



## DEOBAND

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**DEOBAND**, country town northeast of [Delhi](#) in what is now the Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, India, where an influential Dār al-‘olūm was founded by a group of religious scholars in 1867 as an expression of a major religious reform movement partly inspired by British educational models. The goal was to train a class of religious scholars dedicated to a version of Islam stripped of many customary practices deemed deviant. The curriculum was based on the *dars-e neẓāmī* developed at the Farangī Maḥāll in Lucknow in the 18th century, though with less emphasis on “rational” studies in favor of a thorough grounding in the Qur’ān and Hadith. Although the Deobandis were originally apolitical, by the 1920s many of them supported the Indian nationalist movement and later opposed the creation of Pakistan.

As part of a 19th-century trend away from Persian in favor of modern vernaculars, Urdu, with its heavy admixture of Persian vocabulary and forms, was the language of instruction. In this respect the Deoband school led in establishing Urdu as the language of Indian Muslims. Many Arabic and Persian religious texts were translated into Urdu. Nevertheless, as Sufis, many of the teachers continued to cherish the great tradition of Persian mystical poetry. For example, Moḥammad Ya‘qūb Nanawtawī, the first principal (*sadr modarres*; 1867-88) and a revered spiritual guide (*mūršīd*), was said to recite Rūmī’s *maṭnawīs* silently, lest the whole forest burn from his passion (Metcalf, 1982, p. 166).



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