

# Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: A Torch-bearer of Modern Education in India

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**Abstract**—*The great Indian educationists have their own contribution to the development of the educational thought in modern India. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a renowned scholar and famous poet, a brilliant orator and a great philosopher, a fearless journalist and a great statesman also pays a great regard for organizing, harmonizing and synthesizing various trends of educational philosophy in India. He stood for universal humanism, Indian nationalism and inter-community harmony in India. He made commendable contributions in nation building and institutional building, leaving his indelible imprints on the educational climate of India. Maulana Azad, the first education minister of free India, was eminently suited to lead the country in the field of education, learning and culture. He proposed scientific and technological outlook in educational system and offered India an opportunity to compete with the contemporary international educational standards. Democratization of education, maintenance of educational standards, broadening of educational outlook and promoting of mutual understanding were the four important objectives that Maulana Azad promoted as the new goals of education during his eleven years (1947-1958) of tireless struggle to construct rather reconstruct the educational edifice of free India. Maulana’s educational thoughts pertaining to various phases of education proved to be a beacon light for the educationists everywhere. His contribution to establish and strengthen the educational foundation in India is recognized by celebrating his birthday as “National Educational Day” across India. The present paper is intended to explore and deeply analyze the Azad’s character and role played in enriching India to meet the modern standards of world class education.*

**Keywords:** *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, modern education, educational standards, educational outlook, educational thoughts, scientific, democratization.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On the eve of independence, the country of India under interim government, indeed felt a need for a person of great vision and character, who may be able to adopt sound educational policies which would help, in the long run, to rejuvenate the mental saneness and balance the national life and transfuse the right values in it. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first education minister of India, occupies an important place in Indian history in this regard. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was born at Firoz Bakht to Maulana Khairud-Din (a reversed Sufi Pir of the Naqshbandi order) at Macca and grown up in Calcutta, the cradle of Bengal Renaissance. Having no faith in western education, his father never thought of giving him an education of the modern type. He held that modern education would destroy religious faith and arranged for Azad, education in the old traditional manner. At a very young age of sixteen, Azad completed *Dars-e-Nizamia* after which he came over the writings

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of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan that left upon him a profound and significant influence in the context of science and modern education.<sup>1</sup>He admitted in his writings, *Azad ki Kkahani*, Sir Syed's writings brought about an intense revolution in his thought.<sup>2</sup>Another major early influence on Azad was Ibn-i-Khaldun, the Moroccan philosopher, historian and traveller. Azad agreed with him in holding that what led to stagnation in religious and secular learning was an unquestioning acceptance of theology. He found education to be the sole means to rectify this error.<sup>3</sup>In addition to this, the French philosopher Rousseau also put a deep imprint on Azad, who agreed with him in the innate goodness of man.<sup>4</sup> Azad looked upon Rousseau as one who revolutionized entire intellectual and social life of his age.<sup>5</sup> Azad strongly felt that education is the paramount importance for the overall development of the nation. He felt that education alone can bring about democratic consolidation, social cohesiveness and sustained growth.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad is one of those rare personalities through whom the distinctions of twentieth century can be recognized and possibilities of twenty first 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 and where the youth are disciplined and women led a life of dignity. He was the first to raise the issue of the national system of education which is today the bedrock of the national policy of education. All educational programs he said must be carried out in strict conformity with secular values and constitutional framework. He was a strange mixture of medieval scholasticism, eighteenth century rationalism and modern outlook. His profound scholarly knowledge and training in the traditional Islamic sciences and his robust intellect put him on a high pedestal even among his towering contemporaries. For his invaluable contribution to the nation, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was posthumously awarded India's highest civil honor, Bharat Ratna in 1992. Pranab Mukherjee, the President of India, remarked in his speech at the National Education Day celebrations on 11 November 2013, "upon assuming the nation building task of the first ministership of education, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad set up the mammoth task of weaving the fabric of a secular, liberal, modern and universal education system".<sup>6</sup>

The role and contribution of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad could not be overlooked. His contributions towards national and intellectual life of India are multifaceted and have attracted attention of historians and scholars alike. Being a man of luminous intelligence and a mighty intellect with an amazing capacity to pierce through a problem to its core, he was appointed as India's first minister of education and inducted in the Constituent Assembly as the drafting member of the Constitution of India.<sup>7</sup> Under the ministerial patronage of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a number of measures were undertaken to promote primary and secondary education, scientific and technological education, establishment of universities and promotion of avenues regarding research and higher studies. While addressing the meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education on 15<sup>th</sup> march, 1952, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad re-emphasized the five-fold programme for the expansion of education in the country as follows:<sup>8</sup>

1. Universal compulsory basic education for all children of school age.
2. Social education for our adult illiterates.
3. Measures of improvement in the quality and expansion of faculties for secondary and higher education.

4. Scientific and technological education on a scale adequate to the needs of the nation.
5. Measures for the enrichment of the cultural life of the country and encouraging the arts and providing facilities for recreation and other eminent communities.

Maulana Azad gave emphasis to universalisation of education of highest standard and wanted, India as a whole should become literate and there should not only be village schools but also schools which will impart best form of education. He laid utmost emphasis on the importance of secular education and the significance of education in molding the character of our younger generation.

### **1.1. Democratization of Education**

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad strived to transform the department of education into a full-fledged ministry for the intent of providing leadership in the whole field of education and culture. He advocated democratization of education by following the egalitarian principle of equalizing educational opportunities in Indian society. While remaining painstaking of the common folk suffering from class discrimination and caste disabilities, Azad held state responsible for providing every individual as the means of the acquisition of knowledge and self-betterment. His commitment to education beyond caste and class is also reflected in his strident position in the constituent assembly where he talked of equalizing opportunities in the context of old caste and class prejudices. He, thus, spoke in 1948, "If they have been left behind in the sphere of progress, it is not their fault. The society is to be blamed for this. It is all the more necessary therefore that the society which has not until now placed them on an equal footing, should help in their advancement."<sup>9</sup>

Azad further emphasized that democratization of education is possible only while using national language as the media of education. Medium of instruction being the most controversial issue the education department had to face immediately after independence. Azad declared the gradual replacement of English by the languages of the people. Azad proposed that "A child should be instructed in the early stage of his education, through the medium of the mother tongue as has been accepted by the government as its policy".<sup>10</sup> He further observed that if the Indian languages have been made the medium of instruction a hundred and fifty years ago, they would have come in line with the progressive language of the world.

### **1.2. Education of Women**

Having a firm faith on African proverb, "If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation)", Azad proposed that much emphasis should be given to the education of women. He was as much concerned about the education of women as he was of men. Maulana Azad gave special stress on the teaching of modern sciences and also on the education of women. In 1949, in the Central Assembly, Maulana Azad emphasized on the importance of imparting instructions in modern sciences and technology 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 women. Education of women proved to be doubly purposeful in Azad's outlook. Firstly, they need to be educated as citizens of our country and secondly providing education to them will facilitate the education of our younger generation.

### **1.3. Broadening the Scope of Science and Technology vis-à-vis Modern Education**

Besides being the minister of education, an additional charge of the portfolio of natural resources and scientific research was put upon the shoulders of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Having full conscience about the fact that science is a systematic enterprise that builds and organizes knowledge in the form of explanations and predictions about nature and the universe, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad put much vehemence on science and technology and became a nominal force behind the establishment of Indian institutes of technology. Indian institute of technology is considered as a landmark in the progress of higher technical education and research in the country.<sup>11</sup> While inaugurating the Indian Institute of Technology in 1951, Maulana Azad in his address laid stress on three inter-related issues: brain drain, technological improvement and the consequent attainment of self-reliance. At this occasional, he also said: “We must improve the faculties for higher technical education in the country so that we could ourselves meet most of our needs. The larger number of our young men who had been going abroad for higher education could have received such training in the country itself. Indeed, I looked and still look forward to the day when facilities for technical education in India will be of such a level that people from abroad will come to India for higher scientific and technical training.”<sup>12</sup>

Maulana Azad took necessary measures to provide faculties for education in the field of science and technology. Realizing the value of scientific and technological education in the advancement of the country, Azad addressed a meeting of central advisory board on Nov. 9, 1953: “It appears to me that increasing emphasis will have to be placed on providing higher education in the fields of medicine, engineering, technology and science. Maulana Azad established and strengthened a number of scientific, literary and cultural organizations. He gave a new orientation to the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE). Strengthening of AICTE established as an advisory body. Much emphasis was also laid on the Indian institute of science. He was instrumental in transforming Vishva Bharti into a Central University in 1952 and was one of the founders and great patrons of Jamia Millia Islamia. He is also retrieved for founding of the University Grants Commission (UGC), to supervise and advance the higher education in the nation. It was result of Maulana Azad’s initiative and encouragement that a number of institutions and laboratories were established in India. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, honorable President of India, wrote about Azad: “the great impetus and encouragement he was able to give to the development of arts, literature and cultural activities and scientific research are demonstrated by the establishment of various academies and research laboratories and institutions and the commissions which were appointed from time to time to deal with the educated problems.”<sup>13</sup> As the right of children to free and compulsory education act, 2009 becomes a fundamental right, the IITS and IIS of our times nurture students into brilliant scientists whose ideas and innovations continue to establish India in the forefront of the global scientific and technological arena, we as the citizens of India need to remember that when India won freedom, the first minister for education has envisaged a truly liberal and humanitarian educational structure resting upon a base of a compulsory universal basic education and culminating into provision for modern scientific and technical education.

#### **1.4. Institutionalization of Art and Culture**

While formulating the educational policies during his ministerial tenure, Maulana Abul kalam Azad laid

much emphasis on the significance of art and culture. Azad was a great lover of music. Ghubar-e-Khatri, basically a collection of 24 letters, contains the longest letter which Azad wrote on the history of art and music to Nawab Sadar Yar Jang. From this valid proof, it is to be depicted that Azad himself was an accomplished musician. Azad wrote further in the letter about music: "I can always remain happy doing about the necessities of life, but I cannot live without music. A sweet voice is the support and prop of my life, a healing for my mental labors. Sweet music is the cure for all the ills and ailments of my body and heart."<sup>14</sup>

As in New Delhi while opening an art exhibition, Maulana Azad said that art is an education of emotions and is thus an essential element in any scheme of truly national education. Education whether at the secondary stage or at the university stage, cannot be regarded as complete if it does not train our faculties to the perception of beauty. Azad established cultural academies like Sangeet Natak Academy, Lalit Kala Academy and Shahitya Academy. While inaugurating the Indian Academy of Dance, Drama and Music on January 28, 1953, Azad said that India can be proud of long heritage and tradition in the field of drama, dance and music. Azad is of the view that achievement of India in music is greater than that of Greece. Azad felt that the government should certainly help both by material assistance and by creating an atmosphere which is congenial to art and cultural activities, but the main work of the development of literature and culture should be the responsibility of individuals endowed with talent and genius.<sup>15</sup>

Azad started the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) - an organization to establish and strengthen cultural contacts between India and other countries of the east. Besides being the hub of various journals published by the Council, the Council purchases valuable publications and disburses them in other countries to establish closer cultural contacts. Teachers and scholars are exchanged for lectures and studies in universities of India and countries of the Middle East. The patronage given to the Iran society by Azad enabled the Iranian society to carry out its project in various ways. The society celebrated the millenary of Al-Beruni and brought out Al-Beruni commemoration volume and the ICCR purchased a large number of copies of the publication for distribution among libraries and important cultural organizations of the world. This was all due to Azad's special interest in forging a happy cultural union between India and the contemporary world. Many Indian scholars are studying today in Eastern and European universities to equip themselves with modern methods of knowledge and it is all due to the financial and other help given by the ICCR under the guidance of late Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

## **2. CONCLUSION**

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a liberal humanist and a profound scholar, occupies an important position in the educational, cultural and scientific development of independent India. He is the man who totally devoted his life in discovering, synthesizing the philosophies of East and West, understanding the role of education in redefining modernity, religion and nationalism within the twentieth century Indian context. Azad institutionalized various Indian sectors including education and culture and laid the foundation of a future network of scientific and technological institutions. Maulana Azad not only just longed for a completely proficient and literate India but also of a capable citizenry and established the framework for the advancement on the proper bearing. To quote former speaker of Lok Sabha, Sir Somnath Chatterji, "we are unfortunately still to reach the

goal and to fulfill what Azad laid down as the objectives of the country's educational policy for the all-round development of the country.”

### 3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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