

Educational Thoughts of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

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Abstract: This paper is based upon my earlier paper entitled “National Concepts of Abul Kalam Azad” which I had presented at the Department of Urdu, University of Delhi some one and a half decades earlier. I think the theme is much relevant today and therefore the new generation must be abreast with his concept upon education. This is because I had focused in my earlier paper that “Abul Kalam Azad wanted to revive education in a way that would awaken the psycho-social feelings among the masses will lead to develop shared citizenship which ultimately will develop cohesion among different communities. As a result, secular outlook among the masses will be promoted with the essence of tolerance and broad-mindedness”.

I understand that Abul Kalam Azad was the advocator of unity among the the East and the West, for the enlightenment of knowledge and wisdom, in such a manner, that, no contemporary educationists have ever came up to his ideas uptill today and hence, his ideas of education was in sync with the idea of a nation that India wanted to develop. The present article has taken a cue from the previous article and have tried to re-look at the ideas of education that Abul Kalam Azad, as a minister of education wanted develop.

Key Words: Education#Intellectual abilities#Minister of Education#Education system#Darul Uloom Deoband#Agricultural education#Democratic education system

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and his personality:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was a multi-faceted personality. He was much more than just a political leader. He was such a genius scholar that Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru did not thought to make him other than the Education Minister, as his educational thought was in sync with the thought a Nation that India wanted to be developed. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was made the Minister of Education on 15th January, 1947. The steps taken by him with the strong support of Prime Minister Mr. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru as the Minister of Education were extraordinary. At a time when the situation in the country was different, it was not easy to establish any kind of education system. The whirlpool of opposition from all directions was engulfed. It was up to the reformer of the nation and the educationist like Abul Kalam Azad to get India out of such situations and solve the problems. This was possible only through the education and its policy. This is why, Pandit Motilal Nehru had once said about him that

“Maulana's elements are not fire, water, soil and air but knowledge, thought, understanding and prudence”.

Similarly, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has also written while expressing his opinion that

“I have used the knowledge and grace of Maulana, but sometimes in front of Maulana's knowledge and study, I see my knowledge as a drop of water in front of the river”.

Looking to the work of Abul Kalam Azad one can find that he has openly expressed his views upon different aspects such as religious, scientific, literary, journalistic and political issues. Despite the vastness of his mental and intellectual abilities, we have not been able to make as much use of their thinking and enlightenment as we should have. This is one of the reasons why Nazeer Siddiqui had to say that "Maulana Azad was rewarded less for being extraordinary or extremely great and punished more". Whereas, Dr. Zakir Hussain has written about him that “there was no such abuse in Urdu language which was not given to him”. Maulana Shibli Nomani called him 'a marvel of employment brain', Muhammad Ali Johar described him as 'a masterpiece of Arabic genius and non-Arabic genius who discovered Islam lost in India' and Rasheed Ahmed Siddiqui called him 'the second of Aligarh' Sir Syed, but the truth is that we did not pay their dues, we did not benefit from his care and attention and we were unable to fulfill the responsibilities that were imposed on us after his death.

It was not that he was just praised for his thoughts and literary acumen. He was also opposed for his progressive thoughts even from his own community members. While he was travelling, the students of Muslim University, Aligarh stopped the train at Aligarh railway station and treated him badly just because of his progressive thoughts.

Azad during his eleven year tenure as Minister of Education, the manner in which Azad led, the way in which he tried to uplift the mental and intellectual ability of people of India. He expressed that his abilities in fulfilling the cultural requirements that India needs to develop, is the result of the omnipresence, foresight and intellectuality of his personality.

Azad and his educational ideology:

To understand Abul Kalam Azad's educational ideology, one has to understand his educational ideas before he joined as a education minister. This is because, his educational ideas came into being long before he took over the ministry. He has stated his position in great detail in his article "Muslims of India and the Government's Education Policy"(Al Hilal, vol-II, 4th June 1913) and mentions that the new educational reforms in Europe, gives priority to the study of literature rather than the teaching of physics. He believed that "nations are generally formed and degraded by the development and decline of language". Therefore, in his article, he considered the teaching of geography, arithmetic and science as essential but the teaching of language, literature and history as a must. Expressing surprise and regret over the government's education policy, before his becoming education minister, he also had accused the government of failing to promote the education as a 'system' with a flawed policy.

In one of the article, Maulana Azad praised the scholarly acumen of European philosophy of education, its standards and education system and has tried to explain what should be the standard of a university in India. This article is based exclusively on the 2nd May 1913 circular issued by the then government on Muslim education. Maulana Azad while reprimanding this circular has written that

"If this educational manifesto is implemented in their circumstances and the real and fundamental difficulties remain as it is, then Muslims should make it clear that this so-called reform circular is not a panacea for their pain."

Maulana Azad, while pointing out the shortcomings of this circular, termed it as disappointing and in proof of his claim, while analyzing the teaching method of twentieth century Europe, sheds light on the real purpose of education and also to make it credible. His ideas of education aimed to develop an individual to make significant progress according to their intellectual capacity and physical abilities. In the inaugural meeting of the Madrasa Islamia, Calcutta, which was held in 1941, although, related to the religious education system, Azad's educational ideas and future prospects can be explored. In this inaugural meeting, he commented that

"Among the damages that public education has inflicted on our national character and deeds in India, the greatest loss is that the higher purpose of acquiring knowledge has been obscured from our view."

At that time there was no better system of educational awareness and the people were not willing to flow into the mainstream of Western thought. They were hated stepping outside the boundaries of eastern education. Therefore, the people continued to consider the outdated curriculum of education as the source of education and for this they kept burning insenseticks or 'agarbati'. In such smoke the real purpose of life gets blurred. Maulana Azad has also expressed concern in this regard that

"What was the condition of the education itself in which all the primitive times were spent? Even if the answer is given briefly, the pages would turn black, an outdated system of education which from the point of view of the eye, completely has become sterile. Poor in terms of teaching method, poor in terms of subjects, poor in terms of selection of books ... "

Maulana Azad had a sense of poor education system even in his early days of education, even after that and even after taking over the ministry post. This was the reason why after getting the ministry,

he started making changes in the field of education on a war footing. He changed the education and curriculum system from school level to university level. He wanted to establish a democratic education system from the confluence of modern and ancient sciences which would help in the awareness of both Mecca and Somnath. On this initiative of Maulana, Muhammad Hassan has written that

"The education policy that Maulana gave to the country has undoubtedly not been able to eradicate general illiteracy and ignorance in the country, but it is certain that today our country is in the whole region after Japan and China in scientific education."

(‘Aiwan e Urdu’ Azad Number, page-115, December 1988)

Maulana Azad's educational ideas were not limited to mere ideas, but he also put his ideas into practice and tried to implement them. He has given approximately 54 lectures on educational topics which are not only an expression of the Government's education policy but also an expression of his own thinking. In May, 1952 when Maulana Azad was given the additional responsibility of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Scientific Research, he delivered a number of lectures even on scientific topics. Thus, from 1947 to 1956, he covered and addressed most aspects of educational issues and, as a minister, made important decisions. All such lectures were published in book by the Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India on January, 1956. These lectures help us to understand the educational views of Maulana Azad. Going through these lectures one can find that Maulana Azad's focus was not only focused upon school education but also upon university education including the realm of educational thought upon fine arts, agriculture, sports and other fields. His academic ideas cover not only the Indian context but also

upon the comparative literary and educational contexts of other countries. It provides a comprehensive ideas of his wider views of education that he was well aware of. Speaking at a meeting of the Vice Chancellors of Indian Universities on 3rd November, 1951, he spoke of promoting agricultural education and complained that

“there was no reasonable balance between agriculture and industry in India, which has a profound effect on our economic life. We must find ways to increase land production by promoting agricultural education so that we can stockpile for the future and not suffer from declining productivity in this growing population.”

Azad and the harmonization of educational methods:

In the same way, his other lectures and articles also reflect upon his educational ideas. He discusses the Eastern and Western methods of education and highlights the usefulness and importance of both methods of education and the nature of the differences between the two. One can find that the West has developed its education system through the use of scientific knowledge, the East has kept a close eye on esoteric matters and has developed morally. However, Maulana Azad wanted to promote a new type of education by harmonizing the educational methods of East and West, so that the people of this country could reach new heights of development.

Azad was not only a supporter of modern methods of education but also wanted to train the students of this country in the field of religious oriental studies and modern western education. Training that instills a sense of unity, solidarity and understanding among the students of the country. That is why he kept his eyes on basic education. Maulana Azad was also keen on technical education in

madrassas. For the same purpose, he organized a conference of the leaders of Darul Uloom Deoband and the scholars of religious schools in Lucknow. He emphasized on following the style of curriculum in Madarsa also. In this regard, the importance of Maulana Azad is further enhanced by the fact that as a Minister of Education, the curriculum and modules, no other Minister of Education has given as much emphasis on improvement as he had done so far. Therefore, his initiative or goodwill is less to be appreciated.

Maulana Azad's generous heart or his educational service that he established high quality scientific institutes in this country. In order to arouse interest in the useful sciences, he set up institutes and academies for the promotion of the fine arts. Maulana Azad considered education as a fundamental right of all the people of India irrespective of race and religion. Therefore, there was no distinction between men and women in their eyes. He cared for girls as much as he thought education was necessary for boys, but he also thought of girls' education as "their education trains the whole generation". Similarly he was willing to educate adults. Regarding this he focused on establishment of evening Schools for the adults and he had said in his reply in the Parliament session on 5th February, 1951 that

"These schools have been set up where other basic facilities are provided to them and these schools are not for any particular caste but for the elderly persons of all nations ... One hundred and fifty such schools have been opened in Delhi. ... In the next five years, more schools will be opened in different parts of Delhi....This type of school is based on the principle of social studies aimed at making illiterate people literate and improving their quality of life."

Maulana Azad was full of upbringing spirit of new generation. His educational insight can also be gauged from his idea that

"art, literature, science and philosophy have combined to create an oasis of peace and goodwill in the desert of war and strife."

Education and the development of emotions and civility:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was a freedom fighter, writer, journalist and religious scholar as well as a true educationist who gave the right direction and momentum to the national education. A large part of his life was spent for unity and educational betterment. The manner in which the integrated education system is outlined is no less than a beacon for us. In his eyes, education was a means of preparation for life. He did not consider education to be merely a means of mental awakening but called education over all development of emotions and civility. He was convinced of the all-round development of individuals through education. In his view, education was not a means of income but the purpose of life and a mission through which man attains survival. The main purpose of education before him was to believe in God, to promote brotherhood, to promote national harmony and human equality. Till 22nd February, 1958 he continued to work in the field of education. His educational ideas were based on the idea that "no democracy and its system can be established without eradicating ignorance". With this basic idea, he struggled all his life for national education. In his address to the All India Education Conference to be held on 16th January, 1948, he said that "We must not forget for a moment that at least basic education is the birthright of every Indian and without which he cannot exercise his right to be an Indian citizen."

Maulana Azad was a believer in the ancient method of teaching in the field of education, but he put a lot of emphasis on the renewal of the curriculum and considered it an important need of the time. He

did not consider reading a few thematic books to be sufficient for knowledge, so he often insisted on keeping in touch with different sciences. He also considered science and technology to be the most important need of the time. Therefore, on 16th October, 1951 he told Qari Tayyab, a teacher at Darul Uloom Deoband that

"Include the advances in science and technology, philosophy, social sciences and economics in your curriculum so that there is a confluence of religious and secular thought."

Conclusion:

Maulana considered the role of teachers as very important in the process of independent humanization along with curriculum, books and other technical methods. He believed that the teacher played a vital role in improving education, culture and morals. Therefore, it is the duty of the government to take care of its needs. Maulana Azad did not attach any importance to anything other than education for nation building and establishment of democracy. Thus, he promoted peace and unity with his educational ideas, clarified and broadened the possibilities of the future and gave priority to education for the strengthening of human relations. Maulana Azad's educational ideas are the basis of all education activities in the country today.

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