The eighteenth century presents a picture of political and social chaos and of a society desperately trying to salvage what was left of its past glory and dominant position in India. The decay of the Mughal power had adversely affected the social and economic position of the Indian Muslims who had depended on government support to maintain their financial and social position in society. The causes of the collapse of Mughal administration have been discussed elsewhere. The decline began during the time of Aurangzeb and it gained in momentum under his weak successors, but by the end of the 18th century the Mughal emperors retained only the shadow of power without the substance of it.

"The decay of the political authority of the highly centralised Mughal empire was the result, and not the cause as is sometimes imagined, of the depletion of vitality of the Muslims, the arrest of the growth of Muslims civilisation, the domination of the living by the dead, the moral inertia, the flight from reality and an unwillingness to face dangers or hardships for an ideal or a cause on the part of the Muslims. Luxury and ease had devitalised the Muslim Society. The forces that counter cultural decay had been weakened by depletion and dilution of Muslim strength and by the resultant psychological and economic depression. Those with gifts for
action became gangsters living for themselves in perfect abandonment without thought of the morrow or the interests of the community to which they belonged. Those who had no taste for action carried forward the process of decay by a passive acquiescence and an inner corruption. There was neither pride in the past nor hope for the future. Neither the example of the pious Caliphs nor the earlier warriors in the path of God worked as operative agents in their listless lives. The pacifism of the sufis orders degenerated into passivism. Optimistic as to divine intervention and cowardly in their action they were ripe for butchery. Without ambition, without creative capacity, clothing themselves in the tattered garments of an old civilisation, ostrich-like they hid their heads in the sands of Mughal glory."

The later Mughal kings were inexperienced, slothful and pleasure loving. The nobles who were the pillars of the state, were not loyal to their profession or the cause of their master. They had become selfish and played treacherous a role and jeopardised the cause of their master by selling off their loyalties. Consequently, the Mughal empire dwindled into provincial status and the Marhattas, the Jats, the Sikhs and the Afghans established their independent states by annexing imperial dominions. From Akbar to the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal kings were the fountain of authority and they occupied an unique position in the state, but after the death of Aurangzeb, the later Mughal rulers lost their established position and were reduced to a cipher. They were temperamentally and constitutionally were unfit to rule. They left the work of administration

Into the hands of one or more of their favourites and they busied themselves in harem life. As a result of this negligence and indifference, the enemies of the empire, who had been deprived of their independence by the power of the Mughals, found a golden opportunity to raise their heads and extend their territories. By the time of Shah Alam II, there was no Mughal empire, as such. Shah Alam II was the nominal ruler of the Dehli province.

Though the Muslim society was theoretically a caste-less society yet the political, economic and social factors cut it up into various classes on racial, professional and sectarian basis. The Persians, the Turanians, the Afghans, the Arabs and the Indian Muslims, Shaikhzadas, Baluchis, Ghakkars, Medwatis, constituted separate units constantly conflicting with each other for material ends.

The Indian converts continued to observe their old religious beliefs, customs and manners and set themselves up as a separate units from other Muslim groups. Originally the Muslims were a warrior class and military service was the only profession which satisfied their racial ego. But as time passed on economic factors forced them to adopt other professions. During the period under study we find the Muslims engaged in all sorts of professions, but these vocational groups kept themselves apart from other groups by their family customs and traditions.

During the period under study the Muslim community was divided into various sects, e.g. the Sunnis and the Shias,
each being divided again into many sub-sects. The relations of these sects were very antagonistic and strained during the period under review. The Shiites freely displayed their religious antagonism against the Sunnis Muslims in general and Sunni Ulema in particular. The Sunni Ulema and mashaikh were more tolerant towards the Shiites. Shah Wali Ullah tried to compose the differences between two sects, and Sunnis Sufis enrolled Shiites as their disciples.

The Madaris became a distinct sect in this period. The visit to the shrine of Shah Madar, who was the founder of this sect, was given religious sanctity. They differed from the common Muslims in many ways. The Chollubdhaar, was a new sect and was the product of this period. There was another sect known as Be-gaid and Be-targ. The followers of Sultan Sarwar became a separate sect and they invented many religious rituals and performed them with all formalities. The Jalaliyans sect professed to be Shiites as the Madaris were Sunnis and these two sects reviled each other. Nadiriya sect, was founded in India during the reign of Muhammad Shah. This sect was very much influenced by Hindu faiths and beliefs. It also believed in transmigration of the soul. Shah Jamal Ullah declared himself as Naib Mahdi and found a great response from the Muslims. Mir Muhammad Husain, founded a sect known as Namud-va-Namud and many Muslims enrolled themselves as his disciples.

The Mughal court still observed all court ceremonials, and festivals, like Nauroz, weighing ceremony, Dashera etc. attended with dance and music. The Mughal harem contained a
large number of women servants of different nationalities, and a large number of concubines. Shah Alam Jami maintained 500 women in his harem. Besides this the court maintained a large number of dancers, musicians and instrument players, mimics and buffoons. A number of eunuchs served inside the palace. There was a big staff of house-hold officers known as dargahs, who looked after the departments assigned to them. During the later Mughal period, one of the important phenomena was that the ladies of the harem meddled with administrative matters. In the period under review, Lal Kuwar, the wife of Jahandar Shah, the mother of Furrukhsiyar, Mian Parwar and Amat-ul-Habib, the wife of Muhammad Shah, Rani Jui one of the favourites of Muhammad Shah and Nawab Qudsia Begum mother of Muhammad Shah, took keen interest in the administration of the day. In the provincial headquarters the wives of the provincial governors played the same role.

From the time of Akbar till the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal rulers never allowed their nobles to assume royal airs. They were kept in subordination but later on the civil wars compelled the Mughal princes to seek the help of the powerful nobles. Consequently when one of the them became victorious, he had to surrender all his powers into the hands of the noble by whose active support he had been enthroned. As a result of this, the nobles gradually usurped the powers of the monarchs and began to play the role of a king. The Mughal court became
the arena of party politics of different groups. The mutual wranglings and rivalries of the nobles, poisoned the atmosphere of the court. From the kings downward every one belonged to one party or the other. From the reign of Farrukhsiyar onward, the Mughal nobility was divided on religious grounds - Iraai (the Shias) and the Turais (the Sunnis). These two groups continued to play their roles upto the reign of Shah Alam II. Both the groups used violent measures to oust their opponents. This led one group or the other to seek the help of the enemies of the empire - Marhattas, Jats, Sikhs and Afghans. Consequently the Mughal empire, was weakened politically and economically.

The Mughal nobles imitated their master in their daily life. They led a luxurious life and were keenly interested in dance, music and women. They were highly extravagant. The ladies of the harem of the wazir, Qamaruddin Khan, used to take bath in rose water. The nobles distributed large sums of money among the recluses, poors and mashaikh. Marriages and festivals were the occasions when the nobles spent money recklessly to maintain their social position. Lacs of rupees were spent on such occasions or during the festivals of Yazdahum Rabi-ul-Awwal or on the occasion of the anniversary of any great saint.

The nobles of this period were great patrons of poets, ulema mashaikh and literary men. Many of the nobles were great Persian scholars and they composed poems, and rewarded and encourage the poets. The courts of Farrukhabad, Anwala, Tanda and Lucknow were great centres of literary activities. The Muslims were proverbially generous. Though there was a great economic break
down in the period under study, yet, the Mughal nobles displayed their generosity, and established inns, built mosques and reservoirs. Gifts were sent to other Muslim cities like Mecca, Madina, Najaf Ashraf, Karbala, Baghdad, Basrah etc. Some of the nobles were great players of musical instruments and they patronised masters of this art. Some books on music were also written during this period. Indian music reached its highest water mark in this period.

The nobles were greatly addicted to intoxicants like, wine, bhang, opium and charas etc. The mode of life of the nobles had a far reaching effect on the Muslim masses. Paederasty was a common vice and wine and women were the order of the day. The nobles realised money from the subjects by all possible measures. Consequently the masses were reduced to paupery and sheer poverty. The soldiers were thrown out of employment and those who were in service could not get their salaries and passed their time in starvation.

The kings and nobles were very colourful in their dresses and wore costly dresses. They spent large sums of money on their clothings and maintained big karkhanas, where finely embroidered cloth was prepared for their use. Many new names of dresses and styles came into use during the time of the Mughals. Due to the economic decay of the Muslim, dresses of the common people were simpler and they had to face great difficulties in procuring simpler dresses. In matters of diet, the Mughal kings and nobles spent extravagantly on fine and rich food. The upper classes spent much on fruits and fruits were part of their daily diet.
The Muslims of this period were more superstitious and they observed many rituals on the occasion of sun or moon eclipse, marriages, deaths and religious festivals. The real spirit of Islam had departed from the hearts of the Muslims and they laid much emphasis on outward observances. Kite flying, pigeon-fencing, cock and quail fighting, racing and witnessing of animals fights, hunting, smoking of hūga and chewing of betels coffee drinking were very popular among all classes of the Muslims of this period. Both men and women indulged in hūga and betels. Dance and music was very popular. The court maintained a band of musicians and singers. Of every festive gatherings, music and dance were integral parts. Qawwali was very popular among the kings, nobles and commonality alike. This period produced many famous Qawwals, and vocal and instrument players and singers.

The relation between Hindu and Muslims were very cordial. They participated in each other's festivals and other religious and secular functions and lived side by side as brothers and neighbours. Such a long close association of the Muslims with the Hindus led the Muslims to adopt many of their customs, manners and ways of life. The other factor which led to this adoption was that the Hindu converts continued to observe their former religious rituals and traditional customs and manners. There was very little difference between the Hindus and the converted Muslims. The influence of Hindu customs, manners and way of life was discernable in every branch of Muslim social life. The Muslims celebrated more or less all the Hindu festivals like their own. They worshipped idols like the Hindus.
This led to the rise of grave worship among the Muslims. The Muslim ladies were more affected by the Hindu customs and manners. The custom of Jauhar was practiced by the Muslims.

This policy of assimilation and give and take led to the rise of common culture which was neither exclusively Hindu nor Muslim but a 'Hindu-Muslim Culture.'

The Muslims of this period were more superstitious and observed many un-Islamic practices. The ladies especially believed in the effects of evil spirits and they observed many un-Islamic rituals to get themselves rid of their effect. The festival of Shah-i-Barat was borrowed from the Hindus, which was known as Kanagat. In this festival all the rituals of Kanagat of the Hindus were observed. The Muslim men and women wore similar dresses and ornaments as the Hindus.

The 13th century was a period of religious and moral decline and spiritual degeneration of the Muslim society. There was a need of a group of people who could make an attempt to revitalize their moral, religious and spiritual life. This was attempted by Shah KalimUllah Jahanabadi, Shah Fakhruddin Dehlvi, Noor Muhammad Maharvi, Khwaja Mir Dard and Mirza Mazhar Jan Jana. They sent their Khalifahs into distant parts of India to spread the teachings of Islam. On the other hand, Shah Wali Ullah, an eminent theologian and mystic started a movement to bring back the Muslims to the fold of true Islam. He addressed every class of Muslim society from kings downward and woke them from the state of listlessness. He translated the
Quran into Persian so that people could learn the true teachings of the Quran and see how far they were abiding by the same. He wrote many other books for the same purpose. "Shah Wali Ullah's position as a theologian and traditionalist is undisputed and unrivalled in India. His greatness lies in the versatility of his genius, his profound understanding of the Quran and Hadis, his unrivalled broadness of outlook and his keen desire to interpret and explain Quran and Hadis, in the context of the present. In his case, there is no mere sentimental pull to the older Islam. He stands for the present and the future. The dogmatic hair splitting formal theology which had enmeshed itself in Aristotelian philosophy did not satisfy his revolutionary zeal to revive the stagnant Muslim Society. The ulema had become pawns in the game of politics. Opportunism and worldly self-interest made these active participants in or indifferent to the political intrigues of the ruling class and the exploitation of the masses. Shah Wali Ullah had the courage of his convictions to speak boldly to all masses of people and brought home to them the danger they stood in... He had no hope of the revival of Mughal imperialism. He neither liked it nor desired it. He simply wanted to arrest its decay till a better substitute was found for it. The sort of government which he aimed at and which would lead to prosperity of the people was to be built on the model of the government of the Khulafa-i-Rashidin."

1. Prof. Sh. Abdur Rashid, "Islamic Literature, 1955"
Obviously it appears that Shah Sahib failed in his efforts but there is no denying the fact that the movement which was started by Shah Sahib, later on was continued by Saiyad Ahmad Bareilvi and Ismail Shahid. Not only this, Shah Sahib also made an attempt to reform the system of education of the Muslims. He prepared a curriculum for Muslim educational institutions.

The period under study, in no way, was favourable for literary activities but it is a fact that the so called modern Urdu was born and flourished in that period. Mir, Sauda, Mirza Mazhar Jan Jana, Khwaja Mir Dard and Mushaffi purified this language to such an extent that it began to supplant Persian language. Urdu poetry became very popular and Persian poetry went into the background. But when the literary centre shifted to Lucknow, Urdu poetry lost its good qualities, which were its chief characteristics. Here the opulence of this city led to the production of cheap poetry. The poetic assemblies became centres of quarrels of rival groups of poets which lowered its standard.

Persian poetry lost its old popularity yet the cultured and upper classes still composed poems in Persian. So far the Persian prose is concerned, this period may be called the golden period of the development of Persian Literature. Books on various branches of learning were written in great numbers. Persian still was the court language. The knowledge of Persian
was the hallmark of a cultured man.

The study of the social institutions and religious beliefs of the Mussalmans of this period is vital to the understanding of the development of this society and the attempts at social, educational and religious reform movements of the nineteenth century and the erratic movements of this period to adjust the community to the rapidly changing political conditions.

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THE END