

**Shi'a Islam in Colonial India**  
*Religion, Community and Sectarianism*

Interest in Shi'a Islam has increased greatly in recent years, although Shi'ism in the Indian subcontinent has remained relatively unexplored. Focusing on the influential Shi'a minority of Lucknow and the United Provinces, a region that was largely under Shi'a rule until 1856, this book traces the history of Indian Shi'ism through the colonial period until Independence in 1947. Drawing on a range of new sources, including religious writing, polemical literature and clerical biography, it assesses seminal developments including the growth of Shi'a religious activism, *madrassa* education, missionary activity, ritual innovation and the politicization of the Shi'a community. As a consequence of these significant religious and social transformations, a Shi'a sectarian identity developed that existed in separation from rather than in interaction with its Sunni counterparts. In this way the painful birth of modern sectarianism was initiated, the consequences of which are very much alive in South Asia today. The book makes a significant contribution to the global history of Shi'ism, and to understandings of inner-Islamic conflicts in the colonial and post-colonial worlds.

**Justin Jones** is Lecturer in South Asian history at the University of Exeter.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-316-64981-7 — Shi'a Islam in Colonial India  
Justin Jones  
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*For my parents, Celia and Keith, and my wife, Aleksandra.*

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# Shi'a Islam in Colonial India

## *Religion, Community and Sectarianism*

JUSTIN JONES

*University of Exeter*



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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
 4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi - 110002, India  
 79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781316649817](http://www.cambridge.org/9781316649817)

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First published 2012

First paperback edition 2017

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Jones, Justin, 1980–

Shi'a Islam in colonial India : religion, community and sectarianism /

Justin Jones.

p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in Indian history and society ; 18)

ISBN 978-1-107-00460-3 (hardback)

1. Shi'ah – India – History. 2. Shi'ah – Customs and practices. 3. Lucknow

(India) – Religious life and customs. 4. Uttar Pradesh (India) – Religious

life and customs. 5. Islam and politics – India. 6. Islamic sects – India. 7. Religious

life – Shi'ah. I. Title. II. Series.

BP192.7.I4J66 2011

297.8'2095409034-dc22 2011001005

ISBN 978-1-107-00460-3 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-316-64981-7 Paperback

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## Preface and acknowledgements

This book has its origins in a number of research visits to the libraries, religious institutions and older neighbourhoods of the city and Shi'a spiritual centre of Lucknow, undertaken over the course of the greater part of the last decade. Shi'ism in north India has long been misunderstood, portrayed as the relatively homogenous religious confession of a small Muslim minority, or associated with the high cultures and graces of Nawabi Lucknow. By examining the workings of Shi'ism in one regional context from the inside, exploring the shifts and nuances within the alleged Shi'a community, this book seeks to bring to life a living, reflective and changing Shi'ism, one scarcely bound by memories of its past. If this book can give a sense of the vigorous debates, differentiations and indeed internal contestations developing under the aegis of a united Shi'a revival, it will have served its purpose.

Over the obdurately long time that it has taken to bring this study to completion, I have accumulated many debts, and it gives me pleasure to acknowledge many of them here. First mention is due to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which funded the original incarnation of this work as a doctoral thesis, as well as to the Society of South Asian Studies for additional research support. Latterly, I was fortunate enough to take up the Smuts Research Fellowship in the Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge, which gave me the opportunity to rework this research project into a book. Tremendous thanks are due to Kevin Greenbank, Barbara Roe, Rachel Rowe, Jan Thulborn and Anna Maria Motrescu-Mayes for making my years at the Centre of South Asian Studies so enjoyable, and for keeping me going on such an alarming quantity of caffeine. I was attached to Pembroke College, Cambridge, throughout this time as a doctoral student and postdoctoral researcher alike, and I am immensely grateful to all staff and Fellows for their support. I also owe much to my friends and contemporaries in the field with whom I shared many of the joys and otherwise of the academic experience whilst working on this project, among them Rachel Berger, Kaveri Gill,

Ben Hopkins, Humeira Iqtidar, Magnus Marsden, Eleanor Newbigin and Sarah Wilkerson.

Over the last few years, many academics in the field have kindly offered me invaluable guidance and advice on aspects of this research. Particular mention is reserved for the late Raj Chandavarkar, under whose supervision I thoroughly enjoyed working in the short two years from 2004–2006. I can only hope that he would have been at least partially pleased with this final work. Special thanks are owed to Chris Bayly, who has offered all kinds of invaluable support and encouragement over a number of years, and to William Gould, who has helped me in every conceivable way since my early days as a graduate. Francis Robinson and Avril Powell have both provided advice and counsel well above and beyond the call of duty. For helpful conversations and suggestions or for their interest in aspects of this project, I owe additional thanks to many, including Arshad Alam, Seema Alavi, Hayden Bellenoit, Nandini Chatterjee, Joya Chatterji, Michael Dodson, Robert Gleave, Mushirul Hasan, Gordon Johnson, David Lelyveld, Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, Barbara Metcalf, Rosalind O'Hanlon, Francesca Orsini, Shweta Sachdeva Jha, Radhika Singha, Rais Suleiman, Anita Weiss, Akbar Zaidi and John Zavos. Thanks also to the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript for their constructive comments and suggestions.

As of more recent months, I am grateful to my colleagues in the History Department at the University of Exeter, who have provided me with a very pleasant and welcoming environment for the text to be finalized. I have also benefited much from the helpfulness of all at Cambridge University Press, especially Marigold Acland, Regina Paleski, Mary Starkey and Joy Mizan.

The length of time taken to complete this book is matched only by the list of archives and libraries in which it was researched, in both the U.K. and India. My thanks to all of the following libraries, colleges and universities: the British Library, London; the libraries of the University of Cambridge and School of Oriental and African Studies; the Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi; the National Archives of India, New Delhi; the Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow; Kitab-Khana Shibli Numani of the *madrassa* Nadwa't ul-'Ulama, Lucknow; the library of Jami'a Millia Islamia, New Delhi; the Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh; the Tagore Library, Lucknow University; and the Amir-ud-daula Library, Lucknow. I would additionally like to acknowledge the invaluable help of the teachers and administrators of the following extant Shi'a *madrassas* and religious organizations in Lucknow, from which I drew important source material: Nazimiya

Arabic College; Sultan ul-Madaris; the Nor-i-Hidayat Foundation; and Tanzim-ul-Makatib.

My research trips to India would not have been as enjoyable or as fruitful were it not for the contributions of the following. For such a warm welcome during some or all of many trips to Delhi, I am thankful to Shakti Sidhu and family, to Suneet Mani Aiyar and family, and to Sarfaraz Ahmad, Naseem Akhtar and Muhammad Shahnawaz. Particular gratitude is held for Kazim, Zakia and Ahmad Zaheer, for a huge amount of assistance of all personal and professional kinds in both Delhi and Lucknow. In Lucknow, Nirmala Sharma and Naheed Varma both provided me with a warm and friendly place to stay, and the legendary Ram Advani offered me the same excellent company, conversation and cups of tea as he has many researchers before me. Thanks also to the staff of the American Institute of Indian Studies in Lucknow, for their initial help with my orientation in their city. Research stints in Aligarh were enhanced by the good humour of Farhan and Fauzia Mujib, and Ataur Rehman.

The key ideas and arguments of this study, while based on historical record and documentary evidence, were inevitably largely shaped and informed through conversations with influential members of the contemporary Shi'a community of Lucknow. Special mention is reserved for all the following, many of whom are descendants of the key figures examined in this book, for the remarkable helpfulness and goodwill they showed to an outsider with a rather odd curiosity in their personal views and family histories. In view of their great willingness to share information with me and their frequently candid openness, I would like to take the opportunity to make clear that all arguments within this book are mine and mine alone.

For his introduction to the ways of western Lucknow and access to useful sources, I thank Sultan 'Ali Sadiq and family. Muhammad Amir Muhammad Khan, the current Raja of Mahmudabad, was extremely good-humoured and hospitable. The staff of the Shi'a Postgraduate College were very welcoming, especially Bhaskar Srivastava and the principal Dr Naqvi. In particular, a number of active Shi'a clergy within Lucknow were remarkably helpful and accepting of my interests, and this study would have been much different were it not for their assistance. For taking the time to speak with me, thanks to Maulanas Agha Roohi, Kalb-i-Jawad, Jamu Mian, Mirza Muhammad Athar and Safi Haider. Maulana Hamid ul-Hasan, principal of Nazimiya Arabic College, together with Dr Taqvi and Farid ul-Hasan, were endlessly helpful and a great pleasure to have met on several occasions. Among the Shi'a religious

community in Lucknow, my main gratitude goes to two scholars of exceptional generosity. Maulana Sajjad Nasir ‘Abaqati, the descendant of some of the key characters discussed in this book and the closest I could have to an *ustad*, furnished me with much of his wisdom and generosity. He and his relatives Kazim Jarwali, Jamal Kazim and Daniyal Kazim together provided me with a virtual second home and plenty of chai in their residence in Nakhhas, Lucknow. Maulana Mustafa Husain Asif Ja’isi also took me under his wing, allowing me access to his knowledge, home and bookshelves over a number of weeks, and facilitating my visit to some of the rural outposts of Awadhi Shi’ism such as Ja’is and Nasirabad. This study simply would not have been possible were it not for the tremendous collections of material that he made available to me. I am much indebted to him and to his nephews Kazim Mehdi and ‘Ali Mehdi for their formidable assistance.

My greatest thanks, however, remain with those family and friends who have offered the encouragement to complete this work. Were it not for the unconditional support of my parents, Celia and Keith, and of my wife Aleksandra, whose faith in this project and patience during the interminable ‘final stages’ of writing have been remarkable, none of this would have been possible. It is to them that this book is dedicated.

Justin Jones  
Exeter, 2010

## Frequently used abbreviations

AMU	Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University
CSAS	Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge
CUL	Cambridge University Library
GAD	General Administration Department files, UPSA
NAI	National Archive of India, New Delhi
NML	Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi
OIOC	Oriental and India Office Collections, London
UPNNR	United Provinces Native Newspaper Reports, L/R/5, OIOC
UPSA	Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-316-64981-7 — Shi'a Islam in Colonial India  
Justin Jones  
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## Note on transliteration

For the sake of simplicity and elegance, long vowels are marked with diacritics (as below) in the titles of referenced texts only. In the main text, words have been written according to their pronunciation. In quotations from other transliterated sources, words are rendered as they appear in the original text.

آ	ā	ط	t
ب	b	ظ	z
پ	p	ع	'
ت	t	غ	gh
ث	t	ف	f
س	s	ق	q
ج	j	ک	k
چ	ch	گ	g
ح	h	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ڈ	dh	و	v, w, ō, ū
ذ	z		
ر	r	ہ	h, or a <i>at the end of a word</i>
ڑ	r	ی	ē, ī, y
ز	z		
ژ	s		
س	s		
ش	sh		
ص	s		
ض	z		

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-316-64981-7 — Shi'a Islam in Colonial India  
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Frontmatter  
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## Select glossary of terms

<i>ajlaf</i>	the indigenous castes of Muslims, as opposed to <i>ashraf</i> .
<i>akhlaq</i>	moral or mannerly correctness.
' <i>alim</i> (pl. ' <i>ulama</i> )	a scholar of Islamic knowledge.
<i>amir</i> (pl. <i>umara</i> ')	social or political leader; a nobleman.
<i>Amir-ul-mominin</i>	'leader of the people', a title used by the Shi'a to refer to the first Imam 'Ali.
<i>anjuman</i>	a voluntary public association or society.
'Ashra	the first ten days of Muharram.
<i>ashraf</i>	the high-caste, respectable Muslim communities, consisting of Sayyids, Sheikhs, Mughals and Pathans, descended from the Prophet's family or from Muslim ruling classes.
'Ashura	the tenth day of Muharram, upon which the death of Husain is commemorated and <i>ta'ziyas</i> buried.
' <i>atabat-i-'aliyat</i>	the Shi'a holy shrine cities of Iraq at Karbala, Najaf, Kazimain and Samarra.
<i>azadari</i>	the practice of mourning for Imam Husain observed during Muharram.
<i>azan</i>	the call to daily prayer.
Bara-Wafat	the anniversary of the birth (and also death) of the Prophet.
<i>begam</i>	a married <i>sharif</i> Muslim woman.
<i>bid'a</i>	innovation.
<i>bila fasil</i>	'without interruption', a phrase used periodically by the Shi'a to describe 'Ali's succession of Muhammad.

<i>biradari</i>	endogamic kinship group.
Caliph ( <i>Khalifa</i> )	the personages charged with rightful succession of the Prophet according to Sunni Islam, the first and most important of whom are Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Usman and 'Ali.
<i>char-yari</i>	'four comrades', the names of the first four Sunni Caliphs.
<i>chauk</i>	the central market area of a city.
<i>dar-ul-'ulum</i>	an 'abode of knowledge', a <i>madrasa</i> .
<i>dargah</i>	tomb of a saint, shrine.
<i>dars-i-kharij</i>	the course of study in some cases followed to become a <i>mujtabid</i> .
<i>dars-i-nizamiya</i>	the curriculum of learning of many <i>madrasas</i> in north India, associated primarily with Firangi Mahal of Lucknow, with a particular emphasis on rational disciplines and sciences.
<i>deen</i>	religion.
<i>du'a</i>	prayer, recitation.
<i>duldul</i>	effigy of the steed upon which Iman Husain was mounted at Karbala.
<i>fatwa</i> (pl. <i>fatawa</i> )	a legal pronouncement issued by a <i>mufti</i> .
<i>fazil</i>	distinction, glorification, often denoting the degree gained from education within a <i>madrasa</i> or under an elevated ' <i>alim</i> .'
<i>fiqh</i>	the science of Islamic jurisprudence.
<i>firqa</i>	sect, faction.
<i>hadis</i>	the written traditions of the Prophet and his Companions or, in Shi'ism, of the Imams.
<i>hafiz</i>	one able to recite the Qur'an from memory.
Hanafi	the branch of Sunni jurisprudence dominant in South Asia, encapsulating the Deobandi,

Select glossary of terms

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<i>hawza</i>	Bareilvi, Firangi Mahal and Nadwa't ul-'Ulama schools. circle of scholars, denoting a place of learning (e.g. Najaf).
<i>hazrat</i>	Muslim notables, elites.
<i>husainiya</i>	alternative term for an <i>imambara</i> .
<i>'ibadat</i>	worship, religious practice.
<i>ijaza</i> (pl. <i>ijazat</i> )	certificate authorizing its recipient to exercise <i>ijtihad</i> .
<i>ijtihad</i>	the autonomous religious effort of a qualified <i>mujtahid</i> on a point of <i>shari'at</i> .
<i>ikhtilafat</i>	contradiction, disputation, opposition.
<i>'ilm</i> (pl. <i>'ulum</i> )	science/knowledge.
Imam	in Shi'ism, one of the descendants and legitimate successor of the Prophet, beginning with 'Ali and ending with the twelfth Imam; the personages at the doctrinal and devotional heart of Shi'ism.
<i>imambara</i>	the edifices in which Muharram is observed, and eulogies for Imam Husain recited.
Isna 'Ashari	'Twelver', the branch of Shi'ism that subscribes to the authority of the twelve Imams, the two major branches of which are Usuli and Akhbari Shi'ism.
<i>ittehad</i>	unity.
<i>jhanda</i>	flag, standard.
<i>jihad</i>	effort or struggle, often used in the context of holy war in defence of Islam.
<i>juda/judagana</i>	separate/separateness.
<i>juloos</i>	<i>ta'ziya</i> procession, enacted during Muharram.
<i>kalam</i>	the discipline of dialectical theology.
<i>karbala</i>	a piece of ground symbolic of the land in Iraq upon which Imam Husain was

	martyred, where <i>ta'ziyas</i> are buried during Muharram.
<i>khatib</i>	sermonizer; one who delivers the <i>khutbah</i> from the <i>mimbar</i> after Friday prayers.
<i>Khilafat</i>	office of the Caliph.
<i>khutba</i>	the sermon or oratory delivered together with Friday prayers, and on other occasions. It generally contains Arabic exaltations of God, the Prophet and other personages, after which its content is left to the discretion of the <i>khatib</i> delivering it.
<i>khwani</i>	narrative rendition of the Karbala tragedy, offered in some <i>majalis</i> .
<i>madrasa</i>	an educational institution of the Islamic sciences, training <i>'ulama</i> .
<i>majlis</i> (pl. <i>majalis</i> )	council or gathering, or in the case of Shi'ism congregations of mutual mourning for Husain.
<i>mantiq</i>	the discipline of logic.
<i>marja'</i>	one who is seen as qualified to provide guidance in all points of religious practice and law by ordinary individuals. According to some interpretations, only one individual at any one time is entitled to this status, and becomes a universalistic leader ( <i>Marja' ul-Taqlid</i> ).
<i>marsiya</i>	a mostly Shi'a genre of poetry associated with Muharram and especially famous in Lucknow, in which the glories of Husain and the other Imans are recited and their suffering evoked.
<i>mashk</i>	a replica of the empty leather water-carrier said to have been carried by Husain's daughter Sakina at Karbala, a replica of

Select glossary of terms

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	which was a feature of Muharram possessions in some U.P. towns, carried upon a <i>tir</i> .
<i>masjid</i>	mosque.
<i>maslak</i>	sect, school of thought.
<i>matam(dari)</i>	(the practice of) self-flagellation in mourning for the Imans. When blades are used, it is sometimes known as <i>chako ki matam</i> .
Maulana	designation of religious distinction and authority.
<i>maulvi</i>	religious speaker or preacher; learned man.
<i>mazhab</i>	religion, faith.
<i>medan</i>	ground.
Mehdi	in Shi'ism, the absent twelfth Imam, whose revelation is awaited.
<i>mela</i>	fair.
<i>millat</i>	religion, community.
<i>nimbar</i>	the stand from which preachers speak in a mosque.
<i>minhaj</i>	path, system.
<i>mi'raj</i>	the ascension of the Prophet.
<i>mominin</i>	'followers', often used in juxtaposition with the leading <i>sadat</i> of Shi'ism.
<i>mu'afidar</i>	a holder of revenue-free grants of land.
<i>muballigh</i> (pl. <i>muballighin</i> )	missionary.
<i>mufti</i>	one entitled to issue a <i>fatwa</i> .
<i>muhalla</i>	neighbourhood.
Muharram	the first month of the Muslim calendar, observed by both Shi'as and Sunnis in distinct ways, during which the martyrdom of Imam Husain and other personages is commemorated.
<i>mujtahid</i>	one qualified to perform <i>ijtihad</i> . In Shi'ism, the title denotes the leading religious authorities, qualified to make rulings on the <i>shari'a</i> and

	subjects of allegiance for the Shi'a community.
<i>munazara/munazir</i>	religious disputation or debate/debater.
<i>munsif</i>	judge.
<i>muqallid</i>	the individual adherent of a chosen <i>mujtabid</i> or <i>marja'</i> .
<i>mut'a</i>	a form of contractual temporary marriage sanctioned by Shi'a religious law.
<i>mutawalli</i>	the trustee of a <i>waqf</i> or, sometimes, of another religious institution.
<i>nechri/nechriyat</i>	atheist, materialist/atheism, materialism.
<i>nisab</i>	the curriculum of an institution of Islamic learning.
<i>peshnamaz</i>	leader of congregational prayers.
<i>pardah</i>	the veiling or seclusion of women.
<i>qasba</i>	the Muslim-dominated rural towns and settlements of the North Western Provinces and Awadh.
<i>qaum/qaumi</i>	community or nation/the adjectival form, communal or national.
<i>rais</i>	rural landholder.
<i>risala</i> (pl. <i>rasail</i> )	treatise, tract.
<i>sadat</i>	see <i>sayyid</i> .
<i>sadr</i>	president, principal.
<i>sadr-i-sadoor</i>	'chief justice', the term used in Awadh to refer to the chief <i>mufti</i> of a city.
<i>sahaba</i>	denotes the Companions of the Prophet, including the Caliph.
<i>sajjada nashin</i>	successor to the leadership of a religious establishment.
<i>sarparast(i)</i>	leader(ship).
<i>satyagraha</i>	form of civil disobedience, practised by Gandhi and evoked during the <i>tabarra</i> agitation of 1939.
<i>sayyid</i> (pl. <i>sadat</i> )	a descendant of Muhammad via the Imams, the <i>sharif</i> community from whom all Shi'a <i>mujtabids</i> and most Indian Shi'a elites originate.

Select glossary of terms

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<i>shahid/shahadat</i> <i>shajra/shajra-i-nasb</i>	martyr/martyrdom. genealogy/'family tree', usually charting the lineage of <i>sayyids</i> to the Prophet's family.
<i>shari'a(t)</i> <i>sharif</i> <i>soz</i>	the law of Islam. denotes <i>ashraf</i> status. lyrical or musical dirge for Husain, associated with Muharram.
<i>swaraj</i> <i>tabarra</i>	independence, self-rule. the Shi'a cursing of the Sunni Caliphs for their usurpation of Iman 'Ali.
<i>tabligh</i>	dissemination/proselytisation of Islamic knowledge.
<i>tabut</i>	a Shi'a custom performed in some towns such as Lucknow, in which a horse is adorned as the steed of Husain and led in the <i>juloos</i> .
<i>tafriq</i> <i>tafsir</i> <i>takhlus</i> <i>ta'lif</i>	sectarianism, partisanship. the science of Qur'anic exegesis. the name of authorship. compendium of the writings of exalted past scholars, distinct from <i>tasnif</i> .
<i>ta'luqdar</i>	a large-scale landowner whose proprietary rights were established by the British after 1857.
<i>taqiya</i>	in Shi'ism, the concealment or dissimulation of true religious beliefs in circumstances of potential danger or humiliation from other religious communities.
<i>taqlid</i>	deference/submission; in Shi'ism, the emulation of or subservience to a chosen <i>mujtahid</i> in matters of religious law; deference to the <i>ijtihad</i> of another.
<i>taqrib</i>	'ecumenism', the project of constructing cross-confessional unity.
<i>tarjuma</i>	translation.

<i>tasawwuf</i>	Islamic mysticism/Sufism.
<i>tasnif</i>	newly authored tract, distinct from <i>ta'lif</i> .
<i>tauhid</i>	the oneness of God.
<i>tawa'if</i>	courtesan, a female entertainer associated with the Awadh Court.
<i>ta'ziya/ta'ziyadari</i>	an effigy of the tomb of Imam Husain, symbolically revered and sometimes interred during Muharram/the practice of carrying the <i>ta'ziya</i> in a procession to its site of burial, conducted during Muharram.
<i>ta'ziya-khana</i>	a space in a home or <i>imambara</i> in which a <i>ta'ziya</i> is kept.
<i>tazkira</i>	a genre of biographical writing in Arabic, Persian and Urdu.
<i>tehrif</i>	alteration, corruption.
<i>tehsildar</i>	collector, revenue collector.
<i>tehzib</i>	culture or etiquette, a term heavily associated with Lucknow.
'ulama	see 'alim.
'ulum	see 'ilm.
umara'	see amir.
'urs	the death anniversary of a Muslim saint.
<i>ustad</i> (pl. <i>ustaden</i> )	religious teacher.
Usuli	the dominant branch of Isna 'Ashari Shi'ism since the eighteenth century. It differs from Akhbari Shi'ism in that it accepts forms of intellectual and analogical reasoning as legitimate methods of jurisprudence, and in consequence has come to imbue its religious leaders with a greater degree of legal and charismatic authority.
Wahhabi	a reformist school dating from the eighteenth century, renowned for their zealous and uncompromising opposition to any custom deemed to undermine the oneness of God.

*Select glossary of terms*

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<i>wa'iz</i> (pl. <i>wa'izin</i> )	preacher.
<i>waqf</i>	a religious endowment directed towards the upkeep of institutions such as mosques, <i>madrasas</i> and <i>imambaras</i> .
<i>wasiqa/wasiqadar</i>	pension agreement offered by the government of India/in Lucknow, the disenfranchised former nobility of the Nawabi Court.
<i>waza'if</i>	charity.
<i>zakhir</i>	one who remembers God by reciting his names and praises; in Shi'ism, the term often refers to a preacher who renders the significances of the Imams during Muharram.
<i>zamindar</i>	landholder.
<i>ziarat</i>	in Shi'ism, most commonly denotes pilgrimage to the shrine cities, or a visitation to other sacred ground.
<i>zikh</i>	the 'remembrance' of God; the practice of reciting the names of God and, in the case of Shi'ism, of the Imams.