The 18th century was a period of religious unrest and an all round chaos. It was a period of transition as well. It was marked by the growing social insecurity and demoralisation prejudicial to the interest of the people and the country. It was during the later years of this century that reformers belonging to different schools of thought who were destined to transform every stratum of Indian social system, began to penetrate slowly into this country. But the social structure in general, was marked by manifold conventions and traditional features. "Some of them may have become decadent and static with the march of time and the evils caused by the disorder and confusion of the 18th century was no doubt gnawing at the vitality of our culture". The social and economic interests of the different groups were regulated and controlled through social institution of caste, family and religion.

The Institution of caste with all its taboos dominated the Indian society. In India, the Hindus were recognised by their castes - "a man without caste was an insulting epithet",

and he had no place in the society. Pride of one's caste formed an ingredient part among the Hindus. J.A. Dubois was of the view that the Hindus were more attached to their castes, "than the gentry of Europeans were to their ranks". The Institution of caste profoundly influenced the character of the society in several ways. To the foreigner, Hindu society appeared to be a totalitarian organisation with a highly developed community life under the dictatorship of caste.

Of all the Hindus, the most superior class, the Brahmans, strove their utmost to keep up the feeling of outward and inward purity. Hence the Brahman abstained from all kinds of food which were detrimental to their social taboos. They even abstained from the primary objects of nature which they considered as impure. "It is chiefly this unfailing sentiment of propriety which raises that high caste into the respect and reverence which they enjoy in the world".

Along with the abstinence of the Brahmans, certain references denote that even among the Sudras, or the non-caste, the better classes followed the same customs and as such


2. Description of the character, manners and customs of the people of India, Madras, 1862, p.7.
The sincere observance of the social customs raised the Sudras in the estimation of public.  

The Institution of caste determined the vocational expressions of the people in society. Social sanction to career was naturally not based on individual aptitude, but on sheer accident of birth. The determination of caste, defined the professions of an individual. Bharat Chandra's "Vidya Sundari", a narrative poem written in Bengali in the middle of 18th century gave an elaborate account of the general distributions of professions under different castes in Bengal. Very few would accept a work which lowered the traditional repute and dignity of the individual caste. Thus the growing contempt for purely religious functions of the priests, clearly demonstrate that the vested economic interests promoted by caste were fast disintegrating in the 18th century.

Apart from the distinction of rank fostered by the caste institution, the high classes expropriated to themselves

1. Dubois, J.A.: Description of the character, manners and customs of the people of India, Madras, 1862, p.7.


certain privileges from which others were excluded. The study of scriptures and theology remained a monopoly of the Brahmans. The Rajputs and Vaisyas could study the scriptures, recite them at their will, but they could not interpret them. Since the higher religious learning was the monopoly of the Brahmans, to the Europeans it appeared very cruel and unjustified. They took it as a mischievous attempt on the part of the priestly class to consolidate its influence in the society. "It is an essential part of the religion of the Hindus", said James Mill, to confer gifts upon the Brahmans.....gifts to the Brahmans formed an important and essential part of sacrifice.

The most indefensible feature of caste was the social degradation of a large part of the population known better as untouchables. The lower classes legally had no civic status, no civic rights, and could be compared to the slaves of the

Roman society. ¹ James Mill stated that all agricultural and productive classes below the Vaisyas were degraded below the brutes and were considered vile and odious.²

People of different castes could worship the same Gods, observe the same ceremonies, but could not eat together. The delight of a common table was altogether alien to them. So extremely scrupulous were the natives in preparing their victuals, that if any person, who was a non-caste other than Brahman, touched their bodies or clothes or any articles within the area, the whole meal together with the earthenware would be thrown away as being polluted. However, C.R. Wilson is of the view that inter dining was not so rigid as the Britishers had made it to be. He significantly pointed out that "let a blacksmith acquire wealth and he will have his lever well attended by the Brahmans of the respectable descent."³ Thus

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3. Wilson, C.R.: Early Annals of the English in Bengal, London, 1895. The Historian significantly points out that a financially stable man could command respect and be at par with the Brahmans irrespective of his caste.
Wilson held that many of the untouchables held "quite as independent and respectable position as they had in Europe".  

In the 18th century inter caste matrimonial connections were beyond the comprehension of people. Those of the people who indulged in inter-caste marriage, were boycotted, and excommunicated. There have been several evidence which states that if the caste rules were violated, the whole case was reviewed without setting any further decision, but those who breached the law in respect to marriage and sexual intercourse, they were severaly punished. "If a girl of high caste in Peshwa's dominions was detected in act of adultry, she could be sold and treated as a slave."  

However, keeping in mind the variegated loopholes of caste distinctions, Abbe Dubois propounded a novel notion altogether as regards the system of caste in India. He stated: "For my part having been in a situation to observe the charac-ter of the Hindus, and having lived amongst them for many years, I have formed an opinion almost opposite. I consider  

1. Wilson,C.R.: Early Annals of the English in Bengal, London, 1895. The Historian significantly points out that a financially stable man could command respect and be at part with the Brahmans irrespective of his caste.  

2. Raghuvanshi,V.P.S: Indian Society in 18th Century, New Delhi, 1969, p.54.
the Institution of caste amongst the Hindu nations as the happiest effort of their legislation, and I am well convinced, that if the people of India never sunk into the state of barbarism, and if, when almost all Europe was plunged in that dreamy gulf, India kept up her head, preserved and extended the acts of civilisation, it is wholly to the distinction of caste that she is indebted to the high celebrity.

Inspite of the optimistic views put forward by Dubois, it cannot be denied that the entire social structure, which was enveloped by the rigidity of caste taboos, did more harm than good to the society as a whole. The caste distinctions led to class distinctions which finally created animosity among the different classes of people and thus crippled the very edifice on which the society stood.

The relation between religion and social customs in Hindu society is very intimate. "The low state to which religion had fallen, had its counter effects on society. The Hindu social organisation had also degenerated considerably." 

1. Dubois, J.A.: Description of the character, manners and customs of the people of India, Madras, 1862, p.119.

Sati, the cruel practice of burning the widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands, was a noticeable feature in Indian social life in those days. This custom had the sanction of some Hindu scriptures, which laid down that failure of a widow to this duty might lead to her rebirth as animals, while its faithful observance would not only enable her to enjoy delight with her husband for eternity, but also expiate the sins of her husband's paternal and maternal ancestors upto three generations. The horrible rite of the Sati became the order of the day. The idea behind the practice of Sati was that no other effectual duty is known for virtuous women at any time after the death of their husbands except casting themselves into the same funeral pyre. There were several instances of Sati burning all over India, but it ought to be remembered that in great instances the Sati was the victim of the greedy relatives.¹ Many horrible murder was thus committed and cries and shrieks of the poor suttee being drowned by the sound of tom toms and her struggle made powerless by here being pressed down with bamboos.² The British Government adopted a policy of neutrality at first and also passed a regulation to the effect, that "assistance at the rite of self immolation known as Sati was not murder.

2. Ibid, p.vi.
In the month of February 1789, Mr. Brooke, Collector of Allahabad, reported that acting on his own sense of what was right and without specific orders he had refused to give his consent to a Sati, and the Government informed him in reply, that his conduct was approved, but in future he should exert his private influence to dissuade natives from the custom and should not resort to "coercive measures", or to the exercise of authority. A hope was expressed that the natives might in due time discern the fallacy of the principles which had given rise to the practice, and that it would fall into disuse by itself. But the Europeans, inspite of their neutrality in religious affairs, refused to tolerate such inhuman practice. The practice was prohibited within the jurisdiction of the European officers. Luke Scrafton, had given several instances to show that Sati was prevalent. He said, "Another circumstance that contributed to form their general character, is their marrying with infant fidelity, and yet no women are more remarkable for their conjugal fidelity, in which they are distinguished beyond the rift of their sex, by that remarkable custom of burning with their husband. Many Authorfs acribe this to have been instituted to prevent their wife performing them,......he is firmly persuaded that by being burnt with him, the shall

be happy with him in another world; that if she neglects this token of affection, he may take another wife, and she be separated from him for ever. However, false these principles, yet if those poor women are persuaded they are true, you must allow they are powerful motives.¹ About Bengal, Scrafton has however pointed out that in mid 18th century the practice of Sati was far from common and was only complied with by those of illustrious families.² However, in spite of strict vigilance, the rite of Sati was observed outside the jurisdiction of the city, and sometimes even in the suburbs.

Another cruel and horrible rite prevalent among certain Rajput tribes was the practice of killing infant girls. Social usage among certain Rajput tribes prohibited inter marriages between families of the same clan or tribe. Besides, social customs and conventions demanded a very heavy expenditure on the marriage ceremony. The very nature of the crime was such that in spite of strict regulations it was very easy to carry on the practice in secret.³

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2. Ibid, p.10
A peculiar type of Infanticide was prevalent in Bengal. If a woman was childless, her family took a vow that if she bore children, through the Grace of God, her child would be thrown to the Ganges as an offering. In fact, the people had a blind faith in God, and they believed that any major calamity could be appeased by giving offerings to God. In "Devatar Gras", written by Rabindra Nath Tagore, a vivid portrait of blind faith in God is evident. In the process of calming the approaching storm, the child was abandoned as an offering to the Ganges. 

The Brahmans and the Kayasthas claiming higher social pedigree made polygamy a regular feature. They married several times and earned dowry regardless of the sanctity of marital relationship and the natural instincts of women. A Kulin Brahman was permitted to have innumerable wives and he would undertake to marry a woman and visit her only on payment of dowry and regular premiums. Many women married to Kulin Brahmans were never visited by their husbands and their lot were as bad as that of the widows. However, among the lower castes the practice was just the opposite. The bridegroom was "required to pay dowry to the bride,

1. Tagore, Rabindranath: Devatar Gras, 13 Kartikeya, Vishwa Bharati, 1302
2. Dutta, K: Survey of India's social life and economic conditions in the 18th century, Calcutta, 1961, p.37
the amount of which was not very substantial. Fear of discussions in the family supported on low income, was, however, a great check in the abuse of polygamy. Thus "polygamy an evil practice in itself was prevalent on a large scale."

The cruel and evil practice of 'purdah' or seclusion of women also formed an important feature in the society thereby rendering the condition of women worst and distressing. This custom was strictly observed by the Muslims all over India. The high caste Hindus in Northern India probably borrowed it from the Muslims and observed the same. In the Deccan, however, where the Muslim influence was less enduring and smaller in extent, the purdah system among the Hindus was practically unknown. Dubois has also confirmed that the custom of women veiling their faces was not prevalent in South India. Women belonging to poor sections had to do much of drudgery work, for which they had to go out. As a matter of fact, the purdah system was great obstacle for the girls attending schools. It was, however, suggested

4. Dubois, J.A.: Description of Character, Manners and Custom of people of India, Madras, 1862, p.341.
that a special category of women be formed in public who could move about freely in society. This class could have the liberty to attend schools. They could later engage themselves to teach the female members of respectable families. Even if one lady in every respectable family gets education, she would be able to instruct the other members of the family.¹ Such a system was introduced to help ladies of high strata of society, who could not move freely, to educate themselves. Strong prejudice prevailed against girls education in Bengal. Along with this, conservatism prevailed over society, so much so that due to purdah system the very progress of women were hampered. Nevertheless, there are several instances to show that certain Muslim ladies took part in the political and administrative affairs of the country. Nawab ali Vardi's begum was a very able companion of her husband in managing the affairs of the state, and in combating the menace of Maratha inroads.² However such instances were rare. Usually, the purdah system was strictly observed by the Muslims all over India and was also followed by the high class Hindu aristocracy of Northern India.

2. Dubois, J.A.: Description of Character, Manner and Customs of the people of India, Madras, p.211.
Early marriages of both boys and girls formed a noticeable feature in society. Amongst Hindus, marriage was an indispensable duty, a religious obligation enjoined on all, save those who were vowed to life long celibacy in pursuit of religious ideals. "To a Hindu", says Dubois, "marriage is the most important and engrossing event of his life". An unmarried man is looked upon as having no social status and as being an almost useless member of society. A renowned sociologist, Crauford has vividly observed: "The Hindus are so scrupulous with respect to the virginity of their brides, that they marry a person with whom those symptoms have already appeared to which their sex is subject". A grownup unmarried girl was a source of embarrassment to the members of the family and their failure to settle a match for her was a social odium, almost a violation of the sanctity of religion. Thus early marriage became an important feature in the society.

The system of early marriage was prevalent in South India also. Abbe Dubois condemned it in strong words. He

opined that early marriage developed prematurely, "the latest germs of passion and vice and the knowledge of evil comes before the first dawning of reason."\(^1\) Thus, the system of marrying early was evident all over India. However, contemporary European evidence have brought forward novel ideas, through which they have stated the probable cause. In its defence, J. Forbes quotes Montesquieu that in hot sultry climates, "Women were marriageable at eight or nine or ten years of age therefore.....infancy and marriage go together".\(^2\) According to Crauford, "the mental as well as physical faculties of the human species seem to arrive sooner at maturity in Hindus-tan than in colder climates." Whatever might be the reason, it cannot be denied that this was a positive obstruction to social development. Thus "the child marriage, a pernicious custom in one society, produced the most shocking of evils".\(^3\)

The condition of widows was despicable. They were isolated from society and were deprived of all the privileges which they once enjoyed. If a woman died, the widower was allowed to marry again, and were in certain cases pestered.


by the relations to do so. After remarriage, the widower could once again regain his lost status. "A Brahman who is a widower, is like wise felt to have fallen from his station, and nothing is more urgent upon him than to resume the marriage state". But the case was quite different with the widows. It never entered anyone's mind to procure a new establishment for them, even when they lost their husbands at an early age of six or seven. The prejudices among the Brahman class had taken such a strong root, that a simple mention of remarrying the widow was considered to be the greatest possible calamity that can befall a woman is to survive her husband. The widow was not allowed to participate in any family ceremonies as her presence was itself taken as an ill omen in the family. George Forster, in his journey from Bengal to London had said about widows:

"On all occasions, after the husband's death, the widow is classed in the house as a slave or a menial servant. A widow could be easily identified through her hair which was cut as soon as she became a widow."

1. Dubois, J.A.: Description of the Character, Manners and Customs of the people of India, Calcutta, 1905, p.104.
2. Ibid., p.104.
appropriating her property to charitable use, offer up a sacrifice of her heir to the memory of her husband. She is not to decorate her person with jewels, with gold, silver, or any other female ornament. She is not to use perfume, not eat flesh, fish or butter but to live on plain barley or wheaten bread, and eat but once in a day. A woman was declared 'widow' some days after the death of her husband by a particular ceremony. The female relation eventually cut the thread in which an ornament was suspended supposed to be a symbol of marriage. After the thread cutting, the widow had to shave her hair, and join the despised class of widow.

Marriage of widows among higher class Hindu families were not permissible. Yet there were protests made by some intellectuals against the prevailing custom. In the transitional phase of the 18th century, an attempt was made by Raja Raj Ballabh of Dacca to introduce widow remarriage in Bengali society. In the year 1756, Raja Raj Ballabh, being desirous or remarrying his widowed daughter solicited the opinion


2. Dubois, J.A. : Description of the Character, Manners and Customs of the people of India, Calcutta, 1905, p.178.
of learned pandits. Women were at liberty to marry again, if their husbands be not heard of, die, retire from the World, prove to the unuchs, or become out casts. But inspite of his utmost effort Raj Ballabh was not successful. It was only later, that Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar made widow remarriage legal. Inspite of all set backs Vidyasagar was immovable. He said that it was his life's aim to reform the clan of the widow and make widow marriage legal. He practically kept his words.

Indian society was fully conscious of the supreme importance of education in the life of the individual and the community. Although the 18th century was one of the leanest periods of Indian History, yet we find that education was not totally neglected. "To acquire knowledge of the "Shastras" and to encourage it by direct instruction or financial aid to scholars or teachers was considered an act of high religious merit".

In Bengal, the two districts of Nadia and Rajshahi were important seats of learning. The Brahmans were considered the highest educated community since they were well versed in sanskrit, and the religious literature of the Hindus. Among the middle classes, in urban and rural areas as well as among the lower strata of society, education was not totally neglected.

1. Dutta, K.K. : Education and Social Amelioration of Women in pre-British India, Calcutta, 1936, p.44.
Dr. E. Ives mentions that there were many schools for children where they learnt their mother tongue. The accounts clearly show that there were sufficient provision for education, so much so that the practical and spiritual value of education was widely recognised. The saint and the scholar, the priest and the teacher occupied an honourable position in the society. There were the Vernacular schools which played a decisive role in promoting literacy among the masses. The benefits of education in these schools were within the reach of all classes of the society. India was famous for here innumerable academic centres, where teachers and taught sat together at the sacred altar of learning. People from all classes flocked on the same platform of learning thereby rendering a perfect blending. The first rudiments of education was usually given both by the Hindus and Muslims in small schools called "Paaths-halla" under the tuition of teachers called 'Gurus', who may be of any caste or religion. In the 18th century, there was nothing like an integrated system of education under state control.

The Academies of Sanskrit and the School for Vernacular learning were distinct Institutions of learning.¹

True education was patronized to a large extent, but the greatest evil lay in the fact that woman in general were denied the privilege of receiving education. This was partly due to early marriage, purdah and partly to the superstition that an educated woman would inevitably become a widow.² Inspite of this superstition, women used to receive education, of course in a restrictive way, in some high families. Thus it may be said that women in India during the eighteenth century were not universally steeped in ignorance.

There were certain conditions besides religious motives which led the fathers to educate their daughters. The fathers hoped to marry their daughters in wealthy families and in order to look after the affairs of the state in case of widowhood, knowledge of writing and learning was necessary. Thus in order to fulfil this motive, the higher strata of society educated their daughters.


"There was yet another class of women and more especially old women, who learnt to read and write their own vernacular in those early days. There were the bereaved widows or matrons having a religious turn of mind.\textsuperscript{1} Sri Radhakanto Deb who fought for women education in Bengal, educated almost all the female members of his family. Sri Radhakanto Deb in his brochure on Female education made public the fact that almost every female member of his family knew reading and writing. This claim however created great sensation and some scandal in the then orthodox Hindu society of Calcutta.\textsuperscript{2} Although education among the woman was not totally neglected, yet the mass, particularly, the middle class, remained illiterate. This was one of the main reasons why Swami Dayanand, in his plea to reform society, quoted a verse of Manu, "Both the State and Society should make it compulsory upon all to send their children (both male and female) to school after the fifth or eighth years." \textsuperscript{3}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Tattavabushan, Sitanath: Social Reform in Bengal, Calcutta 1904, p.39
\item Ibid., p.41
\item Majumdar, B.B. : History of Indian Social and Political Ideas from Ram Mohan to Dayanand, Calcutta, 1967, p.262.
\end{enumerate}
Slavery was a recognized institution in India since remote antiquity. The conditions of slaves in India during the 18th century was horrible and no better than the Negro counterparts in the U.S.A. The contemporary sources indicated that lot of slaves were very harshly treated. The branding of slaves' forehead with red hot iron was not unknown. However, Sri Amal Kumar Chattopadhaya defended the slaves and refused to believe that they were maltreated. He says that "slaves were treated as the children of the families to which they belonged and they often acquired a much happier state by the slavery than they could have hoped for by the enjoyment of liberty".  

Family system, which formed the chief agency for social relationship was mainly patriarchal in character. The senior male member of the family used to be the undisputed head. The women yielded to the will of the masters. Before marriage, the girls were guided by the dictates of the parents, after marriage the husbands took over from the parents, and henceforth they guided the wives in every respect. In old age, the son looked after the welfare of the mother, if the husbands were not alive. In all the three stages, the women had to submerge their identity to the male dictates. The mistress of the household held a very

respectable position. She was expected to be a perfect blend of modesty, chastity and piety. The contemporary social history depicts several attributes of the mistress in the household. The 18th century poet of Bengal, Bharat Chandra emphasised how a good wife, served as a ministering angel to her family and an impious one was an evil star on it".\(^1\) The remarks of George Forster also vividly describes the position of women "By the ancient law of the country, the wife dependf for the enjoyment of every pleafure, as well as for most of the ordinary accommodationf of life, in the immediate existence of her husband and it becomef her invariable interef to preferve his health, af much of her happineff, if centered in his living an old age. On the demife of the husband, the wife virtually developef into "Caput Morterm". Fhe if not permitted to marry again. Fhe is deprived of all confequencef in the family and divefted of the markf of ornament and distinction.\(^2\) Dubois states that the Hindu women enjoyed the complete confidence of their husbands and were the guardians of family, property, money, jewels and all.\(^3\) Inspite of all this, the life of the

\(\begin{align*}
1. & \text{Raghuvanshi, V.P.S.: Indian society in 18th century, Delhi, 1969, p.105.} \\
2. & \text{Forster, George : Journey from Bengal to England, Vol. I, London, 1798, p.57. Here "f" is written in place of "s".} \\
3. & \text{Dubois, J.A. : Letters on the State of Christianity in India, Calcutta, 1823, p.182.}
\end{align*}\)
woman as a widow was one of mourning. She had to forsake all the pleasures of life and resort to the recital of sacred books. She could not participate in any social ceremonies and her presence in such ceremonies was considered as evil.

In the upper as well as lower strata of society, punishment for adultery was very severe, and very often it was only on this ground that divorce could take place. Henly Verelst pointed out that in the year 1762, a Bengali detected one of his women in an act of adultery and infidelity, and he punished her by cutting her nose. 1 Thus, in spite of the fact that women in general enjoyed a respectable position in the society, they were bound to the four walls of the household.

Another cruel rite which shook the very foundation of the social system was the "hook swinging", a ceremony observed during the Charak Puja festival. On this occasion a number of devotees cast themselves on thorns and upraised knives. They pierced their arms or tongues by iron arrows, drew strings through the flesh of their sides and fixed themselves to their hot iron spikes. There were others who

swung on the Charak tree by hooks fastened through the muscles of their backs. This cruel rite was abolished by law, although the Charak ceremony continued with other amusements.¹

Living side by side for centuries together, the Hindus and Muslim communities had borrowed each others social customs. Unlike the Hindus, the Muslims too arranged in a scheme of social gradation which was upheld by birth. Although the Muslims did not have any stringent rules as far as caste was concerned, yet there were two major classifications through which caste was determined. "In Bengal and Bihar, we come across two main social divisions in Muslim Society, (i) Ashraf, or the high-born and (ii) Razil, a corruption of Rizal, worthless or low-born, something similar to the "Dwijas" (twice born castes), and Sudras of the Hindu Society."² The Ashrafs formed the higher class and were regarded as man full of pride. "They included the Sheikhs and the Sayyids, the Mughals and the Pathans corresponding to the Brahmans and Kshtriyas of the Hindu Society."³ The superior class considered it a shame and disgrace to do menial jobs

³. Ibid., p.85.
and attach themselves to professions which were lower in Status and dignity. Since it was not possible under the changed circumstances, several Muslims, in order to retain their status, were rendered jobless. The ultimate consequence which followed was that the future of the Muslims were doomed. ¹ In Southern India, the distinctions of caste prevailed, and the Muslims of Arabic origin considered themselves the superior class. The Islamic social consciousness was strongly affected by "caste psychology" particularly in those areas where the Hindus were the dominant groups. The Sheikhs, the Mughals, the Pathans and the Persians were distributed into many small classes on the basis of ancestry and local origin. The Muslim classes that were of Hindu stock retained caste in full vigour. The lower sections of the Muslims, the so called "Razii", was also arranged into social divisions. In Bihar, the non-Ashrafs constituted the "Bukals" or traders of low birth. They abstained from rural labour. They were followed by Jotiyas, or the Agricultural class, and the Panniyas, or the artisans. Besides this, there were other low castes people who were not allowed to have any social ties with the higher groups, i.e., the Ashrafs.

¹These classes included the Jolahas, Patwars (tape weavers)

¹ Raghuvanshi, V.P.S.: Indian Society in 18th century, Delhi, 1969, p.85.
Darji, Glass-workers (Churisaj), Daphalis prostitutes, Bhat, Bhatiyaras, Bhangagera (seller of intoxicants), Halwais (confessioners), Barbers, Potters, Shoe-makers and other menial classes.

Thus in the rural Indian villages, where practically the entire Muslim population was descended from Hindu converts, the traditional Hindu outlook and social forms were retained. "The Muslim 'Bhangi' was as downtrodden as his Hindu counterpart, although the Islamic ideal of human equality was a major incentive for many caste ridden and oppressed Hindu to embrace Islam. But in practice their social inequality remained.....".

Slavery was an ancient institution in India, and it continued to remain so during the 17th and 18th century. Like the Hindus, Muslim society too had slaves, and this was a familiar feature of every respectable Muslim house. However, in later years, reformers abolished slavery.

Owing to the intensity of religious life in the country, the Muslim Mulas followed the Hindu priests in procuring large landed endowment in the process of worship. Among


the Muslims, the Mullas working in the mosques held their office by hereditary privilege. They also had large income from the people who utilized them for praying and fasting for the benefit in the other world.

Though Islam upheld monotheism, yet in India, it was very much influenced by the polytheistic elements of Hindu religion. The various elements of nature like the Sun and Moon were the objects of worship by the Muslims also. In Bengal, the worship of Kali was popular among certain classes of Muslims. Beliefs in objects of worship held by Hindus was also shared by their religious classes, the Qazis and Mollas. It was customary for the Muslims to offer "prashad" in Hindu temples, and the Hindus "Shirnee", at mosques. The Brahmans are mentioned as consulting the Qoran, the Muslims seeking the benedictions of the Sapta-Rishi, the illustrious seven sages of the Hindus. If a Muslim did not make offerings, with their own hands, they had them presented on their behalf through proper hands. Thus a fusion of the Hindu and Muslim culture was apparent in the 18th century.


2. Ibid, p.132.

Purdah was popular among the Muslims as well as the Hindus. This custom was mainly in vogue among the aristocratic Muslim families. This system held so much importance that it posed a hindrance to the women seeking education. Backwardness and social conservatism deprived the women to seek education. In spite of this orthodoxy, there are evidence to show that Nawab Allwardi's Begum was a very able companion of her husband in managing the affairs of the State. 1

Thus the Indian society in general suffered from several setbacks. The social conventions, with all its evil practices enveloped the whole society thereby crippling the progress of India. Caste with its manifold wings created havoc among the different classes of society. The condition of the women in general was deplorable. But every cloud has a silver lining. India too witnessed the emergence of several reformers who came forward and dedicated their lives in reforming the society. They successfully proved the old conventions futile, and paved the way for the dawn of a New Era - an age of peace, progress, prosperity and intellectual Renaissance.

1. Dubois, J.A.: Description of the Character, Manners and Customs of the people of India, Calcutta, 1905, p.211.