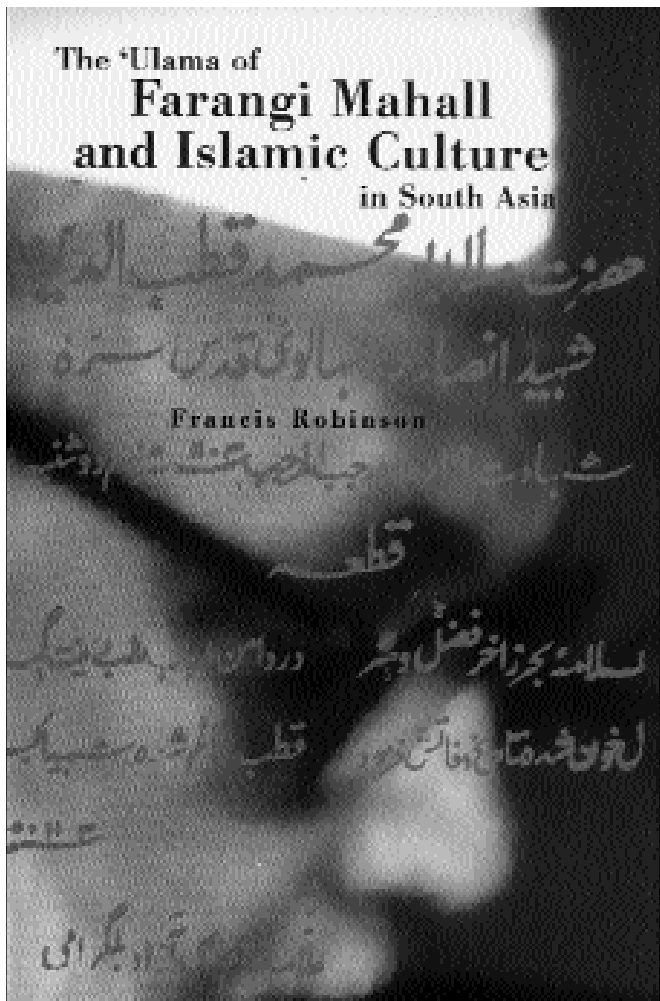


South Asia

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The Farangi Mahall family of learned and holy men is remarkable in the history of India. Indeed, it would be in any society. Claiming descent from Ayyub Ansari, the host of the Prophet at Medina, through the 11th-century saint 'Abd Allah Ansari of Herat, their ancestors migrated to India in the early years of the Delhi sultanate. One branch settled around Panipat, close to Delhi, and in recent times produced: Altaf Husayn Hali, the great poet of the Aligarh 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.



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-great-grandson, Qutb al-Din, was murdered in a squabble over land. In consequence the Emperor Awrangzeb granted his family the sequestered property of a European merchant in Lucknow which,

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in 1695, the family occupied. Over the years they came to occupy a considerable *muhalla*, 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. These they encapsulated in their *dars-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 society through their commentaries on the great books in the *madrasa* curriculum, through the *fatawa* 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 Sufi lines ran through the family: the Chishti-Sabiri from Shah Muhibb Allah of Allahabad (d. 1648), spiritual confidant of Dara Shikoh and defender of Ibn 'Arabi, and the Qadiri line from Sayyid Shah 'Abd al-Razzaq of Bansa (d.1724), spiritual guide of Mulla Nizam al-Din of Farangi Mahall and reviver of the Qadiri *silsila* in northern India.

Such religious leaders were, of course, defenders in the public sphere of their understanding of Islam. Up to the mid-19th century this largely involved, apart from the odd exchange with a Christian missionary, contesting the claims of Shi'a 'ulama or of reformist Sunnis. From the mid-19th century their prime concerns were the threats to Islam presented by British power in India and elsewhere. In the 20th century these came to a head in a wave of protests and organizational developments reaching from the first decade through to the mid-1920s. Farangi Mahallis were at the heart of the

foundation of the Jamiyat al-'Ulama-i Hind and the All-India Khilafat Committee, as well as a host of smaller activist organizations.

Finally, the Farangi Mahallis are of importance simply as a family. We can see how they responded to the challenges of Mughal, Nawabi and British rule, and subsequently to partition and independence. In the 18th and 19th centuries we can trace their movements as they sought service in the courts of Lucknow, Rampur Farrukhabad, Bihar (in Bengal), Arcot and Hyderabad. In the 19th and 20th centuries the princely states remained a haven, in particular Hyderabad, but many also found employment in British India as 'ulama, hakims, publishers, newspaper editors, and administrators in government and commercial concerns. Throughout the family, education – whether traditionally Islamic or Western – has remained highly valued. Now they are spread throughout the world: from Australia, through South Asia, the Middle East, Europe and North America. A good number, now joined by their womenfolk, maintain the family traditions of scholarship, but more often than not in universities.

Research concerns

I first encountered the Farangi Mahallis in the mid-1960s as I began the research which was published as *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: the Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims 1860-1923* (Cambridge, 1974). I was much puzzled that they figured prominently in the imperial record but not in the historiography then current. *Separatism* established their central role in the Khilafat movement. The book itself led the head of the family, Mawlana Jamal Miyan, to come to London from Karachi in 1976. He told me that the records available for the study of his family were much richer than what I had been able to consult in Lucknow. There followed several years of research in Karachi and Lucknow, but also in Hyderabad and Madras. Throughout, family members were teachers and guides of great kindness and generosity. This research led to a deepening of my understanding of Islamic civi-

lization, and not least of the role of 'ulama and Sufis as guardians, interpreters and transmitters of the central messages of Islamic culture. This understanding profoundly influenced my approach to subsequent work, for instance, my *Atlas of Islam since 1500* (Oxford, 1982) and the *Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1996).

All but one of the essays in the *'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* have been published over the past twenty years in different places, most of which are not particularly accessible. The aim of publishing them together is to enable an understanding of the achievement and importance of the family to be perceived more readily. Three of the essays – 'Perso-Islamic Culture in India from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Century', 'Scholarship and Mysticism in Early Eighteenth-Century Awadh' and 'Ottomans-Safawids-Mughals: Shared Knowledge and Connective Systems' – illustrate the role of the Farangi Mahallis as the consolidators and the defenders both of rationalist traditions of scholarship and of Ibn al-'Arabi's Sufi understandings in northern India. The last of the above-mentioned places their achievement in the context of the wider Islamic world and the movement of ideas from the 17th century onwards. Two essays – 'The 'Ulama of Farangi Mahall and their Adab' and 'Abd al-Bari and the Events of January 1926' – set out to evoke what it was to be a learned and holy man in the Farangi Mahalli tradition. Of particular value here is the way in which the *mal'ufat* literature and private correspondence enables Farangi Mahallis to speak for themselves. Four essays – 'Problems in the History of the Farangi Mahall Family of Learned and Holy Men', 'Al-Nizamiyya: A Group of Lucknow Intellectuals in the Early Twentieth Century', 'Ulama, Sufis and Colonial Rule in North India and Indonesia', and again 'Abd al-Bari and the Events of January 1926' – all deal with the family's responses to British rule. We see them responding as jurists, as educators, as spiritual leaders and as young intellectuals, and in doing so for the most part we sense the moderate and balanced judgement which was the hallmark of their rationalist tradition. In the 'Abd al-Bari essay we witness the life and ideas of a man who epitomized the Farangi Mahalli tradition in his time, but whose death in January 1926 brought with it the end of the tradition's greatness.

It is to be hoped that the publication of these essays as a book will establish the significance of the Farangi Mahall family of Lucknow alongside that of the Wali Allah family of Delhi in the Islamic history of India. They are but a starting point; there is more research on this family to be done.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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