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**Title:** Khayrkhah Harati: Nizari Ismaili *da 'i*, author, and poet (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> CE centuries)

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## **Khayrkhah Harati: Nizari Ismaili *da'i*, author, and poet (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> CE centuries)**

Dr Farhad Daftary

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Khayrkhah Harati, Muhammad Reza b. Sultan Husayn Ghuriani, Nizari Ismaili *da'i*, author, and poet. He was born into a prominent Nizari Ismaili family in Ghurian near Harat, in present day western Afghanistan, in the final decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century CE and died not long after 960 AH/1553 CE, the latest date cited in his writings. Khayrkhah thus lived during the first century of the so-called Anjudan revival in Nizari Ismaili *da'wa* activities after the collapse of the Nizari centres of power in Persia in 654 AH/1256 CE.

By the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century CE, the Nizari Imams had established themselves in the village of Anjudan, near Mahallat, initiating the Anjudan revival in Nizari Ismailism that lasted for about two centuries. During this period, the Nizari Imams and their followers continued to disguise themselves under the mantle of Sufism. But, with the adoption of Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion of the Safavid realm, the Nizaris and other Shi'i communities in Persia could now reduce the extent of their *taqiyya* (precautionary dissimulation of one's faith) practices.

The Anjudan period also witnessed a renaissance in literary activities in the Persian Nizari community. Doctrinal works now began to be composed for the first time in the post-Alamut Persian Nizari Ismaili community. Khayrkhah Harati may be considered as one of the most important Nizari literary figures of the early Anjudan period in Persia, second in significance only to Abu Ishaq Quhistani (d. after 904 AH/1498 CE). Khayrkhah's few extant works are extremely valuable for understanding the Anjudan revival in post-Alamut Nizari Ismailism and the contemporary Nizari doctrines, which were essentially rooted in the Nizari teachings of the late Alamut times, when Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi lived in the Nizari fortress communities of Persia and synthesised the Nizari doctrines in the *Rawza-yi Taslim* attributed to him (see editor's Preface, pp. xv-xvi).

In the autobiographical part of his *Risala* (pp. 35 ff.), Khayrkhah relates how his father, Khwaja Sultan Husayn, a *da'i* in the region of Harat, was murdered by brigands whilst on a journey to visit the Nizari Imam at Anjudan. Subsequently, the contemporary Nizari Imam, probably Mustansir bi Allah III (d. 904 AH/1498 CE), better known under his Sufi name of Shah Gharib, apparently designated Khayrkhah himself, then only nineteen years of age, to the position of the chief *da'i* or *hujja*, then more commonly called *pir*, of Khurasan and Badakhshan. In that capacity, the youthful Khayrkhah made the hazardous journey to Anjudan to see the Nizari Imam of the time. Khayrkhah has preserved unique details in his *Risala* on how the Imam managed the affairs of the Nizari *da'wa* and *da'is* from his secret headquarters in Anjudan. In his *Risala*, Khayrkhah also expounds his own views on the status and high attributes of the rank of *pir* in the Nizari *da'wa* hierarchy.

Khayrkhah was a prolific writer (see Ivanow, pp. 142-44; Poonawala, pp. 276-77; Daftary, 2004, pp. 123-24), and his works, all written in Persian, have been preserved mainly by the Nizari Ismaili communities of Badakhshan (now divided between Afghanistan and Tajikistan), as well

as Hunza and other northern areas of Pakistan. Khayrkhah also composed poetry under the pen-name (*takhallus*) of Gharibi, after the epithet of the contemporary Nizari Imam. His works include *Fasl dar Bayan-i Shinakht-i Imam* (1922, pp. 3-49), which was composed around 1545 CE. This work contains a summary of the author's views on the Imamate and other contemporary Nizari teachings. Khayrkhah's other writings include the *Risala*, his *Qita 'at*, and selections of his poetry, all edited and published by Wladimir Ivanow in a collection entitled *Tasnifat-i Khayrkhah* (pp. 1-75, 77-111, 113-32, respectively). As argued by Ivanow (1963, pp. 142-43), Khayrkhah also produced a rescension of Abu Ishaq Quhistani's *Haft Bab* (pp. 3-8) under the title of *Kalam-i Pir*, attributing it to the Ismaili poet Nasir-i Khusraw (d. after 462 AH/1070 CE) in order to enhance its popularity within the Nizari communities of Afghanistan and Central Asia.

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