



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

“Feda’i Khorosani”
Encyclopaedia Iranica
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Introduction and
Early Life

Muhammad b. Zayn al-‘Abidin b. Karabala’i Dawud (b. ca. 1266/1850; d. 1342/1923), foremost Persian Nizari Ismaili author and poet of modern times, who is referred to as Haji Akhund in the Persian Nizari community. Feda’i was born in Dezbad/Dizbad or Dezbad-i Bala (Razmara, *Farhang IX*, p. 180), an Ismaili village in the mountains between Mashhad and Nishapur in northern Khurasan. He was a descendant of Imamquli Khaki Khorosani, an important Nizari poet of Safavid times (d. after 1056/1646). After completing his early education in Dezbad and Darrud, another Ismaili village near Nishapur, Feda’i spent some time in Mashhad, studying the religious sciences, including *fiqh* and *kalam*, at the Baqiriya *madrasa* (Herati, Intro., p. 3).

Feda’i’s Travels to
India

In 1313/1896, Feda’i set off on the first of his three journeys to India to see the Nizari *imam* of the time, Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III (1885-1957). In 1317/1900, Feda’i visited Bombay again and stayed there for a few years, also gaining access to the Aga Khan’s valuable library. In 1321/1903, the Nizari *imam* finally gave an audience (*didar*) to Feda’i and on that occasion issued a *farman* appointing him as the *mu’allim* (teacher) in charge of the religious affairs of the Persian Nizari community. On his return journey, Feda’i passed through the Hijaz and made the pilgrimage to Mecca, whence his popular designation of Haji Akhund. In 1324/1906, Feda’i, leading a group of prominent Nizaris from Dezbad, paid his last visit to the Nizari *imam* in Bombay, where he also testified in court on behalf of Aga Khan III in the course of the hearings of the famous Haji Bibi Case, concerning the case of claims filed by Haji Bibi, a cousin of the Aga Khan, against the latter’s estate and income (Aga Khan, pp. 79-80).

Feda’i and the
Persian Nizaris

During the turbulent years of the Constitutional Revolution in Persia, Feda’i who had hitherto been campaigning successfully throughout the Nizari community of Khurasan for strengthening the religious identity of the Persian Nizaris and the authority of Aga Khan III, fell victim to the intrigues of some dissident Ismailis, who, under the leadership of Murad Mirza, were challenging the Aga Khan’s authority, and to the persecutions of some local Twelver ‘*ulama*’. Until then, the Persian Nizaris had observed their religious rituals

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mainly in the manner of the Twelver Shi'i. Aga Khan III eventually succeeded in preventing the persecution of his Khurasani followers through the intervention of the British consul at Mashhad (Daftary, 1990, pp. 534-38).

Feda'i composed several doctrinal works, including the *Irshad al-salikin*, the *Kashf al-haqa'iq*, the *Kitab-i danesh-i ahl-i binesh*, and the *Hadiqat al-ma'ani*, a treatise on *fiqh*. Copies of these unpublished works, not listed in Feda'i's sections in the Ismaili bibliographies of Wladimir Ivanow (pp. 153-54) and Ismail K. Poonawala (p. 284-85), were shown to the present writer in Dezbad and Mashhad in 1985 by Feda'i's sole surviving grandson, Sadr al-Din b. Mulla Shams al-Din Mirshahi. Feda'i also composed, probably at the suggestion of Aga Khan III, a history of Ismailism entitled *Hidayat al-mu'minin al-talibin*, the first work of its kind by a modern Nizari author. It is, however, permeated with all types of errors and extends from the origins of Ismailism to the Aga Khans and modern times: its copies are preserved by the Nizaris of Badakhshan in Afghanistan and Tajikistan (Berthels and Baqoev, p. 102). The sections on the Aga Khans, comprising the most interesting parts of this work, were evidently added around 1328/1910 by a certain Musa Khan b. Muhammad Khorosani, who died in Poona in 1937 (see Daftary, 1984). Musa Khan and his father had been in the service of the Aga Khans in Bombay. Feda'i's *diwan* of poetry, collected by his descendents and still unpublished, contains about 12,000 verses. His poetry, mainly in the form of *mathnawis* and *qasidas* or *ghazals* are not generally of high quality. They deal primarily with religious and didactic themes or are eulogies of the Nizari *imams*. Feda'i died in Dezbad and was buried there next to Khaki Khorosani; the site was modestly repaired in 1966.

The Writings of
Feda'i Khorosani

Bibliography

Details on Fedai's life and works are contained in Sadr al-Din Mirshahi's unpublished biography of Feda'i and also in the introduction to one of Mirshahi's collections of Feda'i's works (MSS Mirshahi Collection, Mashhad). See also:

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