CHAPTER IX
CONCLUSIONS

The present work embodies the results of the research project entitled, "Socio-Religious Reform Movements in Kashmir—1900-1947", which was undertaken in fulfilment of the requirements for entitlement to the degree of Ph.D. The subject is in tune with the latest trend in historical research which seeks to shift emphasis from political to social history. In fact, research into socio-religious aspect has brought before us a new vista of life. Many hitherto unknown facts have been brought within the focus and these have enabled us to shed light on those alleys of social life which had hitherto been in oblivion.

But pursuit of research on a subject like the one undertaken here turned out to be an uphill task. It was a question of moving from Archives to Library and from Library to field in quest of source material. However, a ton of effort leading to an ounce of result was not without joy and consolation. Perhaps this is the destiny that upholds itself before a researcher.

There are number of general histories on Kashmir and among these History of Kashmir, by K. N. K. Ramzai and Kashir, Vol. II by C. M. D. Sufi were found to be relevant to the period of study of this thesis. Very little information was forthcoming from these works on the socio-religious movements as such. Obviously, the
paucity of material posed a challenge which was met with intensifying efforts to establish contacts with knowledgeable persons including journalists and such social reformers as fortunately still survived. This accounts for the field work that the project came to entail.

In Kashmir socio-religious reform movements drew inspiration from internal and external forces. These movements played a vital role in changing the social outlook of the Kashmiris. Of course, the socio-religious movements did influence the socio-economic life of the Pandits and the Muslims of Kashmir. These two communities together constitute the majority of population in Kashmir. Undoubtedly, in the beginning the response of the people towards these movements was lukewarm, but they gathered momentum with the passage of time.

The Christian missionaries were the first to raise a banner of social service and social reform in Kashmir. They worked in the roughest weather to draw Kashmiris out of the morass of ignorance and darkness. In fact, the permanent contribution of the Christian missionaries in the Valley constituted the vigorous movement for social and religious reform. In this respect the missionaries led a strong campaign against illiteracy, social evils, orthodoxy, casteism and conservatism. They devoted themselves wholeheartedly to uplift the Kashmiri society from the morass of illiteracy, superstition and ignorance. These influences naturally initiated a
process of transformation in the life style and behavioural attitude of the Kashmiris. The impact of modern education particularly imparted by the Christian Mission Schools contributed a good deal towards effecting a change in the dress of Kashmiris. The indigenous types of footwear kharewun and fullahora were replaced with shoes and chappals.

The Kashmiris after initial reluctance joined Mission Schools. The Kashmiri Pandits were the first to join these schools. The Muslims who on the other hand remained under the influence of orthodox Ulama refused to join these schools. As a result, the Muslims remained sunk in ignorance and backwardness. Inevitably the number of Muslims in the government offices was found to be very low. At the beginning of the present century Moulae Rasool Shah, the Sir Syed of Kashmir, realized the importance of English education. He urged his community to take to modern education and himself started a primary school to impart education on western lines. At the outset his mission was met with opposition but in course of time the Muslims too realized the importance of English education and joined the schools imparting modern education in considerable numbers.

As a result of the growth of English education, the new middle class and the English educated intellectuals became committed to social and religious reform. The new middle class intellectuals carried a deep impression of the missionary movement in regard to
social reform. They organised reform movements which were apolitical in character. The reformers sought to remedy the evils like child marriage, trafficking in women, untouchability, widowhood etc.

The Ahl-i-Hadith movement with its roots in Arabia sought to remove unislamic practices which had crept into Islam in Kashmir. The Ahl-i-Hadith challenged the dominance of Mullahs and Muftis and held them responsible for the introduction of unislamic practices into the pure teachings of Islam. Under the influence of the Ahl-i-Hadith movement and as a result of its teaching a considerable number of Muslims began to free themselves from the yoke of the Fira and the Mullah.

Likewise, the educated Pandits of Kashmir also organized several socio-religious movements namely Arya Samaj, women's welfare trust, fraternity society and Yuvak Sabha. These movements by and large were successful in removing some old-age customs deep rooted in the Pandit society. But some of these movements survived only for short periods of time while others withered gradually owing to the lack of interest or support. Nonetheless, these movements generated a consciousness among the Pandits which made the Pandit community to fight for an egalitarian society. These movements made the Pandits to slough off the outmoded and undesirable social customs and practices which had grossly gained credence in the name of religion. In the beginning the Pandits were allergic to change,
but under the influence of indigenous reform movements they gradually accepted the importance of western education. The most rewarding impact of the movements was on education in general and female education in particular. Today we do not find the bandit community lagging behind to any educated community in respect of knowledge. As a matter of fact Kashmiri bandits are found in any part of the world as educationists, scientists, technocrats and explorers etc. Their progressive outlook have won for them epithet of the travelling community.

The socio-religious movements not only produced a change among the people of Kashmir but they even influenced the Dogra rulers. The later Dogra rulers realised the problems of the people in the Valley. They understood the spirit of the new age and, therefore, introduced reforms which went a long-way in releasing the society from the evils of widowhood and child marriage. The Dogra rulers by a legislative act prevented infant marriage and enforced widow marriage, the latter being a need of the changing times among the bandit widows who became destitute and forlorn due to the death of their respective partners.

It, however, seems necessary to point out here that these movements failed to bring about a radical change in the cherished beliefs of the people. Even at present we find a sizeable sections of Kashmiris wedded to their age-old rituals, superstitions and
Dogma. The efforts launched by the Pandit reformers to reform dowry system proved of no use. However, the reforms introduced by the Ahl-i-Hadith movement in the religious sphere had far-reaching effects. This is evidenced by the growing influence of the Ahl-i-Hadith in the Muslim society even in our own days.

It may be stated that during the period under review the reform movements by and large remained confined to the urban areas, particularly, to the city of Srinagar. As such, the villagers who constituted 85% of the total population of the Valley were least benefitted from the reform movements and acts. They still continue to cling to their conservative habits and customs. Their age-old customs and habits continue, more or less, to be the same as in the past.

Although the reform movements eschewed politics in the beginning nonetheless, in due course, they created a good deal of social consciousness among the people. It would not be incorrect to say that the social consciousness generated by the socio-religious movements ultimately awaken political consciousness among the people. Thus like the movements in other parts of India the socio-religious movements in Kashmir formed the back-bone of the evolution of the movement against the personal rule of the Degras, and against the dominance of the British in Kashmir. These movements in the Valley represented the nascent urge to change the prevailing social and religious frame as a prelude to political change.
It would also be pertinent to observe that the reform movements instead of strengthening the communal harmony between the two communities created communal atmosphere in Kashmir. The Arva Semaj though did not raise communal issues in Kashmir, yet the Shuddhi Preacher of the Arva Semaj was responsible for a number of communal combats between the Hindus and the Muslims.

The Ahl-i-Hadith leaders also in their various speeches criticized Arva Semaj for its Shuddhi Preacher. Its leaders issued occasional statements and made speeches which fanned the communal feelings among the two communities. Consequently various reform movements like Arva Semaj and Ahl-i-Hadith formulated their programmes which had communal overtones. It was, therefore, no wonder to see communal tension on the rise and conflicts between the two communities now and then. However, all said and done, it must be admitted that the total ethos of Kashmir preserved the strongly entrenched communal harmony. This tradition was in keeping with the spirit of the teachings of Lal Ded and Sheikh Nur-ud-Din Nurani which had left a deep rooted influence on the minds of Kashmiris.