The ‘Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture

A second branch established itself in Awadh. Documentary evidence of its existence begins with the first known farman of the Emperor Akbar which made a revenue-free grant to one Mulla Hafiz in 1559. The family can be traced through such documents down to the time in 1692 when the Mulla’s great-grandson, Qutb al-Din, was murdered in a squabble over land. In consequence the Emperor Aurangzeb granted his family the sequestered property of a European merchant in Lucknow which, in 1695, the family occupied. Over the years they came to occupy a considerable muhafiz-ah, which was named Farangi Mahall. We know something of the lives of almost every male descendant of Qutb al-Din from the early 18th century to the mid-20th century. They are important in four main ways. They were scholars and teachers, the great consolidators on Indian soil of the rationalist traditions of Islamic scholarship derived from Iran. They were encapsulated in their Dar-i-nizamiyya curriculum, which became the dominant system of education for Indian Muslims until it was overcome by the twin forces of Islamic reform and Western education in the 20th century. Such men of learning were also religious leaders. They offered guidance to people through their commentaries on the great books in the madrasa curriculum, through the ititawas they issued and through the counsel they gave, both public and private. Those with spiritual vocations, moreover, were models of right behaviour, their deeds and sayings being passed on by word of mouth and on occasion in written form, as guidance for their own time and for future generations. Two great Sufis through the family: the Chishti-Sabiri from Shah Muhibb Allahat of Allahabad (d. 1648), spiritual confidant of Dara Shikoh and direct descendant of Ibn ‘Arabi, and the Qadiri line from Sayyid Shah ‘Abd-al-Razzaz of Barsa (d.1724), spiritual guide of Mulla Nizam al-Din of Farangi Mahall and niece of the Delhi sultanate. One branch settled around Panipat, close to Delhi, and in recent times produced: Aftab Husayn Hali, the great poet of the Alligaar movement; Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, the progressive writer; and Dr M.A. Ansari, the pan-Islamic leader and president both of the Indian National Congress and of the all-India Muslim League.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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Regional Issues

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ISBN 1-85458-475
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