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A TWENTIETH CENTURY BRILLIANT SCHOLAR AND A
GREAT STATESMAN OF MODERN INDIA: MAULANA
ABUL KALAM AZAD



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ABSTRACT

As the title suggests the present paper primarily attempts to investigate in to the vision and mission of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Further it throws light on the overall contributions of Maulana to the development of twentieth century united India. Undoubtedly his thoughts and socio-political and literary activities have played an important role towards creation of modern Indian culture. He was not only a great political leader but also a literary giant. Hence an attempt is made here by chiefly examining his active role in the sphere of socio-political activities and literary works created by him in order to understand his philosophy and wisdom. This

paper will unravel the various facets of Azad's personality and his valuable contributions to Indian freedom struggle. An attempt will also be made here to throw light on the approach of his policy towards educational system of modern India.

Thoughts and contributions of Maulana Azad towards educational and Socio-political development will also be discussed to a great extent. This paper will definitely uncover some aspects of his life, thoughts and contributions towards the establishment of modern India.

KEYWORDS : Brilliant Scholar, great statesman, modern India, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, educational thoughts, Present challenges, vision, mission, political leader, literary giant, socio-political activities, literary works, philosophy, wisdom, Indian freedom struggle, educational system, Socio-political development, modern India, literature, journalism.

INTRODUCTION

A renowned educationist, multifaceted genius, fervent secular, true nationalist, brilliant scholar, great thinker, famous journalist, and a great statesman Moulana Abul Kalam Azad is one of the great personalities of twentieth century modern India who needs to be remembered frequently and whose thoughts and ideas must be discussed time and again in order to make use of his philosophy, wisdom and learning in the twenty first century modern India. Needless to say that he was the first education minister of independent India who gave right direction and saw the right path to the education system in the independent modern India. Before writing about his philosophy and

education it would not be inappropriate to give his brief life sketch in order to be able to understand his background properly.

ANCESTORS AND BRIEF LIFE SKETCH:

As we all are well aware of the fact that Indian subcontinent has always been the centre of congregation of eminent personalities since time in memorial. They came here as traveller, businessmen, Sufi and saint, etc. It has always been attracting people from all over the world, particularly during Mughal period people from central and west Asian countries flocked to India, and ancestors of Moulana Abul Kalam Azad is not the exception. Broadly speaking, his forefathers had migrated from Herat, West Asia, to India between the years 1516 to 1530 and settled in Agra during the period of rule of Babar (1). During Akbar's reign they moved to Delhi. His ancestors occupied important civil positions in the government. His grandfather Mohammad Hadi was appointed governor of Agra Fort in Shahjahan's days. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's great grandfather and grand father's name was Shah Mohammad Afzal and Shaikh Mohammad Hadi respectively. Azad's father Moulana Khairuddin had migrated from India to Mecca after the 1857 revolt. This is worth mentioning here that some of the fore fathers of Azad, Moulana Jamaluddin, commonly known as Shaikh Behlol Delhvi, who firmly stood against Emperor Akbar's experimental religion, and his son Shaikh Mohammad used to be under the cloud of royal displeasure. As grandfather of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had died during the childhood of his son Moulana Khairuddin, Moulana Khairuddin was brought up and educated by his maternal grandfather Moulana Munawwaruddin. Moulana Munawwaruddin having disgusted with the state of affairs in India decided to migrate to Mecca. He set out for Mecca along with Khairuddin. He then came to Mumbai but could not go to Mecca due to his ill health. However Azad's father Moulana Khairuddin aged 25 proceeded to Mecca and settled there. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was born in Mecca in 1888. He died on 22 February, 1958. He was named Firoz Bakht at birth. In his youth he was known as Mohiuddin Ahmad. Later finally he adopted the pseudonym of Abul Kalam Azad. After two years of his birth in 1890 the whole family moved to India and settled in Kolkata. He received his education from his father and several private tutors of different subjects in the old traditional manner. Later he taught philosophy, mathematics and logic to students. He had inherited the intellect of his ancestors. Inspired by the philosophy of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan on modern education he inclined towards modern education system and learnt English and studied a lot of books on the various branches of knowledge, including History, Geography and political science. Sir Syed's views on modern education influenced his mind considerably. His intellectual and scholarly achievements created for him a large circle of admirers. He says: "A few days later, I happened to study the writings of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. His views in modern education had a deep impact on me. I felt that unless a person makes an in-depth study of modern science, philosophy and literature, he cannot claim to be educated. I realised that it was essential that I study English. I mentioned this to Moulavi Mohammad Yusuf Jafri who was the Chairman of the Department of Eastern Studies. He taught me English and gave me Pesaray Chand Sarkar's first book. As soon as I had learnt the basic of English language, I started reading the Bible. Having acquired its Urdu and Persian translation, I placed all three before me and began my study. This was very helpful in making me understand its meaning. With the help of the English Dictionary, I then started reading the newspaper. Very soon I found myself reading books in English. Of these I found greatest interest in reading books on History and philosophy" (2).

POSITIONS HELD:

He was elected President of the All India Khilafat committee. He presided over the Nationalist

Muslims Conference in 1928. He was elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1923, and again in 1940, and continued to hold this office until 1946. He led the negotiations on behalf of the Congress Party with the British Cabinet mission in 1946 (3). He became the first education minister of Independent India. He continued to hold this position until his death on 22nd February, 1958. Mahatma Gandhi wanted to meet him when he was interned at Ranchi but Bihar government did not allow him to do so. Later on he met Mahatma Gandhi and gave him full support to non-cooperation movement. Maulana himself confesses that after a few weeks, a khilafat Conference was held at Meerut. It was in this Conference that Gandhi ji preached for the first time the non-cooperation programme from a public platform. After he had spoken, he followed him and gave him my unqualified support. He was actively involved in most of the movements linked with the freedom struggle for which he was jailed many times. He spent about ten years in jail. He wanted to create political consciousness among people so that they could participate in the struggle. In other words saga of freedom movement of India is hidden in the story of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

LITERARY AND SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was a great scholar, essayist, translator and orator. His essays published in various Journals and magazines had gained popularity. He started the periodical *Lisan-al-Sidq* in 1903 from Kolkata. Among his other famous published works are *Tarjumanul Quran*, *Tazkera* (1916), *Ghubar-e- Khatir* (1943) and *India wins freedom*.

Tarjumanul: *Tarjumanul Quran* comprises of the translation, Interpretation and the commentaries of the holy Quran. During his internment at Ranchi he started the work of translation and commentary of Quran and by the end of 1918 he had completed the work in spite of difficulties he faced. *Tazkera* is an autobiographical work which contains descriptions of life of his ancestors. *Ghubar-e- Khatir* is the collection of letters. These books are in Urdu language. 'India wins freedom' is also a very important book of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. In early days he wrote poetry which used to be published in the Bombay based Journal *Armaghan-e- Farrukh*. *Elan-ul- haq* was released on 1902. He wrote review on *Hayat-e- Javed*. He delivered many lectures on various subjects.

Ghubar-e- Khatir (1943): Letters are important source materials for understanding and learning socio-political and economic conditions of the period in which they were written. Azad's letters are master pieces which are an expression of his literary genius. These letters are full of philosophical thought and literary grandeur which have been published under the titles: *Karvan-e Khayal*, *Ghubar-e- Khatir*, *Makateeb-e- Abul Kalam*, *Naqsh-e- Azad*, *Tabarrukat-e- Azad*, *Mera Aqida*, and *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad ke Naam Khutoot -o- Jawab*. Abdul Qavi Desnavi highlights importance of letters: "To be able to understand certain religious issues, literary problems, theoretical arguments of political controversies, or at times to remove certain doubts and misunderstandings that may have arisen out of Maulana's statements, people asked for clarification. To these Maulana Azad replied in considerable detail" (4). These letters which are considered an important contribution to Urdu literature, sometime depicts him as historian, critic, researcher and advocate of humanism. Apart from these there is a long list of his writings which have been published as books or collections of articles. A study of these helps us to understand Azad and his era.

Journalism: He was not only a good litterateur but also a very good journalist as well. He started Urdu Weekly *Alhelal* at Kolkata in July 1912 but the Journal was unfortunately banned under the Press Act

with the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914. He started another Urdu Weekly Alblaagh from Kolkata in 1915. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad describes the utility and importance of these papers. He says: "The publication of Alhelal marks a running point in the history of Urdu journalism. I achieved unprecedented popularity within a short time. The public was attracted not only by the superior printing and production of the paper but even more by the new note of strong nationalism preached by it. Alhelal created a revolutionary stir among the masses. The demand for Alhelal was so great that within the first three months, all the old issues had to be reprinted as every new subscriber wanted the set" (5). He held the editorship of Dar us saltanat for some time. Alhelal created a new interest in Indian politics and brought the freedom movement closer to the victory goal. He was the editor of Wakil at Amritsar for some time. Since then he had desired to start his own paper. Azad's intellectual development, the honing of his political talents, his scholarly interest and mastery over modern Arabic language played an important role in the field of journalism. He was very much associated with Darulmusannefin. He established Dar ul Irshad for the study of Quran in Kolkata in 1914. He started to publish the unpublished works of Mirza Ghalib in Alhelal in 1914. Alblagh was launched from Kolkata on 12th November, 1915 but could not be continued due to government restrictions. The government put him in House arrest. Abdul Qavi Desnavi says: "The anticipated moment arrived at last. The government of Bengal charged Maulana for associating with the enemies of the country. Therefore, on 23rd March, under sec. 3 of the Defence Act, he was ordered to leave Bengal within a week. Other states, too, had imposed a restriction on his entry, excepting Bihar. So Maulana decided to move to Ranchi and left Calcutta on 30th March, 1916. He arranged to stay at the village of Moradabadi near Ranchi. On 8th July, 1916 the government brought out orders for his house arrest. Officials and the Bihar police conducted a search of his place, and took away all his books" (6). He established Anjuman-e- Islamia at Ranchi city. Its purposes were the reform, education and religious services among the Muslims.

POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTRIBUTIONS:

Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, decided to partition the province of Bengal in 1905. This incident caused Political awakening in Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and he got involved in politics wholeheartedly. He came in to contact with great revolutionary workers like Shyam Sunder Chakarvarty, Mohammad Ali, Shaukat Ali, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Molvi Abdul Bari, C.R. Das, Subhash Chander Bose, and Shri Arabindo Ghosh. He was closely associated with Maulana Altaf Hasain Hali as well as Molvi Abdul Haque. He travelled extensively in Iraq, Egypt, Turkey and France. During his journey abroad he happened to come across many revolutionaries of different countries. He met Mustafa Kamal Pasha, a great Turkish revolutionary, who left good impression on him. He continued to meet revolutionaries. His participation gave a kind of energy to the freedom struggle. His relationship with Shibli Nomani was based on love and mutual respect. They remained friends throughout their lives. He was very much perturbed about the Indian Muslims' indifference towards the freedom movement. He tried his level best to gain the trust of great leaders that Muslims have courage and potentiality and willingness to play an important role in freedom movement. He persuaded Muslim leaders to actively participate in the struggle. Abdul Qavi Desnavi says: "In 1905, with the partition of Bengal, there was widespread commotion in the Indian political circle. In 1907, a revolutionary party was established under the leadership of Shyam Sunder Chakarvarty and other freedom fighters. This gave greater momentum to the growing struggle. In 1911, the government was forced to abrogate its decision. This was the first victory of a united India over the British. Maulana Azad was very pleased with this success. He expressed his elation in the editorial of Al-Hilal, vol.I, no.3. From this stage onwards, Maulana Azad

became actively involved in politics" (7). He had strong relationship with Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi. In 1928 Indians became more and more hostile towards Simon Commission. He spoke against it at Rawalpindi, Lahore, Amritsar and Delhi. He was very much patriotic Muslim and he wanted to serve the nation honestly in a better fashion. He stood firmly against the division of Bengal. This was the beginning of his political career. His patriotism was strengthened day by day. In Al-Hilal he used to express his political views and religious beliefs. He wrote to inspire all Indians, especially Muslims to revolt against slavery. Maulana Azad himself claims about his integrity and faithfulness, "I thank the Lord for his generosity that he gave me a family which for centuries had been engaged in instruction and education, and whose noble ancestors had passed on their heritage from generation to generation. Their descendants are fortunate to have inherited virtues such as truthfulness, fearlessness and integrity. They have learnt to raise their voices against injustice, and to sacrifice their life for the love of God. They have learnt to disdain the high and mighty and rebel against them. This is my heritage and my family treasure" (8). He gained wisdom from Quran. Azad was a front runner of khilafat movement. He adhered to the path of nationalism. He had realised the importance of Hindu Muslim unity. He was staunch supporter and believer of communal harmony. He writes in Khutbate Azad, "Even if an angel from heaven was to appear and proclaim from the height of the Qutub Minar, that we can achieve swaraj or independence within twenty four hours, provided India foregoes Hindu-Muslim unity, I would rather give up swaraj, than accept this division. Because if Swaraj is delayed, it will be a loss to India, but if we lose our unity, that will be loss for the entire human race" (9). He was a respected Muslim as well as a patriot and a national leader. His politics centred around Hindu-Muslim unity. He was a torch bearer along the path of national struggle. He was interned in Ranchi until 1st January, 1920.

CONCLUSION

After detailed discussion I came to the conclusion that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was not only a great statesman, litterateur and an intellectual but also a social reformer of twentieth century India. Needless to say that he was one of the architects of modern India. His valuable ideas and thoughts will certainly benefit academicians, politicians and policy makers. Maulana's ideology, thoughts and contributions are like treasure which must be preserved. As time passes and more things are revealed his worth will be enhanced and he will achieve greater height. An intensive detailed study of his writings and academic, political, cultural and religious activities carried out by him throughout his life is required. His literary products are very much relevant today also because they give us insight in to his religious, political and sociological thoughts. To conclude it will not be an exaggeration to say that Maulana is an asset of the nation. Even today in the twenty first century modern world of science and technology we need to revisit, discuss and remember such a great personality like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad again and again for the betterment of the society. Needless to say that the limited scope of this paper does not allow more points to be made extensively on Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

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