



## DELDĀR-‘ALĪ

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**DELDĀR-‘ALĪ** b. Moḥammad-Mo‘īn NAṢĪRĀ-BĀDĪ, Sayyed Ġofrān-ma‘āb (b. Naṣīrābād near Lucknow, 1166/1753, d. Lucknow ca. 1235/1820), Shi‘ite cleric of northern India who helped to establish the Shi‘ite form of Friday prayers and propagated the rationalist Oṣūlī school of jurisprudence in the [Avadh](#) region.

In Deldār-‘Alī’s native village, Naṣīrābād in the district of Rai Bareli, influential *sayyeds* (claiming descent from the Prophet Moḥammad) perhaps first began to embrace Shi‘ism in the 18th century, encouraged by grants of land from the Shi‘ite *nawwābs* of Avadh (Sayyed Moḥammad, p. 47). Nevertheless, Deldār-‘Alī pursued his early Islamic studies primarily with Sunni teachers in the small intellectual centers of northern India; one of them was the renowned Mollā ‘Abd-al-‘Alī Ferangī-Maḥallī. When, in 1189/1775, Nawwāb Āṣaf-al-Dawla established his capital at Lucknow, Deldār-‘Alī made his way there and soon entered the circle of the chief minister, Ḥasan Reżā Khan. The leading state functionaries were looking for young Shi‘ite talent, and Deldār-‘Alī struck them as promising. A notable offered to pay for his studies in Iraq, where he spent the years 1193-95/1779-81 at Najaf and Karbalā’, forsaking the conservative Akbārī legal teachings then popular in northern India for the rationalist Oṣūlī school (*Āīna*, fols. 44-55; Kentūrī, I, pp. 1315-36; Ardestānī, I, 92-91 [pages of Persian text numbered in Western sequence]).

On his return to Lucknow Deldār-‘Alī accepted the patronage of the notables; beginning in 1200/1786 he was pressed into performing Friday prayers, despite initial reservations about whether such prayers were permissible



during the occultation of the twelfth imam. His teaching and writing helped to spread Oṣūlī rationalism among young clerics in Avadh. He opposed the influence of both Sufis and Akbārīs and succeeded in gaining perquisites for Shi‘ite clerics that had earlier been monopolized by less professional groups; for instance, earlier in the 18th century such Islamic charitable and other taxes as *zakāt* and *koms* had been collected and distributed informally by Shi‘ite physicians. The *nawwāb* granted him nine tax-free villages, as well as an annual stipend of Rs. 5,000 (*Ā’īna*, fols. 65-67; Cole, pp. 179-80).

Deldār-‘Alī also promoted the establishment of Friday prayers throughout the realm and set up an informal network of Shi‘ite higher education in the homes of clerics whom he himself helped to train. He and his students issued informal legal rulings for Shi‘ites and discouraged them from appealing to the courts, which were still manned largely by Sunni judges. He refused, however, to establish a formal Shi‘ite court system for Avadh, fearing that such an institution would bring him into conflict with the authoritarian *nawwābs*, who were not always attentive to the rule of Islamic law. He also refused to challenge their intervention in religious matters, as when one *nawwāb* insisted on celebrating *īd al-aẓḥā* (the main Muslim feast day) a day too early. Deldār-‘Alī argued that Shi‘ite clerics should acquiesce, as Avadh was still part of the Sunni Mughal empire and clerics were obliged to practice pious dissimulation (*taqīya*) of their true opinions even from Shi‘ite *nawwābs*. As a result of such attitudes Persian clerics like Aḥmad Behbahānī (q.v.) criticized Deldār-‘Alī for what they regarded as excessive subservience to the state (*Ā’īna*, fols. 142b-46a; Behbahānī, fols. 166b-68b).

Deldār-‘Alī had five sons; the eldest, Sayyed Moḥammad Naṣīrābādī, succeeded him as leader of the Friday prayers at Lucknow.

Deldār-‘Alī was a prolific writer. His works include *Fawā’ed-e āṣaḥḥ wa mawā’ez-e ḥasanīya* (Nāṣerīya Library, Lucknow, Hadith Shi‘a, ms. no. 152), a collection of Friday sermons in Persian made in 1200/1786); *Asās al-oṣūl* (Lucknow, 1320/1902) and the more mature *Montaha’l-afkār* (Lucknow, 1330/1912), on Oṣūlī principles of jurisprudence, both in Arabic; *Mer’āt al-’oqūl* (3 vols., Lucknow, 1320/1902), on *oṣūl al-dīn*, in Arabic; *Resāla fī aḥkām al-araẓīn* (Raza [Reẓā] Library, Rampur, ms. no. 2182), his most important work on land tenure, in Arabic; *Ṣawārem al-elāhīyāt* and *Ḥosām al-Eslām* (both in Persian; Calcutta, 1218/1803), *Du’l-feqār* (in Persian; Ludhiana, 1281/1848-49), *al-Ṣehāb al-tāqeb* (in Arabic; India Office Library, London, ms. no. 2182), and *Resāla dar radd-e madḥab-e šūfīya* (in Persian; Nāṣerīya Library, Kalām Shi‘a,



ms. no. 111), all anti-Sufi polemics; and *Najāt al-sā'elīn* (Nāṣerīya Library, Feqh Shī'a, ms. no. 256) and *Ajwebat al-sā'elīn* (Asiatic Society of Bengal Library, Calcutta, Curzon ms. no. 1016), which are collections of his legal rulings.

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