Chapter – 1
Socio-Political Condition of India during 15th and 16th Centuries

Political Condition

Firoz Shah was the last great Sultan of Tughlaq dynasty. He ruled over Delhi about thirty eight years (1351-1388 A.D.). He crowned his son prince Muhammad in 1387 A.D., and gave him the title of Nasiru’d-din Muhammad Shah and retired himself into seclusion. But Muhammad was overthrown by the royal slaves shortly after his accession. Then Firoz Shah raised his grandson Tughluq Shah II and died in 1388 A.D.¹

The decade that followed Sultan Firoz Shah’ death was full of devastating civil wars, intrigues and murders. The weak successors of Firoz Shah who occupied the throne one after the other in quick succession played in hands of the nobles.

The disintegration of the Sultanate towards the close of Firozshah Tughluq’s reign was followed by the disastrous invasion of Timur. He crossed river Sindhu in September 1398 A.D. and passed through the Punjab like a whirlwind plundering the cities that lay in his march. Principal cities he however avoided till he encamped near Delhi Timur sent his cavalry with orders “to plunder and destroy and to kill everyone whom they met.”² They carried out his order. Delhi was at the mercy of the invader. He returned to Samarqand plundering Meerut and Hardwar and all other cities which lay by

his homeward march in 1399 A.D. Timur's objects to invade Hindustan was plunder and an expedition against the infidels.³

On the eve of his departure from India, Timur held a court on March 6, 1399, and appointed Khizr Khan as a governor of Multan, Lahore and Dipalpur.⁴ The invader did not completely overthrow the reigning Tughluq Sultan but shattered the economic and social life of the people almost all the cities which he captured were looted and plundered. The booty presented by the Prince Pir Muhammad Jahangir who had captured Multan was in such a huge quantity that all the scribes of Amir Timur took two days in preparing the list of goods.⁵

Besides the wealth of India, Timur carried away thousands of artisans and craftsmen to Samarqand and this was also great loss of India. Yahiya says that:

"After the departure of Timur, the vicinity of Delhi, and all those places where his army had passed through were visited by pestilence and famine. Many died of sickness and many of hunger. For a couple of months Delhi presented a scene of desolation and woe."⁶

Although Timur appointed Khizr Khan the viceroy of Delhi, but Khizr Khan established himself only in Multan and Dipalpur. His position was challenged by Mallu Iqbal, who rose to power in Delhi. He marched against Khizr Khan but was defeated near Ajodhan and killed in 1405 A.D. After that the throne of Delhi was transfer into the hands of Mahmud Tughluq, Firoz's

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³ Malfuzat, pp. 394-395.
⁴ Mubarakshahi, p. 173.
⁵ Malfuzat, p. 419.
⁶ Mubarakshahi, p. 173.
younger son, but he died in 1412 A.D. Thereafter the nobles choose an Afghan noble Daulat Khan Lodi for the throne of Delhi. In 1414 A.D. Daulat Khan was defeated by his more ambitious rival Khizr Khan. Khizr ascended the throne but did not assume any royal title but professed to rule as the viceroy of Timur's successor Shah Rukh to whom he also sent annual tributes. Khizr Khan tried to consolidate Delhi’s control from Multan to Kannauj and from the foot of the Himalayas to the Malwa frontier. Khizr Khan ruled for seven years that were mainly devoted to suppress rebellions and discover that engulfed the whole kingdom.

Khizr Khan was succeeded by his son Mubarak Shah (1421-33 A.D.). However he was challenged by the Khokars, under their chief Jasrat, they planned to seize Delhi Empire. Mubarak Shah defeated Jsarat and demolished some of his roots around Sialkot. The third ruler of Sayyid dynasty Muhammad Shah (1434-1445 A.D.) lost much of his small kingdoms and the last ruler, Shah Alam (1443-76 A.D.) proved more incompetent than his father and only hastened the collapse of the dynasty. In 1451 A.D. he transferred the command of Delhi to Bahlol Lodi and retired to his favorite place, Badaun where he spent the rest of his life.

The Lodi dynasty (1451-1526 A.D.) produced more energetic and talented rulers. They established their authority in the Punjab, and in the whole tract corresponding to the Modern Uttar Pradesh.

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8 For detail account of Jasrati's revolt see Mubarakshahi, pp. 200-234.
9 See Mubarakshahi, Chapters on Sayyids.
Bahlol Lodi (1451-1489 A.D.) before occupying the throne had possessed Sarhind, Samana, Sunam, Hisar, Firozah, Lahore, Dipalpur and perhaps some parganas of Multan.\(^{10}\) In 1451 A.D. he not only occupied Panipat, Hansi and Delhi but also added Sambhal, Mewat, Rapri, Etawah, Kol, Kampila, Patiali, Mewat Rapri and Bhogaon to his dominions. He had considerably revived the power and prestige of Delhi Sultanate. It has been remarked that the most outstanding event of Bahlol’s career as the Sultan of Delhi was his ‘life and death struggle’ against the Sharqis.\(^{11}\) For more than fifteen years, even after 1469 A.D., his primary political concern was his struggle with the rulers of Jaunpur. Only by 1486 A.D., he is said to have capture the western territories of Sharqis. On his death in 1489 A.D., he left a kingdom nearly twice as large as it was in the beginning of his reign. Sultan

In the early 16\(^{th}\) century there was a paramount power in Northern India, strong enough to enforce its will on the numerous independent states or even to forge them into a temporary confederacy for the defense of her extensive frontier. The Lodis who held Delhi and Agra were master of limited territory and though they gave promise under the energetic Sultan Sikandar (1489-1517 A.D.) playing the role of Sultanate of Delhi.

Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517 A.D.) the successor of Bahlol Lodi, crushed Husayn Shah Sharqi of Jaunpur, liquidated the Rajput uprisings in the neighboring region and the Raja of Tirhut was forced to pay tribute. Sikandar

\(^{10}\)It is almost certain that Bahlol never possessed Multan proper as a part of his dominions. The reference to Multan might actually be to some disputed territories between the cities of Lahore and Dipalpur one the one hand and Multan on the other, Khwaja Nizamuddin Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, Eng. tr. De, B., 3 Vols, Vol. I, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1911, (rpt. 1973), pp. 334.

Lodi found the city of Agra in 1504 A.D., He exalted the prestige and power of the Sultan. Abdu-Ila says, “He was a bigoted Musalman. He destroyed many Hindu temples. He entirely ruined the shrines of Mathura, the mine of heathenism, and turned their principal Hindu places of worship into caravanserais and colleges. Their stone images were given to the butchers to serve them as meat-weights (this is specially said of the famous idol of Nagarkot, by Ahmad Yadgar) and all the Hindus in Mathura were strictly prohibited from shaving their heads and breads and performing their ablutions.” Furthermore Abdullah the author of Tarikh-i-Daudi says that in Dhaulpur a garden which extended over an area of 7 kos was uprooted, temples were destroyed and mosque were built on their sites. In the case of a Brahmin, Laudhan who was put to death because one day he had asserted in the presence of Musalmans that Islam was true, as was also his own religion. He imposed several social disabilities on Hindus like prohibition of Hindus from bathing in Yamuna. Titus says Sultan Sikandar was given the name But-Shikan (idol smasher), for his destruction of Hindu idols and temples.

Sikandar Lodi was succeeded by his eldest son Ibrahim Lodi (1517-1526 A.D.). He was the last ruler of Lodi dynasty. His arrogant behavior and ill-treatment had displeased the Afghan nobles who formed secret conspiracies against him. During his reign he faced the revolt of Jalal Khan Lodi, governor

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of Jaunpur. Jalal was captured and murdered in Gondwana.\textsuperscript{16} Besides it Bengal, Malwa, Gujarat and other outlying provinces had all become independent. Meanwhile another revolt provide by Rana Sanga of Mewar with the opportunity to make inroads into the Lodi territories as far as Bayan near Agra. Ibrahim marched personally against Rana. The Afghan probably fought an indecisive engagement and Rana retreated for the time being. But when Husain, governor of Chanderi, was killed Rana made a fresh attack and seized Chanderi.\textsuperscript{17}

After this war position of Ibrahim became weaker. He not only defeated by Rana Sanga but also lost his control over Afghan nobles. Some of whom like Daulat Khan Lodi; governor of Lahore threw of their allegiance to the Sultan. Lodi Kingdom was therefore “a congeries of semi independent governorship mostly held by Afghans.” And in 1526 A.D. he was defeated by Babur in the battle of Panipat, and lost both his life and Kingdom. The Sultanate of Delhi came to an end.

In 1523 A.D., Babur was invited by Daulat Khan Lodi to invade Hindustan. Babur was fanatic in religion. He was against the Hindus principles of idolatry and polytheism. He felt that the duty of every pious Muslims was to spread and penetrate Islam in various parts of Asia. To fulfill this desire and ambition he selected India. Towards the close of that year Ibrahim heard of Daulat Khan’s rebellious designed and defection in Babur’s favour. Babur took his action due to the conspiracies of Daulat Khan and Alam Khan, uncle of

\textsuperscript{16} Pandey, A.B., \textit{The First Afghan Empire in India}, op. cit., pp.177-78.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p.183
Ibrahim Lodi. He defeated Daulat Khan and pardoned him. Babur had left a strong garrison in the Punjab. He made his own arrangements for the government of Punjab. He proceeded towards Delhi and halted at Panipat where Ibrahim was already waiting for him. A battle was fought and Ibrahim was worsted and killed. Dr Ishwari Prasad said, “The battle of Panipat placed the empire of Delhi in Babur’s hand. The power of Lodi dynasty was shattered to pieces and the sovereignty of Hindustan passed to the Chaghtai Turks.” Babur quickly occupied Delhi and Agra. In Baburnama he says:

On Friday (Rajab 15th) while we remained on the same ground, Maulana Mahmud and Shaikh Zain went with few others into Delhi for congregational Prayers, read the khutba in my name, distributing a portion of money to the poor and needy and return to camp.”

Babur’s next step was against Rajputana in the reign of Rana Sanga of Mewar reached at the zenith of her glory. It was controlling directly or indirectly the entire resource of Rajputana. The famous battle of Khanwah was fought between Rana Sanga and Babur in 1527 A.D. in which Babur was the victor. He also won the region of Bihar and Bengal after the battle of Ghaghra in 1529 A.D.. Like Rajputs Afghan were also defeated by Babur. He led the foundation of Mughal Empire after establishing the vast empire from river Indus to Bihar and Himalayas to Gwalior. He died in December 25, 1530 A.D.

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18 Daulat Khan Lodi was given only Sultanpur and Jullundhar, Babur, Tuzuk-i-Babri or Baburnama, eds. A.S., Beveridge, tr. in 2 Vols. Vol. I, Oriental Books, Delhi, 1979, p. 422; later on Babur refers to this arrangement taunting Daulat Khan with the words, “three kroes I gave thee on Tatar Khan’s lands.”, Ibid, Vol. II, p.459; Erskine estimated the three kroes as £ 75,000, Ibid, Vol. II, p. 459, n. 4. (hereafter as Tuzuk).
He was succeeded by his son Humayun. But Political condition of that time was very miserable. Sher Khan Afghan in the east and Bahadur Shah in the west, the former in Bengal and Bihar and the later in Gujarat were maturing plans for the overthrow of the Mughals. Humayun was very generous and highly outlined man. His brothers also increased problems for him. The nobles and leader who were granted large state by him increased against him. In 1535 A.D. he scored a victory against Bahadur Shah of Gujarat. In 1539 A.D. he had a war with Sher Shah Sur at Chausa. In which Humayun was defeated and escaped. In the battle of Kanauj (1540 A.D.) Humayun became a fugitive and Sher Shah became the master of Agra and Delhi. Humayun fled away to Iran and took asylum there. After a long period he started to recovery of his lost empire and conquered Kabul, Delhi and Punjab. But he could not enjoy his victory as he died in January 20, 1556 A.D.

Sher Shah captured Delhi in 1540 A.D., but failed to enjoy the territory for long time he died in 1545 A.D. After Firoz Shah, Sher Shah was the first Sultan who believed that one must work unsparingly not only for the consolidation of his power and prestige, but also for securing the happiness of the subjects people. By his administrative reforms regarding land revenue system and the policy of religious tolerance were famous. Akbar started adopting the land revenue system of Sher shah.

For his civil and military achievements he was extremely praised by this line “if Sher Shah had been spared, he would have established his dynasty, and
the Great Mughals would not have appeared on the stage of History.\textsuperscript{21} Although he was more constructive and liberal in his administrative system than his predecessor yet one of his learned associates, Sheikh Nizam, boldly recommended a \textit{jihad}. For the \textit{jihad} he said, there is nothing equal to a religious war against infidels. If you be slain you become a martyr and if you live you become a \textit{ghazi}.\textsuperscript{22}

Sher Shah was succeeded by his son Islam Shah in 1545 A.D. After Islam Shah, Muhammad Adil Shah, a weak monarch and pleasure loving man was the ruler. His authorities was challenged by Ibrahim Shah, watching this chaotic situation, Humayun attacked on India in 1554 A.D., and capture the throne of Delhi.

At the age of fourteen Akbar ascended the throne after the death of his father. As soon as he got the news he enthroned himself and started rule under the guidance of Bairam Khan on February 1556 A.D.\textsuperscript{23} Akbar’s position was still precarious. This was the time of complete disorder. In 1556 A.D. anarchy and confusion reigned supreme in India and famine and pestilence were rampant in the rank and file. The fairest provinces of Delhi and Agra were visited by plague which carried away a large number of people.\textsuperscript{24}

The sovereignty of North West India was contested by Sikandar Sur on the one hand and Muhammad Shah Adil on other hand. Hemu, commander of

\textsuperscript{21}Jaffar, S.M., \textit{The Mughal Empire from Babur to Aurangzeb}, Ess Ess Publication, Delhi, 1936 (reprint 1974), p.66.
\textsuperscript{22}Titus, \textit{Indian Islam}, op. cit., p. 13
\textsuperscript{23}Abul Fazal, \textit{Akbarnamah}, Eng. tr., Beveridge, Vol. II, Rare Books, New Delhi, 1972, pp. 4-12.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid. Vol. II, p. 57, Abul Fazal was an eye-witness of this famine. He says that the famine lasted two years; it apparently prevailed during 962 and 963.
Muhammad Shah Adil, captured Delhi and assumed the title of Vikramaditya.\textsuperscript{25} Bairam Khan advised Akbar to resist the aggression of Hemu. Both armies met on the historic battlefield of Panipat in November, 1556 A.D.. A fierce battle was fought between two armies. Hemu’s victory was almost but suddenly an arrow hit Hemu’s eye and he fall down unconscious. Hemu was killed and Afghans lost the battle.\textsuperscript{26}

Politically, when Akbar ascended the throne Bengal enjoyed independence under Afghan chiefs. Kabul was held by Muhammad Hakim virtually as independent kingdom. Rajputs of Rajasthan had recovered from shocks inflicted by Babur and now enjoyed independence. Malwa and Gujarat already refused to pay allegiance to the Mughals. Gondwana was ruled by local chieftain Orissa was independent. Kashmir, Sind and Balochistan were free from external control. The Deccan Sultanate of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur Golconda, Khandesh and Barar were ruled by their own Sultans. The Portuguese were powerful in Arabin Sea and Persian Gulf. They held sway over whole of the western sea-coast and possessed some good sea ports including Goa, Daman and Diu.\textsuperscript{27} Akbar occupied Gondwana, Malwa and Chittor. He also captured Ranthambhor, Kalinjar, Gujarat, Kashmir, and Sind. The empire consisting five old provinces he inherited from his father was weak. But he established his control and authority over his vast empire. akbar

\textsuperscript{25}Hemu had earned for himself a unique military distinction by successfully fighting as many as twenty two pitches of battles with the opponents of Mubariz Khan, (\textit{Akbarnama}, Vol. II, p. 45) was advancing from Chunar, the capital of his master, towards Agra with a large army , gathering strength on his march from the enemies of the Mughal cause. There was a battle between Hemu and Tardi Beg, the Governor of Delhi. Tardi Beg had been defeated and put a flight (\textit{Akbarnama}, Vol. II, p. 48-50). Now he turned to Delhi and occupied it.
\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Akbarnama}, Vol. II, pp. 58-65.
\textsuperscript{27}Jaffar, S.M., \textit{The Mughal Empire from Babur to Aurangzeb}, op. cit., p.74
through his efforts established a very strong empire full of resources. He followed liberal religious policy which permitted no discrimination for creed and castes. His secular policy too played well. His Rajput policy played significant role in the cordial relation between Hindus and Muslims. Rajputs were the important people in India. There were many small kingdoms in Rajputana when Akbar ascended the throne. The state of Marwar, Mewar, Amer, Bikaner Jaisalmer and Ranthambhor were famous politically and socially. He adopted the policy of goodwill, friendship and liberality towards the Rajputs. Before Akbar, it is said that Babur advised Humayun to follow the policy of religious tolerance. During Humayun’s stay in Iran Shah Tahmasp also suggest that he ‘rear the Rajputs’, without gaining control over the zamindars it is not possible to rule in Hind. Same as Humayun advised Akbar to be kind and considerate to the Rajputs, as loyalty was ingrained in their character. Akbar followed his advice and made a strong relation of friendship with Rajputs.

Akbar adopted a twofold policy towards the Rajputs: a) to win them over as allies by a policy of friendly persuasion i.e. by establishing matrimonial alliance, b) where the above policy proved unworkable as in the case of Chittor- to unhesitatingly indulge in warfare and ensure submission. The features of his Rajputs policy are:

30 Ibid.
Establishment of Matrimonial Relation

He made matrimonial alliances with Rajputs princess, pursued for political motives. First Rajput Raja to give him his daughter in marriage was Raja Bharmal Kachhwaha of Amer in 1562 A.D. Akbar gave complete religious freedom to his Hindu wives. Dr. Beni Prasad says, “it symbolized the dawn of a new era in Indian politics, it gave the country a line of remarkable sovereigns; it secured to four generations of Mughal Emperor the services of some of the greatest captains and diplomats that medieval India produced.”

Akbar married with the princesses of Jaisalmer and Bikaner too. He did not have any matrimonial relation with the Hadas of Ranthambhor.

Appointing the Rajput to High Offices:

Akbar gave high offices and mansabs (ranks) to the Rajputs. He appreciated and rewarded the services of his Hindu subjects, particularly the Rajputs. Raja Bharmal obtain a high rank. His son Bhagwant das reached a mansab of 5000 and his grandson Man Singh to the mansab of 7000. Besides them Rai Singh of Bikaner and Bhimsen of Jaiselmer were given mansabs Raja Todermal and Biharimal were appointed to high civil military offices.

Religious Freedom to Hindus:

The basic principle of Akbar’s policy was toleration. He gave religious freedom to the Rajput. He abolished jizyah and pilgrims taxes on Hindus and also stopped the practice of forced conversion of prisoners of war.

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31 Jaffar, The Mughal Empire from Babur to Aurangzeb, op. cit., p. 87.
33 Akbarnama. Vol. II, pp. 159
Social reform in Rajput Society

Akbar tried to remove the evils prevalent in contemporary Rajputs society. He forbade child-marriage (*bal-vivah*), discouraged *sati* and encouraged widow remarriage. And permission of non-Muslim along with the Muslim for further construction of religious places, proved to be a turning point in medieval Indian History. During his reign many Hindus and Muslims came into close contact with each other and exchanged their ideas and thoughts. So Hindu-Muslims cultures developed. The Hindu studied Persian and Urdu languages and Muslims studied Sanskrit and Hindi literature. With these acts Akbar created an atmosphere of discrimination between Hindus and Muslims. Whole policy of Akbar gave a different complexion as he came to be regarded as an Indian ruler.

Social Condition of Northern India

Hindu society was divided into four *varnas* on the basis of division of labour since ancient time. These four *varnas* were *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Sudras*. On the eve of Turkish invasion the *varnas* system was replaced by castes system determined by birth and in society there came to exist as high castes, lower castes and untouchables. The castes became more ramified and rigid. It was given a religious tinge. In the words of Rawlinson, “caste for the Hindu is part of divine order of Universe; a man’s caste is

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determined by his conduct in previous existence.” Describing the social condition of India Al Beruni wrote,

“The Vaisyas and Sudras are not allowed to hear Vedas, much less to pronounce and recite it. If such a things can be proved against one of them, the Brahmins drag him before the magistrate, and he punished by having his tongue cut off.”

Caste system gained further rigidity under Muslim rule. The Hindu population as a whole could not reconcile the idea of mixing with the Muslim invaders and tried to isolate themselves from the Muslim with scrupulous determination to save their religion and social system. The Hindu treated early Muslim as “malechchas” (the impure), with a social status much lower than that of the Sudras. Al-Beruni has also observed:

“All their fanaticism is directed against those who do not belong to them- against all foreigners. They call them mleccha, i.e., impure, and forbid having any connection with them, be it by intermarriage or any other kind of relationship or by sitting, eating and drinking with them, because thereby, they think, they would be polluted.”

The position of Brahmins and Kshatriyas was materially affected by the Muslim conquest in India. Though they continue to hold this rank but they could no longer play any part in administration. The Brahmins who were earlier exempted from all sorts of taxes and were given a privileged treatment were deprived of this favored position. This naturally implied a change in the

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35Rawlinson, H.G., India: A Short Cultural History, cited by S.C., Raychoudhary, A Social Cultural and Economic History of India (Earliest Times to Present times), Surjeet Publication, Delhi, 1984, p. 56.
traditional duties of the Brahmins. They lost the opportunity to earn enough by officiating as priests; they looked to agriculture through hired labored. Sometime they themselves cultivated the fields. As a result the Brahmins could not devote themselves wholly to the Vedic studies and spiritual pursuits as they used to do earlier. “this was a frank admission of the decline of Vedic studies during the Sultanate period (1206-1526 A.D.) and with it that in the importance of Brahmin caste.” This affected the caste system in another way too. The Brahmins now came to hold the view that even the Sudras could listen to the recitations of the Puranas and take to certain trades which were earlier forbidden to them.

The legal position and formal powers of the Brahmin had undergone a considerably change with the fall of old time Kshatriyas or the ruling classes of Hinduism. They not only lost political power but also the opportunity of earning their livelihood as soldiers. According to Anil Chandra Banerjee, “except in Rajasthan Central India and the Himalayan region in the North West, many of them sank into the status of local landlords, serving as intermediaries in the revenue system organized by the Muslim rulers.” The changed position of Kshatriyas had affected the whole Hindu society. K.M. Ashraf opines, with the elimination of the moral rivalry of the Kshatriyas, the authority and personal influence of Brahmins increased among the Hindu masses.” However, that is not wholly true because the Brahmins themselves

38 Srivastava, A.L., Medieval Indian culture, Shivalal Agarwal, Agra, 1964, p. 22 (hereafter as M.I.C.)
40 Ashraf, K.M., Life and Condition of the People of Hindustan, Jiwan Prakashan, Delhi, 1959, p.79.
were weakened as they could not look at political power for support and patronage. The Brahmins continued to be the unofficial guides of the Hindu society.

The picture of the condition of Vaishyas, Sudras and untouchables described by Al-Beruni seems to be exaggerated and taken from the Smritis rather than the actual condition prevailing in 11th century A.D. Vaishyas had grown prosperous by increase of trade and commerce during the Muslim rule in India.\(^1\)

Sudras were divided into two categories. Those of the lower category were looked down upon as interior as the untouchables. For the Sudras highest duty is the service of the Brahmins, it is recognized that he can earn their livelihood by trade. The old Smritis rules forbid dealing in certain classes of commodities by Sudras engaged in trade is relaxed in times of distress. Some authorities permit them even to sell liquors and meat.\(^2\) In old time the Sudras were neither listen nor study the Vedas and Puranas and nor explain the occult meaning of that. But in Sultanate period the social and economic status of Sudras had considerably improved.

Untouchables, the lower categories of Sudras, were considered as Chandals. Minute rules were laid down in the medieval Hindu shastras and law books, prescribing penance for touching them associating with them and eating food from or detailed rules were prescribed to avoid contact with them. Purification by bathing with clothes on was prescribed for touching or seeing a

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Chandal. Different penance were to be undertaken by a Brahmin for going in the company of a Chandal, for drinking water from a tank owned by a Chandal, for drinking water which had been drawn by a Chandal or in a Chandal’s vessel.

**Muslim Society**

Muslim population in Northern India during the Sultanate had a mixed racial composition. Muslim invaders marched into India not only to conquer but also to enforce a new religion. From the time of Mahmud Ghazani to that of Timur every Muslim soldiers that marched into India and within India against a Hindu kingdom, believed and declared that his mission was to propagated Islam. From the beginning of Muslim rule it was the foreign Muslim who dominated the society, and held aloof as if to demonstrate their superiority of broth race and culture.

Muslim society was divided into three classes of which the first two, *Ahl-i-suyuf* (men of sword) and the *Ahl-i-qalam* (men of pen), and third is *Awwam-i-khalq*. Humayun also divided all the officers of his dominions into three classes first the *Ahl-i-Daulat*, comprising royal family, officers, viziers and all his soldiers; second the *Ahl-i-sa’adat*, consisting of men distinguished for their learning, mainly religious *Ulama* (theologians), *Qazis* (judicial officers), the *Sayyids*, the *Sheikh*, poets and other learned men, judge, nobles and skillful persons; third the *Ahl-i-murad*, that is, those who possessed beauty and elegance and catered to pleasures, i.e., musicians, painters and
singers. In these categories *Ahl-i-sa’adat* or men of learning commended greater respect than the people belonging to the other two categories, but the classification is unjustified because it did not say about the producing classes.

**Privileged Class**

At the top of the social order were the governing class or the military aristocracy and relatives of the king. They were also called *Ahl-i-suyuf* (men of sword). The Turks established a sovereign independent of Muslim state in India; they lived a life of ease and prosperity. They have enough money to expenditure on special occasions such as feasts, festivals, marriages etc. He was a despotic ruler, with no limit or restraint on his powers, except such as was dictated by consideration of a peaceful and stable government. The relatives of the Sultan enjoying great personal prestige and invidious privileges. Many of them were recipients of honors, titles, posts, landed assignments etc.

The nobles constituted the ruling bureaucracy. In the beginning the Turks formed the bulk of the ruling elite. Besides, Persians, Abyssinians, Egyptians, Afghans and converted Mongols also continued to obtain high position. During the period under the majority of the nobles belonged to the various branches of the Afghans who were invited from Roh and settled in North India particularly by Bhlol Lodi; and Sher Shah. In the beginning they

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were not compromise with Indian Muslims. Babur called them rustic and tactless.\textsuperscript{46}

The nobles were mostly of foreign origin and belonged to different nationality. They were tried to live up to the standards of the emperor and had the same vices and virtues, they too spent lavishly on mistress and dancing girls.\textsuperscript{47} Nobles bore the title of Khan which signified the upper most grade of nobility, next in rank come the title of \textit{malik} and lastly that of \textit{amir}.\textsuperscript{48} The Mughal nobles were also known as \textit{manasbdar}. The \textit{manasbdars} were the government officers as well as the richest class in the empire.\textsuperscript{49}

Next privileged class was called \textit{Ahl-i-qalam} or \textit{Ulama}, they covered heterogeneous groups such as the theologians, the ascetic, the \textit{Sayyids}, the \textit{pirs}, and their descendants. Muslim scholars and Sufi \textit{Shaikhs}, though not all rich, also belonged to the upper classes because of the respect they enjoyed in society. Most of them were patronized by kings and \textit{nobles}; many were actually in their employ. Some of them were very well off. They possess the knowledge of Islamic traditions, canon law and theology, they are canonists and theologians. In medieval period they came to have the ultimate decision on all questions of constitutions, law and theology, the law of \textit{Shariat} were enforced by them and things illegal and not sanctioned by the \textit{Shariat} were suppressed by them. They were much superior in dignity and status to others.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{46} Babur observes! “Biban waited on me in this camp. These Afghans remain very rustic and tactless. This person asked to sit although Dilawar Khan, his superior in following and in rank, did not sit.” \textit{Baburnama}, Vol. II, p. 466.
\textsuperscript{47} Prasad, p. 654.
\textsuperscript{48} Ashraf, \textit{Life and Condition of the People of Hindustan}, op. cit., p. 56
\textsuperscript{49} Lal, \textit{Legacy of Muslim Rule in India}, op. cit., p.164.
\textsuperscript{50} Lunia, B.N., \textit{Life and Culture in Medieval India}, Kamal Prakashan, Indore, 1978, p. 181
Tradition classified Ulama into two categories i.e., Ulama-i-akhirat (the pious) and Ulama-i-dunya (the worldly) in the reign of Balban, Firoz Shah Tughlaq, Sikandar Lodi and Sher Shah, Ulamas played important role in political and religious matters, Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi says that Sher Shah has close relationship with Ulamas and he never take his breakfast without them. But the rulers were not always follow the suggestion of their Ulamas and priest they took authority in their own hands. Sultans like Ala-du-din Khalji and Muhammad bin Tughluq led the influence of Ulamas under the control of the sovereign. Akbar in his reign set aside the sovereignty of Ulamas in religious matters by securing from them following written decision to which some of them sign willingly and rest against their conviction:

"If therefore in future a religious question come up, regarding which the opinions of the Mujtahids are at variance, and His Majesty in his penetrating understanding and clear wisdom be inclined to adopt, for the benefit of the nation, as a political expedient, any of the conflicting opinions, which exist on that point, and issue a decree to that effect, we do hereby agree that such a decree shall be binding on us and on the whole nation."  

Though some of the Ulamas were liberal spiritual learned and free to express their views, and risked their lives in speaking the truth, many Ulamas were person of narrow views, conceived, selfish and fanatic.

51Ulama-i-Akhirat- kept themselves aloof from the worldly greed. They set aside their personal demands and desire to render themselves, consequently they were highly respected in society.  
52Ulama-i-Dunya- were wordly minded they were ambitious to become mukawallis or teachers, or Qazis or sadra-i-jahan or Sheikh-ul-Islam or Mufti.  
Middle Class

Next two the privileged classes there was a middle class drawing modest incomes from small holdings of land, or from the royal treasury in return for their service in different capacities. They were district officers, revenue collectors, judges, secretaries, tutors, teachers etc. Some of them were attached to the households of various nobles and led fairly and prosperous and happy life, possessing their own houses in the cities and villages. Some of them cultivated the arts of calligraphy and epistolography which often provided them remunerative sources of income.\(^{55}\) Very few Muslims were merchants and A.D.) stats that due to their lavishness and munificence the Muslim nobility of Delhi remained in debt and used to borrow money on interest from the sahu. As a result of their money lending business they become rich.\(^{56}\)

Even Sufi saints and religious divines were at times compelled to accept things from loan. We learn that Nizam-ud-din Auliya was indebted for twenty jitals. Some of the Sufi saints discouraged borrowing. They said that a darvesh should prefer dying of starvation to incurring debt for the satisfaction of the baser desire.\(^{57}\)

Sahus and merchants also provided loans to the foreigners who came to India and desired to purchase articles of presents for the Sultan. Some of the


\(^{56}\) *Tarikh-i-Firozshahi*, Zia-ud-din Barani, p. 120. cf Rashid, A., *Society and Culture in Medieval India (1206-1556)*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1969, p. 25.

\(^{57}\) Rashid, A., *Society and Culture in Medieval India (1206-1556)*, op. cit., p. 25.
Muslims were petty shop-keepers, some were dealing in horses, a few others in slaves.\(^58\)

**Lower class**

Lower classes formed the bulk of the population. They were economically poor and socially degraded. The lowest stratum of society was composed mainly of shop-keepers workmen, domestic servants, cultivators, usually of Indian origin. The Muslim of the Indian origin followed handicrafts and petty trade in cities.\(^59\) Business and trade were mostly in the hands of Hindu merchants among whom the merchants of Gujarat (usually banias) and Multan were famous for their large scale mercantile activities and fabulous wealth. Very few Muslims lived in villages, most of them were converted Hindus of low castes who worked in rural areas as daily wage earners, landless workers and cultivators. At the bottom of the society there were qalandars and other beggars. Sufi saints who had their hermitages outside the cities. Another element of Muslim population was that of slaves whose number was large. Every king and noble had plenty of slaves.\(^60\)

**Position of Women**

The attitude of men towards women during the period under review was not different from that of the people of earlier period. They were generally commended except in the roles of mother, sister, a faithful wife and to some extent as a daughter. Women’s position in Sultanate period was not as high as

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\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 25.

\(^{59}\) M.I.C., p. 30.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 29.
it used to be in ancient India. No woman was allowed to enjoy an independent status. "In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead, to her son." A woman must never be independent. Muslim women in India also did not possess the privileged position which was occupied by Arab women. On account of women's physical disabilities, she had the status of dependence on men like Hindu women. Sultan like Firoz Tughluq and Sikandar Lodi controlled the freedom of women. Firoz had restricted the visit of women to holy shrines because of evil-minded person who frequented them and waylaid the female visitors. While Guru Nanak praised her important role in the preservation and proper functioning of family and society:

‘Of a woman are we conceived,  
Of a woman are we born,  
To a woman are we betrothed and married,  
It is a woman who keeps the race going,  
Another companion is sought when the life partner dies,  
Through woman are established social ties,  
Why should we consider woman cursed and condemned  
When from woman are born leaders and rulers?  
From woman alone is born a woman,  
Without woman there can be no human birth.  
Without woman, O Nanak, only the True One exists.  

Guru Nanak’s tribute to women raised their social status in Sikh society and made them partners of their husbands’ lives.

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52 Pandey, A.B., The First Afghan Empire in India, op. cit., p. 204.
Polygamy

Polygamy was prevailed among both Hindu and Muslims. It is true, before the advent of Muslims polygamy was not unknown to the ruling classes of the Hindu population, but it received encouragement owing to the impact of Muslim ideas. It was specially belonging to the richer section of the society. Abul Fazl, referring to the Hindus, writes, “Excepting in the King, it is not considered right for a man to have more than one wife, unless the first wife is sickly or proves barren, or her children die. In this case he may marry ten wives, but if the tenth proves defective, he may not marry again. If his first wife is suitable, and he desires to take another he must give the first a third part of his estate.”

Akbar though polygamous himself, appears to have been opposed to polygamy for the general peoples. Abul Fazl writes, “nor does his majesty approve of every one marrying more than one wife; for this ruins a man’s health and disturbs the peace of house.”

Polygamy is permitted in Islam to extent of four wives at a time; no woman in a Muslim household could claim to be the mistress of her house. But generally both Hindus and Muslims practiced monogamy partly due to the religious injunction and partly due to the economic reason.

Almost during the 16th centuries as well as in the 16th centuries of the Sultanate rule the girls were given away in marriage at very tender age, but

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during the last quarter of the 16th century Akbar discouraged child marriage by fixing the marriage age at 14th for girls and 16th for boys in 1582 A.D. In 1587 A.D. he legalized widow re-marriage and prohibited sati for bal-vidhvas in 1590-91 A.D..

**Purdah**

Strict veiling of women was common practice in Muslim society. The custom of purdah or ghoonghat was widespread among Hindus as well as Muslims women of Delhi Sultanate and Mughal rule. It was adopted as a protective measure to save the honour of their women and to maintain the purity of social order. In India it means curtain and when it applies to woman it means a veil. The ladies of aristocracy moved in palkies or dolis and accompanied by male attendants. The ladies who belong to the poor family went about in long garments covering their heads, which is now known as Burqa. In Muslim society the underlying motive of purdah was to kept the women away from Na-mahram i.e., those with whom they could marry. Women continued observing its practice even to their old age. Purdah was adopted by the all class of Muslim society while in Hindu society it was followed by the higher classes and for them this custom was voluntary. It seems as a mark of respect for the elders and outsiders. It was spread in Rajputana, but less vigorously observed in Rajput families, where the ladies in

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the arts of warfare, hunting and other expeditions. In Mughal period it was strictly observed among high class families of both communities. Badauni writes in *Muntakhabu‘t-Tawarikh*:

"If a woman were found running about the lanes and bazaars of the town, and while so doing either did not veil herself or allowed herself to become unveiled...she was go to the quarter of the prostitutes, and take up the profession."  

P.N. Chpora says that women of the lower society, such as peasant and working classes, were free from the bondage of *purdah*. They helped their husband in all external pursuits and internal economy, they take their bath at river-sides and would visit shrines travelling on foot without any restrictions.

**Sati**

The act of burning of Hindu wife under certain condition after the death of the husband was called *sati*. Bernier says that it was a popular belief had gained in the minds of the people that highest virtue for a woman was to become *sati* and therefore, if a widow expressed her unwillingness for it, the people began to doubt her fidelity and affection towards her departed husbands.

The widows who did not burn themselves with their dead husbands they were treated very unfairly by the society. Society looked down upon them.

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71 Chopra, P.N., *Some Aspects of Society and Culture during the Mughal Age*, op. cit., p. 108.
They were not allowed to have their hair long or put on ornaments. Most of
the widows performed sati either willingly or unwillingly. Though sati was
common but not compulsory. This custom was specially favored by the
Rajputs. Emperor Humayun was the first monarch to think of extending an
absolute prohibition to all case where a widow was past the age of child
bearing, even if she offered herself willingly. Badaoni says that Akbar issued
an order that a woman should not be forced to sati. Manucci says, “Mughal
Emperor issued an order that in all lands under Mughal control never again
should the official allow women to be burnt.” The cruel practiced of sati was
prevalent and Kabir criticized it. Nanak asked, “why should we consider
woman cursed and condemned.” He recognizes them as playing the most vital
role in preservation of society as also in the proper development of family life.
Third Guru Amardas puts the problem in simple words: if women ‘appreciate
their husbands they undergo sufficient pain by their death’; if on the other
hand, ‘they appreciate not their husbands, why should they be burnt.

**Jauhar**

The term jauhar is derived from Jatu-griha ‘a house built of lac or other
combustibles’ in allusion to the story in *Mahabharta* of the attempted
destruction of the Pandavas by setting such a building on fire. It is the custom of Indian Rajas under such circumstances to collect wood, cotton, grass, ghee, and such like into the place, and to bring the women and burn them, willing or unwilling. This custom was mostly widespread in Rajputana. When a Rajput king and his champions were reduced to despair in an engagement, they usually killed their women and children by locked them in a house and set fire to the house. Then they come forth and fought bravely in the battle field till death. There are many examples of jauhar in the history of Rajputana. About this custom Abul Fazl says in Akbarnama:

“When such a calamity has occurred a pile is made of sandalwood, aloes, etc., as large as possible and to add this dry firewood and oil. Then they leave hardhearted confidents in charge of their women. As soon as it is certain that there has been a defeat and that the men have been killed, these stubborn once reduce the innocent women to ashes.”

He further gives another example:

“There was also a great fire in the house of the Chauhan whose chief was Aissar Das. As many as three hundred women were burnt in the destructive fire of those refractory men.”

In 1484 A.D. women of Champaner kingdom committed jauhar when Raja Jayasimha was defeated by Mahmud Begarah. Jauhar, in fact, refers to the high standard of womanly honour maintained among the brave Rajputs.

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80 Ashraf, K.M., Life and Condition of the People of Hindustan, op. cit., p. 192
82 Ibid, p. 331
84 Majumdar, The Delhi Sultanate, op. cit., p. 165