

# MAULANA ABDUL KALAM AZAD'S JAIL EXPERIENCES: A BRIEF STUDY

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“Give me the maximum punishment that can be awarded without hesitation. I assure you that the pain that your heart will feel while writing the order, not a hundredth part of it will be felt by me while hearing the judgment.”

“Poochte kya ho bood-o-baash ka haal;  
Ham hain baashinde Jail khaane”

## ABSTRACT

*Maulana Abul Kalam Azad looked for excuses to be alone in jail. When he heard that so and so had been sentenced to solitary confinement, he wondered how solitude could be punishment for a person. Even if worldly things were denied to him, solitary imprisonment was welcome. The prison house where the morning smiles every day, where evening goes behind the veil every night, whose nights are lit up now by the torches of stars and then with the beauty of moonlight; where noon shines daily and so does the twilight, why consider it the bereft of the means of pleasure just because it is a prison house. There is no dearth here of the means; the only problem is that our heart and mind gets lost. We look for everything outside and never look for our lost heart though if we find it all means of epicurean delights would be available in it.*

**Key words : Prison, Court, Madrasa, Tazakira, Al Hilal**

Height about 5' 5"; exceptionally thin; noticeably fair; age about 33 years; has practically no hair on his face through he does not shave; long sharp face with prominent nose. This is the official description of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the golden boy of the Indian independence struggle. Azad lived in a city associated with reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833, founder of the Brahmo Samaj. His family belonged to a strong tradition of learning; his ancestors had come from Heart under Babur's rule (1526-153).<sup>1</sup> Maulana Shaikh Mohammad Khair ud Din (1831-1908), his father, studied under Fazl-i-Haq Khairabadi, the man exiled to Cellular jail of Andaman.<sup>2</sup> He belonged to the Qadri and Naqashbandi orders. The family carried forward the sufi traditions. They were devoted to the Chisti saints.<sup>3</sup> Azad, from his college days, was inspired by the high values upheld by them. He did not give up. Azad read the Holy Quran under the

supervision of his tutors and of his aunt, the elder sister of his wife Aliya and daughter of his teacher, Shaikh Ahmad Zahir Vatri. Azad showed signs of brilliance even before completing the standard Islamic syllabus in 1903. He published his first Ghazal in January 1899. Enjoying a free run of his father's library, he read widely and picked up some books in English, including the Bible. He also could not escape the influence of the writers connected with "Bengal renaissance". At the age of 15, Azad launched Lisan al-Sidq, a literary journal. Over the years of his journalistic ventures continued with Al Nadwa, a journal of the Nadwat –Ul-Ulema, Vakil and the Rifah-e-Aam press in Lahore. His political links were with the revolutionaries in Bengal, which he received with their counterparts in Punjab.<sup>4</sup>

In Azad's young days, Aligarh's MAO College emerged as the nerve centre of debates on reforms, interpretation and innovation. Hence he turned to Syed Ahmad Khan, a vocal protagonist of interpretation, Mutahid-e-Mutlaq. Shibli Nomani (1857-1947), the erudite scholar, opened his eyes to, among other things, new vistas of life in Iran and Turkey.<sup>5</sup> During his travels in the Middle East in 1908, Azad met young Turks in Cairo and kept up his correspondence with them for years after returning to India.<sup>6</sup> His contacts with the followers of Shaikh Mohammad Abudh (1849-1905), the Egyptian jurist at Al-Azhar, enabled him to learn way beyond the eighteenth century curriculum, which was heavily laden with medieval classicism, and acquaint himself with other reformist clusters.<sup>7</sup> When the unfettered Azad moved into his own sphere, he found it easy to identify himself with the urge of national liberation stirring the Turks, the Arabs, the Iranians and the people back home. He wanted them to be united with each other in their struggle to secure liberation. Accordingly he began Al Hilal on 13 July 1912 to engage with the Arab world and its religio-ethical complications.<sup>8</sup>

No other paper in the early twentieth century obtained such resounding success or led to so much controversy. It was then that Azad reached the apex of his renown. Not long afterwards, he was at war with authority and social conventions and, like Mahatma Gandhi whom he venerated, he was as deeply moved by injustice and tyranny. From here his jail journey started. Azad had paid a security of Rs 2,000 under the Press Act. Soon, he lost both the deposit and the press.<sup>9</sup> At the site of his internment in Ranchi, he prayed in a village mosque, lectured on the Holy Quran after Friday prayers and established a Madrasa and an Anjuman-i-Islam. The colonial authorities showed no mercy even after Azad completed the term of his externment. Fearing his 'secret' contacts with the Angora nationalists, they invalidated his passport on 19 September 1923 and jettisoned his travel plans to France and London.<sup>10</sup> Azad was set free on 1 January 1920. He and Mahatma Gandhi were supposed to meet some days later, but the government prevented this. Nonetheless, they knew each other well enough to form the same opinion on the most important issue of the day, the future of the Khilafat and the safety of the Holy places. When Azad landed up in jail on 10 December 1921 and accepted the sentence with his characteristic poise and dignity, Gandhi commented in young India on 23 February 1922: what a change between 1919 and 1922 nervous fear of sentences and all kinds of defences in 1919, utter

disregard of sentences and no defence in 1922; A year later, at the age of 35, Azad became the youngest person to become the congress president. The caravan of my hopes, he remarked in Tazkira, is seeing now the signs of a new goal. Azad wanted all patriots to fill up jails so that no worldly power could pronounce judgment on their self-sacrificing spirit. So, when the Karachi verdicts were pronounced against the Ali brothers and five others, he urged Muslims to continue the work for which the brothers had gone to jail. He recalled being interned for nine months in 1915 and was sorry that that the Ali brothers had stolen a march over him. 'Today he also added, 'instead of sorrowing, we give them congratulations and shall again say that they have outdone us all. According to Azad, when the gates of another court would be flung open, it would be no other than the court of law of God and its verdict would be final in all respects.<sup>11</sup>

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had to go through many trials from Ranchi to Ahmadnagar. Sindh's Premier had to seek official permission for meeting him in Allahbad Jail.<sup>12</sup> Again, the authorities refused to let him travel to Calcutta to deliver a memorial lecture at the University.<sup>13</sup> They did not even let him nurse his ailing wife who was on her deathbed.<sup>14</sup> As the pain and agony of this tragedy heightened, he committed to memory the joys and sorrows of living with her. But Azad was characteristically restrained in acknowledging that she shared his thoughts and beliefs and, despite being a purdah-nashin (behind the veil), she emerged as a comrade in practical life. On 30 December 1941, the gates of Naini prison were opened for Azad; on 09 August 1942, the new gate of the old Ahmad Nagar fort prison closed behind him. The building he and some other prisoners were kept had earlier been used as residence for the cantonment officers. At times war prisoners had also been kept there. During the Boer war, a group of officers among the prisoners had kept in this place. During World War I, the Germans had been housed and during World War II, Italian prisoners had been brought from Egypt. Reflecting on the prison's history, Azad noted how, 'in this world of thousand caprices and moods, so many doors are opened to be closed and so many are closed to be later thrown open.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

Maulana Azad's legacy on in the Ghubar-e- Khatir, a book that uncovers the extent to which the mystical and romantic elements lived on beneath of nationalism. His 'cosmopolitan morality' an expression Ernest Barker used long ago, transcended the function or functions allotted to his station in a particular community. His spirit was soured, but his political stance, far from being a spent force, survived the shock of partition. As Minister of education, we get a glimpse of his social and cultural commitments, some of which were intertwined with the nationalist struggle. He founded the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), THE University Grants Commission (UGC) And the Sahitya Akademi. Maulana Azad cogitated on his past and future in prison. He started at once of his trials: 'four years I have suffered internment; but during my internment I have never desisted from pursuing my work and inviting my people to this national goal. This is the mission of life and if I live at all, I elect to live only for this single purpose. As the pseudo judicial proceedings against him moved toward the inexorable outcome, he stated: 'at all events, how strange and

glorious a place is this prisoners dock where both the greatest and the best of men are made to stand. Maulana Azad penned a host of books during his time in Jail. In Meerut Jail, besides the Tazkira, he toiled over writing the Tarjam al Quran, which differs widely in spirit and aim from the former. The book suffers from the exaggeration and effervescence, but its great merit lies in its accent on the transcendental oneness of all the faiths and the theology of multi religious cooperation. In this sense, the Tarjama al Quran is the most eloquent defence of the ideals of pluralism.

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