At the beginning of the present century the Pandit society presented a dismal look. In realities of life had been eclipsed by customs and superstitions. The Pandits performed an elaborate code of rituals and ceremonies with regard to birth, marriage and death. The Kashmiri Pandit Society was burdened with ugly rituals and costly time-consuming ceremonies. The most horrible aspect of these social evils and practices was the enormous waste of money on birth, marriage and death ceremonies. Among the other evils were infant marriage, the prevalence of widowhood and other related problems. The parents of a daughter were obliged to offer dowry in cash and kind to the inlaws of their daughter. The system of dowary was a never ending ritual. The community, as a whole, was faced with a financial crisis.

1. Sir Walter Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, London, 1895, pp. 257-71; Ryndail Biscone, Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade, New Delhi, 1971, (Reprint), pp. 153-103; A. K. Bansi, The Kashmiri Pandit, Calcutta, 1924, pp. 21-27; Ernest Neve, Beyond the Fir Forest, London, 1915, p. 240. The entire life of a Hindu “from the hour of his birth till the day when he dies and his son sets light to his funeral pyre is regulated by elaborate code of religious rites, ceremonies and customs. These involve daily worship with abolution and offerings of flowers and food, frequent festivities and the observance of a very large number of holy days.”

Superstition was an integral part of social life of the Pandits. The priests and astrologers had acquired an important position in the society and they were exerting great influence on the personal and corporate life of the masses.

This state of affairs evoked a sharp reaction in the minds of a few enlightened Pandits. They evolved a programme to usher in socio-religious reform movements. But they deferred their plan for some time due to the conservatism and obscurantism prevailing in their society. In 1894, Pandit Suraj Kak Mattoo, a leading reis and social reformer formed an association, Ramai Budhaker, which had for its object the introduction of social reforms. To avoid the displeasure of Maharaja, who was against the formation of association in his state, Suraj Kak Mattoo induced him to be its President. The Revenue Member of the Council was made its Vice-President and Pandit Hargopal Koul, an eminent lawyer, was its Secretary.

The Association launched a campaign against thoughtless expenditure on marriages and festivities. Serving of non-vegetarian dishes at the wedding feasts was banned. Voice was raised against

3. W. R. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 293.
5. Civil and Military Gazette, May, 1894.
child marriage and other social evils rampant in the society.
The success of the Association can be judged from the popular song
sung by women as a part of the wedding songs. 6

"Hargopalus Vakil-i-Barbaras
Rakahsaas Kati asi devte bodh
Keth Mokeelvin baji baleye
Suraj Kakni angyen eye". 7

The reforms launched by the leaders brought about a
change in the joint family system. Joint family system particularly
in Srinagar was discarded. The reformers were also to responsible
for providing an atmosphere to daughters-in-law where they could
breathe freely. They began to gain independence from the tyrannical
rule of the old lady of the house. They in order to express their
feelings used to sing:

"Hangah nah Tah range nah
Zangah Zichh Hashye
Bod nat dag nah
Kawah yiiem aushye". 8

6. K.N.K. Bansai, Socio-Economic History of Kashmir. New Delhi,
p. 308.

7. Ibid., "Strange for Hargopal the Government lawyer, a
monster acquiring divine wisdom. At the behest of the great
Suraj Kak, he freed the sheep from cruel death."

8. Ibid., I am independent of you, 0 lone tagged mother-in-law.
There is no pain or agony to me. I should not weep now.
The reforms initiated by Suraj Kak Mattoo could not remain in force for long. The success achieved by him was again reversed by the orthodox and conservative thinking of the Pandits. Till the first decade of the present century there was none to come forward and follow the track laid by Suraj Kak Mattoo.

Around 1920's a few of the Kashmiri Pandits thought of a forum for discussing the socio-religious problems faced by their community. They also determined the ways and means to solve them. The work done by Suraj Kak Mattoo did not prove abiding. Hence soon after Suraj Kak a fresh movement was started by two Pandits namely Pandit Hari Krishen Koul and Pandit Ved Lal Dhar. They formed an association called Dharma Sabha.

Those were the days of political disturbances in the Valley. The Government had issued orders that no association could be formed without securing its permission. The Secretary of


10. Ibid.

11. The Muslims of Kashmir had grown conscious of their rights. They were strongly supported by their brothers outside the Valley. The Hindu-Muslim brotherhood had begun to vanish and Muslims were gaining patronage at the hands of the government. See supra, pp.

12. Letter from Raja Sir Hari Singh Sahib to His Highness the Maharaja (Pratap Singh) Sahib Bahadur Srinagar, dated 14th August, 1922, Jammu and Kashmir Archives, File No's 584/F-7 of 1922, General Department.
the Sabha field an application on August 3, 1923 to His Highness Mahereaja Bahadur for allowing them to start the functions of the Dharma Sabha. The Government granted permission after it was ascertained that the Sabha was purely religious and eschewed politics.

The Dharma Sabha established its office at Mahereaja Rambir Ganj Bazar, Srinagar. Besides Hari Krishna Roul and Ved Lal Dhar, other members of the Pandit community joined the Sabha. Amar Nath Kak was made its President. The Dharma Sabha wanted to put an end to the prevailing social evils and customs. The other aims and objects of the Sabha were. (a) To persuade the Kashmiri Pandits to favour widow marriage; (b) to help the spread of female education

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14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

15a. Elder brother of R.C. Kak, who became the Prime Minister of the Jammu and Kashmir State under Mahereaja Hari Singh.


(c) to fight for the economic betterment of the community; (d) to reconvert to the Hindu faith those Hindus who had embraced other faiths and (d) to educate Kashmiri Pandits on the fundamentals of Hinduism.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the Sabha fell into the hands of conservative section of the Pandits. Consequently, the Sabha could not rise to its expectations. It only addressed itself to the spread (prachar) of Dharma. It founded an Anglo-Vernacular school in Srinagar in 1924 to impart religious instructions. The Sabha being in the hands of orthodox Hindus, its members were required to propagate the essentials of Hinduism and help its spread.

The Dharma Sabha also established its branches in various parts of the city of Srinagar. The main issue before Dharma Sabha was propagation of reconversion (Shuddhi prachar). It opened a Shuddhi Sabha at Partap Bhawan, Amirakadal, Srinagar. The Shuddhi Sabha held its meetings where emphasis was laid on winning over those Hindus who had accepted Islam or Christianity. The Sabha at one of its meetings, held on January 5, 1927, in connection with the death of Swami Shradhanand passed a resolution regarding the Shuddhi prachar.

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It chose its members from all walks of the society. Out of eleven members eight were government servants. The government took no measures to stop the activities of the Sabha, even though it was laid down under Rule 23 of the Government Servants Conduct Rules, that a government servant could not join any organisation whether social or political. This indicates that the orders passed by the government were not universal and were meant for a particular community. It explains why the government rejected the request of several Muslim reformers who tried to bring some change in their community.

21. The Sabha enlisted the support of eleven members whose names were L. Harbhagwan (Inspector Customs and Excise) as President, Pandit Shukur Das (Sub-judge) as Vice-President, Pandit Mehar Chand Dalal as Secretary; Pandit Prem Nath Chikan (brother of Jina Nath Chikan, editor Subhai Kashmir), as Assistant Secretary; Lala Jivan Lal, (Officiating A.G.P.), as member; The other members were Fateh Chand, (Deputy Inspector Customs), Lala Atma Ram (Deputy Inspector Customs), Pandit Nitya Randhastri (Professor Sri Pratap College, Srinagar), Jr., Kulbhushan, (Health Officer), Pandit Daulat Ram, (Engineer), and L. Uttam Chand. See Jammu and Kashmir Archives, File No: 1571/p-5 of 1920, General Department.


23. Jammu and Kashmir Archives, File No: 240/p-136 of 1918, Political Department. Some Muslim reformers wanted to establish Anjuman-i-jamal-ul-islah with the advancement of education and mutual cooperation amongst the people. With a great hope the Muslims presented an application to government for starting the Anjuman, but the government on pretty excuses poured boiling water on the feelings of the Muslims.
The social reforms initiated by the leaders of the Dharma Sabha were not broad based. Their vision was not deep. They were mostly worried over the wasteful expenditure on celebrations like sacred thread ceremony and other festivals which they desired to curb by organising public opinion against it. It is important to mention that the youth that joined its membership had practically no say in its activities. As a result, the working of the Sabha went on smoothly and the movement met varied fortunes over three decades. However, the spread of education among the young men could not keep them silent. They were greatly distressed at the painful situation of their community. Widowhood was the main problem before the young reformers. They, therefore, demanded a widow-marriage. But the orthodox and the conservative elements in the Sabha, particularly Amar Nath Kak, the president of the Sabha tried to suppress the voice of the young blood. Nonetheless, the conservative failed to check its youth wing. The difference between the two groups widened and the radical group under the leadership of Iren Nath Bazaz resigned from the Dharma Sabha.

25. Ibid.
26. Interview with K. K. Kak, Journalist and a social reformer taken at his residence Regal Chowk, Arinagar on May 29, 1985.
27. Ibid., Daughters of the Vitasta, op. cit., p. 233.
The young group of Kashmiri Pandits organized themselves in a body known as Fraternity Society in 1930. The word was taken from the now famous slogan of French Revolution: equality, fraternity and liberty. Almost all the members of the Fraternity Society had received modern education in Srinagar and outside the state, thus the society represented the new Kashmiri elite. It was obligatory for the members of the Fraternity Society to give up smoking, become a vegetarian and to wear khadi. The society enlisted the support of young blood for the first time and had given to the Pandit community a well-organized group of disinterested and selfless workers. Frem Nath Bazaz was the king-pin of the Fraternity society. Other prominent members of the Fraternity Society were Damodhar Bhat of Hanjura, Dr. Saligam Koul, Jia Lal Koul and Dina Nath Farimu. Among other members were Shambhu Nath Koul.

31. Interview with Mohan Krishen Picket at his residence in Srinagar on September 15, 1985.
32. Interview with Shri Shambhu Nath Shan, op. cit.,
33. Later a leading advocate on the Revenue side.
34. He was the brother of Damodhar Bhat, retired as a Principal of a Higher Secondary School.
35. He served as the Principal Medical College and the Director of Health Services for a number of years.
36. He retired as a employee of A.G. Department.
37. He retired as a principal of a Higher Secondary School, now settled in Bombay.
Ourfcu, Dina Nath Bezaz, P. N. Koul, Mohan Krishen Pickoo,  
I. N. HaI, Janki Nath Vishin, Dwarika Nath Kacnu, Poet Dina  
Nath Dilqir, Radkey Nath Koul and the musician Ved Lal Char(Vakil). 38

The Fraternity Society had a progressive and rational  
outlook. It wanted to modernize the Kashmiri Society in order to  
enable it to march with the times. 39

The office of the Fraternity Society was established at  
Campatyan in Srinagar. It launched a campaign to mobilize public  
opinion to support the eradication of social evils. The members  
of the Fraternity Society used to hold meetings at various places  
at least twice a week and invited prominent educationists, intellec­  
tuals and poets to address them. The prominent personalities who  
addressed them were Master Zinda Koul, Mr. Shridar Paul Boolo and  

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38. Daughters of the Visate, op. cit., p. 233; Secin Bezaz,  
jr, cit., PP. 31-32.

39. Ibid., the conception of social reform visualised by the  
Fraternity Society was comparatively broad and included not  
only check on wasteful expenditure and the like but also  
the spread of education among women, freedom for widows  
to remarry, revival of cultural activities, improvement in  
community’s health, encouragement in inter-dining, rural  
reconstruction and change in national dress to make it  
decent, graceful, dignified and suitable for local climatic  
conditions.

The presence of a few women, for the first time, at the meetings of the society heralded the advent of a new era. The workers moved from one locality to the other and exhorted the Kashmiri Pandits to curtail expenditure on the marriages. To enforce social reforms they even resorted to picketing. The state did not adopt a hostile attitude whenever and wherever picketing was resorted to. With the passage of time even picketing proved ineffective.

The question of widow marriage in Kashmir posed a difficult problem. It is noteworthy that a few widow marriages were celebrated in Kashmir but they did not have the willing approval of the society. It is said that when Hergopal Koul was going to marry his widowed daughter, he was greatly harassed by the people and as such he

41. Interview with Mohan Krishen Poojoo, p. cit.
42. From early times down to the thirteenth century A.D., Kashmiri women enjoyed remarkable freedom, wielded ample powers and exercised responsibility which gave them a high status in the society. Brauti and Grihya-Sutras mention how the wife uttered Vedic mantras as an equal with the husband at the religious ceremonies. See Radha Kumud Mukerjee, Women in Ancient India, New Delhi, 1958, pp. 5-6. But all the freedom enjoyed by a Kashmiri woman died soon with the establishment of the Muslim rule.
43. Interview with Mohan Krishen Poojoo, p. cit.
thought it prudent to abandon the proposal.\textsuperscript{45} Ironically enough, the Bandits were aware of the fact that the widows contracted illicit intimacies with those whom they loved or with others who helped them financially or otherwise.\textsuperscript{46} But even then the general voice of the common masses tried to make the lot of even teenaged widows miserable and pitiable.\textsuperscript{47} Hiscoe has focussed his attention on the sad and miserable plight of the young widows. The number of widows among the Kashmiri Bandits was appalling.\textsuperscript{48} Many of them were young and innocent girls and often led unhappy lives.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{45} F. Schmahul, \textit{Etr. cit.}, p. 48.

\textsuperscript{46} Daughters of the Viteata, \textit{Etr. cit.}, p. 235.


\textsuperscript{48} "As there was no restriction to early marriage there were number of child-widows, who were obliged to live in their father-in-law’s house, and do as they were told. I came to know of the cruelties practised on these girls, especially by the Brahman priests, who were often the fathers of the drowned babies. The infants were thrown in the river or to prish dogs at night so that the Hindu religion should not be disgraced; Syndeale Biscee, \textit{Autobiography}, London, 1951, p. 96., also see, \textit{Beyond the Irrawaddy}, p. 240.

\textsuperscript{49} Anand Koul Bamzai, \textit{Etr. cit.}, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., \textit{Beyond the Irrawaddy}, p. 240.
One of the reforms for which Fraternity Society fought was to get a law passed in the state which would legitimise widow-marriage, as had been done in British India many decades earlier. The members of the Society presented a memorandum to Maharaja Hari Singh. The memorialists also demanded that the children born of such marriages should be entitled to inherit ancestral property and should suffer from no legal disabilities to which they would not have been ordinarily subjected as legitimate progeny.

Maharaja Hari Singh, in order to enlist the public opinion regarding the issue of widow-marriage directed the district authorities of the state to look into the matter. In Jrinagar, the Tehsildar, Koghu Nath Mathoo, convened a meeting of Hindus to ascertain their views. Accordingly, in April 1931, a meeting was

51. Negin Bazar, **Cit.** p. 32.
52. In British India Lord William Bentick had passed the Sati Act in 1829. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar supported by other enlightened reformers was successful in getting the widow-marriage Act passed in 1856; It legalized marriage of widows and declared issues of such marriages as legitimate.
53. **Daughters of the Vitasana**, **Cit.** p. 236.
55. Nothing is known as to what happened in other districts of the Valley. It shows that the activities regarding the social changes in the Valley except Jrinagar were unsatisfactory.
56. **Daughters of the Vitasana**, **Cit.** p. 236.
held on the velvety lawns of the Sahal compound. Hundreds of  
bandits attended it. The majority of the bandits who attended  
the meeting were against the proposal of widow-marriage. The  
members of the Fraternity Society who numbered very few tried to  
convince the bandits regarding the blessings of widow-marriages.  
They issued placards and pamphlets, containing articles on widow  
marrige, to all present in the meeting. But the members of the  
Sharma Sabha, under the leadership of Anubhav Vak greatlty opposed  
such a reform. The placards, pamphlets and posters of the Fraternity  
Society were torn to pieces. In another meeting held at Rughanath  
Mandir Hall at Fateh Kadal, the members of the Fraternity Society  
came out with almost no success. "Cries of Janatan Dharma Ki Jai  
were raised by the adherents of Vak which meant that Janatan Dharma  
was disallowed widow marriage and it would triumph. To this the Fraternity  
group calmly rejoined by raising the slogan, Satya Janatan Dharma  
Ki Jai, conveying that the true and eternal moral code could not  
enslave widows and such laws alone would finally emerge victorious."  

58. Ibid., p. 238.  
60. Daughters of the Vetatea, or. cit., p. 239.  
Although the reformers could not cut much ice in this direction, yet it is significant that they tried their best to keep up the tempo of the reforms which already had made their mark in British India.

Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz apprised Mahatma Gandhi about the social abuses of the society, particularly the sad plight of widows. Gandhi Ji appealed to the young widows to take up courage and set an example in the society through their remarriage. If the Kashmiri Pandits did not come forward to take their hands in marriage, the widows should go out of their estate to find a husband. He also advised the young Hindus that until they found a widow, they should refuse to marry. This letter created a great uproar in the Pandit circles. They became desperate. Attempts were made on the lives of the members of the Fraternity Society. For weeks writes Bazaz, "it became difficult for the young enthusiasts to move freely in the city. They were nicknamed as Mund Kath (progeny of widows) and contemptuously addressed and sneeringly looked upon. Meanwhile

62. "That by and large, Pandits were opposed to the marriage of widows and his endeavour to enlighten public opinion met with tremendous opposition. See Nagin Bazaz, op. cit., p. 32.

63. Ibid.

64. Interview with Ved Lal Dh H, (Vskil), op. cit.

political disturbances took place in Srinagar and in the year 1937, the members of the Fraternity Society joined the Yuvak Sabha.

The Fraternity Society could not succeed in the achievement of its aims and objectives. But as a result of the activities of the society a new type of leadership emerged which played an important role in the Bandit community. The society could not establish schools for the education of women but its workers served the cause of education by acting as voluntary teachers in women's Welfare Trust.66

The Fraternity Society deserves much praise for taking steps towards emancipation of women and eradication of social evils even at the cost of their lives. Their work was to blaze a trail to be followed by the coming generations.

66. Interview with Mohan Krishna Picken, 20 G.I.T.