

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Indian Freedom Movement: A Historical Study

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Abstract

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was one of the outstanding Muslim thinkers of Modern India. He was an embodiment of great courage, fearlessness, integrity and ardent love of freedom. Azad came out to the cause of country with a stride and a style of his own. He was an Indian scholar and a senior political leader of the Indian independence movement. Following India's independence, he became the first Minister of Education in the Indian government. In 1992 he was posthumously awarded India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna. 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 November 11th as "National Education Day" across India.

Keywords: *Lisan al Sidq, Al-Balagh, Rbbubiyat, Maulana, Nairang-e-alam, Al-Hilal, Khilafat, Paigham, Vakil, Traditionalism, humanitarian.*

Introduction

Mohiyuddin Ahamad was born in Mecca in 1888. His pen name was Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. (Syed Shihabuddin, 1991). Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was known as the leader of the freedom movement, journalist, an eminent scholar, as a religious thinker, and a great writer. He had a deep sense of freedom, and he considered it as a birthright. He utilized all his energies in India's national unity and freedom. He played an important role as the president of Indian national congress and as minister of education. Maulana Azad had a traditional education from his father and other teachers. After he had completed the traditional courses of studies, at the age of twelve, he began contributing articles to Indian journals and assisting in the editing of papers. At sixteen, he brought about his own paper '*Lisan al Sidq*' and such great scholars as Shibli and Hali marveled at the maturity of his scholarship (Tara Chand, 1972). Sir Syed's rationalism and developed a great respect for the great medieval scholars and reformers like Al-Ghazzali and Ibn-Taimiyah, who were not popular in the religious circles of India. They had been great critics of Greek logic and philosophy, which were regarded as the bases of Islamic theological dialectics (Ravindra Kumar, 1991). After the death of his father, he undertook a journey to Islamic countries like Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Turkey in 1908. There

he came in contact with the reformatory religious and political movements initiated by Jamaluddin Afghani, Sheik Muhammad Abdu, Syed Pasha, and young Turks. He returns to India filled with revolutionary ideas, which pervaded the Muslim world.

He had been deeply impressed by Sir. Syed Ahamad Khan but never argued with his political views. In 1905, Lord Curzon's decision to partition of Bengal led to unprecedented political agitation. Aurobindo Ghosh's paper 'Karmayogi' became a symbol of national awakening and revolt. At that time, Maulana was 17-18 years of age. He, however, joined the agitation against the partition of Bengal. He said, "In fact, all the revolutionary groups were then actively anti-Muslim. They saw that the British were using the Muslims against India's political struggle, and the Muslims were playing the government's game. The revolutionaries felt that the Muslims were an obstacle to the attainment of Indian freedom and must like other obstacles be removed"(Maulana Azad, 1992).

Maulana Azad started an Urdu weekly *Al-Hilal* in June 1912. It was not merely 'a turning point in the history of 'Urdu journalism' but a landmark in the Indian freedom struggle. He said that "*Al-Hilal* created a revolutionary stir among the masses." It was not Longley a new language in thought and approach; even its texture was different, for his style was terse and virile though sometimes a little difficult because of its Persian background. This very youthful writer and journalist caused a sensation in Muslim intellectual circles, and though the elders frowned upon them, his words created a ferment in the minds of the younger generation (Jawaharlal Nehru, 1981.)

He gave an inspiring message to Indian Muslims through *Al-Hilal* which had two main objectives; firstly to revive in the true spirit of religion and to recognize their religious and social life and, secondly to infuse in them the spirit of freedom and to persuade them to join the national movement of the congress in its struggle for achieving self-government. He clearly thought that national freedom could be won only through the nation's own efforts (S.S. Hameed, 1990). *Al-Hilal* was regarded by the government as a propagator of dangerous views, especially concerning the war. Its security deposit was forfeited, and in 1914 it had to cease publication. During war had broken out in 1914, and the *Al-Hilal* press was confiscated in 1915. After five months, he started a new journal called *Al-Balagh*, but its life also was too short. In 1913 Maulana Azad founded an association named Hizbullah, with the purpose of awakening freedom sentiments among the Muslims and to prepare them for actual armed struggle against the foreign power (K.A.Nizami, 1990).

The Khilafat Movement and Azad

Mahatma Gandhiji decided to support to the Khilafat movement as this was to him an opportunity of uniting the Hindus and Muslims. In 1919, November 26, Gandhiji was elected president of the All India Khilafat Conference at Delhi. The Khilafat committee sprang up all over India (S.N.Sen, 1994).

On February 28-29, 1920, Maulana Azad presided over the Khilafat Conference at Calcutta. A resolution passed at the conference under his chairmanship to boycott British goods and co-operation of non-Muslim countrymen as sought. As president of Khilafat conference in 1925, he advised the Khilafath committee to maintain its organization but to give up the idea of reviving the Khilafat and to work for the education, social reform, and economic progress of Muslims. Addressing the All India Khilafat Conference at Kanpur on 24 December 1926, he said, "The Khilafat committees should ally themselves with the congress organization for the furtherance of the national program." He thought that interest in the movement of the Islamic world deepens the desire for freedom in India. He wrote; "In Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, the Muslims were engaged in revolutionary activities for the achievement of democracy and freedom" (Maulana Azad, 1992).

Maulana Azad was elected Indian National Congress on 15th September 1923 when he was 35 years of age and was the youngest man to be elected president. Azad elected the second time on March 17, 1940. He continued to hold that office till 7th July 1946. These six years of Maulana's office were characterized by hectic political developments.

Religious views of Azad

He was born in an extremely orthodox family of Sufis and divines and was brought up to lead a religious life. He had begun work on his commentary on the Quran in 1916, and the vicissitudes of his career served only to confirm him all the more in his faith. He considered the Quran as the real basis of the faith, and it inspired all his thinking. Addressing a symposium on the concept of man, he said. "God marks the highest limit of human thought. By identifying man with god, the Eastern concept of man elevates him to godhead. Man has, therefore, no other goal but to re-establish his identity with God. He thus becomes superior to the entire creation" (Moin Shakir, 1983). Explaining the basic principles underlying his religious approach, Maulana Azad remarks in *Tarjuman-ul-Quran*: "Distinction is, no doubt, usually made between the old and the new learning's. But in my search of truth, his distinction has never counted with me. The old I have received as my heritage and the new is as familiar to me as the old, as I have delved in both" (Maulana Azad, 1990).

The conflict between modernity and tradition was in the very early years of his intellectual career but disappeared completely thereafter. He developed an integrated approach, based on a clear and dynamic appraisal of all trends of thought, past and present. For him, human thought was a continuous process of response and reaction and could not be dichotomized into past and present, modernity and tradition. His religious ethics and secular ideals marched hand in hand. He studied religion both as a 'personal morality' and as a 'social ideal' and combined the two in a broader framework of human struggle for better social order and presented rationally integrated solutions of problems. James Pratt, a well-known author on

religious psychology, has discussed four temperamental kinds of religion: traditional, rational, mystical and practical. Maulana Azad had his own categorization. He Says:

“One religion is hereditary, and you believed in it because your forefathers had believed in it. Another type of religion is geographical; you believe in that because it is the path chosen by the people of a particular geographical area, and you follow it like others of that area did. There is yet another type of religion, which based on the census. There is a column of religion in census-papers, and you just get Islam entered in it. There is the customary religion-a structure of customs and ceremonies, which you should not disturb, but allow yourself to be molded by it. But besides all these types, there is one another but real religion which is generally lost site of in assessment of religious attitudes” (K.A.Nizami,1990). According to the Azad, this last type of religion is the result of the inner quest of man to unlock the mysteries of nature and to understand God, man, and the universe through his own intellectual effort. Maulana Azad’s own religion was of this last category and was the result of his personal adventure in the realm of thought and emotions.

The cornerstone of Maulana’s religious ideology is the Quranic concept of Rububiyat. God’s bounty as the nourishes of the world is for all. He makes no discrimination whatsoever in His creatures. The sun rises and gives light and warmth to the rich and the poor, the pious and the erring alike. The clouds pour water on the palace and the cottage without any discrimination. The river keeps its bosom open to all. These are expressions of Rbbubiyat, and it is incumbent on man to emulate these in his dealings with other human beings. The system of universal providence should inspire a man to adopt an attitude of benevolence towards all his creatures. He remarks: “The fact is that the basis of work ship according to the Quran rests on the idea that the aim of human life is to reflect in one’s own thought and activity the attributes of God”.(Maulana Azad,1990).

Azad’s matures thought appears in the *Tarjuman-ul-Quaran*, the first volume of which was published in 1931. Azad had to deal with the religious attitudes of his day, which believed in the humanitarian role of religion. Maulana Azad some very vital ideas about tafsir, and wanted to write a separate volume on the principle of tafsir, but he could not undertake it. He has, however, given in a succinct manner, the basic principles of his approach in this regard.

1. The Quran has a form of presentation that is characterized by naturalness and direct appeal to basic human instinct and intellect, uncorrupted by ratiocinative tendencies. It is opposed to artificiality “Wadha-iyat” of every type and expects the man to view things in their natural simplicity and purity.
2. The attitude of philosophy disquisitions and discussion is alien to the Quranic spirit scholars like Imam Fakhurddin Razi adopted philosophic arguments to support the Quranic ideas. The Imam

“invested the Quranic word with an absolutely novel import”, remarks (Maulana Azad, 1990) the Maulana.

3. The Quran should be interpreted, as the early generations of Islam understood it. Later generations were influenced by Greek and Iranian traditions and sought to present the Quran in the terminology of the day. The subject of the Quran is not Greek philosophy, and these Greek terms were unknown when the Quran was vouchsafed to mankind. The import of Greek terms in the Quranic exegetical literature obscured the real meanings of the Quran. This approach was wrong and harmful as the efforts of the present generation to interpret the Quran in terms of every new development in the science of the Cosmos. (K.A.Nizami, 1990).
4. Traditionalism and adherence to conservative patterns, which overtook Islamic learning after the fourth-century A.H, killed the spirit of Ijtihad and fresh interpretation.
5. The Muslim schools of jurisprudence and a group of Sufis attempted Quranic interpretation in support of their own viewpoints.
6. The Quran cannot be understood without insight into Arabic lexicon and semantics. In this emphasis, Maulana Azad precedes the studies of Izutsu.
7. The Quran asks the man to think and ponder but does not permit Aristotelian methods of assertion and refutation.

It is round these seven basic principles that Maulana Azad has sought to interpret the Quran.

The Orientation of Muslim Religious Education and Institutions

Maulana Azad felt very acutely the need of re-orientating the syllabus of Muslim Religious institutions and giving a new forward pull to Muslim intellectual activity. In his address (February 22; 1947) to Muslim scholars involved in instruction in religious Sciences-including, the Arabic and the Persian languages-Maulana advised total reorientation of syllabi (K.A.Nizami, 1990). This he thought necessary in order to do away with the spirit of taqlid and initiate an era of original religious thinking in the Muslim religious classes in India.

Azad was keen to inculcate the Spirit of independent inquiry and assessment in the institutions of Muslim religious learning. His main motto was to adopt the best, to reject the redundant and the obsolete. He firmly believed that India could not do without some sort of religious education because the mold of the Indian mind is basically religious.

Moulana Azad as a Journalist

As a journalist cum editor, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had numerous celebrating of his own certainly his contribution in making the status high of the age-old and dilapidated journalism by connecting it from the modern era. Azad's journalism was not only occupational, but it contained in it the anxieties of

the country and was entirely tied by the religious ideals. Azad successfully edited at least half a dozen newspapers in the first three decades of this century.

Abul Kalam Azad embarked on his journalistic career at an incredible age of eleven. He made his debut in 1899, with *Nairang-e-alam*, (S.S.Hameed, 1990) a monthly poetic journal, which ran for three to four months. At the end of 1900 he edited a weekly newspaper known as *Al-Misbah*. This also lasted only for three to four months. In May 1902, he contributed an article on the power of press to Makhzan (S.S.Hameed, 1990). He edited newly added prose section of a monthly poetic journal *Khadang-e-Nazer* published in Luck now.

Azad also has edited another journal *Edward Gazette* of Shahjehanpur sometime between 1902 and 1903. His article, "Islam and Muharram" which sharply attracted the rituals connected with Muharram provoked strong reactions from the Shias. Azad's journalist career really started when he launched the first regular journal *Lisan-ul-sidq*, which was published between November 28, 1903 to May of 1905 (S.S.Hameed, 1990). Only twelve issues have released out within the period of its publication. Azad's association with Shibili Numani was a remarkable turning point in his later intellectual development. Shibili invited Azad to Luck now to assist him in the editing of *Al-Nadwa*, an organ of *Nadwat-ul-Ulema*. It was a journal of Islamic theology and civilization.

Azad edited the paper *Vakil* from April, 1906 to November 1906. His second spell as editor of *Vakil* covered the period from August/September, 1907 to August 1908. He wrote articles on Aligarh, Turkish and Egyptian political situation. He changed the paper to a bi-weekly, and its circulation increased almost by double. After leaving *Vakil*, Azad explored the possibility of launching an independent paper of his own. Having considered the circumstances prevailing in India and the Muslim world, he took a momentous decision and launched *Al-Hilal* in July, 1912 (Ravindra Kumar, 1991). Azad had modeled his journal on the pattern of the Arabic papers particularly published from Egypt. The mission of *Al-Hilal* was to promote the Muslims to follow the teachings of Islam. Addressing the Muslims, he wrote in *Al-Hilal*, "For Hindus to fight for independence was a patriotic act but for Muslims it was certainly a religious duty" (S.S.Hameed, 1990). He was also influenced with the religious attitudes of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, whether he was an opponent of his imaginative process by poetical outlook and advocated the modern form of religion. That's why the columns of *Al-Hilal* expected from the Indian Muslims that they would abandon those non-Islamic factors. In 1915 the government seized '*Al-Hilal*' the Maulana Azad in the same year started editing another newspaper *Al-Balagh* (Ravindra Kumar, 1991).

Al-Balagh was no different in spirit from *Al-Hilal*, though there was a greater emphasis in it on the ethical philosophy of Islam. The object of *Al-Balagh* was to publish two types of articles, one set for the learned and another set for the general public. Some of the special articles related to "Islam and Socialism", "Impact of war on Morality", "Greek influence of Islam", etc. The underlying message of all these was Islam

and its meaning. *Al-Balagh* exhorted the Muslims to stand up and to fight against injustice. Abul Kalam Azad attacked the stronghold of conservatism and ant-nationalism, not directly, but by spreading ideas, which undermined the Aligarh tradition. This very youthful writer and journalist caused a sensation in Muslim intellectual circles and though the elders frowned upon him, his words created ferment in the minds of the younger generation (Jawaharlal Nehru, 1981).

Azad made two other efforts to embark on journalistic ventures; one in September, 1921 when he launched the weekly *Paigham*, and the other in June, 1927 when he revived *Al-Hilal*. The drawback in both these ventures was that Azad had little time to spare of journalism. *Paigham* propagated the ideas of non-cooperation and Khilafat. Although this paper expounded Islam's basic principles, its emphasis was on current politics. During the period he also launched a fortnightly, *Al-Jamia* in Arabic on April 1, 1923. It lasted until March 1924. This was the first Indian Journal in Arabic. Its main purpose was to keep the Arab world informed of the Political activities in India. Its basic theme was similar to that of *Paigham*, *Al-Hilal*'s message of Pan-Islamism and the unity of the East was echoed in *Al-Jamia*. In this way, his life's one important factor/aspect is the sphere of his journalism, which inspires us to understand the skill of his rationality.

Conclusion

Maulana Azad's role as a religious thinker cannot be overemphasized. He rejected obscurantism, fanaticism and blind adherence to tradition. He stood for free and independent enquiry of religious verities and truths without any inhibitions. He looked upon religion both as a 'personal morality' and a 'social ideal'. For him religion was a force to integrate human society rather than to disintegrate it. It stood for service of humanity not for creating tensions and divisions. He firmly believed that India could not do without some sort of religious education because the mould of Indian mind is basically religious. He illustrated both in his thought and in his action that the religious spirit was basically humanitarian, cosmopolitan and stood for the welfare of mankind.

The Maulana was a man of letters. He had a good command over Arabic and Persian literature. He wrote thought provoking articles in his journal *Al-Hilal*. Though his journal '*Al-Hilal*' Azad deeply inspired the Muslims of India in favor of national politics. He believed that religious freedom was meaningless without political freedom. His meditative frame of mind and studious nature made him a proficient writer. As a writer he showed his magnum opus 'India wins freedom'. In which he gave his reminiscences and reaction to the Indian freedom, movement in a very lucid style. His mastery over language is noteworthy that proves him a good writer. It is thus clear that Azad was a man of vigorous and dynamic personality. He stood for the ideals of national unity, probity in administration and economic progress. He was not only one of the great scholars of the Quran but also by virtue of his command over Arabic and Persian he was held in high esteem as Quranic interpreter in the countries of the Middle East and Africa.

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