

Origin of Muslim Conference and its process of transformation into National

Conference:

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Abstract:

The state of Jammu and Kashmir came into political platform only after signing the treaty of Amritsar in which the state was sold by the Britisher's to Maharaja Gulab Singh for an amount of Seventy five Lakh Nanak shahi. The state came under the direct rule of Dogra's. The dogras left no stone unturned to get back the huge invested money and levied heavy taxes in every nock and corner of the state. The general population was effected by these high taxes. The tyrannical rule of Dogra's gave birth to many political organizations. The Muslim conference was one among them who played a prominent role in giving a sigh of relief to the common masses. Sheikh being a secular person rejected the idea of Muslim conference and formulated a new party known as National conference with a secular ideology. He left an indelible impact on the political landscape of Kashmir that transformed the people of Jammu and Kashmir from Muslim conference to National Conference. The paper tries to discuss how Muslim conference emerged out of the tyrannical rule of Dogra's and how Sheikh changed the direction of Muslim conference to National Conference.

Keywords: *Dogra, Reading Room, Muslim Conference, National Conference, Sheikh Abdullah*

INTRODUCTION: The state of Jammu and Kashmir as it exists today was founded by Maharaja Gulab Singh, the founder of Dogra rule in the state. He acquired the valley of Kashmir from the east India Company from a sum of rupees 75 lacks (Nanak shahi) in cash. The sail deed was struck between the two parties by means of a treaty which is historically known as a treaty of Amritsar, on March 16, 1846³ by Mr. F. Currief Drevet, Major Hengy Mout Gomery Lawrence on the behalf of Lord Harding and Gulab Singh. The East India Company sold Kashmir along with its two million people to Maharaja. The policies of Maharajas like taxation; revenue system was totally against, the common people. All the officials of the Maharajas were corrupt and the most victims of this system were peasants. Meetings were held to organize a political movement against the Maharaja but the signs of awareness among the Muslims of Kashmir were noticed during the time of

the last ruler of the Dogra raj Maharaja Hari Singh. Which increased among them the anti Maharaja Feelings.⁸ Under such brutalities and step motherly behavior for the people, few educated youth of Kashmir started revolt against the atrocities of the Dogra rule. These atrocities gave birth to reading room party that merged into Muslim Conference which in turn changed into National Conference. The role of Choudhary Gulam Abbas, Sheikh Abdullah, Molvi Abdul Rahim and Gulam Nabi Gilkar can't be turned to deaf ear. They played an important role in evacuating the Dogra's from the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

OJECTIVES:

- The objective of this study is to find the atrocities done by Dogra's by their policy of drain of wealth.
- To find the role of reading room party and its impact on convergence to Muslim conference
- To find the root cause that led to the convergence of National Conference from Muslim conference and its role and impact in the state.

3. Reading Room:

Under the oppressive rule of the dogras the Muslims were groaning however, failed to launch a struggle against Dogra. It was partly because of the Dogra autocracy, which imposed ban on the formation of political organization¹⁶. In Maharajas rule the government filled 60 percent of the vacancies without any reference to the board. The remaining 40 percent were required for those, who belong to royal family. The maximum age for recruitment was fixed at 22 years. The government had the rights to reject the candidate without assigning any reasons. The entire Muslim graduates were above 22 years of age, therefore clearly stood debarred from the recruitment to any respectable service. Since the formation of political associations was banned the Muslim students who had returned from the Aligarh University on April 12,1930, mostly came from middle class families. They faced the problem of unemployment and felt frustrated. Among them were Sheikh Abdullah, Mohammad Rajab, Gulam Mohd Mukhtar and Qazi Saif ud- Din in those days there was no political party or social organization in Srinagar the plan was starting agitation against dogras. The Muslim students who came from Aligarh University with the cooperation of other set a small reading room at Syed Ali Akbar Mohalla Srinagar. The main aim of the reading room was to get Muslims together. It was

established because of to discuss the social, economic and political problems of the Muslims. These leaders collect funds for the improvement of the reading room in the state. Later on the reading room was shifted from Syed Ali Akbar Mohalla to Fateh Kadal. The few educated youths were succeeded to stand a reading room where they used to discuss the policies on employment, personal issues, and national issues and started it an organized manner and for men a management committee. Mohd Rajab and Sheikh Mohd Abdullah were the president and general secretary of this committee.

4. Change of reading room to Muslim Conference:

On 29 April when Bakara Eid was celebrating, the Maharajas forces prohibited to Iman Munshi Mohammad Ishaq to deliver a speech after the prayers. The Maharaja's police refused him to deliver speeches against the Maharaja. The Muslims were shocked by this unlawful act.

On 21st of June 1931, at a meeting of Khanqa -i-Maulla; it was the most important meetings in the history of the movement. It was a unique gathering off Sunni, Shias, Hanfis, Wahabis and Ahamdis. After the end of the meeting Abdul Qadir a religious fanatic made a speech against the government. He was arrested and charged for trail before the court. His trial in the court of the session's judge greatly excited the Muslim public and huge crowds gathered outside the court on the days of hearing. Consequently, it was decided to hold trial within the premises of the central jail. While the court was in session, a crowd of about five thousand people collected outside the jail and raised slogans demanding the withdrawal of the case against Abdul Qadir and made a hue and cry at the gate of the jail. The police attempted to check them from entering me the jail. The demand was not met, the crowd threw stones on police, and order was given to police to open fire which resulted 22 people received bullets and both were injured by police. This caused great uproar in the valley. The officials failed and became nervous to control situation .The crowd carried the dead bodies that were killed by police and went towards city and raised a banner of blood with slogans against the Maharaja. The incident created great resentment in the mob mind against the Maharaja. The Hindu shops were also were burnt and looted by forces at the area of vichernag and Nowshera. 3 Hindus were killed and others injured. Even today 13th July is considered as a landmark in the history of modern Kashmir. It was on that day that for the first time open demonstrations against the despotic rule of the Maharaja took place.

On 23 January 1932, a public meeting was held under Sheikh Abdullah at khanqah Maulla Srinagar. He said if Maharaja Hari Singh does not listen to me I will tweak his ears. After the statement of Sheikh Abdullah a ban was imposed on Sheikh Abdullah and On 25 January Abdullah was again arrested. The news of Sheikh Abdullah's arrest routed the people once again. The people organized public meetings, processions and hartals. Maulana masoodi was also arrested by police and in result meeting with Sheikh Abdullah in central jail. After two months Sheikh Abdullah was released from the prison on May 5, 1932.

According to Maulana Mohammad Syed Masoodi the decision to form a party and name it the Muslim Conference was taken in the central jail, Srinagar, in course of discussions that he had with the Sheikh Abdullah while both were internal together.

The unexpected mass support enjoyed by the Kashmiri Muslim leadership was considered timely to launch an organized struggle by forming a political organization for the purpose. An assurance with full cooperation in this regard was given by the leaders of Kashmir as well as Jammu committee. The need was felt to bring all Muslims of the state under a common banner in a systematic way. With that end in view various Muslims groups joined together to form all Jammu and Kashmir Muslim conference. The inaugural session of Muslim conference after its formation was held from 14 to 16 of October 1932 in the historic Pathar Masjid Srinagar under the presidency of Sheikh Abdullah. It was a unique gathering of all Muslims sat shoulder to shoulder on the same platform with the common object of providing Muslims with a single political organization. The committee also adopted a flag with green cloth with a crescent and a star. On next day Sheikh Abdullah was elected the president of Muslim conference. In his presidential address, Muslim conference had come into existence to struggle for the rights of all oppressed sections of the society. It did not work for the unity of the Muslim community alone, but it persistently strived for the unity of all communities, whether Sikh, Muslim and hindu.

6. National Conference:

It is evident from the above discussions that the Muslim conference was a secular and progressive organization. The leaders of the Muslim conference were belonging to Muslim community, but their programme was broad as that of any progressive political organization of the Indian subcontinent. With secular ideology the Muslim leadership influenced some liberal minded non Muslim leaders. It was a joint struggle of the Muslims

and non Muslims against Dogra rule. In all sessions of Muslim conference stressed on forging Hindu Muslim unity. By the end of 1935, the Kashmir's were ready to launch a healthy movement and the valley now received the support of the people irrespective of their region and caste.

In fifth annual session of Muslim conference that was held at Ponch in May 1937, under the Sheikh Abdullah. He requested the non Muslims to support the freedom movement and join this movement. The sixth annual session was held in Jammu on 25- 27 march 1938 under the presidential ship of Shiekh Abdullah. He said: it is an opportunity to all those people who suffers from the government should get an opportunity to join the struggle against the Maharaja. He invited all Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Buddhists of the state. He said some Muslims have misconception that all non- Muslims living a life of comfort. Not only have a few among them stood protected against inequalities and disabilities otherwise rest of them is like poor and illetrate. In the same session Shiekh Abdullah started the conversation process of the Muslim conference into national conference. According to Maulana the main purpose of this change was to provide both Muslim and non Muslim in a same roof in future. It was supported by Raja Mohd Akbar but was opposed by A R Sagar and Abdul Majid. On June 8 the working committee of the Muslim Conference was held in Srinagar after a hot discussion of five days passed the resolution. The opinion of the working committee the time has now come to fight for the achievement of responsible government. The people who desired to participate in this struggle may easily become members, irrespective of their caste, creed or religion. Both leaders were opposed the resolution where they were asked to resign from the party. The working committee of Muslim conference met on 28th June 1938, at Srinagar. The discussion lasting for five days and spread over 52 hours and passed the resolution.

A healthy development which took place as a result of the Youngman's agitation was to desire of the enlightened section of non Muslim communities to join with the muslims in their struggle for freedom on august 5, 1938 the Muslim conference observed the responsible government Day demand. An appeal was made to people assemble under the banner of freedom. In the conference the leaders also demanded the release of Raj Mohd Akbar Khan of Mirpur. The demand for the raja's release was put forth vehemently by Muslims and some non Muslim leaders. A joint manifesto was signed by Muslims and some non Muslims leaders known as national demand was issued on august 29, 1938. The

government immediately imposed section 144 of the criminal procedure code in Srinagar and ban on all public meetings in Srinagar. Shiekh mohd Abdullah, P N Bazaz and other dominant leaders thus signed the national demand document.

In a meeting at Pratap Park Srinagar on 29th august 1938, Shiekh Abdullah was again arrested by security forces and sentenced six months imprisonment. As a result hartals were started in the Srinagar some youth were killed by Maharaja's forces and many were arrested. The leaders of the Muslim conference reached Srinagar for they had now the moral support of all India state People's Conference. The most dominant leader of the Muslim Conference, Shiekh Abdullah was released on 24th of Feb 1939 from the Kathua jail. After his return from jail he was given a grand reception by people at Srinagar. A historical session of the Muslim Conference was held at Pathar Masjid Srinagar on 10, and 11th June 1939, under the president ship of Ghulam Mohd Sadiq. Maulana Masoodi a leader of Muslim Conference explained the aims of session.

The conference approves for bringing about the necessary amendments and changes in its constitution. The conference decided to change the name of Muslim conference into National conference. And every citizen of J&K whether male or female, irrespective of religion and cast to become the member of the party. In his presidential address he said the delegates, and the decision which we take today will have its effect all over the country. You are assembled here not only to decide your own fate, but the fate of your future generations. I am confident that each one of you comes here with earnest desire in his heart to exalt the nation. It is the time we should unite each other, not to discriminate any one on the basis religion. Choudhary Abbas feared that the national conference will come under the influence of Indian National Congress. But Sheikh Abdullah solemnly declared that it would be most harmful and dangerous to bring the freedom movement under the influence of some outside organization. It was also decided in meeting that our party would keep aloof from Indian National Congress as well as Muslim League. The leaders who supported the conference were M. A Sagar and Mirza Afzal Beigh. Prem Nath Bazaz also addressed the meeting and said whenever I expressed my views on unity and harmony to my friends they used to laugh at me but only Sheikh Abdullah used to say that unity will be achieved progressively and slowly.⁷⁴ The resolution was opposed by Choudhary Hamidullah Khan with an idea that a minor chunk of Non Muslims with less percentage in

population and high percentage in government service would not cooperate with the Muslims.

After the session was ended the resolution was with an over whelming majority voted in favor of the change of Muslim conference into national conference. Only four delegates were raised in opposition. Thus all Jammu and Kashmir National Conference set up its organization which replaced the constitution of Muslim Conference and was passed on 10th and 11th of June 1939.

Green flag of the Muslim Conference was replaced by Red flag with a white plough in the middle of flag was approved by all members of National Conference. An ardent worker Pandit Prem Nath Dhar prepared the design of flag. This was approved with least amendments. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah beautifully describes the philosophy of the flag as, "The red background was adopted to signify the ascendancy of the tillers to a place of dignity and honor and plough to bring about the supreme need for the promotion of the in trusts of the vast masses of cultivators who had suffered under feudal suppression. The red flag thus embodied the parties' basic program dedicated to peasants and the working people. The flag was eulogized in a revolutionary poem by Molvi Mohd Syed Masoodi with the following opening couplets:

Lehra ah Kashmir ka Janda
Tehfil-u-Jawaan-u-peer ka Janda
Bazoya bay Shamsheer ka Janda
Halwala Dilgeer ka Janda
Lehra ah Kashmir ka Janda
Lehra ah Kashmir ka janda

Translation:

Flutter ye the flag of Kashmir
O! The flag of young and old
O! The flag of armless masses,
O! The favorite flag of workers,
Flutter ye the flag of Kashmir.

Conclusion:

The change from the Muslim Conference to the National Conference gave a secular character to the freedom movement. It brought the Kashmir politics closer to that of the

Congress. The National Conference became the mouth piece of the Indian National Congress especially under the influence of Jawaharlal Nehru. According to Shiekh Abdullah following events paved the way for the conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference. In 1934, the Maharaja established a legislative assembly known as Praja Sabha consisting of 75 members out of which 33 were to be elected by different communities. There were 19 elected members of Muslim Conference. In assembly both Muslim and Non Muslims members brought Hindu Muslim closer to each other. Secondly a meeting was held at Lahore at the residency of Dr Saif- ud Din Kitchloo leader of Punjab. He said our programme would be according to the ideology of Congress. We want that the people of Punjab do not interfere in our matters. In June 1936 Ali Mohd Jinnah visited the valley. He was impressed by the Muslim leadership in valley to consider non Muslims as an integral part of their movement, Jinnah suggests the Muslim leaders you should win the hearts of Non Muslims and treat them very well, and it will give you more benefit if all Non Muslims support your freedom movement. Around 1937, I met pundit Jawaharlal Nehru for the first time. When he was in his way from Lahore to North West frontier province. I went from few days with pt Nehru appreciated our movement. I clarified him our position that our movement was not communal. In spite of the fact that the name of our association was Muslim conference, yet we attempted our best to influence non Muslims interest yet couldn't succeed. A part from this I was suggested by Nehru to increase the participation of Hindu community. Their participation will benefit the organization and a critique regarding communal movement will be ended. The main aim of the conversion of the Muslim conference into national conference was to provide a common platform to all Muslims and Hindus. Shiekh Abdullah was always against the communal politics of dogras.

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