



‘ABD-AL-‘ALĪ BAḤR-AL-‘OLŪM

‘**ABD-AL-‘ALĪ MOḤAMMAD BAḤR-AL-‘OLŪM**, a leading 18th century Indian theologian of the Ḥanafī school. Born in Lucknow in 1144/1731, he was the son of Mollā Neẓām-al-dīn (q.v.), a member of the Ferangī Maḥal family and founder of the Dars-e Neẓāmīya. ‘Abd-al-‘Alī studied under his father and, sometime after the latter’s death, succeeded him. But he was not destined to stay in Lucknow. From time to time quarrels flared between the prominent Sunni families of Lucknow and the Shi‘ia court of Awadh established by Borhān-al-molk Nīšāpūrī in the early 18th century. After being drawn into one of these quarrels, ‘Abd-al-‘Alī felt that it would be better if he left Awadh. He moved first to Shahjahanpur, where he stayed for twenty years, and then to Rampur for four years. Subsequently, he was invited by Monšī Ṣadr-al-dīn of Burdwan to join *madrassa* at Buhar (Bengal), and later by Navvāb Vāllājāh Moḥammad ‘Alī Khan of Karnatak (Arcot) to go to Madras. Since the Navvāb came from the village of Gopa Now in Awadh, he was well acquainted with the achievements of the Ferangī Maḥal family. The Navvāb bestowed the title *malek-al-‘olamā* on ‘Abd-al-‘Alī, built him a *madrassa*, and provided stipends for him as well as for his large retinue of companions and pupils. Some of these stipends were continued by the Navvāb’s successors and by the British. ‘Abd-al-‘Alī never returned to Lucknow. He died in Madras in 1225/1810 and was buried in the Vāllājāhī mosque.

As a teacher and writer ‘Abd-al-‘Alī had great influence on his Indian contemporaries. He specialized in *feqh*, *oṣūl al-feqh*, and *ḥekma*. All his books, mainly commentaries and glosses on texts, are in Arabic and Persian. Most



notable is his *Fawāteḥ al-raḥamūt*, a commentary on Moḥebballāh Behārī’s *Mosallam al-ṭobūt*. (For a full list of his more important works, see *EI*² I, p. 937.) ‘Abd-al-‘Alī was also, after the tradition of the Ferangī Maḥal family, a mystic. He was especially renowned for having visions of the Prophet while awake. His father initiated him into the branch of the Qāderī order (*selsela*) stemming from Shah ‘Abd-al-Razzāq of Bansa. There is, moreover, a secondary line of spiritual succession stemming from ‘Abd-al-‘Alī himself; it remains influential in Ferangī Maḥal to the present day. Among the classical theoreticians of *taṣavvof*, ‘Abd-al-‘Alī was profoundly affected by Ebn al-‘Arabī. He made a lifelong study of his expositions in *Foṣūṣ al-ḥekam* and *Fotūḥāt al-makkīya*, and his Persian commentary on Rūmī’s *Maṭnavī* sought to explain the “secrets” of that text in the light of Ebn al-‘Arabī’s two major works.

‘Abd-al-‘Alī’s acquisition of the name Baḥr-al-‘olūm has been reported variously. Family tradition, which is probably reliable, says he was given the name by Shah ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz Dehlavī (‘Enāyatallāh, *Tadkera*, p. 141). In south India ‘Abd-al-‘Alī is remembered as having brought about a great intellectual awakening (Pirzada, *Foundations*, p. 351). The Ferangī Maḥal family regards him, together with Mollā Neẓām-al-dīn and Mawlānā ‘Abd-al-Ḥayy, as one of its most distinguished ancestors.

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