

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

A Great Educational Pioneer

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Abstract

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was a great intellectual, scholar and philosopher. He was one of the prominent freedom fighters of India, president of Indian National Congress and the first education minister of free India. Maulana Azad erected his educational philosophy on the basis of his vast and thorough knowledge of Islam and the concepts of both the East and the West. He approached education in a manner which was relevant and suitable to man as the supreme creation among all creatures on the earth. He visualised such an educational system which could help in bringing readjustment among different outlooks and ideas. He proposed scientific and technological outlook in educational system, so as to deal with the present situation, not only at the national level, but also to compete at the international level. In his involvement with education as a mission of guiding mankind towards higher goals of life, he provided, over a period of half a century, a kind of educational leadership, which the present study seeks to examine in depth.

INTRODUCTION

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, originally named Muhiyuddin Ahmad, was born on 11th November 1888 in Mecca, Saudi-Arabia. Maulana Azad was a Muslim theologian, philosopher and one of the most learned men of the east. He was the best author of modern commentary on Quran.

In 1923, he was elected as the president of Indian National Congress. In 1947, he became the first education minister of free India and remained at this post till his death in 1958. He was a great scholar of Urdu, Persian and Arabic languages. He wrote a number of articles on education, history and literature. He enlightened new lamps of hope among

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Indian scholars. Maulana Azad was a brilliant debater, as indicated by his name — “Abul Kalam” which literally means “Lord of Dialogues”.

In the field of education, Maulana Azad had been an uncompromising exponent of universalism, that had been distilled into his mind from the Sufistic legacy of his home and from the pantheistic traditions of his country. In order to guide mankind towards the supreme goal, he launched the programme of educating his countrymen and through them, the entire human race. The real objective of education, according to Azad, was to train the children as members of the community and to instill in them the habit of cooperative action for the social good. As the quality of a man in the ultimate analysis depends on the education he receives and the values he was taught to cherish, he felt that the government has a duty to organise a truly liberal and humanitarian educational system, which would set the country on the roads to progress. Azad’s ideal was a fusion of the Eastern and Western concepts of man, to create a fully integrated personality. Whereas the Eastern concept dwelt on spiritual excellence and individual salvation, the Western concept laid stress on worldly achievements and social progress. Azad felt that the two should ideally be integrated into a wider philosophy of education for the world. Maulana Azad was not only enlightened, learned, wise and

humble, he was also a man who often led from the front and set personal examples for others, which could be summed in the following words by Akbar Allahbadi,

*“The sluggards are quite content with
mundane delights;
the wise cannot but strive for the
ultimate.”*

HIS WORKS

Basic Concept of Quran, Ghubar-e-Khatir, Dars-e-Wafa, India Wins Freedom, Tazkirra, Khutabat-e-Azad etc.

PERIODICALS EDITED

Al-Balagh (Calcutta), Al-Hilal (Calcutta), Al-Jamia (Calcutta), Al-Nadwa (Luknow), Lisanal Sidq (Calcutta), Paigham (Calcutta).

AZAD’S PHILOSOPHY

At the core of Azad’s philosophy was his deep religious temperament. He was a spiritualist and a scholar of Islamic religion and philosophy. He was free from communal feelings and prejudices. He praised Islamic religion but did not criticise any other religion.

There are three basic metaphysical concepts of Azad: God, Universe and Man. The concept of God is the most important of all. The concept includes man’s innate faith in the divine existence on the one hand and his acquired belief in his attributes on the other. While his faith has remained uninfluenced by his intellectual advancement, his belief has made

perceptible progress towards transcendentalism, monotheism and concept of love and beauty. On the scale of evolution, man has reached the stage where he must look to God in his endeavor towards higher levels of creation. God must therefore, bear for him, the attributes within his comprehension, and as a source of inspiration also.

The concept of universe follows from Maulana's concept of God—the universe manifests all his attributes for its operation as the perfect scheme of creation. For example, his attribute of providence, sustains its existence. His benevolence provides for its grace and beauty and His justice brings the scheme to its perfection.

The concept of man evolves from the two preceding concepts. In the gamut of creation, the creative process has finally flowered in the appearance of man, who has by virtue of his inherent qualities, assumed the office of God's vicegerent on this planet and even around it. In his sharing of the infiniteness of the divine attributes, he alone, of all the creatures, has acquired the competence to achieve "mastery over the entire creation". This points to man as a free agent of God and at the same time, offers an optimistic view of his destiny.

Maulana's Tarjuman-e-Quran (1945) depicts well, the concept of his religious faith in Islam as a whole, the concept of "Taqdir" (luck) etc. While, explaining the term Taqdir, Maulana dealt with 'freedom

cum accountability'. Maulana dealt, however, delicately with 'Wahi' (revelation) — the supreme kind of inspiration, learning that man is endowed with. He says the revelation is the supreme faculty guiding man in his/her direction.

In Azad's philosophy there are five universal values which one must try to achieve in order to claim to be a full fledged man. These are— Ma'aruf (Good), Haq (Truth), Jamal (Beauty), Love and Adl (Justice).

AZAD AND EDUCATION

The core of his educational thinking is Islamic, but it is modified in the light of his knowledge of modern educational thought in the West and in India. He gave a scientific basis to the system of Islamic higher education, deriving his inspirations from the European and American experiences and practices of education. The impact of the West on his thinking is seen significantly at work, in his attempt at modeling a new system of child education in India. He was highly impressed by the West in the education of children at the elementary stage. Azad desired a similar move in the Indian educational setup.

Maulana Azad felt that a reorientation and revision in the content of education was necessary in the context of the changed needs of independent India. He held that the education system was little inclined towards academic and literacy studies, in keeping with

the requirements of a colonial administration. In independent India, there was the need to develop the agricultural sciences and to focus on technological and engineering studies. Further, owing to a false sense of values, there was too much importance attached to a university degree and too little to the quality of the education imparted. In an address to UNESCO, Azad emphasised that the future of man was dark unless concepts of international understanding, and world unity were explained to children in schools in realistic terms.

Maulana Azad considered education to be the birthright of all men. He viewed education as a process leading to the growth of the "Complete Man". He explained that literacy would give man the access to knowledge of the wide world, which in turn, would enable him to live in harmony with his environment. He felt that the state had an obligation to ensure education to all, at least upto the secondary education — elementary, middle and higher. Of these, elementary and middle are more important, because the foundation of the entire national education is laid in the early stage. For these two stages, it is accepted that the pattern of basic education is of great importance to the whole structure of our national education.

Experience has shown that education can profoundly affect the development of an individual and through individuals, of societies. If

the individual is not an integrated personality, society cannot be harmonious. The function of education in the modern world is therefore, to build up integrated individuals in an integrated society and the concept of both the East and the West must contribute to such a development.

WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Our educational programmes will ultimately depend upon the proper education of women. If women are educated, more than half of our problems will be solved. Educated mothers will mean, children who can be easily made literate.

STATUS OF WOMEN

"Providing education to women without giving them freedom and forcing them to conformity to the veil, will not only be useless but injurious and baneful." (Inaugural Address by Azad at the UNESCO Seminar on Rural Adult Education, Mysore, November 02, 1949).

MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

Azad holds that there is no place for English as the medium of instruction in future in India, but at the same time, there should be no precipitate action that may damage the cause of education. It holds that the replacement of English as a medium of instruction should be gradual and stage-by-stage, so that, there is the least possible interruption or interference with the process of education in the country.

AZAD'S EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Azad's educational Policy can better be defined by his five point's scheme. It includes:

1. Compulsory education for children of 6–14 year of age;
2. Social education for illiterate adults;
3. Standard higher education;
4. Art education for the development and preservation of National culture; and
5. Education of science and technology for the development of the country.

AZAD AS MINISTER OF EDUCATION

Azad was the first education minister of independent India. He, in his tenure from 1947 to 1958, did tremendous work for the upliftment of the country. Following are some of them:

1. For the progress and development in science education, following institutions were established:
 - Scientific Research Institute under the chairmanship of Shanti Swaroop Bhatnagar;
 - A separate institute for atomic development;
 - Indian Council for Agriculture and Scientific Research
 - Indian Council for Medical Research;
 - Indian Council for Historical Research; and
 - Indian Council for Social Science Research.
2. Indian Council for Cultural

Relations, for introduction of Indian culture to other nations.

3. Institute of international studies was established in *Sapru* House.
4. Following three academics were formed:
 - Sahitya Academy for development of literature;
 - Sangeet Natak Academy for the development of Indian music and dance;
 - Lalit Kala Academy for the development of painting;
5. With the aim of preservation and development of national culture, and also with the aim of study of Sanskrit language and literature, many institutions, especially universities were established.
6. Indira Uloom-e-Shariqa and Indira Uloom-e-Islami institutions or the development of Islamic Education of Osmania University, Hyderabad were promoted by him.
7. Azad was a scholar of History. In his regime, national archive and national museum were looked after properly.

CONCLUSION

Maulana Azad wanted to bridge the gulf between the East and the West, through the system of education. Undoubtedly, the ideology propounded by Maulana can resolve antagonism between materialism and spiritualism, that has prevailed in human world in the past. It can also guide man in his future advancement towards the higher levels of existence.

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