Conclusion
Delhi Sultanate under Sultan Iltutmish, Balban, Alauddin Khalji, Muhammad bin Tughlaq, Firoz Shah Tughlaq and Sikandar Lodi was essentially a period of expansion, consolidation and integration. Thus, cultural efflorescence was expected in such stable and positive circumstances. Personal interest of the Sultans in socio-cultural matters acted as the contributory factor. The period witnessed the influx of talented persons from the neighbouring lands (Central Asia, Iran and Iraq) into the Delhi court. These foreigners have been further incorporated into the provincial courts of the governors and muqtils.

The sources related to the Sultanate period referred to the high salaries given to the nobles along with the assigned revenue from the iqtaṣ. Their salaries were fixed thousands of gold tankahs. Besides salaries and assignments, gifts and rewards were among the secondary sources of income which made them much wealthy. They further accumulated wealth through corrupt practices and bribe. Barani, Amir Khusrau and Afif condemn some of the prominent nobles of the Delhi Sultans for their corrupt practices. As a result of these evil practices they had accumulated great wealth which was estimated lakhs of gold tankahs. Thus the sources indicate that the nobles amassed huge wealth through their salaries, assignments, awards as well as bribe and corruption.

Direct and indirect references in the sources indicate the manners and etiquettes of the nobility of the period under review. These sources gave us a very graphic account of the royal court, court ceremonies, royal processions and finally the presence of the nobles with some of the prescribed etiquettes of the period. The court etiquettes and rituals were elaborate and provided considerable symbolic capital to the Sultans and the nobility. At the same time, they reinforced hierarchical relations between the nobility and the ruling class.

The feasts, festivals and ceremonies appeared to be the important features of the socio-cultural life of the nobles of Delhi Sultans. It was the restive feature of the court culture of the period. Huge amount was lavishly spent. Numerous kinds of rich dishes and drinks were served in a prescribed manner according to the ranks and positions of the invited guests. At the same time, they also served to strengthen the bonds between the rulers and the ruling aristocracy, bringing them together through display and
entertainment. However, the rituals and ceremonies that were followed on these occasions legitimated imperial authority and reinforced the hierarchies in the court culture.

Among the games, hunting was the most popular game as well as great source of recreation besides other games like chess, nard, qamarbazi, chaugan (polo) and other less important outdoor and indoor games. Sultans were fond of hunting thus as a result of their interest in the game, a separate hunting department was established and high ranking nobles were included on hunting expeditions. Nobles and officials accompanied Sultans in hunting expeditions with all their necessary requirements, thus the hunting event was full of excitement and fun. Besides hunting, music was a great source of recreation for the nobles. The compilation of two works on Indian music, Ghunyat-ul-munya and Lahjat-i-Sikandarshahi by the prominent Tughlaqid and Lodi nobles verified the fact. To ease the strain of hard work, they found relaxation in listening music. Music, musicians, singers, convivial and drinking parties, garden parties, sama and qawwals, story-tellers, dancers, jesters acrobats, jugglers and other entertainers were found to be the sources of recreation for the nobility under the Delhi Sultans.

As far as the household and domestic life of the nobles is concerned, they lived in palatial houses, wore rich silken and brocaded dresses, maintained large kitchens. In their kitchen establishments valets, cooks, running footmen, water-bearer, sherbet-dispensers, betel-givers, arm-bearers, spear-bearers, umbrella-bearers, laver-carriers, chamberlains and heralds were the domestic functionaries (hashia). Expert cooks were also patronized by the nobles. Several kinds of rich dishes, in rich proteins, were served to them in the vessels of golden, silver, glass, brass and even in chinaware.

Polygamy was prevalent practice. Having two wives was common among the nobles of Delhi Sultans. The matrimonial alliance took place among the nobles. To enhance their social position, the below ranked nobles make matrimonial relations with illustrious nobles as well as with the royal family. Also sometimes they established matrimonial relations with the members of royal family. Matrimonial relations between the royal family and the nobles of high repute enhanced the social status of the nobles among the ruling class. It is further significant to note that Sultan Alauddin Khalji forbid the nobles to form any matrimonial alliances without the royal consent considering that the close connections formed among the nobles might be
dangerous for the Sultanate because their numerous intermarriages and the patronage in the hands of few, gave them degree of power which enable them by coalition to rebel against the royal authority. The practice of divorce (talaq) and dowry were prevalent in the elite society, thus references show that the nobles divorced their wives though in intoxicated or excited state of mind.

The harem and slaves of the nobles have been the significant features of noble’s household. They maintained large harem and slaves. Large numbers of slave girls were maintained by them. They own palanquins for the short distance journeys while for the long distance journeys they used horses, camels and elephants. Boats were also used by them for their journeys via rivers. Dula was the common means of medium for the transportation. The kahars (palanquin-bearers) were engaged by them to carry them from place to place. They used covered palanquins for their slave girls and dula covered with silk curtains for harem ladies.

Given the immense resources that were accessible to the nobles, there was a lot of investment of resources on ostentation and display. Generosity was considered an important social ethic, and the ethic of generosity was played out in court culture through gift-exchanges, elaborate feasts and festivities. Charitable activities of the nobles are recorded in both the primary and secondary sources. Zia Barani and Mushtaqi particularly offer detailed information in this regard. These historians and others record the distribution of food, garments, gold and silver tankahs and other necessities of life provided by the nobles to the poor and destitute. They even helped in the marriages of the poor girls by providing amount, cloth, beddings in the form of dowry from their own establishments and fixed the allowances for the widows.

In short, the main motivating factor behind this philanthropy and generosity of the nobles was not only their concern and pious attitude towards the poor and destitute but the element of display and competition existing in their society. As they loved to display pomp, power and magnificence most of the times they were under debt because of lavish expenditure on their establishments. However, by generous acts of charity and benevolence they contributed largely in the upliftment of life and culture of the people. Further, their generosity towards the common people and amount spent on public welfare works clearly indicates the wealth and consumption levels of the nobles. So much so that the noble’s lavish generosity sometimes evoked Sultans criticism too. Meanwhile, evidences indicate the lowest vices in contrast with
the highest virtues of the nobles. The practices of bribery, corruption and wine drinking existed in the elite society.

Not only the Delhi Sultans patronized literature and building construction, but their nobility was also prominent in this regard. The patronage to literature and architecture was another aspect of the court life of the nobility. Their interest and patronage to literary and constructional activities highlight the fact that talented persons from different regions found entry to the royal court and in their own establishments. Result was that the nobles acted as a bridge between the royal court of the Delhi Sultans and the distant regions in promoting cultural progress which can be sustained by the few examples of the nobles like Malik Bahauddin Tughril, Malik Tatar Khan and Mian Bhua and others.

Remarkably rich literary and intellectual activity became a distinct feature of the cultural life of the Sultanate nobility. By reviewing the existing literature and other sources, it appears that the literature on almost all the subjects and sciences was composed and patronized by the nobles. As far as the traditional form of knowledge is concerned, Amir Khusrau, though not a noble in strict sense, and few other nobles reckoned among the finest exponents of Persian prose and poetry. Even the noble like Mian Bhua, who has been praised by Mushtaqi, showed his interest in music and medicine, while other nobles showed his interest in astrolabes. Contemporary chronicles highlight the literary and cultural interests of the nobles and their patronage to poets, scholars and musicians. However, in addition to the royal imperial court of the Delhi Sultans, the households of nobles have been served as the major centers of cultural activity. As a result, the poets and scholars compiled works on different subjects like history, Indian tales, masnavis, qasidas, farhang literature, insha, fitrah, tafsir, fatawa, tibb, astronomy and astrology, mathematics, gemology, mining and metallurgy, architecture, numismatics and music. The nobles had their own libraries and collection of books. Although it is not ascertain that any great educational institution established or patronized by any of the nobles, but madrasas have been established by them in their respective regions.

The Sultanate period witnessed extensive constructional activity, both under the Sultans and their nobles. Following the footsteps of the Sultans, nobles constructed a large number of buildings, both religious and secular in nature, like Jami mosques, mosques, idgahs, sarai (inns), wells, baolis (step-wells), tanks, khanqahs, canals and
even in some cases cities were also founded by them. The inscriptions engraved on the buildings made it easy to identify the buildings constructed by the nobles. These religious and secular structures, the *sarai* and *khanqahs*, were meant to provide comfort to the travellers and sufis. Likewise, the construction of the wells, step-wells, canals, tanks and other water resources highlight their concern for the public welfare. Besides, it appears that these structures were perceived as enduring memorials for those nobles and officials who built them and thus perpetuated their memory.

As chief architect of the Sultanate period, the names of Malik Ahmad bin Ayaz (Chief Architect), Malik Ghazi Shahna (*naib* of *Mir Imarat*) and Zahir-ul-Juyush are significant. The epigraphs of the period record a long list of nobles and officials who constructed several buildings, sometimes out of their own pockets. Khan-i-Jahan *wazir* and his son were great builders of that time. They constructed many mosques at Delhi which were much significant in their plans and dimensions. The tomb built by him was similarly significant because it was the first octagonal tomb built at Delhi. It would be of interest to take a look at the continuation of constructional activities by the nobles right from the Mamluks to the Lodis.

However, the nobility under the Delhi Sultans played a decisive role in enriching the socio-cultural life of the Sultanate period. Their social life was modeled on their Persian and Turkish counterparts with the sports like chess, polo and hunting as the chief amusements which were the prerogatives of the elite society of the Delhi Sultanate. Willingly adoption of Indian headgear, the practice of chewing *pan*, ceremonies related to marriage and death, transformation of Indian music, its forms and musical instruments into their society not only showed Indian influence but also reflect the local atmosphere in the elite society.

In short, the nobles as administrators and aristocrats not only involved in their allotted administrative responsibilities in their specified regions rather they had enjoyed their lively social and cultural life in Indian and Perso-Islamic perspectives. However, the nobles as governors and *muqtis* and other high ranked posts were deputed in the far-flung regions of the Sultanate. In their respective assignments, they were exposed to their regional people and imbibed their local culture and customs and, in turn, they also infused in them their Perso-Islamic culture. Thus, the assimilation of two cultures to which we may also termed the composite culture are evident in their marriages, feasts and festivals, living and food habits, games and
entertainments etc. However, the nobles of the Sultanate period not only acted as ‘connector’ between the rulers and the ruled rather as ‘connector’ of two cultures being a patronisers of art and literature, music and paintings as well as builders of religious and secular edifices and as supervisors of public welfare works and, above all, as ‘innovators’ in the field of science, technology and crafts.

To conclude, the study has revealed the diversity in the socio-cultural life of the Sultanate nobility. It has studied the centralization of resources in the hands of the nobility. The huge income of the nobility created a court culture marked by ostentation and display. The extravagant lifestyle of the nobility served as the backdrop to elaborate ceremonies, rituals and social practices which marked the cultural life under the Sultanate nobility.