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# Conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir- A Historical Prospective

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**Paryaz Ahmad Bhat**

Research Scholar Vikram University Ujjain (M.P.) India

Email: paryaz123@gmail.com

**Abstract:**

*The conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir in 1939 A.D. was an event of far-reaching consequences in the freedom movement of Kashmir. It was not an abrupt development but the culmination of the gradual process that began as early as the formation of Muslim Conference. This paper aims at discussing all such developments that paved the way towards the formation of common platform.*

**Key words:** Muslim Conference, National Conference, Sheikh Abdullah, Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad, Prem Nath Bazaz, Glancy report, resolution, working committee.

**Introduction:**

Sheikh Abdullah and his colleagues were greatly influenced by the lectures of Kashmiri polymath and lawyer Molvi Abdullah. Molvi's son Molvi Abdul Rahim, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Ghulam Nabi Gilkar were the first three educated Kashmiri youths to be arrested during the public agitation in 1931 A.D. Kashmir's first political party, the Muslim Conference with Sheikh Abdullah as its president, Chaudhary Ghulam Abas as general Secretary and Molvi Abdul Rahim as secretary was formed on 16 October 1932. In his presidential address Sheikh Abdullah categorically stated that the Muslim Conference had come into existence to struggle for the rights of the oppressed sections of the society and not Muslims alone. It was not a communal party and would struggle for the rights of the oppressed, whether Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs, with the same favor. The

Muslim Conference constituted a committee of nine members for the purpose of establishing contacts with non Muslim parties and exploring the possibility of forming a joint organization. According to Sheikh, this effort was not successful because of the unfavorable reception of the ideas by Non-Muslim parties. Then in the sixth annual session of the Muslim Conference which was held in March 1938, at Jammu Sheikh Abdullah spoke in favor of the conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference.

**Objectives:**

1. The objective of conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference was making unity among the different sections of the society.
2. Another objective of conversion of Muslim Conference into National

Conference was making the freedom struggle of Kashmir broad-based.

3. The last but not the least was the role of Sheikh Abdullah.

### **Conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference:**

It was at the early stages of the mass movement that the need for the formation of a state wide political organization was keenly felt but in the absence of the freedom of associations, no step could be taken to meet the need. The way was however cleared with the acceptance of the Glancy report and the recommendations made by him latter as chairman of the franchise committee. Extensive consultations were therefore held with men who had gained prominence as result of their role in the movement. By the end of 1935, the Kashmir were ready to launch a healthy national movement in the state. Early in 1936, Colonel Colvin relinquished the post of Prime Minister of the state and the Maharaja appointed Sir N. Gopaldaswami Ayyanger to this office. The new Prime Minister, a hardened bureaucrat, was at heart a nationalist. He wished that a truly nationalist party was organized to guide the national movement. The demand for political rights and the establishment of a responsible Government in the valley now received the support of all the people of the state irrespective of cast, color, creed and religious beliefs. The Muslim Conference observed a Responsible Government day on 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1936. Sheikh Abdullah who was the president of the Muslim Conference had enjoyed upon the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs to participate in the function to be held in this connection. His appeal met with most encouraging response. A number of meetings were held which were addressed by Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs

leaders, impressing upon the people to form a common platform and a party. The responsible government day meetings aroused overwhelmingly the people of Kashmir for the formation of a truly national political party for the achievement of its objectives.

The change in the attitude of people towards politics was again noticed in 1937, when the working class organized large processions in Srinagar to highlight their demands. It was led by Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad, the procession protested against retrenchments and unemployment. In various meetings Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad stressed that the labor movements had nothing to do with communal politics. It was movements which embraced all the wage earners. He emphasized the need of forming a united front of all communities against despotism. Many Hindus and Sikh labor leaders especially Prem Nath Bazaz also addressed the meetings and voiced the same sentiments. Thus it was the leadership of Muslim Conference that paved the way for establishment of a united nationalist party in the state.

In the sixth annual session of the Muslim Conference which was held in March 1938, at Jammu Sheikh Abdullah spoke in favor of the conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference. It was in the same session Sheikh Abdullah in his prudential address observed, "We must end communalism by ceasing thinking in terms of Muslims and Non-Muslims when discussing our political problems. We must our doors to all such Hindus and Sikhs, who like ourselves, believe in the freedom of our country from the shackles of an irresponsible ruler." No doubt Sheikh Abdullah as an outstanding leader of the movement wanted to convert the Muslim

Conference into National Conference earlier, in order to facilitate the participation of non-Muslims without any objection and excuse, but he was waiting for the evolution of as favorable atmosphere towards this direction. On 24 June 1938, he placed a resolution embodying his views about the conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference before the working committee. In June 1938, the working committee of Muslim Conference in its meeting at Srinagar passed after a long discussion, lasting for fifty two hours, a resolution recommending the general council to allow all the people to become the member of the party irrespective of cast, color or religion. In August 1938, twelve representatives of various communities moved a resolution, the famous “National Demand”. According to it the ultimate goal of the people was “to bring about complete change in their social and political outlook and to achieve responsible government under the aegis of Maharaja. The demand papers were signed by the eminent leaders like Sheikh Abdullah, Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad, G. M. Sadiq, Shayam Lal Saraf, Sardar Budh Singh and Jai Lal Killam. In 1939 the recommendation of the working committee of Muslim Conference was accepted by the general council and thus on the 11<sup>th</sup> June 1939 the Muslim Conference into National Conference. Henceforth, the National Conference was the most influential political party in the state. It launched many agitations against the government and weathered many storms. In spite of many hurdles and vicissitudes, the conference became the truly representatives of the will of the people and grew from strength to strength. The National Conference held its first session in October 1939, and passed a resolution embodying all

the demands made in the “National Demand” Paper. The National Conference declared that it aimed at the establishing a responsible government which in other words meant a legislature composed entirely of the members elected on the basis of adult franchise and joint electorates, with some seats reserved for minorities.

“The conversion of conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference was a painful process. One can have a sense of this when one recalls the ordeals we had to face to give the new Conference its amplitude. But that would be looking merely at the surface of things, beneath that surface lie the sacrifices I had to make turning hard hearts into sensible ones.”

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah

#### **Conclusion:**

To conclude we can say that it was the conversion of Muslim Conference into National Conference in 1939 which was a great historical event in the history of Jammu and Kashmir. This brought different sections of the society under one banner, in order to fight against the oppression of Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. Which helped to achieve the freedom from the despotic rule of Maharaja Hari Singh Kashmir and democracy was introduced in Jammu and Kashmir.

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