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MAHILA KALA MAHAVIDYALAY, AURANGABAD

(Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University, Mumbai)

Organized One Day Interdisciplinary National Conference

on

Thoughts and Works of Indian Social Reformers

:: Editor in Chief ::

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MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD: THE SOCIAL REFORMER

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INTRODUCTION:

This Paper focuses on contribution of Abul Kalam Ghulam Muhiyuddin Ahmed bin Khairuddin Al-Hussaini Azad renown as 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.

Objectives of Study:

1. To study contribution of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.
2. To study Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as a social reformer.

Life of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was born on 11 November 1888 and he was an Indian independence activist, Islamic theologian, writer and a senior leader of the Indian National Congress. Following India's independence, he became the First Minister of Education in the Indian government. He is commonly remembered as **Maulana Azad**; the word Maulana is an honorific meaning 'Our Master' and he had adopted *Azad (Free)* as his pen name. His contribution to establishing the education foundation in India is recognised by celebrating his birthday as National Education Day across India.

As a young man, Azad composed poetry in Urdu, as well as treatises on religion and philosophy. He rose to prominence through his work as a journalist, publishing works critical of the British Raj and espousing the causes of Indian nationalism. Azad became the leader of the Khilafat Movement, during which he came into close contact with the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi. Azad became an enthusiastic supporter of Gandhi's ideas of non-violent civil disobedience, and worked to organise the non-co-operation movement in protest of the 1919 Rowlatt Acts. Azad committed himself to Gandhi's ideals, including promoting Swadeshi products and the cause of Swaraj (Self-rule) for India. In 1923, at an age of 35, he became the youngest person to serve as the President of the Indian National Congress.

In October 1920, Azad was elected as a member of foundation committee to establish Jamia Millia Islamia at Aligarh in U. P. without taking help from British colonial government. He assisted in shifting the campus of the university from Aligarh to New Delhi in 1934. The main gate (Gate No. 7) to the main campus of the university is named after him. Azad was one of the main organizers of the Dharasana Satyagraha in 1931, and emerged as one of the most important national leaders of the time, prominently leading the causes of Hindu-Muslim unity as well as espousing secularism and socialism. He served as Congress president from 1940 to 1945, during which the *Quit India* rebellion

was launched. Azad was imprisoned, together with the entire Congress leadership. He also worked for Hindu–Muslim unity through the Al-Hilal newspaper. Azad grew as a highly skilled man having knowledge of religion. While he had a respect for it, he was not satisfied with the old and traditional approach. He was an ardent supporter of rational thinking. He thought that the processes of enlightenment will liberate people from old and superstitious thinking. His firm belief in modernity stemmed from the idea that the scientific knowledge and rationality would be able to remove many evils in a country like India.

Azad wanted to revolutionize the education system in India. He was an ardent supporter of the emancipation process. He saw so many intricate flaws because of the orthodoxy that prevailed in most parts in the country. There is an opinion among scholars that Azad had personally nothing much to do with education, and it was Nehru who handed over the task to him. No doubt Azad accepted the responsibility on the insistence of Nehru and Gandhi. However, he was a qualified person to take on the responsibility for the same. They were aware of the fact that Azad was keenly committed to education, culture and scientific and technical progress. If there were some mistakes and limitations in his work, Nehru always came forward positively to take care of them. Though Azad was not a professional educationist like Tagore and Gandhi, his impact on education was vast. In a newly independent India, there was a need for a person who had an immense vision and character and who might have been able to judge the situation correctly. In addition, the person should have been able to implement the sound educational policies which would help infuse its citizens with the right values.

After the Independence of India in 1947, when he took over the ministry of education, which included science and culture, he presided over this ministry for a decade. Education for Azad meant nothing less than man's being and becoming, derived from both religion and humanism. Education, science and culture have a unique role to play in making the new India of our dreams, with its rich composite culture, its precious unity in the midst of valuable diversities, its overall national integrity, its abiding values of truth, justice and tolerance, and its unique capacity to synthesis the cultures of the East and the West into a new and creative blend that preserves the best of the part, along with the eager pursuit of new paths of progress to enrich the quality of our lives. Let us all work together to eradicate illiteracy and ignorance, laziness and poverty, so that our country can take an equitable place in the comity of nations.

Azad understood that the introduction of adult franchise for a national program of education should stress the rights and duties of citizenship and the ability to participate in national development. There ought to be a difference between the citizens of independent India and the colonial subjects of foreign rule. This change could be only possible through the program of mass education. He established a section of social education as one of his first measures. Azad emphasized the role of education in national development and inspired the growth of science and technology. During an opening address at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur in August 1951, he said: One of the first decisions I took on assuming charge as minister was that we must so improve the facilities for higher technical education in the country that we would ourselves meet most of our needs. The large number of our young men who have been going abroad for higher training could have received such training in the country itself. Indeed I looked and still look forward to the day when the facilities of technical education in India will be of such level that people from abroad will come to India for higher scientific and technical training.

Azad gave special stress on the education of women. In 1949, in the central assembly 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 women.” Further talking about women’s education that had been most marginalized, Azad argued that it was important for two reasons: first, women need education as citizens of free India. Second, their education makes the task of educating the younger generation easy. As a first union minister of education Azad made a unique contribution and stressed on the necessity of starting programs and policies for the speedy, all-round and inclusive development of educational facilities in the country.

After joining the interim government in January 1947, Azad left his legacy for Indian education system by establishing various institutions and organizations. He appointed University Education Commission in 1948 and the Secondary Education Commission in 1952. He recognized All-India Council for Technical Education, established the University Grants Commission in 1953, and The Indian Institute of Science. To strengthen cultural relations between India and other countries, Indian Council for Cultural Relations was established. To provide an advanced training and to conduct research, a National Institute of Basic Education was established. To review the progress in the field of secondary education, an All-India Council for Secondary Education was constituted. A Central Bureau of Textbook Research was established. To promote research and training programs, a Central Bureau of Educational and Vocational Guidance was established. A National Council for Rural Higher Education was set up in 1956. To upgrade the teacher training programs, the Central Institute of Education was established. Library services were extended in various parts of the country. Azad occupies a key position in the educational, cultural and scientific development of modern India.

CONCLUSION:

The core of his educational thinking is Islamic, but it is modified in the light of his knowledge of modern educational thought in the West and in India. The impact of the West on his thinking is seen significantly at his work and in his attempt to model a new system of child education in India. As a member of the constituent assembly and Minister of education, he played an important role in the enactment of 'Right to Education'. He expressed his thought, "Every individual has the right to an education that will enable him to develop his faculties and live a fully human life. Such education is the birthright of all citizen. A State cannot claim that it has fulfilled its obligations until it enable itself to provide for every single individual the prolific ways to the acquisition of knowledge and selfbetterment. Moulana Azad stressed the importance of primary education for the future welfare of the people. He emphasized on the speedy progress of adult education and observed that without education, electorate democracy could not perform the functions expected of it. Therefore he wanted the scope of adult education should also include provision for Social education.

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