

## **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad; An Unparalleled Educationalist in Modern India**

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*In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the virus of communal tension gripped the country. Hatred, intolerance, selfish motives diluted the Nationalistic fervour, while the British were riding high on the crest with their policy of “Divide and Rule”, India was caught in a whirlpool of impasse. It was at this time when the dark clouds of communalism aborted the hopes of Indian leaders and the masses were disillusioned, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad with the message of Hindu-Muslim Unity and oneness appeared on scene of steer our ship from the turbulent storms to the peaceful shores.*

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Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru described Maulana Azad as “A great man – a man of luminaries, intelligence and intellect with an amazing capacity to pierce through a problem to its cause. The word ‘Luminous’ is perhaps the best word I can use about his mind. When we miss and when we part with such a companion, friend, colleague, comrade, leader and teacher there inevitably a tremendous void created in our life and activity.”

**Life of Abul Kalam Azad :-** Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was born on Nov. 11, 1888 in a deeply orthodox muslim family inn mecca, Soudi Arab, Islam’s main center of pilgrimage. He was a distinguished scholar, a great poet, a true freedom fighter and independent India’s

first education minister. His forefathers came to India during the ‘Mughal Emperor, Babar, from Heart afganistan. Azads were the decendent of eminent Ulema or Scholars of islam region. His mother was the daughter of rich trabian sheikh and his father, maulana khairuddin was a Bengal Muslim of Afgan origins. Khairuddin left India during 1857, Sepay. Mutiny and settled in Mecca, where he met his wife. In 1890 he along with family returned to Calcutta (Now Kolkata).<sup>1</sup>

**Accademic Career of Azad :-** Maulana Abul Kalam Azad’s real name was Abul Kalm Ghulam Muhiyaddin. Maulana Azad had its initial formal education in Arbic, percian and Urdu with theological orientation and then

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philosophy, geometry, mathematics and Algebra. He also learnt English language, world history, politics on his own. Maulana Azad had a natural inclination towards writing and this resulted in the great start of the monthly magazine “Nairang-e-Alam” in 1899.

**Entrance in political life :-** After his return in India from an extensive visit of Egypt, turkey, Syria and France, Azad met prominent Hindu revolutionaries – Shri Aurobindo Ghosh and S.S. Chakraborty. They helped in developing radical political views and he began to participate in the Indian Nationalistic Movement. Then he continued to write provocative articles against the British Government.<sup>2</sup>

**Participation in Indian National congress :-** While extending his support to Mahatma Gandhi and Non-co-operation movement, Maulana Azad joined the Indian National Congress in January, 1920. He also emerged as an important National leader of the Indian National Congress party. He also served as the member of congress working committee (C.W.C.). In 1930 Azad was arrested for violation of the salt laws as part of Gandhi’s salt Satya Grarha. He was put in meerut jail for a year and a half.<sup>3</sup>

During the violence that erupted following partition of India, Azad assured to take up the responsibility for security of muslims in India. Towards this, Azad toured the violence – affected regions of borders of Bengal, Assam and Punjab. He helped in establishing the refugee camps and ensured uninterrupted supply of food and other basic materials.

**Azad becomes an education minister :-** He was imprisoned several times by the British. From 1920-1945 Abul Kalam Azad was in

and out of prison a number of times. He was twice elected president of the Indian national Congress in 1923 and in 1940. He continued as president of the Congress till 1946 and when India became independent he was taken in the cabinet by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and appointed him as Educational Minister of free India, a position that he held till his death on 22 Feb, 1958.

**Maulana Abul Kalam Azad; as an educational minister :-** Abul Kalam Azad was one of those geniuses whose names are written with golden letters in the pages of history. All of them contributed their energies in various ways. They not only structured the syllabi but also formulated the politics in the order to carry the light of education in the remotest rural areas. They also chalked out programmes for the training of teachers to make them abreast of the development taking place in the world of education.<sup>4</sup>

Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan inspired Maulana. Maulana Abul Kalam considered that education is incomplete without the knowledge of western education. He did not go to any Madarasa, nor did he attend any modern institution of western education. He learnt everything at his home. Though born to an orthodox muslim family, he was a truly secular person. He started urdu weekly “Al-Hilal”.

So prof. Sayed Azam said, “Education is the key and this was visualized by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.”<sup>5</sup>

But if we look back to the historical development of education in India, a man of enormous tastes, rated high in the realm of education Maulana Abul Kalam Azad has all along played a prominent role in keeping the

Movement of education alive in this country.

**Azad's vision about education :-** Azad was secularist and eminent educationist. As India's first education minister, he was convinced that education is a tool of social transformation. He had a clear vision that all individuals should have a right to education that would develop their faculties and enable them to live an enriched life. He well rounded view of education prompted him to set up apex education bodies like the All India Council of Technical Education and the University Grants commission.

He also thought 'education is essential for preparing a population that is not only knowledgeable and skilled but is aware of its responsibilities and willing to contribute to the growth of the nation and as well as well being of society.'

**His tremendous effort for education :-** The philanthropist Maulana Abul Kalam Azad introduced a bill in parliament on 26 April 1951 to amend the Benaras Hindu University act, 1915 so that the university would open its door to the students of all communities. The Government had decided not to change the name of Aligarh Muslim University and Benaras Hindu University, but both Hindu and Muslims could become member of the courts of both universities when the bill was passed on 23<sup>rd</sup> sept, 1951.<sup>6</sup>

Maulana was very anxious to leave an abiding impact on the system of education and held the mechanism of the state govt. functionaries and the inertia of the government machinery responsible for his inability to achieve something remarkable.

Even before assuming the reins of office as Minister of Education, Maulana said that the

most important task before the National govt. would be to set up a new programme of National Education.

Maulana Azad said, "The central Govt.'s educational programme induced the setting up of a National Museum, allocation of funds for fundamental research, development of archaeological studies and the use of broadcasting films for purposes of mass media."<sup>7</sup> Maulana Azad was against the existence of communal University as they harmed the country greatly. He praised the missionary societies for spreading modern education and in contributing to the development of modern languages. However he criticized the mass conversion carried on by them.

**Aazd; The founder of many educational institutions:-** "Education and awareness would be necessary if peace is to be ushered into society, in the country and on the globe, and if future generation's are to be empowered with spreading and maintaining prosperity and development. The creation of the future generation, which are capable of facing challenges of the future, is indeed an investment."<sup>8</sup> By Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

Realizing this matter Azad established many new educational institutions which were the National Academics viz the Sangeet Natak Academy (1953), Sahitya Academy (1954) and Lalit Kala Academy (1954), 'The Indian council for cultural Relations' having been established by him earlier in 1950.<sup>9</sup>

The Maulana felt that the cultural content in Indian Education was very low during the British rule and needs to be strengthened through curriculum. As chairman of the

Central Advisory Board of Education, an apex body to recommend to the Govt. educational reform both at the center and the states including universities. He advocated in particular universal primary education, free and compulsory for all children upto the age of 14, girls education, vocational training, Agricultural education and technical education. Over all, he established the university Grants Commission (U.G.C.) in 1956 by an act of parliament for disbursement of grants and maintenance of standard in Indian universities.<sup>10</sup>

**Progress of Engineering and technical Education during the period of Azad :-** On the technical education side, he strengthened the All Indian Council for Technical Education (AICTE). The Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur (IIT-K) was established in 1951 followed by a chain of IIT's at Bombay, Madras and Kanpur and Delhi. "The School of planning and Architecture" (SPA) Came into existence at Delhi in 1955.

Besides, it can be well understood on the basis of following statistic from 1947 to 1955. During this period the technical and engineering education was developed rapidly in India by the educationist, Maulana Azad.

#### **Development of Engineering Education**

#### **Development of Technical Education**

Subject	1947	1950	1955
The number of educational Institution	16	24	25
The number of students	420	782	1050
The qualified students	300	498	700

Thus Maulana Azad built a modern India through strengthening higher and technical education, he also held the belief that along with training engineers and technicians for the development of the industries, it is equally necessary "to spread general Education for raising the general level of economic activities in the country."<sup>11</sup>

#### **Azad's contribution for Religious Education :-**

Maulana Azad advocated religious teaching in schools, not from a narrow, factional sense of religiosity, but from a liberal and open perspective. His definition of "Secular" was different even from the mainstream opinion of the period, for he believed and worked for multi-culturalism and interfaith understanding. A strong advocate of the need to transcend narrow provincialism, he declared "We want to built in India a national outlook which will transcend the limitations of province, state, religion, caste or language."<sup>12</sup>

He believed that the solution to the problems created by religious fanaties lay not in rejecting religions instruction in elementary stages the solution to the problems created by religions fanaties lay not in rejecting religions instruction in elementary stages but in imparting sound and healthy religious education so

that children in their formative stages would not be misguided to fanaticism and intolerance of other religions.

**His other countless contributions :-** A part from his countless contributions in the field of education, Azad rose to prominence through his work as a journalist, publishing works critical of the British Raj and espousing the causes of Indian Nationalism, Azad became a leader of the khilafat Movement during which he came into close contact with Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>13</sup> Azad became an enthusiastic supporter of Gandhi ideas of Non-violent Civil Disobedience and worked actively to organize the Non-cooperation movement in protest of the 1929 Rowlat's Acts. He was also a strong advocate of undivided India.

**Conclusion :-** However it can be said that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad is one of those rare personalities through whom the distinctions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be recognised and possibilities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century determined. He was also the builder of Modern India. The country's educationist has to learn from his outstanding contributions and policies. Maulana was the first to raise the issue of the national system of education which is today the bedrock of the national policy on education (1986) updated 1992. The concept implies that, up to a given level, all students, irrespective of caste, creed location or sex have access to education of comparable quality.

He had not only the great contribution

in education but also in the Hindu-Muslim unity and Indian National movement. In this context his notable words were "If an angel were to descend from the clouds today, settle on the Qutub Minar of Delhi and proclaim from their that India will attain Swaraj provided Hindu-Muslim unity is renowned, then I would renounce Swaraj and not sacrifice Hindu-Muslim unity, because if Swaraj is delayed, it is the loss to India, but if Hindu-Muslim unity is lost, it is the loss to humanity."

Besides he was an educationist, freedom fighter and philanthropist that has been written with the golden scripts in the pages of Modern History.

Being impressed by Azad, prof. Azam said, "Azad was secularist and responsible for introducing compulsory education in the country for empowering the people. He was also responsible for universal Adult Franchise."

However, Maulana's life was a penance and a sacrifice, an offering to the wide galaxy of great souls of India. This supreme unconditional sacrifice should be imprinted in the minds of every Indian. His boundless and endless concern should be expressed in every possible way so that man may learn that a meaningful life is to seek the "brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God."

At last, I can say that it is only when people learn from the lives of such noble men that they understand, life is not merely living as it comes but living for a noble cause.

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