CHAPTER-1
Social and Economic Conditions of Indian Muslims in the Eighteenth Century

The Mughal Empire increased in strength for about 150 years after its establishment in India and reached a high degree of centralization. Its subjects, both Hindus and Muslims, owed loyalty to the Emperor, whose orders were obeyed as the commands of a person holding the highest authority in the land. As long as this attitude prevailed, the integration and power of the empire was assured. Aurangzeb was now the Emperor in Delhi and he was the repository of the powers vested in the central authority. He was “magnificent in his private habits, diligent in business, exact in his religious observances, an elegant letter writer and ever ready with choicest passages from the Quran.” After his death in 1707, the Mughal Empire entered its period of descendance was in the process of disintegration.

The history of the Mughal Empire from that period onwards presents a dismal picture of ruin, brought about by unquestionable thirst for intrigue and treachery. Of the six emperors that succeeded Aurangzeb, two were under the thumb of Zulfiqar Ali Khan, a General who knew no scruples and four were willing tools in the hands of a couple of political adventurers, the Sayyid brothers.¹

Deterioration and disintegration had set in 1720, Nizamul Mulk succeeded in recurring the Deccan from the control of the central authority in Delhi. The Governor of Oudh, a Persian merchant by origin, had established his own dynasty, independent of the control of the Emperor in Delhi. The Hindu subjects of the Empire were at the same time asserting their independence. The Sikhs were rising as a power to be reckoned with. The Marathas having enforced their claim to blackmail (Chauth) throughout Southern India forced the Emperor to agree to the cession of Malwa, Gujarat and Orissa.²

The Rohillahs were soon to set up independent chieftainships. The weakening of the central authority had a damaging effect on the economic life of the Empire, whose revenues began to dwindle at an alarming rate. Security on the roads while travelling, so essential for the free flow of trade and industry, had been badly affected and this in turn tended to depress the economic prosperity of the people, giving rise to a serious law and order problem. The mighty Empire of the Mughals, so persistently
built up, was faltering and, split up into fragments; it had lost its certainty to successfully oppose the encroachments on its territories from its external foes and on its powers from internal foes.³

Everyone was concerned more with the accumulation of private wealth, than that of national power and glory. Noblemen and politicians were intrigued with the enemies of the realm, in order to squeeze out certain advantages for themselves, in case the intrigue and the adventure succeeded. “None of them was willing to face the Marathas and they minted excuses when ordered to proceed against the recalcitrant Raja of Jodhpur.” The example set by the upper echelons of society was proving to be contagious and the common people were infected by the malady of lack of loyalty and a general feeling of demoralization.⁴

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, sectarian antagonism had created a gulf between various sects of Islam in India, the inevitable consequence of which was that it was difficult for the Muslim Emperor to keep his grip over his subjects, who were preponderantly non-Muslims. “The raggedness of character, the determination and the will to meet and overcome all administrative and political difficulties, were no longer at the level achieved in the periods when the Empire was still in the process of expansion.” This antagonism had enabled open hostility to creep in the Muslims of India, who were a house divided against it, badly shaking the foundation and fabric of the Muslim rule.⁵

To add to this difficulty, there existed social and economic causes, which also worked to their detriment. Beginning as a small minority, Muslims had increased in numbers, but this advantage had been more than off set by the disadvantages it produced, breeding divisions and quarrels, rather than giving birth to strength through unity.⁶

The patronage extended to Muslims had resulted in increasing the prosperity of the Muslim Zamindars, noblemen, workers and artisans, but with the uneven dispersal of wealth among the various sectors of the society, this patronage had accentuated mat-distribution of wealth, bring with it evil consequences. The decadent conditions that were apparent to every eye at the beginning of the eighteenth century had brought to the surface chaotic trends and the entire edifice of the onetime glorious Empire was screened by a blinding fog of social, political administrative and economic disorder.⁷
Those who were supposed to run the Government machinery, thereby, ensuring justice and fair play, law and order, economic prosperity and social cohesion, had degraded themselves to the level of parasites, which fattened their personal power, to the utter neglect of their duties and responsibilities. Under such conditions, tyranny of the poor and unfortunate members of the society was the order of the day and bribery and extortion, favoritism and nepotism. The Muslims were as much subjected to these humiliations and tyrannies as the Hindus and the people holding the whip of authority in their hands lashed the backs of both with equal ferocity. “The Muslims had not only lost their leaders; but also their integration. From a well integrated community, they had degenerated into a helpless crowd.”

When a ruling class is bent on forcing the obedience from their subordinates, then, they are actually destroying the growth of intelligence and self-respect among their people. This briefly sums up the relationship that subsisted at this time between the classes and the masses. The edifice of social integration and unity among the Muslims of India was built on the foundation of a common faith, Islam, without which it would certainly topple over. When spiritual confusion blurs the vision of people, their political disintegration, invariably, follows soon. It is, therefore, the loyalty towards a leader and religious enthusiasm, that has, at many periods of history proved to be the best means of preserving social cohesion and integration. Agreement among the people tends to increase cooperation among them and those sharing common religious beliefs are better able to work in harmony than those quarrelling over their beliefs.

At such a time, sometimes a religious reformer takes upon himself the duty of bringing about unity among his co-religionists over the essentials, leaving each side free to differ on non-essentials. Historic causes tend to answer their own needs and the same was for the Muslims of India at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The times cried out loud for a benevolent and bold religious reformer who could once again unite the Muslims against a common foe and the times produced one such a great person in Shah Waliullah.

Shah Waliullah of Delhi, the greatest Muslim scholars of eighteenth century in India, made an immense contribution to the intellectual, economic, social, political and religious life of the Muslim community in India, the effects of which persist to the present day. He lived during a time when the Muslim empire was losing ground on
the Indian subcontinent, with the Muslim community divided and at odds. Seeking to give theological and metaphysical issues a new rational interpretation and laboring to harmonize reason and revelation, he tried to reconcile the various factions of the Indian Muslims, thereby protecting the empire from collapse.12

Shah Waliullah contended that the root cause of the downfall of the Indian Muslims was their ignorance of the sacred scripture of Islam. He initiated a movement with the theme ‘Back to the Quran’ and translated the Quran into Persian to facilitate its understanding among all the Muslims of India. It is believed to be the first complete translation of the Quran from the Arabic by an Indian Muslim Scholar.13

Eighteenth century in the Indian sub-continent opened with two most important occurrences. One was the birth of an unparalleled Islamic scholar, thinker and reformer Shah Waliullah Dehlavi (1114-1176 H. /1703-1762 AD.) and another was the death of a righteous, pious and strong great Muslim ruler, Emperor Aurangzib Alamgir (reign - 1658-1707). The times of that century were very uneasy, critical and ruinous for Muslims in all spheres – political, science, educational, etc. In this chapter, we are going to mention the social and economic conditions of Muslims of India in the eighteenth century under two sections.

1. Social Condition

Shah Waliullah’s period was famous for political instability and degeneration. The political degeneration generally becomes the cause of moral and social downfall. It is also true that moral and social degeneration causes the political downfall. In the times of Shah Waliullah the Emperors, especially Muhammad Shah (1719-48), Ahmad Shah (1748-54) and Jahandar Shah (1754-59) and common nobleman were afflicted with social and moral crimes and the general public was influenced by them.14

Enumerating the causes of the downfall of Mughal Empire, Vidya Dhar Mahajan writes, “Too much wealth, luxury and leisure soften their characters. Their harems became full. They got wine in plenty. They went in palanquins to the battle field. Such nobles were not fitting to fight against the Marathas, the Rajputs and the Sikhs. The nobility degenerated at a very rapid pace.”15 Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlavi has given same examples and luxurious living of Mughal nobles, as he stated “The women of the houses of Nawab Qamaruddin Khan used to conclude their bath with a
dip in rose water. The indenture on pan leaves and flowers purchased for the womenfolk of another noble amounted to Rupees three hundred”. 16

Another historian Ghulam Ali Azad says, “It was commonly known and stated by the people in Aurangabad that quite a large number of persons never cooked food in their own houses during the time of Amirul Umera (Hashim Ali Khan). The cooks of the Amirul Umera used to sell their share victuals with results that highly rich Pulau could be purchased for a few Paisas.” 17 Individual’s moral and social behavior, customs and cultures and practices were borrowed from the non-Muslims. 18 Many Hindus’ customs and cultures and nonsensibal practices were continuously important to the Emperor’s and noble palaces and established as a Muslim culture. 19

Unorthodox creeds and polyteistic practices disregarding the divine command to make religion exclusively for God had been taken from polytheist and Shi’its, which were, to say the least, more dangerous for the Muslim society than their other social and moral degeneration. Divine honors were paid to the graves of the saints, prostration was common before the so-called spiritual guides, shrines were venerated bedecked with costly bed sheets, and flowers, ablutions were offered for one’s ancestors, fairs were held in graveyards and musical concerts were held to honor the departed saints taken as guardian spirits in every part of the country. The doctrine of Tauhid (oneness of God), had come to acquire a peculiar, restricted connotation: that God was undoubtedly the creator and lord of the Universe, but he had delegated his authority to the saints and godly souls who distributed favors on his behalf or acted as intercessors between man and God. 20

It's in this connection that the statement of Luther of Stoddard is mentionable here, although his generalization is not free from objection, as he said, “As for religion it was a decadent as everything else”. The austere monotheism of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) had become overlaid with a rank growth of superstitions and puerile mysticism. The mosques stood unfrequented and ruinous, deserted by the ignorant multitude, which decked out in amulets, charms and rosaries, listened to squalid fakirs or ecstatic dervishes, and went on pilgrimage to the tom of a holy man: worshipped as saints and intercessors with that Allah who had become too remote a being for the direct devotion of these benighted souls. As for the moral percepts of the Quran, they were ignored or defined, wine-drinking and opium-eating were good-high universal, prostitution was rampant, and the most degrading vices flaunted,
naked and unashamed.” Describing the hopeless situation of Indian Muslim Society Sayid Sulaiman Nadwi said, “The Mughal Empire was about to Collapse”. Exotic beliefs and practices and innovation in matters of religion were common among the Muslims: impious sheikhs and fakirs had turned the shrines of the saints into purple seats for beguiling over credulous message.” The palace of Emperor and many nobles was influenced by Iranian Culture and accustomed with many Shia’ customs.

A new eighteenth century development in some provinces of India was the model of celebration of the anniversary of the Muharram. They formed processions displaying the placards and along with their mourning songs, abused and condemn the enemies of Imam Husain (d.61H./680 AD). Sometimes there were some quarrels between Sunnis and Shi’ites, but sometimes in some places the Sunni’s also participated in the programs. Prostitutes were available and homosexual intercourse and debauchery was rife. The eighteenth century craze for licentiousness had prompted many members of the aristocracy to appear in their private musical gatherings in dresses as women-wastefulness and extravagance were the hallmark of aristocracy.

The number of other festivals and fairs offering opportunities for unbridled revelry and marry- making and outing were considerable. There was no imposition placed on the participants drinking habits during the festivities, and the nights were mainly devoted to Utter debauchery. Muhammad Shah, Jahandar Shah and Ahmad Shah were so attracted to the unsocial practices that beautiful women were seen in their palaces even at a distance of a few miles. To deal in usury and interest was also common in the Mughal Empire. Gambling, adultery and wine drinking was found, especially in the noble society.

In spite of social degeneration from every side and in almost all classes, there were many perfect spiritual persons available in the country, as Shah Abdul Aziz stated, “as many as twenty two leading and good guiding sheikhs of different mystical orders happened to be available, in the reign of Muhammad Shah (1719-48) in Delhi – it is something which rarely comes about,” who sustained the hopes and spirits of the Muslim population of these, the most prominent was Shah Waliullah. As a greatest thinker and reformer of his times, Shah Waliullah observed the Indian Muslim society properly and diagnosed its diseases perfectly and then presented them with a proper treatment and advised for there relief. Shah Waliullah’s addresses and
advice regarding the social life is important and these are the true pictures among Indian Muslim society simultaneously. Some of them mentioned below:

“No society could survive without maintaining some resemblance equilibrium. A proper adjustment of income and expenditure and the avoidance of the extremities of poverty and wealth were the imperative laws of society. On the moral side, should a large number of people indulge in distilling liquor and carving idols, they would corrupt the religion of the other inhabitants”.

Shah Waliullah drew the attention of the Indian nobles to the fact that the aristocracy’s extravagance was the principle reason for the fall of the Persian and Byzantine towns and, in turn, for that of the empire. The townsfolk in those two empires had vied with each other for supremecy in pomp and prodigality. They lavishly spent money on palatial buildings, baths, garden, horses, handsome slaves, food, drink and clothing. Consequently, their agriculturists, merchants and artisans were taxed most crucially. Those who dared to rebel were crushed by the military. The same was true, as Shah Waliullah said, the condition for those Mughal towns where not only the aristocracy, but also ordinary people had been so prostrated by extravagant and reckless spending on effeminate luxuries that they were unable to get out of the vicious circle.

The luxurious living of the rulers was indeed and apt to illustration of that of the days of Chorus (Kisras) and Kaisers. But for these vices, there were other causes for these principle vices as well, namely the limitation of the reserved territory bankruptcy of the state exchequer, multiplicity of the jagirdars and the monopoly system. In short, the storm of misfortunes had started blowing from everywhere and, the upper class was mainly responsible. This was the condition of Delhi, the capital of the empire.

Addressing the Muslim soldiers Shah Waliullah said that they had been raised by Allah for the purpose of jihad in order to root out polytheism at its core. They were failing, however, to pursue their sacred duty. Their horses and arms were used to enrich themselves and jihad remained far from their minds. They drank, consumed Indian hemp, were clean – shaved (except mustaches) and oppressed the weak. In return, for such bad behaviors they gave nothing to society. The military would soon have to account for their deeds before their creator. Allah wishes them to act and dress like pious ghazis (fighters). They should wear beards, perform compulsory prayers
and protect the poor and the defenseless. Ghazis in battle should be eager for victory. Prior to traveling and fighting, they should pray. If all these customs are followed Shah Waliullah believed it would be impossible for Muslim soldiers to lose in a battle.\textsuperscript{34}

Turning to the artisans, Shah Waliullah asserted that, like members of other classes in Muslim society, they too had adopted the wicked ways. They had abandoned compulsory prayers and have begun to worship their own gods, making pilgrimages to the tombs of Sufis like Shah Madar\textsuperscript{35} and Salar Mas’ud\textsuperscript{36}. They had invented innumerable devices for living and followed a multitude of superstitious and magical practices. Some of them had adopted a special type of dress and superstitiously ate certain foods; some drank alcohol and forced their women into prostitution to support their habit. These evils ensured that they would experience unhappy lives in this world and none too pleasant ones in the next. The morning and evenings of artisans should be occupied in prayer: their days in the pursuit of their legitimate and traditional professions; their nights set apart for their families; their earning should be greater than their spending and the remainder should be used for the comfort of the travelers.\textsuperscript{37}

Shah Waliullah posed the question to the descendants of leading Sufis: why had they splintered into various groups, each directed along a different path? He believed these Sufis had abandoned God’s way and that of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and they had assumed instead their own leadership, thereby challenging God. Not only misguided, in their religious practices, such Sufis posed as teachers and influenced others. Moreover Shah Waliullah asserted that they accepted disciples for money. They used the sacred knowledge for worldly gains and led their disciples away from Allah and the Prophet. To him, many contemporary Sufis are similar to bandits, thugs and imposters and enemies of the faith. Shah Waliullah continued with a general note of warning to all Muslims about teachers, they should be beware of those failing to attract people to the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), but drew them to themselves. The subtle teachings of past Sufis could not be discussed with laymen, for Sufism in general was designed to promote ihsan (inner development).\textsuperscript{38}

Addressing the ulama (learned) Shah Waliullah called them fools, preoccupied with Greek learning and the mastery of grammar. To him, these did not rate as a form
of learning. Real knowledge was confined to Quranic verses and the understanding of Sunnah. Therefore, the ulama should learn the Quran and understand its complex terminology and controversial verses. Likewise, it was the duty of all theologists to preserve the authentic Hadiths of the Prophet. They should attain a correct understanding of the Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh) methods used in prayers, ablutions, and jihad. Even his way of speaking and the control of his voice should be copied and the ulama should also have some knowledge of his ethical practices. The Sunnah, however, should not be elevated to the status of obligatory religious duties, like methods of performing ablutions and salat and nisab (a certain estate of number or measure for being the Shar'i tax obligatory), Zakat and the rules of inheritance. The history of the Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh) companions and Arabic grammar should be studied with theology in mind.39

Addressing the preachers the Shah Waliullah said that they had been confusing people by quoting false Hadiths in their sermons. Ecstatic utterances, came from those who were not engrossed in the divine; rather people should learn ‘Ihsan’ in order to receive divine inspiration.40

Shah Waliullah’s admonitions to common Muslims were equally severe. He said that they had turned to cupidity and avarice. Women had begun to dominate men and they in turn had ignored the natural rights of women. People considered the unlawful palatable and lawful bitter. Allah had commanded nothing that could not be performed by the average person. Shah Waliullah advised Muslims to satisfy their sexual urges in lawful marriages. Extravagance should be avoided by people in every social group. Only food that was permitted by the Sharia’ should be eaten. People should support themselves without becoming parasitic on the community or state. Allah would help each person to achieve self-sufficiency.41

Shah Waliullah condemned usury on economic grounds. He pleaded that the lust to become rich through usury undermined interest in agriculture, crafts and other productive professions. People were tempted to enrich themselves by realizing high rates of compound interest. This was an extremely unhealthy means of earning money. In pre-Islamic Arabia, he wrote, unending enmity and wars between different tribes and clans due to usury, prompted the Quran to make it illegal and forbidden.42 In this connection, Professor Athar Abbas Rizvi has given a wrong information from Shah Waliullah by misinterpreting his statement in Hujjatullah al- Baligha, as he
informed, “However, the Shah Waliullah did not totally forbid the taking or giving of Loans on interest, but asserted that it was the duty of authority enforcing the Shari’a to set a limit to the interest rate.”

Actually the Shah Waliullah did not say the above, but his stated: “The order in this matter is confined to the Shari’a (Law maker, means Allah and His prophet) either he limits the permission by low rate or strongly forbids the high rate or prohibits it totally, it is upon him.” Neither Shah Waliullah nor any other authority has the right to make the interest permissible which has been forbidden by the lawmaker – Allah and his prophet. Shah Waliullah clearly said, “To deal in interest is rejected (batil).” Shah Waliullah has drawn the attention of the people towards gambling and said that they should reject gambling because this was the way to seize the wealth of others based on ignorance, illegal lust and fraudulence.

Shah Waliullah had criticized the innovation which had crept into the practice of the Muslims. Regarding the festival of the tenth day of Muharram Shah Waliullah said that ‘Ashura had been made the day of mourning by a particular community; he asked if they did not know that every day was Allah’s and his will was responsible for all happenings. If it was true that Imam Husain (d.61 H./680 AD.) had been martyred on the day, it was also true that not a single day had passed without the death of some beloved of Allah. Some people had also learned by reserving ‘Ashura for sports and games. On the Shab-i-Barat Muslims, like heathens organized frivolous games and demonstration, said the Shah Wali-Allah. He challenged the Muslims to demonstrate the logic behind such a practice. He also condemned them for wastefulness in marriages. Again, when a death occurred in a family, the members of that family were made duty bound to feed their relatives during the mourning period. This he said was an unlawful custom.

Criticizing the neglect of prayers, Shah Waliullah said that few men were so deeply involved in their professional affairs that they were unable to find more time to perform prayers; others were so busy with their own amusements that they had forgotten the prayer times. Many had neglected Zakat, although a large section of rich men provided food and clothing for a number of people, it was not done with a view to giving Zakat.

Disapproving the Muslims dependence on the mansabs and stipends, Shah Waliullah asserted that the rulers, being unable to bear the burden of their protégé’s
demands had no alternative but to harass the ryot.⁴⁹ Shah Waliullah has condemned the Muslims visiting the tomb of any pious man for seeking the fulfillment of any demand.⁵⁰ But as for him, the normal visiting of any grave is a permissible good deed (mustahab).⁵¹

Shah Waliullah has advised the Muslims to return to the Arabic language, Arabian dress and Arab style of living and preferring them to others.⁵² Above advice given by Shah Waliullah proved that he was not at all pleased with the Iranian and Hindu cultures which had entered the palaces of Empires and nobles of the Mughal empire and to a pure Muslim society.

2. Economic Conditions

The increasing revenue demands of the state, the oppression and rapacity of the Zamindars, revenue farmers and the depredation of the adventures made the life of the people miserable. However, the life of the Indian masses was by and large better than it was at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵³

Of the two mainsprings of the Indian economy, agriculture and small industry, agriculture was the most important. But it was technically backward and stagnant. Cultivation depended on climate and the single factor which dominated the Indian agriculture was monsoon dependency. The lack of rains resulted in famines. The peasants had to work hard to meet the demands of the state, the Zamindars and the revenue farmers. Despite the backwardness of the means of communication, in land and foreign trade was carried under the Mughals. The chief imports were: bullion, raw silk, horses, metals, ivory, precious stones, velvets, brocades, perfumes, drugs, porcelain. The exports were various textiles, paper, indigo, opium salt paper and miscellaneous goods.⁵⁴

The most important industry in India was the manufacturing of cotton cloth. The principal centers of cotton manufacture were distributed throughout the country. Dacca was reputed to produce delicate Muslin fabrics ‘the best and finest cloth made of cotton’. Bernier observes, “There is in Bengal such a quantity of cotton and silk, that the kingdom may be called the common storehouse for those two kinds of merchandise, not a Hindustan, but of all the neighboring kingdoms, and even of Europe”. Though Bengal was the premier center of silk production, silk weaving was practiced in Lahore, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Gujarat. Shawl and carpet weaving
industries flourished in Kashmir, Lahore and Agra, and shipbuilding flourished in Maharashtra, Andhra and Bengal. According to an English observer: ‘In shipbuilding they (the Indians) probably taught the English for more than they learnt from them.’ The Mughals in the eighteenth century encouraged trade and commerce. The Mugal, magnificent and luxury. Towns and cities grew out of this spirit. The riches carried annually to Delhi did not stagnate there. The production of each province and the performance of every art were in high demand.\(^{55}\)

The economic results of the foreign trade were beneficial to India. Foreign traders exported raw silk and salt papper from India cotton and silk goods, to the European markets. The imports arising out of foreign trade did not disturb the favorable balance of payments on account of the gold and silver bullion which the English and Dutch merchants brought to India. “India occupied a premier place in the world trade, in the beginning of the eighteenth century”, Peter the Great of Russia was constrained to admit. Bear in mind that the commerce of India is the commerce of the world and he who can exclusively command, it is the dictator of Europe.\(^{56}\)

In India, the reorganization of the land revenue system is considered as one of the crowning achievements of Akbar as an administrator, but the credit does not go to him exclusively. In fact, it was Sher Shah Suri who made a systematic survey of the land under cultivation and laid the foundation on which Akbar raised the superstructure. After a careful survey, the land was classified in to four categories based on its fertility and cultivability and the revenue was fixed accordingly. The arrangement benefited the state as well as the peasantry. The fixed land tax provided certainty of revenue and prevented by fraud on the part of the revenue officers.\(^{57}\)

According to Lane Pool, the land tax had always been the main source of revenue in India, and become almost the sole universal burden since Akbar had abolished not only the Poll – tax and pilgrim’s dues, but over fifty minor duties. The basis of the land revenues was the recognition that the agriculturist was the owner of the soil, the state being entitled to the surplus produce. In similarly iqta or land grant was also adopted. An equal rate was demanded from both the Muslim and Non-Muslim subjects. This was a complete departure from the Islamic principle of Ushr or Kharaj. It aimed at returning to the peasant, the power to enjoying his property and profit from his labor. The very successful land revenue system of British India was a little more than a modification of these principles.\(^{58}\)
Akbar also introduced a new and fairer system of taxation based on carefully estimated tables of crop yields. Tax collectors had their own district tables and used them to calculate how much grain the farmers should contribute. This contribution was then converted into its cash value, district by district, because food prices varied in different parts of the empire.  

The industry was also very developed in this period. After citing various sources that give an account of Indian industry in the sixteenth century, Moreland remarked in 1920: “Making every allowance for these sources of error, it is still in my mind indisputable that in the matter of industry, India was more advanced relatively to Western Europe than see is today.” A considerable amount of trade was carried on by overland route through the two Indian gateways, Qandahar and Kabul, with Balkh and Khurasan, Khwarizm and Persia. Turkey and Arabia, and even Tibet and China. But it is not known whether Indian traders had any concern to maintain a favorable balance of trade as the European mercantilists strived for it in this period. The Indian maritime trade was confined to the coastal areas only because of the Portuguese piracy. To quote Moreland again”, in the closing years of the sixteenth century of Portuguese were indisputably masters of the Indian seas, not so much from their own strength as from the failure of the Asiatic nation to realize the nature of the sea power”.  

Shah Waliullah belongs to that period of the Mughal rule in India when, after the death of Aurangzeb Alamgir the process of all round disintegration of the empire had already set in, comprising of all aspects of the society; political, social, moral, religious, educational, economic and others. During his lifetime, Shah Waliullah saw the regime of the kings of the Mughal dynasty that had lost control over many provinces of the empire and two years after his death they, surrendered the administration of Bihar, Orissa and Bengal to the British company.

During his life time Shah Waliullah tried his best to reverse the course of events by his writing and by taking an active interest in the political affairs of the country. But he could only delay the doom’s day. But could not avert it. Shah Waliullah mentions in his book. *Fuyuz ul Harmaim* his dream about the destruction of the forces working against Islam and its followers and he also mentions the result of this struggle, which was to culminate in the destruction of every system prevalent at that time.
The prophecy mentioned in the dream is confirmed by the events that followed. Here we are concerned with the economic system only and we have to examine the change in the system predicted by Shah Wali-Allah. While discussing the causes of the rise and fall of nations, Shah Waliullah attaches great importance to the economic factor. He asserts that an ideal society and a just economic system go together. They are interrelated and interlinked. He divided the life of mankind into two related compartments. One is concerned with the spiritual favors of God and closeness to him while the other pertains to the worldly boon or favors received from his Lord. So that one cannot be indifferent to earning one’s living and the material wealth in this world.

With the downfall of the Mughal Empire the problems of maintaining law and order in the country were dangerously horrible pastures. They had affected the social, educational and economic conditions also. Without going into its details, we shall discuss here the general economic conditions prevalent during those days.

As we know, the feudal system was the order of the day at that time. Under this system the land of the country had become the property of the kings, nobles, 
*Jagirdars* and *Zamindars*. With this monopoly, they were treating the agriculturists as farm workers who had to work hard to satisfy their masters. They were like beasts of burden working from morning till evening, while also bearing the main burden of taxes. Even then it was difficult for them to make the earnable. Whenever the government needed the money they were the target of additional taxes. The defaulters were punished. The position of farmers was reduced to that of the beasts, donkeys and bulls that were used for ploughing, irrigation and harvesting the crops. The rich class lived in extreme luxuries while the life of the poor class presented a horrible contrast with their miseries. Shah Waliullah said that main cause of societal ills was the unjust economic systems prevalent in the country. The wealth of the state which was in fact the property of the society had become the wealth of the individuals such as kings, nobles, landlord, and other such people, and the common man was at their mercy. There were people who were totally dependent on state grants such as poets, the so-called *Mujahideen, Sufi* and Scholars of divinity and others of their class who had become a burden on the state. They had no other means of income nor did they need any.
In fact, it was the capitalist created system of economy, which had ruined the country. It had resulted in an unjust distribution of wealth. The wealth of the country had become the property of a few people, which in fact, should have been the property of the society. Apart from these ills of the feudal system there was a large section of the population, which was wholly dependent on the state for its living. It had become accustomed to draw money from the Treasury without rendering any real service to the state on the plea that they were soldiers, Sufis, poets, scholars of divinity and belonged to a such group of people whom the rulers generally favored with grants without their rendering any service to the state. They had all become a burden on the economy of the society, though they had lost their utility. This section of the population had become lazy and the main burden of taxation fell on the working class. These poor people were exerting themselves and working hard as laborers for the protection of the wealth of the society. This class of people was agriculturists, traders, manufactures and people of different vocations. This was the main section of the society which was toiling hard produce as much as they could.

Analyzing the causes of the failure of the economy, Shah Waliullah says, “during these days the main causes of the failure of the economy are two fold: The first cause is that people have become accustomed to being a burden on the state. They belonged to the class of soldiers, the scholars of divinity, the poets and the so-called pious ones who want to live without work, being solely dependent on the state grant. They have become a burden for the economy of the society. The second cause is that the agriculturists, traders and people engaged in different crafts have to pay havey taxes which is beyond their capacity, although the secret of the prosperity of the country and the improvement of the economic conditions lies in the reduction of taxes without which no industry can flourish and which is, in fact a great source of income for the state. This is an important point, which the people should bear in mind”.  

Shah Waliullah’s thought was for the economy, which brought development to the people who were below the poverty line. He wanted to increase the purchasing power of the common man, which was so much needed during his days. He was not in favor of the economic model, which did not benefit the economically weak class. He also came down heavily on the policy dictated by the feudal-oriented system. He was more concerned about the value while the market economy of those days was
concerned about price. He realized that the capitalist model of development was ruining the country so far as the interest of the common man was concerned. He did not approve the concentration of the sources of economy in a few hands and in its place, suggested an alternative arrangement in which the economy is largely beneficial for the humanity. He criticized the development of the country which was not for the masses but for a particular rich section of the society. For him the basic need of the society was to augment the production for the masses, which was the need of the hour. The problem of the common man, he emphasized was the equitable or just distribution of the wealth and that the resources of income should be utilized for the benefit of the masses. Deeply analyzing the economic condition of the country, the causes of the failure of the economy. Shah Waliullah considered the economic model of those days utterly alien to the realities of the country, which was inhabited largely by the toiling masses. He wanted the market to be for the people and not the people to be for the market.

Shah Waliullah’s thoughts on the economic conditions of those days provide yet another example of his masterly skill in integrating economic theory with ethical values. No doubt, he was definitely ahead of his time in suggesting solution for the ills of the society. All his emphasis was on the plea that the economy of the society should not be pushed into the hands of the capitalist class. It should be for the larger and needy section of the population of the country which included agriculturists, small traders, labor and people belonging to different vacations. In short, he laid the foundation of an economic theory which is well balanced and which safeguards the economic interests of all the sections of the humanity at large.
Notes & References


35. Tomb of Shah Madar at Kanpur, India.

36. Tomb of Salar Mas’ud at Bahraich, India.


46. Ibid., p. 259.
47. Shab-i-Barat: The 15th Night of the Month of Sha’ban.
49. Ibid., pp. 1/217-19.
50. Ibid., p. 2/45.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.