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Role of Desh Hitaishini Sabha in Social Reform Movement in Rajputana

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ABSTRACT: It is significant here to note that the efforts to purge the society from social evils, started much before the commencement of social reform movement in Bengal, much before the arrival of British East India company in India and much before the birth of the reformatory spirit of Sawai Jai Singh III of Jaipur. As we shall see in the next pages, the earliest of the efforts to put an end to certain social evils was done by the Pareek Brahmins of Sanganer (Jaipur), who, as early as Samvat 1600, framed certain rules to check the practice of doing heavy expenditure on the occasions of marriages. The Pareek Brahmins of Sanganer (Jaipur), fixed a 'maryada' i.e. limit on the marriage-expenses and made it very clear by writing it in black and white and distributing the copies of the agreement among Pareeks of other regions. But it must also be made clear here, that the reform efforts of the Pareeks of Jaipur was directed towards their own betterment and was made obligatory on Pareek community alone, to whichever place they belonged to.

KEYWORDS: Desh Hitaishini, Sabha, Social, Reform, Movement, Rajputana

I. INTRODUCTION

Moreover the efforts of certain enlightened rulers of Rajputana (like Sawai Jai Singh III of Jaipur, Maharaja Bukht Singh and Vijay Singh of Jodhpur), created an atmosphere which was conducive to the social reform process. The examples set up by them paved the way for future reforms, as the cue was picked up by the native rulers and different social or caste organizations.

The first step in this direction, was taken up by the State of Mewar when in 1877, Maharana Sajjan Singh convened a meeting at Udaipur with the purpose of adopting rules to regulate marriage expenses in Mewar.⁵³ It was attended by 32 Chiefs and State officials and resulted in the formation of the Desh Hitaishini Sabha (now onwards Sabha) on 2nd of July, 1877. [51,52,53] The aim of the Sabha, as specified at its inception, was to regulate marriage expenses of Rajputs, and to fix the 'tyag' amounts, given to Charans and Bhats on the occasions of marriages, and to restrict the practice of polygamy prevalent in the upper sections of the society.

As we have seen in Chapter II that the system of dowry, the pressure of performing marriages with grandeur, coupled with other socio-political and economic factors, forced the parents to kill their new born babies. Some of the enlightened rulers of Rajputana, understanding the gravity of the situation, tried to put an end to these social evils, though it is a matter of debate that how far their efforts were successful in curbing these evils. The efforts of Sawai Jai Singh III of Jaipur, Maharaja Bukht Singh and Vijay Singh of Jodhpur as well as the efforts of British Officers have been discussed in detail in Chapter II and Chapter V, to have a clear picture of the-then social conditions as well as of their reformatory zeal. They, to put an end to this heinous practice, tried to regulate the marriage expenditure and also tried to restrict the movements of Charans and Bhats to their respective territories beside prescribing other harsh punishments. Their efforts had the desired effects and slowly and gradually the incidents of female infanticide started declining.

The Sabha also worked on the same lines and framed rules, limiting the expenditure done on the occasions of marriages, to facilitate the parents to make arrangements for the marriage of their sons and daughters, without any

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difficulty. Similarly, the Sabha also framed rules for restricting the practice of polygamy, prevailing amongst Rajputs, Brahmans and Mahajans.⁵⁴ It was laid down that only those Rajputs, whose annual income exceeded Rs.500/- were to give 'tyag' to the Charans, Bhats etc. and even in that circumstance, the amount given as 'tyag', was not to exceed 10% of the total annual income. On the occasion of marriage of eldest son or of daughter, a Rajput would spend only 25% of the total annual income. On the marriage of other sons, other than the eldest, a Rajput would spend 10% of the total annual income and 1% of the total expenditure on 'tyag'.

According to the rules laid down by the Sabha, 'tyag' was to be given to only those Charans and Bhats, who were the residents[54,55,56] of the State, in which the marriage was being solemnized and not to those who gathered from outside the State. It was also laid down that the Brahmans and Mahajans could spend 25% of their annual income on the occasions of marriages. They could also marry upto the age of 40, provided that they didn't had any issue from the first wife. Permission of a third wife was given to the Rajputs, till they were 45 years of age and if they had no issues from the previous marriages. Those who wished to re-marry, after the prescribed age limit, were to take prior permission from the Sabha.

In 1879, the Udaipur Darbar asked the Political Agent to issue orders to other native States, to restrict the movements of Charans and Bhats, living in their territories, from entering into Mewar, for the purpose of getting 'tyag' from there.⁵⁵ The Udaipur Darbar also told the Political Agent that they have ordered their Charans and Bhats, not to go to foreign territories, for the above mentioned purpose. The Political Agent, issued orders for it asking the native States and the British officers to do the needful; but the British government didn't show much interest in it, as it considered it to be a problem of the Rajput rulers.

II. DISCUSSION

The importance of Sabha lies in the fact that the need to curtail the expenditure on marriages among Rajputs and its relation with the evil of female infanticide, was also felt by it and an attempt was made to regulate them. Similarly, those Rajputs who were poor, were exempted from giving 'tyag' to Charans and Bhats. It is difficult to say, whether these reforms were self-inspired or were done under the influence of the British Officers as there are no records available. Dr. M.S. Jain, has however opined that, Shyamal Das, the court historian of Mewar Darbar, had deliberately kept quiet on the birth, the functions and the rules of the Sabha, even after being a member of it.⁴² His loyalty, according to Dr. Jain, towards his British masters, stopped him from giving much information in that respect. Had he written much about the Sabha, the truth about the 'originality' of Walterkrit Rajputra Hitkarini Sabha, as far as its rules were concerned, would have appeared before the public and could possibly belittle the aura of Walter, observes Dr. Jain.

It is significant to note that much before the birth of Sabha, some of the rulers of different States, tried to do away with the practice of female infanticide and feeling that the extortionous demands of Charans and Bhats was one of the main causes of it, tried to restrict their movements within the territory, to which they belonged. They also tried to regulate the heavy expenditure done on the occasions of marriages and also fixed the amount of 'tyag', which was to be given to Charans and Bhats on joyful occasions. But none of them tried to put an end to the prevalent practice[57,58,59] of polygamy, which was widely in practice in the upper classes of society. Here lies the real significance of Sabha, as its efforts to put restrictions upon polygamy, were first of its kind in the written history of Rajputana. Though the Arya Samaj denounced polygamy much before the Sabha and did not support it under any circumstance, but it must be noted here that the efforts of the Arya Samaj did not have the legal force behind it, as it was not powered by the authority of the State, whereas the Sabha was an official body and its rules were made obligatory on the upper sections of the society. The Sabha allowed polygamy, only in case, where a male issue was not begot from the previous marriage or marriages. If seen from the eyes of the feminists and social activists of 20th and 21st century, this restriction could look disturbing, insulting and offensive, as it puts the entire blame of being barren or of producing 'daughters only' on the mothers and allows the father to enter into a new matrimonial relationship. But if we take into consideration the social-political, religious and economic situations, it would appear as revolutionary, and a far-sighted effort to put an end to the practice of polygamy.

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The formation of the Sabha proved to be crucial to the reform movement in Rajputana, as it was another attempt from the side of the rulers, to set things right and to put an end to certain social evils. It generated another wave of reform, and inspired the enlightened people to activate themselves for the development of their communities. The establishment of the Sabha was an important move and almost after a decade, it was followed by the **Walter Krit Rajputra Hitkarini Sabha** (now onwards, W.K.R.H.S.), which was established by a British Officer. The W.K.R.H.S. was formulated by Col. Walter, who was the Officiating Agent to the Governor General for the States of Rajputana in 1888; and in the second meeting of the committee members, which commenced from 15th to 24th of February, 1889 at Ajmer,⁵⁶ this organization came to be known as W.K.R.H.S.

Col. Walter, who had spent almost the whole of his official life in Rajputana, also felt that there was an urgent necessity for framing rules, whereby the expenses of marriages and funerals among Rajputs could be curtailed. His long experience had convinced him that one of the evils resulting from the unnecessary heavy expenditure in marriages was female infanticide and that the adoption of rules whereby such expenses were regulated would result in the abolition of this evil. Though attempts were made from time to time in Rajputana but they had been ineffective as there was no uniformity of the rules, which differed in each State.

In October 1887⁵⁷, Colonel C.K.M. Walter, addressed a circular to all Political Officers, on the subject of the adoption of a set of rules for regulating the expenses of marriages amongst Rajputs and suggested that a large representative committee should assemble at Ajmer, for the settlement of the above mentioned issue. The members of this committee were to consist of one official, one leading Jagirdar [60,61,62] and one Charan from each State. His suggestion met with the "heartiest approval" of every ruling chief in Rajputana, with the exception of the Maharawal of Banswara, who informed Lieutenant Pinhey that he was unable to find any suitable person either to represent the Darbar or the Charans of Banswara.

During his winter tour, Col. Walter, personally discussed this and many other questions, with the chiefs of the States and they expressed a wish that some measure for curtailing excessive expenditure at funerals as well as marriages should be considered at the meeting. The Maharao Raja of Bundi showed great interest in the proposals of Walter and was the first to suggest that we should also determine minimum age for marriages of boys and girls to put down child marriages. The Maharao Raja of Bundi in 1888, in his communications to Col. Walter, suggested desirable marriageable ages of bride and bridegroom as 14 and 18 years respectively. Col. Walter took up the cue and incorporated it in his speech at a State Banquet given by His Highness, the Maharaja of Jaipur. He also stated the importance of a voluntary suggestion by a native prince and described it as "the greatest social reform that could be introduced into Hindu Society in India."

The representatives of the States met at Ajmer and formed a committee, which began its proceedings on Monday, the 5th of March, 1888, and continued its sittings throughout the week. Colonel Walter was especially anxious that whatever decision was arrived at, should be unanimous, and that the various questions should be settled by the delegates themselves untrammelled by the presence of a British officer. At the same time, he assured them that whenever they desired, he was willing and ready to help them with his advice, and on several occasions, deputations waited on him to discuss matters in which they needed his help.

On the morning of Saturday the 10th of March, 1888, Col. Walter and Col. Trevor, the Commissioner of Ajmer, proceeded to the Daulat Bagh, where 40 delegates, had assembled.⁵⁸ The important document, "which was drawn up entirely by the representatives themselves" was read out and the representatives told Col. Walter that it was a unanimous decision of all and that they accept every rule, mentioned in the document.

III. RESULTS

When this part of the ceremony was over, Kavi Raj Shyamal Das, the historian, genealogist and bard of Mewar, who was respected all over the Rajputana, thanked Colonel Walter and the British Govt. on behalf of all the delegates, for

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the meeting and for setting once and for all the vexed question of “tyag”⁵⁹ and expressed his disappointment over Col. Walter’s leaving for England and prayed the British Government to give an extension to his service in India. In all, twenty-two (22) rules were made by the committee, which are as follows:-⁶⁰

Rule No.1: If the marriage is that of the Thakur himself, or an eldest son, or a daughter, the amount to be expended was fixed as under:

- (a) When the value of the Estate was above Rs.20,000/-; not more than 1/4th of the annual income was to be expended.
 - (b) When the rental was below Rs.20,000/- but was not less than Rs.10,000/- not more than 1/3rd of the annual income was to be expended.
 - (c) When the rental was below Rs.10,000/- but was not less than Rs.1000/-; not more than ½ (half) of the annual income was to be expended.
 - (d) When the income was below Rs.1000/-; not more than 2/3rd of the annual income was to be expended.
- It was laid down that the above limits were in no case to be exceeded, but anybody could spend less if he so wished.

Rule No.2: Seeing that the disputes arise regarding the gifts, which the girl’s father sends to the father of the groom; it was laid down that the sending of ‘tika’ (i.e. presents given on engagements) should be altogether stopped. However, the customary presents of opium, betel leaves etc. which were sent on the occasion of the betrothal, were to continue, but the engagement itself was to be arranged by the groom’s father.

Rule No.3: Of the sum to be spent on ‘tyag’ under Rule 1, Rs.9, local currency percent, on the annual income of the Estate, was to be distributed as present, by the father of the bridegroom, among the Charans, Raos, Dholis etc., in the proportions fixed by the custom prevailing in each State. The share of this payment which the Dholis [63,64,65] would receive, was inclusive of the amount given on account of ‘Ghur-Charhi’. Except the above percentage, the fathers of the young couple were not to give any other item to Charans, Raos, and Dholis, on account of marriage.

Rule No.4: Persons who held property valued at less than Rs.500/- would pay nothing. When the property was worth from Rs.500/- to Rs.1000/-, the amounts to be given as ‘tyag’ or presents to the Charans etc. would be half that specified in Rule 3.

Rule No.5: A list would be made of the Charans, Raos, Dholis etc., attending the celebrations, and the day after the completion of the marriage rite, they would be paid their shares, and would be dismissed to their homes.

Rule No.6: Only the Charans, Raos, Dholis etc., who were residents of the territory in which the marriage was taking place, were entitled to the receipts of presents. Those of foreign territory were forbidden to come. It was also laid down that only the father of the bridegroom would make the payment; the father of the bride was liable for nothing.

Rule No.7: In the case of the marriage of sons other than the eldest, and of brothers of the Thakur, who were dependent for support on the latter, the expenditure would be 1/10th of that specified in Rule 1, and the amount to be distributed as ‘tyag’, one rupee local currency percent on the income of the Estate.

Rule No.8: If sons and brothers were allowed separate maintenance, the expense would be calculated on what the Estate allowed them, according to the usual proportions above fixed.

Rule No.9: The scale of ‘tyag’ set forth in the preceding rules applied to a first marriage only. If a second or third marriage was contracted, the payment would be at the rate of Rs.2 local currency percent. When the income was less than Rs.5000/-, no ‘tyag’ was to be distributed on the occasion of a second or a third marriage, while in the case of a younger son or brother no ‘tyag’ was to be disbursed if the marriage was other than the first, when as already settled, 1 percent would be distributed as ‘tyag’ on a second or third marriage, the eldest son only would be liable for ‘tyag’ according to the rate above stated.

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Rule No.10: In the capital of the State itself, no Sardar was at liberty to distribute 'tyag'.

Rule No.11: Tyag would be distributed strictly in accordance with the scale laid down: no enhancement or reduction was to be made. If some people, regardless of their reputation have never given 'tyag', they need not do so in future.

Rule No.12: The amount of presents fixed, was to be accepted with thanks and distributed before witnesses. The recipients were not to go to foreign territory, nor would they use abusive language. Charans, Raos, Dholis etc. were to be guided by the intention of the rules, which was drawn up and each State was to see that it is enforced.

Rule No.13: It was also laid down that five years hence, a committee would assemble to reconsider the rules, which were fixed to regulate marriage expenses, and the distribution of presents; and after another interval of five years, a similar committee would be convened to report on the advantages or drawbacks of the arrangements.

Rule No.14: In every State a committee would be appointed, which would consist of a Sardar, an official and a member of the Charan and Rao castes or with such modifications in the constitution as the Darbar might be in favour of. It would be the duty of this committee to make arrangements for carrying out the regulations, regarding the expenditure to be incurred on marriages and deaths and on 'tyag', as well as the other instructions embodied in these rules. When a marriage was to be celebrated, one month's previous notice was to be given by the head of the Estate concerned to this committee, which would be required to see that the regulations prescribed are conformed to. The committee would be empowered to permit at their discretion, the [66,67,68] attendance of those of their territory who were privileged to be present or to make such other arrangements as they might deem expedient. The provisions of Rule 5 would remain in force for two years, after which it would be considered whether it was better to disburse the 'tyag' to the assembled Charans etc., or to have the money remitted to the committee for distribution.

Rule No.15: The fathers of some girls owing to their not possessing the means, obtain the necessary funds for their daughters' marriage from the bridegroom's fathers. This was considered as a most objectionable practice and one that was opposed to the Dharmashastras. Many fathers, although without adequate means shun such impropriety and adjust the marriage expenditure to their present circumstances. There are others again, who have neither land nor maintenance, and are practically without any means, and only earn a daily livelihood as cultivators. If such as these who elect to do so, take Rs.100/- and spend the lot on the marriage it matters little, but no greater sum should be taken, and they should as far as possible strive not to take anything. Should it be proved that the girls father accepts, or the boy's father gives any sum contrary to this rule, the delinquents will be suitably punished.

Rule No.16: It laid down that boys and girls should not be married before the age of 18 and 14 respectively. It was also laid down that as regards engagements concluded before this date, the marriage could take place, as soon as the girl completes 14 years, irrespective of the boy's age.

Rule No.17: When a widower has attained the age of 45 years, and had a son living, he should not contract another marriage.

Rule No.18: The expenses on the occasion of death would be on the following scale:-

(a) When the value of the property owned was less than Rs.1000/-; 2/3rd of the income was to be expended.

(b) When the property was worth from Rs.1000/- to 5000/-, 1/4th of the income was to be expended.

(c) When the property was worth from Rs.5000/- to Rs.10000/-, 1/5th of the income was to be expended.

(d) When the property was worth above Rs.10,000/-, 1/8th of the income was to be expended.

It was also specified, that anyone could spend less than the amount specified, but not more.

Rule No.19: The sums to be expended on marriages and deaths have been set forth above, but should the proportion which had been fixed, calculated on the value of the property, yield a very insignificant sum, or if there be no property,

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then notwithstanding what is contained in the preceding rules, the party concerned was at liberty to spend upto a limit of Rs.100/- on a marriage and of Rs.75/- on death.

Rule No.20: Besides the committee in each State, the premier Sardar of each clan would superintend the arrangements for giving effect to these regulations.

Rule No.21: It was urged to give widest publicity to these rules and for this, each State might have copies printed off and distributed amongst all classes of Nobles, Jagirdars & Others.[69,70,71]

Rule No.22: It was laid down that as there were no Charans in Karauli, those from the adjoining States of Jaipur and Alwar could go there.

Thus, these were the twenty-two rules, which were framed by the committee.

On 16th of Jan. 1889, Col. Walter asked Col. Trevor, the Commissioner of Ajmer to make necessary arrangements for a second meeting of the Committee members at Ajmer.⁶¹ Col. Walter expressed his satisfaction on the working of the rules in all the States but even then he felt the necessity of the second meeting, of the 'Original Committee', Hence, on 15th Feb. 1889 a meeting of that committee was held at Ajmer which commenced from 15th to 24th of Feb. 1889.⁶² The members from all the States attended the meeting with the exception of Jaisalmer and Dungarpur and some supplementary rules were introduced. Following resolutions were passed in the second meeting of W.K.R.H.S.: - It was resolved in the second meeting that this committee shall be known as the "Walter Krit Rajputra Hitkarini Sabha", and the Agent to the Governor General was elected as the President and the Commissioner of Ajmer, as the Vice-President. 2.All the measures taken in the different States with regard to these rules were to be published in the govt. press of each State and circulated among the various sub-committees.

3.At the betrothal the intended bride's father would make the usual mark or 'tika' on the intended bridegroom's forehead and would give him beetel-leaves to eat, and the plain coconut would be given into the boy's hand, together with cash not exceeding one mohar and not less than one rupee. The lower classes of people such as servant's etc., entitled to receive gifts, were to be paid according to the rates fixed below, which must not be exceeded:-

- (a) Estates valued above Rs.50 thousand annually were to pay Rs.100.
- (b) Estates valued from Rs.50,000 to 20,000 annually were to pay Rs.50.
- (c) Estates valued from Rs.20,000 to 10,000 annually were to pay Rs.20.
- (d) Estates valued from Rs.10,000 to Rs.5,000 annually were to pay Rs.15.
- (e) Estates valued from Rs.5,000 to 1,000 annually were to pay Rs.10.
- (f) Estates valued below Rs.1,000 annually were to pay Rs.5.

4.It was resolved that as a general rule twenty people might be taken, but in the case of marriages on a large scale, the number should be fixed at the rate of two men for every hundred rupees allowed to be expended by the girl's father. It was further laid down that the marriage procession should arrive at the house of the bride's father on the day fixed for the marriage, would stay there for two days and would take leave on the fourth or on the fifth day at the latest, if the fourth was considered in auspicious for departure. Further it was laid down that the persons who attend weddings could bring servants with them in accordance with the following scale:-

- (a) A person whose scale is valued- above Rs.50,000 can bring 25 servants.
- (b) From Rs.50,000 to Rs.20,000 can bring 15 servants.
- (c) From Rs.20,000 to Rs.10,000 can bring 10 servants.
- (d) From Rs.10,000 to Rs.5,000 can bring 5 servants.
- (e) Below Rs.5,000 can bring 2 servants.

It was also [72,73,74] resolved that no one should bring more than the numbers fixed, though any one could bring less if he liked.

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5. The sum received from the master or land lord, was to be expended in addition to the amount fixed by the rules, but not the sum received in "Neota".
6. It was also specified in the second meeting of the committee, that in case any one was guilty of breach of the rules, the special committee in the State, to which he belonged would deal with such offence and convey such warning or award such punishment as was deemed proper.
7. It was also specified that the ratio of expenditure to income should be fixed according to the schedule to be prepared.
8. It was also decided that it was very necessary that a half yearly register of births, deaths and marriages be submitted to the special committees at the capitals of different States through the district officials or "Nizamuts".
9. Whenever a party would go to a State or district other than his own to get his son married it was laid down that he should obtain a document from the State 'Nizamut' or tehsil to which he belonged, mentioning the amount of his annual income and the sum he could spend.
10. The meeting of the committee was to be held annually at Ajmer for the next three years.
11. It was also resolved that the following papers be printed and supplied to the capital towns and districts of all the States for the information of the people at large:
 - (a) General Report submitted by this committee to the President.
 - (b) General Statement giving the details and numbers of marriage and funeral ceremonies performed in each State.
 - (c) Statement showing the amount of expenditure at Marriages and deaths and the distribution of "tyag" etc. referred to above in Rule IX.

The W.K.R.H.S. was organized to promote a scheme of social reforms pertaining to Rajputs, especially to curb the practice of female infanticide but, gradually, it extended and included within its fold, issues like polygamy, child and unmatched marriages, minimum age of marriage, expenses incurred in marriages and funeral ceremonies, 'tyag' and also included in its sphere castes other than Rajputs. Though attempts had been made to check female [75,76,77] infanticide much before the birth of W.K.R.H.S., therefore it cannot be said that it was pioneer in the abolition of female infanticide in Rajputana. But the relation of female infanticide with the practice of spending large amounts in the marriage ceremonies as well as in the ceremonies related with death and the impoverishment which arised side by side with these practices, which ultimately forced the people (and especially Rajputs) to opt for female infanticide, was understood by him. It is difficult to ascertain what led Colonel Walter to formulate this organization, as the records available presents a contradictory picture. Whether it was his ardent desire to reform the society of Rajputana or whether he undertook this work, in order to have an extension of his tenure, as Dr. M.S. Jain has pointed out, ⁶³ is difficult to tell. It is true that he desired an extension and tried to have it by writing and requesting his senior officers and ultimately succeeded in getting it. It is also true, that in the very year of its formation Lord Northbrook, Lord Kimberley and the Bishop of Carlisle in the House of Lords expressed their warmest appreciation of the reforms introduced by the Rajputana princes under the guidance of Col. Walter.

It is significant to note that the W.K.R.H.S. combined in itself the good principles and points of all the previous reform efforts, and thus clubbed them under its own roof. The principles of W.K.R.H.S., were almost the same as those of Desh Hitaishini Sabha but differed in few respects. Firstly, not only the giving of 'tika' by the bride's father but also taking of money from the groom's father for the bride i.e. 'reet' was prohibited by the W.K.R.H.S., which was much prevalent in the then society. ⁶⁴ Moreover it was laid down that the expenditure done at the time of engagements or betrothals was to be incurred by the groom's family and not by the bride's side as was customary in those days. Another difference between the Desh Hitaishini Sabha and W.K.R.H.S. was the prescription of minimum age limit for marriages of boys and girls. The W.K.R.H.S. prescribed 14 as the minimum marriageable age for girls and 18 for the boys, which was some what higher than what was being prescribed by various caste panchayats and other social organizations in Rajputana as well as in British India. It also asked the parents to marry their daughters, before the age of 25 and enjoined that the Local Sabhas, should endeavour to find a [78,79,80] suitable match for a girl who remains unmarried after this age. It is significant to note here, that Emperor Akbar too, in order to check child marriages, prescribed 14 and 16 as the minimum marriageable age for girls and boys ⁶⁵ but his orders didn't produced the desired effects. The same was the case with W.K.R.H.S. as it could not root out the age old social beliefs regarding child marriages. The real significant thing about the W.K.R.H.S. was, that for the first time in the history of Rajputana, an

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attempt was made to raise the age limits of marriage. As late as 1924, the caste organizations prescribed 8,10,11 or 12 as the minimum marriageable age for girls.

It also fixed the amounts to be spent on the occasions of marriages of Rajputs and laid down that the prescribed limits were not to be exceeded in any case, though anyone could spend less, if he so wished. Similarly, the amount of 'tyag', was also fixed according to the categories of the land holders and the Charans and Bhats were also forced to accept what was prescribed in the rules of W.K.R.H.S. Moreover, they were forbidden to enter into the foreign territories for the purpose of getting 'tyag' from there. It was also laid down that only the father of the bridegroom would make the payments i.e. 'tyag' to the Charans and Bhats and the father of the bride was liable for nothing. These provisions of W.K.R.H.S. reminds one, of the provisions of the proclamations of Sawai Jai Singh III, and Maharaja Bukht Singh and Vijay Singh of Jodhpur who in 18th Century, worked on the same lines and prescribed the same remedy for the above mentioned evils. The role of these enlightened rulers, to purge the prevalent social evils, will be dealt in the next chapters in detail.

To check these evils, it suggested the appointment of a committee (or Local Sabha) in every native State of Rajputana and Malwa, which was to consist of a Sardar, an official and a member of the Charan and Rao castes. It was the duty of this committee to make arrangements for carrying out the regulations, regarding the expenditure to be incurred on marriages and deaths and on 'tyag', as well as other provisions of the W.K.R.H.S. It also forbade the marriage of a widower, who was above the age of 45 and who had a living son, to contract another marriage. Beside the committee in each State, the premier Sardar of each clan was [81,82,83] given the power to superintend the arrangements. A half yearly register of births, deaths and marriages was to be kept by the local Sabhas, to keep a record of the above mentioned particulars and also the infringements, if any happened.

It published yearly reports to review to effects of the rules. Each of the local committees in different States of Rajputana submitted their reports and a comparative analysis was drawn on their basis. The W.K.R.H.S. also gave a comparative analysis of the breaches of laws amongst Rajputs and Charans of various native States of Rajputana. According to the report of 1905⁶⁶ 4198 marriages and 1589 funerals were performed amongst the Rajputs and 220 marriages and 129 funerals amongst the Charans. Of the 4198 marriages and 1589 funerals ceremonies performed amongst the Rajputs, 3894 marriages and 1499 funerals were in accordance with the rules; and out of 220 marriages and 129 funerals amongst the Charans, the rules of the W.K.R.H.S. were observed in 198 marriages and 126 funerals. The report also presented the fact that the progress was not satisfactory in the States of Bharatpur and Dholpur while the local Sabhas of other States did a commendable work. Not only this, it also examined the causes which resulted in violation of laws. As in the case of Dholpur, the large number of delinquencies were associated with the fact that intermarriages were performed between the inhabitants of the Dholpur State and those of the adjoining British and Gwalior territories, where there were no such rules in vogue. Similarly, the W.K.R.H.S. warned those local Sabhas, who used to send incomplete reports to the central body and asked them not to commit mistakes next time. This report of 1905 also shows the progress of the W.K.R.H.S. in comparison to 1900, and 1904.⁶⁷ While in 1900, 2,743 marriages were performed amongst the Rajputs of Rajputana, 240 marriages were against the rule regarding age; and 147 marriages were against the rule regarding number of wedding party. Similarly, in 1904, 3837 marriages were performed amongst the Rajputs and out of them 90 were against rule concerning age and 91 were against rule concerning number of wedding party.

According to the General Statement of Marriages and Funerals performed amongst Rajputs during the year 1909,⁶⁸ 328 marriages were performed in Jaipur and out of them 327 were according to the rules and one was against it, as far as the age of marriage was concerned. According to the Statement, no cases of infringement were reported, in 1909, as far as the rules related with marriage expenses, 'tyag' and 'tika' were concerned. In Jodhpur, 239 marriages were solemnized and out of them 3 were against the rule, related with the age of marriage. No cases of infringement were reported as far as 'tyag', 'tika' or marriage expenses were concerned. Similarly in Jaisalmer, 246 marriages were performed amongst Rajputs in 1909 and 2 were against the age of marriage, while 30 were performed against the rule related with marriage expenses and 1 was against the tyag rules. In the State [84,85,86] of Bikaner, 108 marriages were solemnized in 1909,

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and out of them 3 were against the prescribed age of marriage, 1 was against the rule regarding marriage expenses and no case of infringement was reported as far as rule related with 'tyag' was concerned. In 1909, 1170 marriages took place amongst the Rajput community, residing in 19 native States of Rajputana and out of these 1158 marriages were performed according to the rules and 12 against it, as far as the age of marriage, fixed by W.K.R.H.S. is concerned; in 1139 marriages, the rules regarding marriage expenses were obeyed and in 31 cases it was violated; in 1169 cases, the tyag rules were obeyed and in 1 case, it was disobeyed; in 1104 cases the rules regarding 'tika' were followed and in 2 cases it was violated.

According to the General Statement of Marriages and Funerals amongst Rajputs during the year 1912-13, ⁶⁹ 322 marriages were performed in Dholpur and out of them 309 were in consonance with the rules regarding age of marriage of the W.K.R.H.S., while 13 were against it. No cases of infringement were reported in Dholpur, as far as the expenses incurred in marriages and 'tyag' were concerned. In Ajmer-Merwara, 151 marriages were solemnized in 1912-13 and out of them 144 were according the rule and 7 were against the rule regarding the age of marriage. No cases of violation, as far as rules for limiting the marriage expenses, 'tyag' and 'tika' were concerned, were reported. Thus, in short, 5216 marriages were performed amongst the Rajputs of Rajputana (of all the 19 States) in 1912-13 and out of them 48 were performed against the prescribed age of marriage; 15 were performed against the rule regarding marriage expenses; 3 were performed against the 'tyag' rules and no incident, in which 'tika' rules were violated, were brought to the notice of the Central Committee of W.K.R.H.S.

It is remarkable that the drawbacks of the Sabha were not overlooked and it was observed that, at times, the rules framed could not be carried out satisfactorily, as the various rules framed by different communities differed in each State. It could give rise to controversies, if the two parties engaged in a marriage, belonged to two different States, out of which one might have no rules or the rules of two States (although community is same) might differ. The rules which were in force in Rajputana differed with those of Malwa, and hence it created confusion.⁷⁰ In Malwa, for example, the practice of taking money for the marriage of a daughter, from the groom's side (called as 'Reet') was strictly prohibited, whereas in Rajputana, one could accept upto Rs.100/-, on account of his incapability to marry his daughter, from the groom's side. Moreover, the Malwa-rules allowed more followers in the barat than the Rajputana rules. Similarly, the maximum age of marriage for a man, prescribed in Rajputana by W.K.R.H.S. was 45 while in the case of Malwa it was 55. To solve this anomaly, it was resolved in 1909 that, the rules of W.K.R.H.S., Malwa would be applicable on all the barats (marriage processions) of Malwa, which would come in Rajputana, for the purpose of marriage and those which would go from Rajputana to Malwa, would be bound by the rules of W.K.R.H.S., Rajputana. Similarly, 'tyag' was calculated in Rajputana on the income of a landholder, whereas in Malwa it was calculated on the total expenditure of marriage. Moreover, in Rajputana, 'tyag' was to be distributed on the marriages of younger brothers and sisters, while this was not so in Malwa. To resolve the disputes arising thusby, it was laid down by Resolution XI of 1905, that when a Rajput would go[87,88,89] to Malwa for a marriage, he would distribute 'tyag' according to the rules laid down by the Malwa Sabha and when he would come from Malwa to Rajputana he would be governed by the Rajputana rules. It also laid down that in case of a marriage procession proceeding to British India or any place outside Rajputana, where these rules were not in force, the distribution of 'tyag' would depend upon the wish of the bride groom's father. To avoid situations/conflicts, it encouraged framing of uniform laws for each community. Consequently a widower above 45 years of age was allowed later on, (by Resolution V of 1896), to remarry, if he was healthy and strong. But the bride was to be above the age prescribed by the rules. In case a widower of 45 years, had an infant child, by his deceased wife and if it was difficult for him to bring up the child as well as to look after his household affairs, the State Committee could make a special exception to the rule, after satisfying itself that it was proper to do so.

The report of September, 1909 is significant as it incorporates the salient features of the rules framed at its meetings in 1888 and in subsequent years. Another factor which stand out is that its preamble clearly stated the rules to be "binding on Rajputs of all ranks except ruling chiefs." This can be considered as an impediment as the practice was widely prevalent amongst the ruling families. In the socio-religious set up of Rajputana, where the ruling family set examples for others, any reform which did not include them could not be expected to be thoroughly successful.

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To put a further check on the breaches, resolution II of 1893 provided for half yearly registration of births, deaths and marriages to the special committees at the capitals of the different States through the district official or Nizamats. Exceptions could be made only when marriage had been arranged before these rules came into force and the girl was 14 years of age. But it was advisable that girls were to be married before the age of 20. It was also provided that no second marriage shall take place during the lifetime of the first wife, unless she (first wife) is afflicted with an incurable disease or has no offspring. Resolution V of 1895 laid down that if any person agrees to give his girl in marriage to a man, knowing that the latter is already married to another woman, commits the same offence as the person proposing the marriage. Thus this resolution brought both the parties on a single footing and made them responsible as well as punishable before the committee. Similarly, to put a check on the 'tika' expenses, resolution V of 1907 provided that the entire amount of 'tika' should be fined to the extent of one-half of 'tika' should be forfeited and the acceptor of the 'tika' should be fined to the extent of one-half of the amount of 'tika'.

Moreover, it also laid down that any person who informs the committee of cases in which giving and acceptance of 'tika' have really taken place, shall be given as reward one-fourth of the forfeited tika amount. The local Sabhas were asked not to disclose the name of the informer if he so desired and should the information thus received turned out to be incorrect, the local Sabhas were empowered to award a suitable punishment to the person giving the false information. The W.K.R.H.S. was formed to deal only with the problems of the Rajputs but later on, it included the Charans and gradually, by 1890, extended to other communities like Brahmans, Vaishyas, Kayasthas, and Mahajans in the States like Bikaner, Jodhpur, Karauli, Kishangarh, Kota and Alwar and the Jats of Bharatpur and Dholpur.⁷¹ Members of 12 castes, other than Charans and Rajputs, framed rules for the guidance of their ceremonies and submitted to the Darbar. The report of 1894⁷² points out that rules had been made for castes other than Rajputs and Charans in Bikaner, Jodhpur, Karauli, Kishangarh, Kota and Alwar and also that the Jat States of Bharatpur and Dholpur had formed local committees for the introduction of its rules. In 1909-10, the barbers of Karauli also framed rules for themselves, on similar lines. Similarly, the Khati, Dhimar and Khandelwal Communities of Bharatpur framed rules for themselves in 1918-19. The main achievement of W.K.R.H.S. lies not only in making modest reforms among the Rajputs but in the fact that it made others adopt them. Col. Walter's scheme involved no legislation and did not call for any action on the part of the police.⁷³ It was a gentlemen's agreement and it worked in creating a public opinion. This created an impression that the method of Walter could be adopted for other castes too. Soon, the Agarwala community adopted the lines of the Rajputs and in 1889, the Mers and the Merats of Merwara framed rules fixing the age of marriage for girls at 11 years, which was introduced in 1891.⁷⁴ Similarly, in 1890-91, the Rajguru Purohits of Jodhpur and the Pushkarna Brahmans of Bikaner framed rules providing that no marriage should take place in which the prospective bridegroom and the bride did not attain the age of 15 and 11 years respectively.⁷⁵ The other sects of Brahmans also agreed that no marriage be solemnized where either party was under 11 years.⁷⁶ In 1891, the Malis of Jodhpur and the Sidhs of Bikaner followed the example of Rajguru Purohits. There was so much enthusiasm that as many as thirty-six communities framed rules with regard to the age limits of the bride and the bridegroom.⁷⁷

Despite the efforts of W.K.R.H.S. (beside others), it was not successful in completely eradicating the practice. In fact, the Sabha lost its hold and became almost non-functional and no annual meeting of the Sabha was convened for almost a decade since 1924. Perhaps the passing of the post of Secretary to Rajputs had something to do with its being non-functional. It is remarkable here to note, that for the first 14 years, persons other than the Rajputs held the post of Secretary, of the central committee and worked for the social upliftment with great zeal. Kayastha Durga Prasad, Munshi Nand Lal Bhargava and Pandit Shankar Nath were the Secretaries of W.K.R.H.S. who carried on the reform process in the initial years.⁷⁸ But when this post was passed on to Kishan Singh of Gangwana, who himself was a Rajput noble, the W.K.R.H.S. lost its vitality and much of its earlier reformative spirit. The same thing happened with the State committees, which ultimately made it a decorative piece. It may also be the reason that after Walter, none other British Officer, cared for social reforms with as much zeal and enthusiasm as Walter did. The cause of its being non-functional may also be ascribed to the growing consciousness among the various castes, regarding social reforms, which made the British officers feel that the time had come to limit their influence and interference in the social matters and allow the things to happen in their own way.

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It is significant to note that on August 11, 1934, Thakur Bachan Singh of Dervalva (Jhunjhunu),⁷⁹ who was the Secretary of W.K.R.H.S., Jaipur and Rajasthan Kshatriya Mahasabha, Ajmer, wrote a letter to the H.H., Jaipur in which he lamented the fact that the W.K.R.H.S. had become an instrument of oppression and had ceased to be of any help to the ordinary Rajputs. According to him, the poor and illiterate Rajputs were put to a lot of inconvenience on account of the W.K.R.H.S. and they were forced to give tips and bribes to the Tehsildars and the Nazims to get the necessary permission for performing marriages and 'nuktas'. He also told that he had obtained the signatures of thousands of Rajputs, who agreed with him and who wished to do away with this Sabha. He also reported that he had written several letters, in this regard, to Rao Bahadur Thakur Narendra Singh, who was a member-in-charge of the W.K.R.H.S., but nothing had happened and no action was taken on his letters.

On 15th of March, 1935, Thakur Bachan Singh again appealed to the H.H. Jaipur⁸⁰ to put an end to this body, as he believed that it was of no use and had become non-functional. But nothing came out of this letter and consequently, he sent a copy of the letter to the Resident at Jaipur, who took this matter seriously. H. Burton, the Resident at Jaipur,⁸¹ admitted that the last recorded meeting of W.K.R.H.S. was held in 1924 and since then "there does not appear to have been any meeting nor has there been any demand on the part of any of the States for such a meeting." However, he opined that the mere existence of the Sabha (i.e. W.K.R.H.S.), even in its present [88,89]unsatisfactory condition, could exercise some check on extravagance at marriages and funerals and that on these grounds its continued existence could be justified. Col. George Ogilvie,⁸² A.G.G., remarked that a contributory cause for its inactivity lied in the fact that its Secretary frequently made himself absent, which had brought this body to a "stage of inactivity and inanition."

Consequently, in 1935,⁸³ the A.G.G. wrote a letter to all States asking them whether they were prepared to resuscitate the activities of the W.K.R.H.S. or wished it to be closed down. The replies received showed that 9 States were in favour of abolition and 9 States were in favour of continuance. The Jaipur Darbar offered the suggestion that a Conference should be called in order that a representative meeting should decide as to whether the Sabha (i.e. W.K.R.H.S.) should cease to exist or whether its rules should undergo revision. At the same time the Jaipur Darbar considered that the Sabha, even in its present unsatisfactory condition, served a useful purpose and opined that for that reason it would be inadvisable to abolish it.

As a result, a Conference was called on 19th-20th and 21st of May 1936 at Ajmer to decide the fate of this body, and Raja Amar Singh of Banera (Mewar) was nominated as its Chairman.⁸⁴ In the Conference, all the representatives of native States agreed that the rules that were made nearly half a century ago had outgrown their usefulness and it was high time that drastic changes be made in them.⁸⁵ "Eradication of social evils", Raja Amar Singh of Banera, in his closing speech as the Chairman, observed, "largely depends on the education of the people to the realization of their disastrous effects rather than on the enforcement on rigid rules and regulations."

"On account of the heavy penalties", he further observed, "that have been from time to time inflicted in several States for technical infringements of the rules and the difficulties that are some times experienced by poor Rajputs in obtaining certificates for marriages and nuktas, many of the Rajputs have begun to look upon it, as an institution that checks them at every stage of their ordinary life." "The Sabha (i.e. W.K.R.H.S.) has therefore," he remarked, "suffered to a great extent in its usefulness for lack of interest and cooperation on the part of those for whose sole benefit it was inaugurated."

Seeing the difficulties, it was decided by the members that a sub-committee should be appointed to look into the matter carefully.⁸⁶ Consequently, Thakur Madho Singh of Sankhwas (Jodhpur), Rawal Sangram Singh of Samode (Jaipur), Raja Chandrasen of Kunadi (Kota), Thakur Anand Pal of Karauli and Kunwar Ganpati Singh of Kharwa (Ajmer) were appointed as the members of the sub-committee.

It was also decided in the Conference, that in order to make W.K.R.H.S. more useful and to create greater interest in its activities, its aims and objects should be extended so as to include other social reforms of the Rajput Community as well. The question of freeing the Rajputra (Central) Sabha (i.e. W.K.R.H.S.) from official tutelage was also raised by the Resident for Rajputana and in view of the observations made by him in the opening speech made by him at the

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Conference held at Ajmer on the 23rd September, 1940, it was decided that in future the President and the Vice President of the Central Sabha be drawn from among the Princes, and their election be held accordingly (vide Resolution no.4).⁸⁷ In accordance with the said resolution H.H. the Maharaja of Jodhpur and H.H. the Maharawal of Dungarpur were elected President and the Vice President respectively.⁸⁸

Seeing the great anomalies in the present rules, the central body of W.K.R.H.S., repealed all the existing rules and framed another set of rules, which came into force from the 1st of January, 1941.⁸⁹ According to the new rules, the name of W.K.R.H.S was changed to Rajputana Walterkrit Rajputra Hitkarini Sabha and its rules were made applicable on all the Rajputs of Rajputana, except the ruling princes and chiefs.

IV. CONCLUSION

It was decided that the President and the Vice President of the Rajputana Sabha would be elected every third year from amongst the princes by the representatives of the States. Each State in Rajputana became entitled to nominate one Rajput member to the Rajputana Sabha, whose term "was for atleast three years". Any person who informed the Sabha of the cases in which 'tika' money was given or taken, was to be given a reward not exceeding one-fourth of the 'tika' amount. The amount thus received was to go the Rajput Fund, which was to be used for marriages of the daughters of poor Rajputs, for providing scholarships to needy and deserving Rajput students, for donations to private Rajput educational institutions and recognized boarding houses etc. and for help to needy Rajput widows. In the annual conference of Rajputana Walterkrit Rajputra Hitkarini Sabha in December 1943, it was resolved that the Sabha was for the benefit of both the Rajputs and the Charans and its rules should continue to apply to both the communities, therefore following amendments were made in 1943 : (i) In section 2, "all Charans" was added after Rajputs and before "of Rajputs" (ii) In section 16, " or Charans " was added after the words " as far as possible be Rajputs", (iii) In section 17, " or a Charan " was added after " be a Rajput, " (iv) in section 8, "or Charan" was added after "one Rajput." The amount realized by fines and forfeitures from Charans, under these rules, was to be credited to the Charan Fund and spent for the benefit of Charans on the same lines as provided for Rajputs. [89]

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- 2.Ibid.
- 3.Barhat, Krishna Singh, Rajputana Ka Itihas, Vol.I, p.84.
- 4.Jain, M.S., op.cit., p.240.
- 5.RSAB: Ajmer Records, Commissioner's Office, File number-2 (1886); Cf. Jain, M.S., op.cit., p.240.
- 6.Ibid.
- 7.RSAB: From Col. Walter, A.G.G. in Rajputana to the Secretary to the G.O.I., Foreign Department; No.277-C, dated 23 March, 1888; Basta no.130, file No.1493; Ajmer Commissioner's office.
- 8.Though Col. Walter has mentioned the names of 41 representatives, who took part in the meeting, yet in the original list of representatives, the name of Kavi Raj Buldeo Raj of Khetree, was found to be deleted by hand. Therefore the number 40 is mentioned here. RSAB: Proceedings of a committee of Sirdars, officials and Charans, from all the States of Rajputana, held at Ajmer, for the purpose of regulating the expenditure connected with ceremonies at marriages and deaths among Rajputs. Basta no.130, File No.1493, Commissioner's Office, Ajmer.
- 9.RSAB: From Walter to Secretary, G.O.I., Foreign Department, no.277-C, dated 23 March, 1888; Basta no.130, file no.1493, Commissioner's office, Ajmer.
- 10.Ibid.
- 11.RSAB: From Col. Walter to Col. Trevor, dated 16 January, 1889, Basta No.130, File no.1493, Commissioner's Office, Ajmer.
- 12.RSAB: Supplementary rules framed by the general committee of Rajput Sardars and Charans, assembled at Ajmer from 15th to 24th of February, 1889; Basta no.130, File no.1493, Commissioner's Office, Ajmer.
- 13.Jain, M.S., op.cit., pp.240-247.

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14. However in December 1943, the permission of accepting or taking of 'reet' was given to those parents, who because of their financial difficulties were unable to perform their daughter's marriage. They were allowed to accept a sum not exceeding Rs.100, from the groom's side and were asked not to spend more than this amount on the marriage. RSAJ: Proceedings of the meeting (of W.K.R.H.S.) held on 25th December, 1943, General, Social & Religious, Basta no.12.
15. Sharma, S.R., op. cit. p.182.
16. RSAJ: Annual General Report from the members of the General Committee of the W.K.R.H.S. to E.G. Colvin, A.G.G., Rajputana, and the President and Chairman of the W.K.R.H.S.
17. Ibid.
18. RSAJ: General Statement of marriages and funerals performed amongst the Rajputs, during the year 1909. Appendix-A. Annual General Report to E.G. Colvin, A.G.G., for 1909.
19. RSAJ: Annual General Report to E.G. Colvin, A.G.G., for the year 1912-13. Jaipur, 1909.
20. RSAJ: Annual General Report of Walterkrit Rajputra Hitkarini Sabha, Jaipur, 1909.
21. NAI: For. Intl. B, June, 1894, No.391.
22. Ibid.
23. Lawrence, W.R., The India We Served, pp.278-279.
24. R.A.R. Bikaner State, 1895-96, p.76.
25. Singh, S.R., Nationalism and Social Reform in India, 1885-1920, p.158.
26. Indian Social Reformer, p.209.
27. The Indian Spectator and the Voice of India, Aug.9, 1896.
- 28(a) Kayastha Durga Prasad was appointed as the Secretary of the W.K.R.H.S. on 1st of September, 1889. RSAJ: General, Appointment of a Secretary of W.K.R.H.S., Record no.015 (Part IV), 1890/401, Residency.
- (b) Munshi Nand Lal Bhargava, became Secretary in 1900 and left this post in 1905, as he got a new and higher job in the Government.
- (c) Pandit Shankar Nath, became Secretary of W.K.R.H.S., in 1905 in place of Munshi Nand Lal Bhargava. RSAJ: Annual General Report of W.K.R.H.S., 1905, p.51.
29. RSAJ: From Bachan Singh of Dervalva to the Vice President, Council of State, Jaipur, dated 11th of August, 1934. General-20 current, proposed abolition and reconstitution of W.K.R.H.S., File No.150.
30. Ibid.
31. RSAJ: From H. Burton, the Resident at Jaipur, to the Vice President, Council of State, Jaipur, dt. 22 May, 1935; General-20-current, Proposed abolition and reconstitution of W.K.R.H.S., File no.150.
32. RSAJ: Speech made by Col. George Ogilvie, A.G.G., as the President of W.K.R.H.S., in its Conference on 19th May, 1936. General-20-current, File No.150.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. RSAJ: Speech made by Raja Amar Singh of Banera (Mewar), on 21st of May, 1936, as the Chairman of W.K.R.H.S. General-20-current, proposed abolition and reconstitution of W.K.R.H.S., File No.150.
36. RSAJ: From Rawal Sangram Singh of Samode to Education member, Council of State, Jaipur, dt. 26 of May, 1936. General-20-current, proposed abolition and reconstitution of W.K.R.H.S., File No.150.
37. RSAJ: Copy of note, recorded by Rawal Sangram Singh of Samode, dated 14th of October, 1943. General-20-current, File No.58.
38. Ibid.
39. RSAJ: Revised rules of W.K.R.H.S., General, Social & Religious, Basta No.9.