



CONTRIBUTION OF MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD IN INDIAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Alam, Mohd Anzar¹, Shahin, Rukaiya²

1. Academic Counsellor (Political Science), IGNOU, Jamia Millia Islamia Study Centre and SOL(DU), New Delhi (India)

2. Assistant Research Officer (Ministry of Home Affairs) Govt of India.

ABSTRACT

This examines the multifaceted contributions of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to India's freedom struggle and nation-building process. It highlights his role as a nationalist leader, an architect of composite nationalism, and a strong advocate of Hindu–Muslim unity. The study gives special attention to his pioneering contribution to education as independent India's first Education Minister. It also explores his intellectual, cultural, and journalistic contributions that shaped modern Indian political thought. The book argues that Azad's legacy continues to inspire democratic, secular, and inclusive values in contemporary India.

Keywords : Marginalisation, Communal Polarisation, Non-Cooperation, Khilafat Movement, Two-Nation Theory

Introduction:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was one of the most important leaders of India's freedom struggle and a great thinker of modern India. He was born on 11 November 1888 in Mecca, and his family later settled in India. From early childhood, Azad received traditional Islamic education at home, where he studied the Quran, Hadith, Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. At the same time, he developed interest in modern subjects such as history, philosophy, science, and politics. This combination of religious and modern education helped him develop a balanced and open-minded personality. Maulana Azad strongly believed that education was the foundation of national progress. He felt that without knowledge, freedom and social development were not possible. At a young age, he began writing articles and newspapers to spread awareness among people about British exploitation and the need for unity. His writings inspired many Indians to join the freedom movement. He actively participated in major national movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement, and he was imprisoned several times by the British government. One of the most important aspects of Maulana Azad's life was his strong belief in Hindu–Muslim unity. He firmly opposed communal politics and the division of India on religious lines. He believed that India was a shared homeland of people belonging to different religions, languages, and cultures. As President of the Indian National Congress, he worked closely with leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru to strengthen the national

movement. After India achieved independence in 1947, Maulana Azad became the country's first Minister of Education. In this role, he worked tirelessly to develop a strong and inclusive education system. He supported free and compulsory education, higher learning, scientific research, and cultural development. Many important institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), University Grants Commission (UGC), Sahitya Akademi, and Lalit Kala Akademi were established under his guidance. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad is remembered not only as a freedom fighter but also as a nation-builder and a champion of education and unity. His life and ideas continue to inspire students, teachers, and leaders. He believed that true nationalism is based on knowledge, tolerance, and mutual respect, values that remain relevant even today.

Maulana Azad and Khilafat Movement:

A Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) started by Indian Muslims to protest against the **unfair treatment of the Ottoman Turkish Empire** by the British after World War I. They wanted to protect the position of the **Caliph (Khalifa)**, who was the religious leader of Muslims worldwide.¹ The Khilafat Movement was led by several prominent Muslim leaders. Maulana Muhammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali were the most active leaders, organizing meetings, protests, and campaigns across India. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was one of the most important and respected Muslim leaders of India's freedom struggle. A brilliant scholar, writer, and speaker, he became a guiding voice for thousands of young Muslims in khilafat Movement. His influence grew even stronger during the Khilafat Movement, Because he combined religious authority with a modern and national outlook, many political leaders began to rely on him to shape public opinion. During the Khilafat period, Mahatma Gandhi saw Azad as a bridge between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi believed that national unity was essential for independence, and Azad's popularity among Muslims helped him bring both communities together under the Non-Cooperation Movement. In this way, Gandhi used Azad's influence to strengthen the national struggle. The Ali brothers, who were the main leaders of the Khilafat Movement, also depended on Azad. His presence gave their movement religious credibility and attracted educated Muslim youth, something the Ali brothers alone could not achieve. Even the Congress leadership recognized Azad's value. His involvement allowed the party to reach Muslim households that earlier had little connection with Congress. By giving Azad an important position, the leaders gained wider support and proved that the Congress represented all Indians. On the other hand, the British tried to use Azad's growing popularity as a reason to divide people, portraying him as a danger to communal peace. They arrested him several times to weaken the unity he was helping to build. Although many leaders used Azad for their own political perspectives, his vision always remained clear. He believed in a united India where people of all religions stood together for freedom. His role in the Khilafat Movement not only shaped Muslim participation in the national struggle but also strengthened the idea of harmony and collective effort. Maulana Azad's life shows how one leader's influence can become a powerful tool for both unity and politics.

Maulana Azad And Non-Cooperation Movement :

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad played a remarkable role in the Non-Cooperation Movement started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920. At a time when India was suffering under British rule, Azad emerged as a powerful voice of courage, unity, and nationalism. He believed that freedom could be achieved only when Indians stood together, and he worked tirelessly to bring Hindus and Muslims into a single national struggle. speeches and his writings in ***Al-Hilal* and *Al-Balagh***, he inspired thousands of people to boycott British schools, courts, and goods.² His message was clear: India must rely on its own strength and reject everything that kept it dependent on the British. During this period, many leaders also saw Azad as a bridge between the Khilafat Movement and the Non-Cooperation Movement. His influence among Muslim communities helped Gandhi gain wider support, and together they turned the freedom struggle into a truly mass

movement. Because of his bold stand, Azad was often arrested, yet even in jail his determination remained strong. Maulana Azad's contribution to the Non-Cooperation Movement was not just political; it was emotional and moral. He taught people that true independence required unity, sacrifice, and faith in non-violence. Through his leadership, the movement gained a broader base and a deeper purpose, making him one of its most important guiding forces. When Mahatma Gandhi suddenly called off the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922 after the Chauri Chaura incident, it created a deep impact on Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Azad, who had worked tirelessly to mobilize both Hindus and Muslims through this mass struggle, was taken by surprise. He believed the movement was at its peak and had begun awakening people across the country, especially the Muslim community through the parallel Khilafat Movement. Its sudden closure left him disappointed because he felt that one violent incident, though serious, should not have ended a nationwide non-violent movement that had gathered tremendous support. The withdrawal also weakened the Khilafat Movement, which Azad considered a powerful platform for bringing Muslims into the national struggle.³ With the Non-Cooperation Movement stopped, the Khilafat agitation lost direction, and Muslim leaders began to feel abandoned. This affected Azad personally, as he had played a key role in building Hindu–Muslim unity under Gandhi's leadership. The unity he had hoped to strengthen began to fade, and the political energy he had helped create suddenly slowed down. Inside the Congress, differences grew among leaders. Many, including Azad, respected Gandhi's moral stand but felt uneasy about the political setback. Yet, despite his disappointment, Azad remained loyal to Gandhi's principles and continued to support non-violence and constructive work. This period became a turning point for him. It pushed him to rethink strategies, strengthen the organisation from within, and focus on long-term nation-building. The closure of the movement, therefore, was not only a political setback but also a moment of introspection that shaped the mature and influential leader Maulana Azad would soon become.⁴

Azad and Civil Disobedience Movement:

The Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34) was a very important phase of India's freedom struggle. Its aim was to challenge British rule through the open and peaceful breaking of unjust colonial laws. The movement was started by Mahatma Gandhi with the historic Dandi Salt March in 1930. It brought millions of people into the national movement and turned the struggle for freedom into a true mass movement. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad played an important role in making this movement successful. Along with Gandhi, he made a significant contribution during this critical period of the national movement. In this connection, Azad was sent to jail three times. During the Salt Satyagraha, he placed before the people certain ideas that he believed were necessary for the achievement of Swaraj. He stressed four main ideas to attain freedom. First, he urged people to become non-violent revolutionaries. Second, he demanded that the freedom struggle should be closely linked with constructive programmes. Third, he gave a strong call for unity among Indians. Fourth, he appealed to the people to be fearless in the face of British repression. Although the movement faced many setbacks, such as repression, arrests, and its suspension after the Gandhi–Irwin Pact in 1931, Azad continued to emphasise its long-term importance. The Gandhi–Irwin Pact of March 1931 had a deep effect on the Civil Disobedience Movement.

The movement was suspended in return for the release of political prisoners, the return of confiscated property, and limited concessions like allowing people to make salt for personal use. However, the pact did not provide any clear assurance of self-government or independence. As a result, the strong momentum created in 1930 weakened. Many people, especially peasants and workers, felt disappointed because their sacrifices did not lead to major political gains, and the British government slowly regained control. Azad did not see the pact as a final settlement but only as a temporary truce, a view he clearly expressed in his book *India Wins Freedom*.⁵ He believed that the British had given

only symbolic concessions while keeping real political power in their own hands. According to Azad, the absence of any firm promise of independence showed that the British only wanted to gain time and were not serious about transferring power. He also warned that suddenly withdrawing a mass movement without achieving clear goals could weaken public morale and reduce people's confidence in Congress leadership. This fear proved correct, as the Civil Disobedience Movement restarted in 1932 but failed to reach the same level of intensity and mass participation as before. At the same time, Azad did not completely reject the pact. He supported Gandhi's decision as a strategic necessity, arguing that continuous struggle under severe repression could have exhausted the masses and harmed the long-term freedom struggle. Later events supported Azad's balanced view. The failure of the Round Table Conferences, the re-arrest of Congress leaders, and renewed repression in 1932 showed that British policy had not changed. Yet Azad maintained that the Civil Disobedience Movement had lasting importance because it politically awakened millions of Indians and weakened the moral authority of British rule. Thus, his assessment of the Gandhi–Irwin Pact showed a deep and rational understanding that, although the pact temporarily weakened the movement, it also exposed the limits of British concessions and strengthened the long-term foundations of India's struggle for freedom.

Azad and Quit India Movement:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad presents the Quit India Movement of 1942 as one of the most dramatic and controversial phases of India's freedom struggle. He explains the movement against the background of the Second World War, when India was dragged into the war without the consent of Indian leaders. Azad notes that this created widespread anger among the Indian people and strengthened the demand for complete independence. Azad explains that the immediate cause of the movement was the failure of the Cripps Mission in 1942. The British government sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India with proposals that promised dominion status after the war but gave no assurance of immediate freedom. Azad criticises these proposals for keeping real power in British hands and for allowing provinces the right to secede, which he feared would encourage India's division⁶. According to Azad, the failure of the Cripps Mission convinced Congress leaders that British rule had no intention of transferring power honestly. When the Congress Working Committee met in Wardha in July 1942 and later at Bombay in August 1942, the Quit India resolution was adopted. Azad clearly states that he supported the objective of ending British rule but had serious reservations about the timing and strategy of the movement. He feared that launching a mass movement during a global war, when repression would be severe, could lead to chaos and uncontrolled violence. Azad records that on 8 August 1942, at the Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee, Gandhi gave the famous call of "Do or Die." While Azad respected Gandhi's moral authority, he was deeply worried about the consequences of this call⁷. His fears soon proved correct. Within hours of the resolution, the British government arrested Gandhi, Azad, Nehru, Patel, and other top Congress leaders. Azad describes how the sudden arrest of the entire leadership left the movement without direction. According to Azad, the absence of central leadership led to spontaneous and often violent protests across the country. Students, workers, peasants, and ordinary citizens attacked government buildings, disrupted communication lines, and clashed with the police. Azad makes it clear that although the movement showed the depth of popular anger against British rule, it also revealed the dangers of an unorganised mass uprising. He was particularly concerned that violence weakened the moral strength of the national movement.

Azad also discusses his long imprisonment at Ahmednagar Fort from 1942 to 1945. During this period, he shared confinement with Nehru and other leaders. He reflects that the Quit India Movement, though suppressed militarily, marked a psychological turning point. The British may have crushed the movement by force, but they lost all moral authority to govern India. Azad believed that after 1942, British rule survived only because of military power, not public

consent. However, Azad does not glorify the movement uncritically. He argues that the Quit India Movement did not directly force the British to leave India. Instead, factors such as the weakening of Britain after the war, international pressure, and changes in global politics played a major role. Yet, he accepts that Quit India made it clear that Indians would no longer cooperate with colonial rule under any circumstances. Azad also links the movement to later political developments. He suggests that the breakdown of negotiations after Quit India indirectly strengthened communal politics, as constitutional discussions were carried out without Congress participation while its leaders were in jail. This, according to Azad, contributed to the growing influence of the Muslim League and ultimately to the demand for Pakistan.

Azad presents the Quit India Movement as a bold but risky decision. He admired the courage and sacrifice of the Indian people but remained critical of the lack of planning and leadership after the arrests. His assessment is balanced and rational: Quit India did not immediately bring independence, but it destroyed any remaining illusion that British rule could continue with Indian cooperation. In Azad's view, the movement was a moral declaration that British authority in India had become completely illegitimate.

Maulana Azad As a Congress President:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad occupies a unique place among the foremost leaders of India's freedom struggle. A rare combination of deep scholarship, intellectual brilliance, and active political engagement, Azad emerged as one of the most influential thinkers and leaders of modern India. He was the youngest President of the Indian National Congress, assuming office at the age of 35 in 1923, and also served the longest continuous term from 1940 to 1946, during the most critical phase of the national movement. Azad presided over important Congress sessions such as Delhi (1923) and Ramgarh (1940), where he strongly denounced British imperialism, opposed communal politics, and consistently advocated Hindu-Muslim unity. His leadership during the Second World War and the final negotiations for independence placed him at the centre of national decision-making. Before Azad's appointment as Congress President in March 1940, the divide between the Congress and the All-India Muslim League had significantly deepened. This was largely due to the political marginalisation of the League after the provincial elections of 1937. One of the major sources of conflict was the question of political representation. The Muslim League repeatedly demanded separate electorates and weightage for Muslims, fearing marginalisation in a system based on numerical majority. The Congress opposed these demands, arguing that they institutionalised communal divisions and weakened national unity. In the 1937 elections, the Congress performed remarkably well, winning 716 out of 1,585 seats, while the Muslim League fared poorly, securing only 109 seats.⁸

The year 1937 proved to be a turning point in Congress–League relations. Under the Government of India Act, 1935, provincial elections were held in which the Congress won a decisive mandate and formed ministries in seven provinces. In contrast, the Muslim League failed to form a government in any province, exposing its weak mass base. The Congress also refused to form coalition governments with the League, most notably in the United Provinces, where it asked League members to join the ministry only as individuals. During the Congress ministries (1937–39), the League accused the Congress of pursuing majoritarian policies, such as the promotion of Hindi, the singing of *Vande Mataram*, and the Wardha education scheme. These issues were used by Muhammad Ali Jinnah to reorganise the League, portray the Congress as a Hindu-majority party, and mobilise Muslim opinion. This process intensified communal polarisation and ultimately paved the way for the Two-Nation Theory and the demand for Pakistan in 1940. It was in this highly

charged political atmosphere that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was elected Congress President. Recognising the seriousness of the situation, Azad directly addressed the implications of the Two-Nation Theory in his inaugural presidential address at the Ramgarh session. He argued that the theory was not only harmful to India's unity but also detrimental to the long-term interests of the Muslim community itself.⁹ Deeply impressed by this vision, Jawaharlal Nehru described Azad as an "emblem of India's unity."¹⁰ Through his leadership, Azad consistently sought to reassure Muslims that their rights, culture, and political interests would be protected in a united and independent India.

Maulana Azad And the Cripps Mission:

By 1942, at the height of the Second World War, the British government sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India with proposals intended to secure Indian cooperation in the war in exchange for constitutional concessions. At this critical moment, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was serving as President of the Indian National Congress and played a central role in the negotiations with Cripps. Although Azad initially welcomed the British initiative, he soon recognised the serious inadequacies of the proposals. The Cripps Plan offered Dominion Status only after the war, allowed provinces the right to opt out and form separate unions, and proposed a Constituent Assembly with both elected and nominated members, while retaining substantial British control. Azad, along with Gandhi, Nehru, and other Congress leaders, rejected these terms because they postponed independence, threatened India's unity by permitting provincial secession, and denied real self-government. In his autobiography *India Wins Freedom* (1957), Azad expressed deep disappointment with the rigidity of British policy and warned Cripps that granting provinces the right to secede would "open the floodgates of Balkanisation in India."¹¹

He firmly argued that genuine Indian cooperation in the war could be secured only through the immediate transfer of real political power to Indian hands. The Cripps Mission ultimately failed, as neither the Congress nor the Muslim League accepted its proposals—the League rejected them for not explicitly recognising Pakistan, while the Congress under Azad opposed them for failing to ensure complete independence and national unity. The collapse of the mission directly led to the launch of the Quit India Movement in 1942, during which Azad, as Congress President, stood firmly behind Gandhi's call for mass civil disobedience, fully aware of the risks of imprisonment and repression.¹² His leadership during this period underscored his unwavering commitment to freedom, national unity, and secular nationalism amid immense political challenges.

Cabinet Mission Plan And Role of Azad:

The Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 was an important step taken by the British Government to decide the future of India. After the Second World War, the British realized that they could no longer rule India and needed to transfer power to Indian hands. To manage this transition peacefully, a special mission of three British cabinet members—Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps, and A. V. Alexander—was sent to India. The main aim of the Cabinet Mission was to bring Indian leaders together, stop growing tensions between the Congress and the Muslim League, and create a system that would allow India to become independent. It proposed a united India with a federal structure and gave Indian leaders the responsibility to frame their own Constitution. Although all its suggestions were not accepted, the Cabinet Mission Plan played a major role in shaping the path to India's independence. The Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 became a crucial moment in India's constitutional negotiations, and the sharply differing responses of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Jawaharlal Nehru played a major role in its eventual failure. Maulana Azad, then President of the Congress, strongly endorsed the Plan because it preserved the idea of a united India while allowing space for political compromise between communities. He believed that the system of grouping provinces into Sections

A, B, and C offered the best chance to satisfy both Congress and the Muslim League. For Azad, the Plan was not perfect, but it was the only realistic way to avoid partition and ensure a peaceful transfer of power ¹³.

In contrast, Muhammad Ali Jinnah viewed the Plan through the lens of Muslim political security. He initially accepted it because the compulsory grouping of Muslim-majority provinces gave him leverage to protect Muslim interests and prevented Congress from dominating the future Constitution. However, when Nehru stated in a press conference that the Constituent Assembly would not be bound by any grouping arrangement, Jinnah felt that Congress was trying to weaken the safeguards promised to the Muslim League. Feeling deceived, he withdrew his acceptance and intensified his demand for Pakistan. Jawaharlal Nehru, on the other hand, approached the Plan with deep reservations. While he agreed to participate in the Constituent Assembly, he rejected the idea that groups of provinces could act as powerful, semi-independent units. Nehru believed that such a structure would lead to a weak centre and create internal divisions that could threaten India's long-term unity. His insistence on a strong central government brought him into direct conflict with Jinnah's emphasis on Muslim autonomy. Ultimately, the conflicting visions of these three leaders—Azad's desire for compromise and unity, Jinnah's focus on constitutional safeguards for Muslims, and Nehru's insistence on a strong, centralised nation—shaped the political atmosphere and led to the collapse of the Cabinet Mission Plan. Their disagreements revealed deeper tensions within Indian politics and pushed the subcontinent closer to the final outcome of partition in 1947¹⁴. The differences between these three leaders were not just political they represented three different visions of India's future. Their conflicting interpretations ultimately led to the collapse of the Cabinet Mission Plan and accelerated the process that resulted in the Partition of India.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the Mountbatten Plan:

The **Mountbatten Plan of 3 June 1947** marked the final British framework for India's transfer of power. It accepted the demand for **Partition**, creating two dominions—India and Pakistan—while giving provinces the choice to join either. It also allowed princely states to decide their future and fixed **15 August 1947** as the date of independence ¹⁵. Although no longer Congress President (J.B. Kripalani had succeeded him in 1946), **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad remained one of the tallest voices in the party**, respected for his intellect and moral authority. At this decisive moment, Azad stood firmly against Partition, which he described as “**not only a division of the land but also a partition of hearts**” (*India Wins Freedom*, 1957). He believed that India's unity was the outcome of centuries of shared history and culture, and warned that dividing the country on religious lines would create endless animosity and weaken both nations. Azad urged **Lord Mountbatten** to revive the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, with its federal structure and grouping of provinces, as a viable alternative to Partition. But by mid-1947, the ground reality had changed irreversibly. The **Muslim League under Jinnah was uncompromising in its demand for Pakistan**, while within Congress, leaders like **Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru**—though personally pained—accepted Partition as the lesser evil compared to the looming prospect of civil war and continued British rule ¹⁶. Azad reluctantly acquiesced to the Congress decision but never reconciled with it in spirit. In his memoir, he lamented that India had lost the chance to remain a united, plural, and powerful nation, and predicted that Partition would sow **permanent hostility** between the two states. His prophecy, as later events demonstrated, proved tragically accurate.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Strongly Opposed Partition of India:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was one of the strongest opponents of the Partition of India and a lifelong defender of a united, composite Indian nationalism based on Hindu–Muslim unity. As President of the Indian National Congress from 1939 to 1946, he consistently argued that India's freedom and unity were inseparable and that any division on religious

lines would permanently damage the nation's social, cultural, and political fabric. A senior Congress leader and a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, Azad believed that communal harmony was the moral and political foundation of Indian nationalism. Although the C.R. Formula was projected as a pragmatic compromise, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad rejected it with uncompromising clarity.¹⁷ In his assessment, the formula marked the first formal acceptance within the Congress of the principle that India could be divided on religious grounds. Azad argued that conceding the possibility of separation, even conditionally, amounted to an implicit recognition of the Two-Nation Theory and thus struck at the very foundations of Indian nationalism. For him, this was not a tactical adjustment but a historic surrender of principle. Azad consistently maintained that India was not, and could never be, a federation of religious communities. It was a composite nation forged through centuries of shared history, culture, and political struggle. He warned that a plebiscite based on religion would not merely test opinion in certain regions but would institutionalise communal identity as the basis of political sovereignty. Such a step, he argued, would deepen divisions, inflame passions, and make partition not a possibility but an inevitability. In *India Wins Freedom*, Azad expressed particular anguish over Mahatma Gandhi's acceptance of the C.R. Formula. While Gandhi regarded the proposal as a necessary moral concession to end communal conflict and secure independence, Azad viewed this acceptance as a grave error. He believed that once the Congress leadership agreed in principle to partition, the moral authority of the national movement was irreversibly weakened, and the League's separatist demand was effectively legitimised. According to Azad, what was presented as a temporary compromise soon became a permanent political reality..

Azad firmly rejected the Two-Nation Theory and maintained that Indian Muslims were an inseparable part of Indian nationality. According to him, religion could never be the basis of nationhood, and communal division would weaken both Hindus and Muslims. He believed that India's culture was unique, composite, and indivisible, shaped by centuries of shared history between different communities. He famously declared that he was proud to be an Indian and that without Muslims, Indian nationalism would remain incomplete. During the period of intense communal violence following Muhammad Ali Jinnah's call for Direct Action Day on 16 August 1946, particularly in Bengal and Bihar, Azad made continuous efforts to control violence and appealed strongly for Hindu-Muslim unity. Despite being criticised by some Muslim leaders for remaining within the Congress, he refused to abandon his commitment to national unity. Azad played a crucial role in negotiations with the British government, especially during the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, which he regarded as a historic opportunity to preserve India's unity while protecting minority rights. Under his leadership, the Congress accepted the plan, which proposed a federal structure without partition. Azad believed that the plan adequately addressed Muslim concerns and warned that the creation of Pakistan would politically and culturally weaken Muslims who remained in India. He repeatedly argued that communal conflict was the result of political mismanagement rather than religious differences. When the British announced the Partition Plan on 3 June 1947, Azad opposed it strongly, viewing it as both a political and moral failure. While leaders such as **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru**, and eventually **Mahatma Gandhi** accepted partition as inevitable under prevailing circumstances, Azad never reconciled himself to it. He believed that accepting partition meant surrendering the ideal of a united India for which he had struggled throughout his life. Even after partition became a reality, he continued to warn that it would deepen communal divisions and weaken the subcontinent. Azad also believed that India had the potential to become a strong and powerful nation like the United States. He argued that India's diversity, population, and civilizational depth could have been sources of strength. However, British colonial policies deliberately encouraged Hindu-Muslim divisions to weaken the freedom movement. Over time, religious identity overshadowed national unity in politics, leading to partition and long-term instability. Partition fragmented India's political, economic, and social strength, and post-independence political conflicts further weakened national cohesion. According to Azad, it

was not a lack of potential but persistent divisions and communal politics that prevented India from fully emerging as a strong and stable state.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was not alone in opposing the Partition of India. Leaders such as **Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan** and **Md. Asif Ali** also rejected the idea of dividing the country on religious lines. They shared Azad's belief that partition would weaken India politically and morally and would permanently divide its people.¹⁹ For Azad, Indian nationalism was incomplete without Muslims, and the creation of Pakistan represented a denial of India's composite cultural identity. Azad strongly disagreed with the Congress leadership's eventual acceptance of partition. He believed that Jawaharlal Nehru was among the first senior Congress leaders to accept the Partition Plan and that this acceptance was later supported by Mahatma Gandhi, despite Gandhi's earlier firm opposition¹⁸. Azad viewed this shift as a tragic surrender to political pressure rather than a moral or national necessity. According to Azad, he was gradually sidelined within the Congress leadership, and he later withdrew from active Congress presidentship, believing that Gandhi did not wish him to continue in that role because Azad's uncompromising opposition to partition conflicted with the changing political strategy of the party. This withdrawal symbolised, for Azad, the decline of principled leadership in favour of political compromise. Popular respect for Azad, however, remained strong. During his travels by train across India, people reportedly gathered at railway stations and raised slogans calling Maulana Azad the real leader of the nation, reflecting public admiration for his integrity and unwavering stand for unity. Azad also criticised Nehru's explanations for partition. According to him, Nehru gave incorrect and oversimplified statements about Muslims, presenting partition as an unavoidable outcome of Muslim separatism. Azad firmly believed that communal conflict was not caused by religion itself but by political mismanagement, British divide-and-rule policies, and the failure of leadership to resist communal pressures.

In Azad's assessment, partition was not the result of historical necessity but of political failure. He warned that accepting religious division would weaken India's long-term national strength and damage Hindu–Muslim relations for generations. His views continue to represent one of the most principled and morally consistent critiques of the Partition of India in modern history.

Constitutional Debates and Maulana Azad:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad played an important role in India's constitutional debates during the late colonial period, especially while serving as President of the Indian National Congress from 1940 to 1946. He consistently opposed the two-nation theory and argued that religion could not form the basis of a modern nation-state. In constitutional discussions, Azad maintained that Indian nationalism was territorial and civic in nature, and that Hindus and Muslims together constituted a single, indivisible Indian nation. He believed that communal divisions would weaken constitutional democracy and threaten national unity. Azad supported a strong yet flexible federal structure that balanced national unity with provincial autonomy. During the constitutional negotiations related to the **Cripps Mission (1942)** and the **Cabinet Mission Plan (1946)**, he advocated a united India with adequate safeguards for minorities within a federal framework. He feared that excessive centralisation would alienate minorities, while extreme decentralisation would undermine the authority of the national government. The Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 represented, in Azad's view, the most viable constitutional compromise to preserve India's unity. As one of the chief Congress negotiators, he argued that the plan's provisions—such as a three-tier federal structure and grouping of provinces—addressed Muslim concerns without necessitating the partition of the country.

Commented [A1]:

Under his leadership, the Congress accepted the plan, seeing it as a constitutional alternative to communal division. Azad strongly favoured the protection of minority rights through constitutional guarantees but opposed separate electorates and communal vetoes, which he believed institutionalised communalism. Instead, he emphasised equal citizenship, fundamental rights, and cultural and religious freedom within a secular constitutional framework. Though he was not a member of the Drafting Committee, Azad guided Congress strategy in the Constituent Assembly during its early phase and stressed consensus-building in constitutional decision-making. After the acceptance of partition, Azad viewed the outcome as a failure of constitutional politics rather than an unavoidable necessity. In his reflections, particularly in *India Wins Freedom*, he expressed regret that the Cabinet Mission Plan was not fully implemented and warned that partition would permanently divide the subcontinent along communal lines. His constitutional vision—rooted in composite nationalism, secularism, federal unity, and minority protection—left a lasting imprint on India's constitutional ethos, even though his ideas were overshadowed by the events leading to independence and partition.

Conclusion:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad stands out as one of the most profound and principled leaders of India's freedom struggle, whose life and work embodied the ideals of unity, secularism, intellectual depth, and moral courage. From his early years as a scholar deeply rooted in Islamic theology yet open to modern thought, to his emergence as a national leader, Azad consistently sought to harmonise tradition with modernity and faith with nationalism. His intellectual journey prepared him not merely to participate in politics, but to shape its moral and philosophical foundations. Throughout the freedom movement, Azad played a decisive role in mobilising the masses and strengthening Hindu–Muslim unity. His contributions to the Khilafat, Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India movements reveal a leader who combined realism with idealism. While fully committed to the goal of independence, he was never uncritical or impulsive. His balanced assessments of movements, negotiations, and agreements—whether the Gandhi–Irwin Pact, the Cripps Mission, or the Quit India Movement—demonstrate a statesman's ability to look beyond immediate emotions and evaluate long-term national consequences. His repeated imprisonments testify to his personal sacrifice, while his continued faith in non-violence and constitutional methods reflect his moral consistency.

As Congress President during the most critical years of the national movement, Azad emerged as a central figure in negotiations with both the British government and Indian political forces. He firmly opposed communal politics and the Two-Nation Theory, arguing that India was a composite nation shaped by centuries of shared history and culture. His strong advocacy of the Cabinet Mission Plan reflected his belief that constitutional compromise, not partition, offered the best path to independence while safeguarding minority rights. The failure of this plan and the eventual acceptance of partition marked, in Azad's own words, not a historical necessity but a tragic failure of political leadership and imagination. Azad's unwavering opposition to the Partition of India remains one of the most morally compelling aspects of his legacy. Even when sidelined within the Congress and criticised by leaders of his own community, he refused to abandon his belief that Indian nationalism was incomplete without Muslims. His warnings that partition would divide hearts, institutionalise communalism, and weaken the subcontinent proved tragically prophetic in the decades that followed. Yet, despite his deep disappointment, Azad did not retreat into bitterness. Instead, he continued to serve the nation, most notably as independent India's first Education Minister, laying the foundations of a modern, inclusive education system.

In retrospect, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad represents the conscience of Indian nationalism—an intellectual who resisted narrow identities, a politician who valued principle over power, and a patriot who believed that unity in diversity was India's greatest strength. His ideas on secularism, federalism, minority rights, and national integration continue to hold

deep relevance in contemporary India. Azad's life reminds us that true nation-building requires not only political success but also moral vision, intellectual honesty, and an unwavering commitment to unity.

References :

1. Chandra, Bipin (ed), *India's struggle for independence*(2016),Delhi, Penguin India
2. Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam, *India wins freedom: an autobiographical narratives* (1959) Hyderabad, Orient Blackswan pvt.ltd
3. Gail, Minault *the Khilafat Movement :Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*. New York: Columbia university Press (1982).
4. Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam, *India wins freedom: an autobiographical narratives* (1959) Hyderabad, Orient Blackswan Pvt.Ltd
5. India win freedom (chapter "the Gandhi Irwin pact and the first round table conference.)
6. An autobiographical Narratives, trans, Humayun Kabir (Bombay orient longman 1959) chapter : Cripps Mission
7. R.C Majumdar, R.C, *History of freedom movement in India Vol.ii*fima K.L Mukhopadhyay.
8. Wolpert, Stanley, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (Karachi Oxford University Press 1993).147
9. Hasan, Mashirul, "Islam and Indian Nationalism: Reflections on Abul Kalam Azad" Papers presented at an international conference organized by the Dept. of History, Jamia Millia Islamia, in collaboration with the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi, and funded by UNESCO, 1989.
10. Ibid 10
11. Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam, *India wins freedom* (Ch: Crips Proposal)
12. Majumdar, R.C., (ed) *History of the Freedom Movement in India vol III*
13. Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam, *India wins freedom: an autobiographical narratives* (1959) Hyderabad, Orient Blackswan Pvt.Ltd
14. Jalal, Ayesha, "The Sole Spokesman Jinnah, the Muslim League and Demand for Pakistan". Cambridge University Press(1994)
15. Menon, V.P. *The Transfer of Power in India* (1998) Orient Blackswan.
16. Jawahar Lal Nehru. *The discovery of India* (Oxford University Press)
17. Malihabadi, AR, *Azad Ki Kahani* p.249.
18. Ali, Sheikh B, *Abul Kalam Azad Vision and Action*, Azad Publication, Mysore ,2001,p.107
19. Menon, V.P., *Transfer of power in India* (1998) Orient Blackswan, p.235