



CONTRIBUTION OF MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD IN THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was an educationist, freedom fighter, politician and journalist. In his more than four decades long public life, he left behind his legacy in the field of education. He established the national system of Indian Education which is still present in free India. He was honoured with India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna in 1992 after his death. He was originally named Muhiyuddin Ahmad and was born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia in 1888. After two years of his birth, his family relocated to Calcutta. His father was a renowned scholar and his mother came from a family of reputed scholars from Medina.

A highly respected scholar, he was also the first Education Minister of Independent India from 15th of August, 1947 to 2nd of February, 1958. Maulana Azad's full name was Sayyid Ghulam Muhiyuddin Ahmad bin Khairuddin Al Husain Azad. Maulana Azad completed his formal education by the age of sixteen years. Later on, he was well-versed in many languages such as Persian, Arabic, Pashto, Urdu, English, Bengali and Hindustani languages. Later on, he studied Modern Science, History, Philosophy, Politics and Mathematics with Geometry and Algebra. He was a prolific reader and mastered in Islamic Theology. He was running a library reading room and debating society before he was twelve.

At the age of fourteen, he was writing Urdu poetry, reviewing learned books and contributing articles to many well-known literary magazines of the day. In 1905, he met Maulana Shibli Nomani who took NadwatUl Ulema at Lucknow, where for some time, he edited Al Nadva. In 1906, he took up the editorship of Vakil of Amritsar. In 1912, Azad started publishing a weekly called Al-Hilal which he used to write against British policies. Al Hilal became a revolutionary mouth piece. The publication gained immense popularity among the public and the British had to finally ban it in 1914. Azad soon started another weekly 'Al Ralagh' which ran until he was booked, under defense of Indian Regulation, in 1916. The governments of Bombay, Punjab, Delhi and United Provinces had banned his entry and was deported to Bihar until October, 1920. Azad was elected as a member of the Foundation Committee to establish Jamia Millia Islamia at Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh. He assisted in shifting the campus of Aligarh to New Delhi in 1934. The main gate of the university is named after him.

Despite censoring, he found ways to rebel against British activities through the power of his writing. He was a radical and liberal for the Muslims of that time. He propagated his views through his writing and was an advocate for Indian nationalism and revolutionary ideas based on Hindu-Muslim unity. He met Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 and plunged into the Khilafat issues between 1912 and 1919. He was elected the President of Congress at the end of 1939. He served as a member of the Constituent Assembly during 1948-50 and the parliament in 1950. He was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1952 and re-elected in 1957. He was the Minister of Education during 1947-52 and the Minister of Natural Resources and Scientific Research during 1952-58. He expired on February 22, 1958. It was Abul Kalam who first raised the issues of the national system of education. It was he who shaped many of the policies, especially those related to education. He believed that India as a nation should aspire for high educational standards and never compromise on that front.

Primary Education all over the country:

He focused on the universalization of elementary education that meant elimination of illiteracy up to secondary standard and education for adult and women. In the meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education in January 1949, he talked about the National Approach of the Government towards education. He presented the first and foremost task of the National Government in the provision of free and compulsory basic education for all. Maulana Azad was committed to provide a national policy on education. His inspirational quote was “Every individual has a right to education that will enable him to develop his faculties and live a full human life. Such education is the birth right of every citizen. A state cannot claim to have discharged its duty till it has provided for every single individual means to the acquisition of knowledge and self-betterment.” About the global perspective of knowledge, Maulana Azad said in UNESCO, “Knowledge is above all limitations and boundaries. Whatever the region of the globe where it first emerged, it is the common heritage of all mankind. All human being regardless of country or nationality can lay claim to it with equal right.”

Azad has fully realized the importance of fundamental research in science and technology. He remarked, “There can be no advance in either industry or technology without fundamental research work. The scope of such research should however be extended and cover not only the scientific subject but also the humanities including philosophy, the social science, anthropology etc.” It was Azad’s encouragement that a number of institutions and laboratories of scientific research were established in a very short period of five years owing to his significant contribution in the field of science and technology. The legendary man is fondly remembered till today. Under his leadership, the first Indian Institute of Technology was established in 1951 and the University Grants Commission was established in 1953. He also assisted Jawaharlal Nehru in establishing the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research.

Along with science and technology, Maulana Azad laid equal emphasis on art, music and literature. He founded the Sangeet Natak Academy in 1953, Sahitya Academy in 1954 as well as Council for Cultural Relations. He oversaw the setting up of the Central Institute of Education, Delhi which later became the Department of Education, as a research center for solving new educational problems of the country. On his initiative between 1947 and 1958, budgetary allocation for education was raised fifteen-fold. Maulana Azad also focused on girl’s education. He emphasized on educating the rural poor and girls. On 16th January, 1948 as the Education Minister he said, “No program 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.”

As the chairman of the Central Advisory Board of Education, he gave thrust to adult literacy, universal and primary education, free and compulsory for all the children up to the age of fourteen, girls' education and diversification of secondary education and vocational training. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was an intellectual at par and his dedication to the field of education is unparalleled as he envisages a liberal and humanitarian education system. His idea was a fusion of Eastern and Western concepts to bring about wholesome and integrated personality to the education system. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana was truly a “Mir-e-Karvan”. “A very brave and gallant gentleman – a finished product of culture. His birthday on November 11, is celebrated as National Education Day. At 69 years of age, Maulana Abul Kalam passed away on February 22, 1950. Any realistic assessment of Maulana Azad's contribution to modern India will not be complete unless we look into the manner in which he reached out to his co-religionists during the freedom movement and after the advent of freedom and persuaded them to play a constructive role as the shaping of the destiny of the new liberated state. A leader is defined as a person who knows the way, who shows thee way and who goes the way. By a profound learning and a luminous intelligence, he did a good job for the country. It was the good qualities of the past and the deep learning which made Maulana Azad what he was.

The Ministry of Minority Affairs of the Central Government of India set up the Maulana Azad Educational Foundation in 1989 on the occasion of his birth centenary to promote education among the educationally backward sections of the society. The Ministry also provides the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad National fellowship, an integrated five-year fellowship in the form of financial assistance to the backward communities to pursue higher studies such as Ph.D

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