

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: Architect of Modern Indian Educational System

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Abstract

This paper will critically examine the role of Azad's contribution towards modernizing the education system in India. This paper would also study how Azad was distinct from other intellectuals to promote education in India.

Being the first Education Minister of Independent India, his attention was to reinforce and democratize the educational system. The motive behind democratizing of education was to universalize the achievement vis-a-vis to break the dominating structures of the hegemonic hierarchy of caste and class. He wanted the Muslims to imbibe a reformist attitude. He was opposed to the separatism and sectarian nationalism which was being preached by the Muslim league. He was not only one of the great scholars of the Koran in modern times, but due to his command over Arabic and Persian, he was held in high esteem as a Quranic interpreter in the Middle East and Africa.

Keywords: *Modernization, Education, Intellectual, Democratize, Universalize, Hegemony, Hierarchy and Nationalism.*

At any time, the main progress of any country depends on the efficient structure of the science and education system. Namely, a good structure of this sphere will make the educated population of the country. Especially, the new educated generation of the country plays a significant role in the prosperity of the motherland. When the young generation that future of the country depends on them remains without education, it will delay the progress of the State for a long period.

So Maulana Azad realized this point. He understood that salvation is in the right education system.¹ Maulana Azad was one of the front-ranking leaders of pre-and post-independent India. As a Muslim scholar and a prominent Muslim leader, he espoused the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity with great commitment. He opposed the partition of India brought about on communal lines. Though informally educated, he acquired proficiency in several languages, including Urdu, Arabic, Persian and Hindi. He was also trained in Hanafi fiqh, Shariat, mathematics, philosophy, world history and science.²

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad is one of those rare personalities through whom the distinctions of the 20th century can be recognized and possibilities of the 21st century determined. He stood for a learning society through liberal, modern and universal education combining the humanism of Indian arts and the rationalism of western sciences, a society where the strong are just, and the weak secure, where the youth is disciplined, and the women lead a life of dignity - a non-violent, non-exploiting social and economic order. He was free India's first Education Minister and guided the destinies of the Nation for eleven years.

After independence, there were many responsibilities on the shoulders of Indian leadership. Maulana Azad was one of those leaders who stood for a leaning society through liberal, modern and universal education combining the humanism of Indian arts and relationships with other cultures and ethics. He set the milestone of the National Education system. He focuses on education as he knows it would be a fundamental pillar in nation-building. He was addressing an All India Education on January 16 1948, "We must not for a moment forget, it is a birthright of every individual to receive at least the basic education without which he cannot fully discharge his duties as a citizen."

Maulana Azad received the education mostly from his father, which was traditional. He did not go to any Madrasa, nor did he attend any modern institution of western education. Maulana Azad's literary life started at the age of 12 when he began his writing until 1916. He started his literary articles during this period. He launched his famous journal AL-Hilal and wrote his autobiography "Tazkira and Tafseer -Quran" between 1916-1936. He wrote an epic book, Ghubar e Khatir, during 1936-45.³

As a journalist, Maulana Azad remained associated with many reputed journals/newspapers like Vakil, Zamidar, Muslim Gazette, Paisa Akhbar, Mashriq, Al-Huque, Humdard and Comrade (an English Journal). All these journals were painted with "Pan Islamic" colours.⁴ At the same time, he was exposed to the writings of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Keeping it a secret from his father, he started learning English and, by his effort, acquired enough knowledge of the language to study advanced books on history and philosophy.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was one of the few nationalist leaders. They could easily blend his intellectual prowess with a deep commitment to the ongoing nationalist political processes in 20 century India. Azad contributions towards the national as well as intellectual life of India are multifaceted and have attracted the attention of historians and scholars alike. However, what is not widely known is that he also contained within his intellectual worldwide-view seeds of an educationist, a fact largely ignored by historians and educationists because his role as nationalist attracted more attention. It was perhaps because his role as minister of education in sovereign India too was paid scant attention. It was only after the decision of the Central Government to observe his birth anniversary on November 11 as the National Education Day since 2008.⁵

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was one of the most dynamic personalities produced. He was a truly learned man, a devout Muslim, a consistent champion of freedom from British rule and an advocate of Hindu Muslim unity. In his speech at Ramgarh, he said, "I am a Muslim and proud of the fact. Islam's great traditions of fourteen hundred years are my Inheritance, the teaching and history of Islam; its arts, letters and civilization are my wealth and fortune. I have to protect them... The spirit of Islam has not come in the way of these sentiments. It helps and guides me forward. I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of the indivisible unity, which is Indian nationality."⁶

Maulana Azad remarkable openness to modern western knowledge even opposed western rule over India. He made a lasting contribution to Urdu prose literature with his translation and interpretation of the Quran. His many other religious writings and his introspective autobiographical and epistolary works.

Educational Ideas of Maulana Azad

From the study of Azad's ideas on the educational policies, one can comprehend the four important objectives that he promoted as the new goals of education in post-independence India:

1. Democratization of education;
2. Maintenance of educational standards;
3. Broadening of educational outlook; and
4. Promotion of mutual understanding.

For democratization of education in India, to liquidate mass illiteracy. Azad strove to introduce two important reform measures: universalizing elementary education and launching a nationwide drive for adult education. To make education free and universal for the younger generation, he emphasized implementing the 40-year Post-War Educational Plan within one-fourth of its time. What characterized Maulana Azad's uniqueness of broadening the educational outlook was his insistence on making education free and compulsory up to the secondary stage?

For the promotion of mutual understanding, Azad brought his ideology of human fraternity and fellowship to bear on the office of the Education Ministry. Azad was an apostle of international amity and the indivisible unity of man. He had expressed his abiding faith in man's essential accordance, holding it above all other objectives of human life, such as religious salvation, economic prosperity, cultural advancement, and political emancipation. For this philosophy of universalism, he found support from both the Islamic and Hindu world-views.

Apart from this fact, education is the dynamic side of philosophy. What presently justifies taking up a study like Azad's association with education throughout his public life is his involvement with education as a mission of guiding humankind towards higher goals covering more than half a century?

The Educational Philosophy of Maulana Azad

According to Subhash Kashyap, "Azad's writings reflect a synthesis of his political nationalist philosophy and his religious philosophy based on secularism. Though they were saturated with religious fervour, it is easy to discern the secular Message from between the lines. He wanted to discern the secular Message from between the lines. He wanted to act as scholar dissemination ideas through the instrumentality of his writings among the Muslim religious teachers he regarded as natural leaders. He thought that it was the educated class that ought to be educated first so that they could influence the behaviour of the general public."

Maulana Azad's philosophy is based on religious temperament. He was a spiritualist and a scholar of Islamic religion and philosophy. K. G. Saiyadain points out in his article. He says that Azad's educational ideas are grounded in his understanding of Islam. He also says, "Azad's was not an exclusive "Islamic mind or even an oriental" mind. He was equally conversant with all other aspects of his Indian and modern heritage, which cut across the east-west barriers. In Azad's philosophy, there are five universal values that one must try to achieve to climb to be a full-fledged man. These are Ma'aruf (Good), Haq (Truth), Jamal (Beauty), Love and Adl (Justice).⁷

Five-Fold Education Program

In the meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education, Maulana Azad emphasized the fivefold programme for the expansion of education in the country as follows:

- a. universal compulsory primary education for all children of school age,
- b. Social education for our adult illiterates,
- c. Measures for improvement in the quality of and expansion of facilities for secondary and higher education,
- d. Technical and scientific education on a scale adequate to the Nation's needs
- e. Measures to enrich the community's cultural life by encouraging the arts and providing facilities for recreation and other amenities.⁸

Maulana Azad believed and said that "a good school is a national asset of the highest value at any place or at any time. Schools are the laboratories that produce the future citizens of a State. The quality of the State, therefore, depends upon the quality of such laboratories. In the context of modern India, the importance of good schools is even greater. On the one hand, we have vast illiteracy and on the other, almost unbounded opportunities".⁹

Maulana Azad thus emphasized the universalization of education of the highest standard. He wanted that India as a whole should become literate. There should be village schools and schools that will impart the best

form of education and that proper emphasis should be given to women's education. He laid utmost priority on the importance of secular education and the importance of moulding the character of our young citizens.

Women Education

Women education is an essential part of Maulana Azad's education policy. He knew that our education programs depend upon women education because with uneducated "Adhi Abadi", we could not achieve our national dream, i.e. development. In 1949 UNESCO inaugural address, he said, providing education to women without giving them freedom and forcing them to conform to the veil, not only be useless but dangerous and baneful."¹⁰

Maulana Azad put particular stress on the teaching of modern science and also on the education of women. In 1949, in the Central Assembly, he emphasized the importance of imparting instruction of modern sciences, knowledge and also observed that "no programme of national education can be appropriate if it does not give full consideration to the education and advancement of one-half of the society- that is the women."¹¹ In modern science and women education, Maulana Azad was highly influenced by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. In his writing like *Azad ki Kahani*, he admitted that Sir Syed's writing brought about an intense revolution in his thought, both his religious and intellectual life.

Maulana Azad raised the issue of women education in Constituent Assembly in 1949, asking for multiplying the educational opportunity for women. Azad strongly felt that our objective could not be realized unless we got out of narrow-mindedness, our greatest hindrance. In this new era of freedom, we should keep ourselves free from this disease as there is no other disease as dangerous for the healthy growth of national life. Azad felt that women's education is doubly purposeful: first, they need to be educated as citizens of free India. Second, their education facilitates the task of educating the younger generation.

Efforts and its Consequences

After attaining independence, Maulana Azad became the first Education Minister of free India and presided over this country's education and cultural destiny till the last breath of his life. Natural Resources and Cultural and Scientific Research (renamed Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs) was also his creation. The eleven years of his eventual ministership have been most influential in India's history of educational development. "The appointment of the University Education Commission (1948) and its report in 1949, the appointment of Secondary Education Commission (1952) with their report of 1953: the reorganization of the All India Council for Technical Education from its inception on November 30, 1945, to its amended form of today: the chain of laboratories of scientific research established during the period: the establishment of the Kharagpur

Institute of Higher Technology: the rapid development of the Indian Institute of Science: the establishment of the University Grants Commission with considerable financial resources these are some of the highlights in the animated scene.

But Maulana Azad's notable contribution as Education Minister was the ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) at New Delhi. The ICCR library was started with 8000 volumes presented by Maulana Azad from his collections. Maulana Azad's contribution to the cause of Indo- Iranian friendship is substantial. Due to his efforts, a cultural agreement was signed between the Governments of India and Iran on December 1, 1956.¹²

The Last Message

It is not too much to say that the vision and the powerful personality of the Maulana Azad gave unity of purpose to the phenomenal extension of technical education in this decade. As he rightly opined in his last speech at the meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education on February 6, 1958, only for a night before his death:

"When I assumed charge of education in 1947, I immediately saw that there could be no solution to our educational problems without the fullest co-operation of the Centre and the Province. Education was no doubt a provincial subject, but it was my considered opinion that this distinction could be maintained only when our educational targets have been achieved. Till such time, the Central Government should openly recognize that thought education is a state subject. It must share this responsibility with the state Government if we are to meet the challenge of the times."¹³ Maulana Abul Kalam Azad efforts are the landmark of the present education system. Maulana Azad contribution to the National education system is helpful to deal with current challenges. In the light of Maulana Azad's vision, we can improve and develop the level of education.

Conclusion:

Today, we appreciate that great leaders of our country like Maulana Azad dreamt of a fully literate India and competent citizenry and laid the foundation for the country's progress in the appropriate direction. Unfortunately, we are still to reach the goal and fulfil what he laid down as the objectives of the country's educational policy for the all-round progress of the country.

Education makes us better citizens and inculcates in us virtues of tolerance, discipline, commitment, culture, compassion and sensitivity. Specially, women's education, as they constitute nearly fifty per cent of our population. There is an unacceptably wide disparity between the literacy levels of men and women in our country. Removing the factors that inhibit the full participation of women in the various spheres of society is a very important step for the empowerment of women in our community.

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