session, this new legislation was eventually approved by the Majlis replacing the law of 23rd of Jawza.⁵

Anyone who reads the statements made by Shaikh Asadullah Mahallati in the course of reading, debate and approval of this bill in the Majlis will understand from which sources those statements and struggles originated. Again, it was the same band of official accountants who opposed the 1919 Agreement signed by Vusuq al-Dawleh. The late Sayyed Hasan Mudarris used these accountants' knowledge and expertise in attacking the Agreement.

In the old regime, the standard unit of wealth and money was kurur (half-a-million). Towards the end of the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah the total revenue of the country in cash and kind was in excess of twelve kurur tomans (60 million rials). We can assume that half of these revenues were used for government expenditures and the expenses of the

crown. The official accountants were not entitled to receive any remuneration for handling the accounts in these categories. The other half of the revenues was spent on the salaries and grants payable to other persons. The official accountants were entitled to receive 2 per cent of the amount of this latter category of salaries and grants. This was received when they certified in the margin their validity for accounting purposes. In this case the total expenditure of the central organisations of the ministry of finance was no more than 600,000 rials per year.

If we assume that the people in charge of tax collection were in receipt of an amount equivalent to the above-mentioned sum from the governors-general of the provinces and the governors of the cities, the entire expenditure for the ministry of finance through the country was more than 1,200,000 rials per annum. It was indeed a great service and evidence of the highest standard of integrity and honesty that the financial system of the country was run at this low level of expenditure. The taxes coming from the agricultural properties alone in the old regime were sufficient to pay for all the expenses of the country. At present this source of revenue is not sufficient to pay for even a fifth of the expenses that the administrative machinery responsible for collecting that tax incurs every year.

FOOT NOTES

1. Tr. The office of chief administrator of Azerbaijan meant that the governor-general was crown prince but the actual administration was done by the chief administrator.
2. I sold that beautifully written manuscript in 1909 for 750 francs when I was a student in Paris and was short of money.
3. Tr. In the siyaq system used for notation in account keeping during the pre-Constitutional era, and now completely obsolete, certain written signs and marks were used instead of numeral figures.
4. Tr. Joseph Mornard was the head of a Belgian Mission. The Belgian Mission was unpopular for two main reasons. First, because these Missions were imposed on Iran by Great Britain. Secondly, because they mixed in political intrigues (see A.C. Millsbaugh, *Americans in Persia*, Washington, 1946, p. 17; also Robert McDaniel, *The Shuster Mission and the Persian Constitutional Revolution*, Minneapolis, 1974.)

5. The law of 23rd Jawza is relative to the powers which the National Consultative Assembly had given to an American citizen called W. Morgan Shuster who was engaged as the head of treasury. After his departure, Mornard of Belgium who was then the head of the department of customs, was promoted to the office of head of treasury. He abused this position in the interests of foreigners. That law was repealed on the proposal of Mushir al-Dawleh who was then prime minister. Until the enactment of a new law on the organisation of the ministry of finance, a committee consisting of three persons elected by the Majlis was set up to supervise the finances of the country.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

LETTERS TO EDITOR

US must address past actions with Iran

John K. Cooley's excellent April 27 Opinion piece, "US should call for direct talks with Iran," is absolutely right, except that Mr. Cooley left out one grievance that after 50 years still resonates strongly in Iran.

Iranians who are strongly nationalistic have every right to be suspicious of our ulterior motives. They have never forgotten that it was not too long ago (1953) that the US helped overthrow a freely elected constitutional government.

Nothing else has worked, and without Iran's participation, nothing can be achieved.

Fariborz S. Fatemi

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