

Concept of Legacy and Ancestry of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: A Study

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Abstract

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was one of the most influential independence activists during India's freedom struggle. He was also a noted writer, poet and journalist. He was a prominent political leader of the Indian National Congress and was elected as Congress President in 1923 and 1940. Despite being a Muslim, Azad often stood against the radicalizing policies of other prominent Muslims leaders like Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Azad was the first education minister of independent India. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was posthumously awarded 'Bharat Ratna', India's highest civilian honor, in 1992.

Key words: Maulana, Activists, Congress, Independent India, Bharat Ratna.

Introduction:

This paper is made an attempt to discuss the Legacy of Maulana Azad and his ancestry. Move back to the time when India was under British rule, around the period of 1855 that is after the formation of the Indian National Congress. This period has seen the efforts, dedication and intellectual minds of various moderate leaders like CR Das, Motilal Nehru, Dada Bhai Naroji, and one important name among these names is the 'Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad.

Early life:

Azad was born on 11 November 1888 in Mecca, then a part of the Ottoman Empire, now a part of Saudi Arabia. His real name was Sayyid Ghulam Muhiyuddin Ahmed bin Khairuddin Al-Hussaini, but he eventually became known as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Azad's father was a Muslim scholar of Afghan ancestry, who lived in Delhi with his maternal grandfather, as his father had died at a very young age. During the Indian Rebellion of 1857, he left India and settled in Mecca. His father Muhammad Khairuddin bin Ahmed Al-Hussaini wrote twelve books, had thousands of disciples, and claimed noble ancestry, while his mother was Sheikha Alia bint Mohammad, the daughter of Sheikh Mohammad bin Zaher Al-Watri, himself a reputed scholar from Medina who had a reputation that extended even outside of Arabia. Azad was settled in Calcutta with his family in 1890.

Azad was home-schooled and self-taught. Following fluency in Arabic as a first language, Azad began to master several other languages including Bengali, Hindustani, Persian, and English. He was also trained in the Mazahibs of Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali fiqh, Shariat, mathematics, philosophy, world history, and science by tutors hired by his family. An avid and determined student, the precocious Azad was running a library, a reading room, and a debating society before he was twelve; wanted to write on the life of Al-Ghazali at twelve; was contributing learned articles to Makhzan (a literary magazine) at fourteen; was teaching a class of students, most of whom were twice his age, when he was fifteen; and completed the traditional course of study at the age of sixteen, nine years ahead of his contemporaries, and brought out a magazine at the same age. At the age of thirteen, he was married to a young Muslim girl, Zulaikha Begum. Azad compiled many treatises interpreting the Qur'an, the Hadis, and the principles of Fiqh and Kalam.

Early journalistic career:

Azad began his journalistic endeavours at an early age. In 1899 at the age of eleven he started publishing a poetical journal Nairang-e-Aalam at Calcutta and was already an editor of a weekly Al-Misbah in 1900. He contributed articles to Urdu magazines and journals such as Makhzan, Ahsanul Akhbar, and Khadang e Nazar.

In 1903, he brought out a monthly journal, Lissan-us-Sidq. It was published between December 1903 to May 1905 until its closure due to shortage of funds . He then joined Al Nadwa, the Islamic theological journal of the Nadwatu l-Ulama on Shibli Nomani's invitation. He worked as editor of Vakil, a newspaper from Amritsar from April 1906 to November 1906. He shifted to Calcutta for a brief period where he was associated with Dar-ul-Saltunat. He returned to Amritsar after few months and resumed the editorship of Vakil, continuing to work there until July 1908.

Struggle for Indian Independence:

In 1908, he took a trip of Egypt, Syria, Turkey and France where he came into contact with several revolutionaries such as followers of Kamal Mustafa Pasha, members of Young Turk Movement and Iranian revolutionaries. Azad developed political views considered radical for most Muslims of the time and became a full-fledged Indian nationalist. In his writing, Azad proved to be a fierce critic of both the British government and Muslim politicians; the former for its racial discrimination and refusal to provide for the needs of the Indian public, and the later for focusing on communal issues before matter of common-self-interest (Azad pointedly rejected the All-India Muslim League's communal separatism). However, his views changed considerably when he met ethnically oriented Sunni revolutionary activists in Iraq and was influenced by their fervent anti-imperialism and Arab nationalism. Against common Muslim opinion of the time, Azad

opposed the partition of Bengal in 1905 and became increasingly active in revolutionary activities, to which he was introduced by the prominent Hindu revolutionaries Aurobindo Ghosh and Shyam Sundar Chakravarty. Azad initially evoked surprise from other revolutionaries, but Azad won their praise and confidence by working secretly to organize revolutionaries' activities and meetings in Bengal, Bihar and Bombay (now called Mumbai).

Pre-Independence Activities:

As an activist demanding the reinstatement of the Caliph in Istanbul, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad came onboard with the Khilafat movement during 1920. He became involved with the Indian freedom struggle through the Non-cooperation movement initiated by Gandhi, of which the Khilafat issue was a big part of. He wholeheartedly advocated the principles of the non-cooperation movement and in the process became drawn to Gandhi and his philosophy. Although initially skeptical of Gandhi's proposal to launch an intensified drive against the British Raj demanding independence, he later joined the efforts. He travelled all over the country giving speeches and leading various programs of the movement. He worked closely with Vallabhbhai Patel and Dr. Rajendra Prasad. On August 9, 1942, Maulana Azad was arrested along with most of the Congress leadership. Their incarceration lasted for four years and they were released in 1946. During that time, the idea of an independent India had solidified and Maulana headed the Constituent Assembly Elections within Congress as well as led the negotiations with the British Cabinet mission to discuss the terms of independence. He vehemently opposed the idea of partition based on religion and was deeply hurt when the idea went forward to give rise to Pakistan.

Post-Independence Activities:

During the violence that erupted following partition of India, Maulana Azad assured to take up the responsibility for the security of Muslims in India. Towards this, Azad toured the violence-affected regions of borders of Bengal, Assam, Punjab. He helped in establishing the refugee camps and ensured uninterrupted supply of food and other basic materials. It was reported that in the crucial Cabinet meetings both Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Maulana Azad clashed over the security measures in Delhi and the Punjab.

The role and contribution of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad could not be overlooked. He was appointed as India's first Minister for Education and inducted in the Constituent Assembly to draft India's constitution. Under Maulana Azad's tenure, a number of measures were undertaken to promote primary and secondary education, scientific education, establishment of universities and promotion of avenues of research and higher studies.

Al-Hilal and Khilafat movement:

He established an Urdu weekly newspaper in 1912 called Al-Hilal from Calcutta, and openly attacked British policies while exploring the challenges facing common people. Espousing the ideals of Indian nationalism, Azad's publications were aimed at encouraging young Muslims into fighting for independence and Hindu-Muslim unity. With the onset of World War I, the British stiffened censorship and restrictions on political activity. Azad's Al-Hilal was consequently banned in 1914 under the Press Act.

In 1913, he was founding member of the Anjuman-i-Ulama-i-Bangala, which would become the Jamiat Ulema-e-Bangala branch of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind in 1921. His work helped improve the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal, which had been soured by the controversy surrounding the partition of Bengal and the issue of separate communal electorates. In this period Azad also became active in his support for the Khilafat agitation to protect the position of the Sultan of Ottoman Turkey, who was considered the Caliph or Khalifa for Muslims worldwide. The Sultan had sided against the British in the war and the continuity of his rule came under serious threat, causing distress amongst Muslim conservatives. Azad saw an opportunity to energise Indian Muslims and achieve major political and social reform through the struggle. Azad started a new journal, the Al-Balagh, which also got banned in 1916 under the Defence of India Regulations Act and he was arrested. The governments of the Bombay Presidency, United Provinces, Punjab and Delhi prohibited his entry into the provinces and Azad was moved to a jail in Ranchi, where he was incarcerated until 1 January 1920.

His Literary works:

Azad wrote many books including India Wins Freedom, Ghubar-e-Khatir, Tazkirah, Tarjumanul Quran (Urdu: ترجمانِ قرآن), etc.

Ghubar-e-Khatir:

Ghubar-e-Khatir (Sallies of Mind), (Urdu: غبارِ خاطر) is one of the most important works of Azad, written primarily during 1942 to 1946 when he was imprisoned in Ahmed Nagar Fort in Maharashtra by British Raj while he was in Bombay (now Mumbai) to preside over the meeting of All India Congress Working Committee.

The book is basically a collection of 24 letters he wrote addressing his close friend Maulana Habibur Rahman Khan Sherwani. These letters were never sent to him because there was no permission for that during the imprisonment and after the release in 1946, he gave all these letters to his friend Ajmal Khan who let it published for the first time in 1946.

Although the book is a collection of letters but except one or two letters, all other letters are unique and most of the letters deal with complex issues such as existence of God, the origin of religions, the origin of music and its place in religion, etc.

The book is primarily an Urdu language book; however, there are over five hundred of couplets, mostly in Persian and Arabic languages. It is because, Maulana was born in a family where Arabic and Persian were used more frequently than Urdu. He was born in Mekkah, given formal education in Persian and Arabic languages but he was never taught Urdu.

It is often said that his book India Wins Freedom is about his political life and Ghubar-e-Khatir deals with his social and spiritual life.

Maulana Azad as freedom fighter:

Maulana Azad was considered as the most prominent Muslim freedom fighter for independent India. He was very close to Indira and Nehru. He was arrested several times for his leadership by the British Govt. of India.

Legacy of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was a strong believer in the co-existence of all religious communities. His contributions to the field of education in India are incomparable, hence his birthday, 11 November, is celebrated as National Education Day.

In 1992, he was posthumously conferred the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award. The Ministry of Minority Affairs of the Central Government of India set up the Maulana Azad Education Foundation in 1989 on the occasion of his birth centenary to promote education amongst 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 students from minority communities to pursue higher studies such as M. Phil and PhD. now in twelve class level for girl students.

Conclusion: Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad was a renowned poet and scholar. He was very fluent in many languages and was a very good leader as he convinced many people to join the Indian Freedom fight. Azad worked for Indian nationalism and worked for the Hindu-Muslim Unity in India. He is not only remembered for his role as Freedom Fighter for Indian Independence but also as the first education minister of independent India from 1947 to 1948. On February 22, 1958, he passed away due to a stroke. For his invaluable contribution to the nation, Maulana Azad was awarded "Bharat Ratna" in 1992 which is India's

highest civilian honour in the year 1992. His birthday, 11 November is celebrated as National Education Day in India.

He is celebrated as one of the founders and greatest patrons of the Jamia Millia Islamia. Azad's tomb is located next to the Jama Masjid in Delhi. In recent years great concern has been expressed by many in India over the poor maintenance of the tomb. On 16 November 2005 the Delhi High Court ordered that the tomb of Maulana Azad in New Delhi be renovated and restored as a major national monument. Azad's tomb is a major landmark and receives large numbers of visitors annually.

Jawaharlal Nehru referred to him as Mir-i- Karawan (the caravan leader), "a very brave and gallant gentleman, a finished product of the culture that, in these days, pertains to few". Mahatma Gandhi remarked about Azad by counting him as "a person of the caliber of Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras".

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