



# ŠĀH ṬĀHER ḤOSAYNI DAKKANI

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**ŠĀH ṬĀHER ḤOSAYNI DAKKANI** (b. K<sup>v</sup>ānd, ca. 880-90s/1480-90s; d. Ahmadnagar, 956/1549), thirty-first and the most famous **imam** of the Moḥammadšāhi (or Mo'meni) branch of the Nezāri **Isma'ilis**. Due to his years of residence in the Deccan (Dakkan), in southern India, he was also known as Šāh Ṭāher Dakkani. Šāh Ṭāher was also a learned theologian, poet, literary stylist, and an accomplished diplomat who rendered valuable services to the Nezāmšāhi dynasty of **Aḥmadnagar** in the **Deccan**.

The most detailed account of this Nezāri imam is related by Moḥammad-Qāsem Hendušāh Astarābādi, better known as Ferešta, in his *Golšan-e ebrāhimi*, commonly called *Tāriḵ-e Ferešta*, a general history of Muslim India completed in 1015/1606-7 (Ferešta, II, pp. 213-31). Earlier sources, such as **Badā'uni**, Ṭabāṭabā, and Šuštari, contain briefer accounts of this Isma'ili imam. Later works, such as those produced by Nahāvandi, Kāfi Khan and **Loṭf-'Ali Beg Āḍar Bigdeli**, do not add any new details to the accounts of Ferešta and Ṭabāṭabā. More recent Nezāri Isma'ili authors hailing from the rival Qāsemšāhi community, such as Šehāb-al-Din Šāh Ḥosayni (d. 1302/1884) and Fedā'i Korāsāni (d. 1342/1923), treat Šāh Ṭāher in an erroneous and confusing manner. The entire extant literature of the Moḥammadšāhi Nezāris themselves is comprised of a handful of treatises that remain in manuscript form (Ivanow, pp. 165-67).



Šāh Ṭāher was born in the last decades of the 9th/15th century in the village of K̄vānd near Qazvin. Šāh Ṭāher's ancestors as imams were also known as the K̄vāndi *sayyeds* in that locality, where they had followers from the middle of the 8th/14th century. Šāh Ṭāher's father, Šāh Raẓi-al-Din II b. Ṭāher, who had succeeded to the imamate of the Moḥammadšāhi Nezāris around 868/1463 and had followers also in Syria and Qohestān, seems to have migrated from Sistān to [Badakṣān](#) around 913/1507. There, with the help of the local Nezāris, Šāh Raẓi-al-Din established his rule over a large section of Badakṣān. Soon after, in 915/1509, however, in the midst of quarrels among his followers, Šāh Raẓi-al-Din himself was killed, and his head was taken to Mirzā Khan, a local Timurid ruler (Duḡlāt, pp. 185-87, 194; tr., pp. 217-21, 227; Barthold, pp. 326 ff.). Mirzā Khan and his Timurid successors, as well as the local Özbegs, severely persecuted the Nezāris of Badakṣān, who then belonged almost entirely to the Moḥammadšāhi faction.

Raẓi-al-Din II was succeeded in the Moḥammadšāhi Nezāri imamate in 915/1509 by his son Šāh Ṭāher, who, in Ferešta's words, now became the *sajjādanešin*, that is, head of his family and community. Šāh Ṭāher's imamate coincided with the rise of the [Safavids](#), and he was evidently the earliest Nezāri leader to have disguised his teachings under the [Eṭnā'ašari](#) form of Shi'ism. This dissimulation (*taqiya*) practice may also explain why he composed several commentaries (*šarḥ*) on the theological and juridical works of some well-known Eṭnā'ašari Imami scholars, such as 'Allāma Ḥelli (d. 726/1325; Ferešta, II, p. 230; Poonawala, 1977, pp. 271-75). Many of his poems have also been preserved. Similarly to the preceding Nezāri imams of the post-[Alamut](#) times, Šāh Ṭāher also used Sufism as another dissimulating cover. In this connection, it may be added that Šāh Ṭāher might have been the actual author of an anonymous work entitled *Ba'z-i az ta'wilāt-e golšan-e rāz*, representing esoteric interpretations (*ta'wilāt*) of selected passages of Maḥmud Šabestari's well-known versified Sufi work, *Golšan-e rāz* (Ivanow, p. 164; Poonawala, 1977, pp. 274, 351; Daftary, 2007, pp. 419-20, 454).

Šāh Ṭāher acquired much popularity in Persia due to his learning and piety. The Safavid Shah [Esmā'il I](#) (r. 907-30/1501-24) heard about Šāh Ṭāher and invited him to join the circle of scholars at his court in Solṭānia in [Azarbaijan](#). However, soon the Safavid monarch became apprehensive of Šāh Ṭāher's growing religious following. But on the intercession of Mirzā Ḥosayn Ešfahāni, an influential dignitary at the court, who may have been a secret convert to Isma'liism, Šāh Ṭāher was permitted to settle down in [Kashan](#).



There, the Isma‘ili imam became a religious teacher (*modarres*) at a local theological seminary and acquired many students and disciples. Many of Šāh Ṭāher’s followers (*morid*) proceeded to go to Kashan from other localities in Persia to attend his lectures. Šāh Ṭāher’s success soon aroused the hostility of the local officials and the Eṭnā‘āšari scholars, who forwarded malicious reports to Shah Esmā‘il about the ‘heretical’ teachings of Šāh Ṭāher. He was also accused of leading the Isma‘ilis and other heretical sectarians and of corresponding with foreign rulers against the Safavids (Şafā, p. 663).

Shah Esmā‘il, who had already been suspicious of Šāh Ṭāher’s activities for some time, now issued an order for his arrest and execution. But Šāh Ṭāher was warned in time by his friend at the Safavid court, Mirzā Ḥosayn Eşfahāni. In 926/1520, the Nezāri imam fled from Kashan with his family, just missing the guards who had been sent for his arrest. He first went to Fars and then sailed for India, landing at Goa. Šāh Ṭāher initially proceeded to the court of Esmā‘il ‘Ādelšāh (r. 916-41/1510-34), who ruled from Bijāpur over one of the five states emerging from the breakdown of the Bahmanid kingdom of the Deccan (Şafā, pp. 663-64). Esmā‘il’s father, Yusof, was the first Muslim ruler in India to adopt Shi‘ism as the religion of his state. But Esmā‘il ‘Ādelšāh himself did not have any deep religious convictions. Disappointed by his poor reception at the ‘Ādelšāhi court, the Nezāri imam then met some dignitaries in the service of the Neẓāmšāhs of Aḥmadnagar, another of the dynasties succeeding the Bahmanids. Soon afterwards, Borhān I Neẓāmšāh (r. 915-61/1509-54) invited Šāh Ṭāher to his capital.

In 928/1522, Šāh Ṭāher arrived in Aḥmadnagar, which was to become his permanent abode. He soon became the most trusted advisor of Borhān Neẓāmšāh and attained a highly privileged position at his court. With the approval of Borhān Neẓāmšāh, Šāh Ṭāher delivered weekly lectures on different religious subjects inside the fort of Aḥmadnagar. These lectures, attended by numerous scholars and the Neẓāmšāhi ruler himself, served to spread Šāh Ṭāher’s fame throughout the Deccan (Ferešta, II, p. 218). Ferešta, who knew Šāh Ṭāher’s descendants, also relates interesting details on this imam’s miraculous healing of Borhān’s young son, ‘Abd-al-Qāder, which led to the conversion of Borhān Neẓāmšāh from Sunni Islam to Eṭnā‘āšari Shi‘ism, which, according to all sources, was the form of Shi‘ism propagated by Šāh Ṭāher in India from the beginning (Ferešta, II, pp. 219-23; Ṭabāṭabā, pp. 258-63.)

The propagation of Eṭnā‘āšari Shi‘ism by a Nezāri Isma‘ili imam may indeed



represent a very strange phenomenon. It should be recalled, however, that Šāh Ṭāher and other Nezāri Isma‘ili leaders of the Safavid times were still obliged to use *taqiya* in the guise of Eṭnā‘āšari Shi‘ism, which was more acceptable also to the Muslim rulers of India, who cultivated friendly relations with the Twelver Shi‘i Safavids (Daftary, 2005, pp. 395-406). In addition, Šāh Ṭāher expressed his Isma‘ili ideas in the guise of Sufism. These complex associations are clearly reflected in the *Lama‘āt al-ṭāherin*, a versified Moḥammadšāhi Nezāri treatise composed around 1110/1698 in the Deccan by a certain Ġolām-‘Ali b. Moḥammad (Ivanow, pp. 166-67; Poonawala, 1977, p. 281). In this sole Moḥammadšāhi work preserved in India, the author camouflages his scattered Nezāri ideas under Eṭnā‘āšari and Sufi expressions and covers. He eulogizes the twelve imams of the Eṭnā‘āšaris while also alluding to the Moḥammadšāhi Nezāri imams.

Šāh Ṭāher achieved his greatest religious success in the Deccan when Borhān I Neẓāmšāh, shortly after his own conversion, proclaimed Eṭnā‘āšari Shi‘ism as the official religion of the Neẓāmšāhi state in 944/1537. Henceforth, an increasing number of Shi‘i scholars, including Šāh Ṭāher’s own brother, Šāh Ja‘far, gathered at Borhān I Neẓāmšāh’s court and benefited from his patronage. Meanwhile, the Safavid court in Persia rejoiced at hearing about the endorsement of Shi‘ism in the Neẓāmšāhi kingdom, and Shah Ṭahmāsb sent an emissary carrying gifts to Borhān I Neẓāmšāh. In return, Šāh Ṭāher’s son and future successor, Ḥaydar, was despatched on a goodwill mission from Aḥmadnagar to Persia (Ferešta, II, pp. 228, 230).

Ferešta and other authorities relate many details of the diplomatic services rendered by Šāh Ṭāher to Borhān I Neẓāmšāh. This Moḥammadšāhi Nezāri imam participated during more than two decades in numerous negotiations and mediations on behalf of his Neẓāmšāhi patron with neighboring Muslim rulers in Gujarat, Bijāpur, Golconda, and Bidār. After an imamate of some forty years, Šāh Ṭāher died in Aḥmadnagar sometime between 952/1545-46, the year mentioned by the contemporary Safavid Prince Sām Mirzā (p. 29), and 956/1549, the most probable date recorded by Ferešta (II, p. 230). His remains were later taken to Karbalā and buried in the Imam Ḥosayn’s shrine complex.

Šāh Ṭāher was succeeded in the Moḥammadšāhi Nezāri imamate by his eldest son Šāh Ḥaydar, who was then still at the court of Shah Ṭahmāsb I in Persia. Šāh Ṭāher had three other sons; all attained high positions at the courts of various Deccani rulers. The Moḥammadšāhi imamate was handed down



among the descendants of Šāh Ḥaydar (d. 994/1586), who continued to live in Aḥmadnagar and later in Awrangābād. This particular line of the Nezāri imams ended with Amir Moḥammad-Bāqer, the fortieth in the series, who had his last contact with his Syrian followers in 1210/1796 (Tāmer, pp. 597-98; Šafā, p. 665). The only known members of this Nezāri group are still located in Syria.

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