

MAULANA ABUL KALAM AJAD'S REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Maulana Azad was a great educationist. He wanted to spread education among common people. He contributed to the laying of a strong foundation for education in India. His commitment to provide secular, liberal, modern and universal education is relevant even today and continues to guide us for achieving education for all. The corner stone of his education policy was his conviction that democracy cannot function without the eradication of illiteracy. He wanted a common system of education, based on equality, and without distinction of race religion, caste, class or occupation. His work for education and social upliftment in India made him an important influence in guiding India's economic, social and educational development. Maulana Ajad's vision, ideas and action will always continue to inspire us in translating our endeavours to provide quality education for all.

Key Word : Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

Introduction

If we look back to the historical developments of education in India, a man of enormous tastes, rated high in the realm of education, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had played a prominent role in keeping the movement of education alive in this country. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad is one of those rare personalities through whom the distinctions of the 20th century can be recognized and possibilities of the 21st century determined. He stood for a learning society through liberal, modern and universal education combining the humanism of Indian arts and the rationalism of western sciences, a society where the strong are just and the weak secure, where the youth is disciplined and the women lead a life of dignity - a non-violent, non-exploiting social and economic order.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's real name was Abul Kalam Ghulam Muhiyuddin. He adopted the pen name 'Azad' as a mark of his mental emancipation from a narrow view of religion and life. He was popularly known as Maulana Azad. He was a poet, an orator, an educationist, a scholar, a vivid writer, a freedom fighter, a politician, a philosopher and above all a gentleman with righteous thoughts. He was genuinely a multifaceted personality. By his great dreams and indeed greater actions, Maulana Azad has left an indelible imprint on India and its educational philosophy. He was a man with charming personality, with a rarest gift of inspiring people, and had the admiration from everyone from nook and corner who came in contact with him. He always had the greatest quality of seeing the positive side of others and was always a very sympathetic listener. He was also an advocate and a promising orator. Maulana Azad used all his talents to bring change in the society and liberate the mankind from ignorance. Maulana Ajad was a socially conscious individual and a person who ceaselessly toiled to lighten the burdens of religious differences and

tried to marginalize the relations between people. His life epitomized the best of Indian culture which cherishes all worthwhile human values and achievements and absorbs what is good, noble and beautiful artistically, morally and spiritually. His vision on education is of great importance for a country like India.

Educational Philosophy

Maulana Azad was a great educationist. He wanted to spread education among common people. He contributed to the laying of a strong foundation for education in India. His commitment to provide secular, liberal, modern and universal education is relevant even today and continues to guide us for achieving education for all. The corner stone of his education policy was his conviction that democracy cannot function without the eradication of illiteracy. He wanted a common system of education, based on equality, and without distinction of race religion, caste, class or occupation. The vision that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad set out for education is that of universal education of the basic pattern for all children of school-going age, followed by a diversified secondary education. He believed that an unsatisfactory system of secondary education undermines the entire system of education in the country. In the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) in 1955, he said, "You will remember that at the last meeting of the board, I placed before you my ideas on secondary education. This is the stage up to which all should have the opportunity to go. In any case, it is the stage, which marks, and will continue to mark the end of education for the vast majority. It should, therefore, prepare them for life".

The Maulana Ajad felt that the cultural content in Indian Education was very low during the British rule and needs to be strengthened through curriculum. As Chairman of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), an apex body to recommend to the Government educational reform both

at the center and the states including universities, he advocated, in particular, universal primary education, free and compulsory for all children up to the age of 14 years, girls education, vocational training, agricultural education and technical education. They not only structured the syllabi but also formulated the policies in order to carry the light of education in the remotest rural areas. They also chalked out programmes for the training of teachers to make them abreast of the developments taking place in the world of education. His greatest contribution, however, is that in spite of being an eminent scholar of Urdu, Persian and Arabic he stood for the retention of English language for educational advantages and national and international needs. However, he advocated that primary education should be imparted in the mother-tongue.

Maulana Azad is remembered as amongst the leading Indian nationalists and educationists of his time. His firm belief in Hindu-Muslim unity earned him the respect of the Hindu community and he still remains one of the most important symbols of communal harmony in modern India. His work for education and social upliftment in India made him an important influence in guiding India's educational, economic and social development. His standing as an outstanding scholar of 'oriental learning' was demonstrated in moulding the educational system of the country in the immediate post-independence years. In his many-splendoured life his eminence as a scholar and educationist was outstanding. Therefore after the attainment of our Independence, he was befittingly given charge of the Ministry of Education which included art, culture and scientific research. The great impetus and encouragement he was able to impart to the development of scientific research are demonstrated by the establishment under his guidance of various academies and research laboratories and institutes which have put India in the rank of scientifically advanced countries. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru at the 1st Maulana Azad memorial lecture on 11th November, 1959 said: "The Maulana Ajad was a great religious scholar, journalist, writer, poet, philosopher and above all, a great political leader whose services and sacrifices in the freedom struggle will be long remembered along with his matchless contribution as free India's first Education Minister." Maulana Azad remained a close confidant, supporter and advisor to Prime Minister Nehru, and played an important role in framing national policies on education. Maulana Azad masterminded the creation of national programmes of school and college construction and spreading the enrollment of children and young adults into schools, in order to promote universal primary education. Addressing the conference on All India Education on January 16, 1948, Maulana Azad emphasized: *"We must not for a moment forget, it is a birth right of every individual to receive at least the basic education without which he cannot fully discharge his duties as a citizen."*

As the Minister for Education he insisted that both the

Union and the States must share responsibility in promotion of education. He appointed the University Education Commission in 1948 and Secondary Education Commission in 1952. Between 1947 and 1958, on his initiative the budgetary allocation for Education was raised fifteen fold.

He was the first to raise the issue of the National System of Education which is today the bed-rock of the National Policy on Education (1986) updated in 1992. The concept implies that, up to a given level, all students, irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex have access to education of a comparable quality. He said that all educational programmes, must be carried out in strict conformity with secular values and constitutional framework. He stood for a common educational structure of 10+2+3 throughout India. If Maulana Azad were alive today he would have been the happiest to see the Right to Free Education Bill passed by the parliament. The Right to Education Bill seeks to make free and compulsory education a fundamental right. The wealth of the nation, according to Maulana Azad, was not in the country's banks but in primary schools. The Maulana was also a great votary of the concept of Neighbourhood schools and the Common School System. Once he first came across the writings of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. He was greatly impressed by his views on modern education. Maulana Ajad realized that a man could not be truly educated in the modern world unless he studied modern science, philosophy and literature.

Maulana Azad advocated religious teaching in schools, not from a narrow, factional sense of religiosity, but from a liberal and open perspective. His definition of "secular" was different even from the mainstream opinion of the period, for he believed and worked for multi-culturalism and interfaith understanding. A strong advocate of the need to transcend narrow provincialism, he declared, "We want to build in India a national outlook which will transcend the limitations of province, State, religion, caste or language." He believed that the solution to the problems created by religious fanatics lay not in rejecting religious instruction in elementary stages but in imparting sound and healthy religious education so that children in their formative stages would not be misguided to fanaticism and intolerance of other religions.

He established the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1956 by an Act of Parliament for disbursement of grants and maintenance of standards in Indian universities. He firmly believed with Pandit Nehru that if the universities discharged their functions well, all will be well with the Nation. According to him the universities have not only academic functions; they have social responsibilities as well. On the technical education side, he strengthened the All Indian Council for Technical Education (AICTE). The School of Planning and Architecture (SPA) came into existence at Delhi in 1955. It was he who launched the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in 1950 which

has now come up to play a significant role in the academic growth of the country. The establishment of three academies- Sangeet Natak Academy (1953), Sahitya Academy (1954) and Lalit Kala Academy(1954) — to promote art, music and literature were his ideas. He assisted Pandit Nehru in setting up the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and many a chain of Science Laboratories in India.

The Maulana Ajad was a man of vision. While he envisioned a modern India built through strengthening higher and technical education, he also held the belief that along with training engineers and technicians for the development of the industries, it is equally necessary "to spread general education for raising the general level of economic activities in the country." It was his far sightedness that showed up when he started the IITs as education minister in the Nehru cabinet, a decision that paved the way for the transformation of India into a technological powerhouse in the 21st century. He foresaw a great future in the IITs for India :

"I have no doubt that the establishment of this Institute will form a landmark in the progress of higher technological education and research in the country."

The Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur (IIT-K) was established in 1951 followed by a chain of IIT's at Bombay, Madras and Kanpur and Delhi. Extending the Maulana Ajad's vision on higher education, the Government of India last year decided to set up eight more IITs along with various IIMs and Central Universities across the country under 11th five year plan. Never before in the history of India has been planned such large expansion in higher education in a go.2008-05-24 10:09

Secular to the marrow of his bones Maulana Ajad's advice to students was: 'Bury communalism once for all.' Student indiscipline, however, continued to worry him. Presiding over the meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) on February 7, 1954 he said: "What worries me most is that the extent and magnitude of the student's unrest is very often without any relation whatsoever to the supposed cause. Such unrest among the students strikes at the root of our national culture. The student of today is the potential leader of tomorrow. He will have to sustain the social, political and economic activities. If he is not properly trained and does not develop the necessary resources of character and knowledge he cannot supply the leadership which the nation will need". He stood for modern India with secular credentials, a cosmopolitan character and international outlook which must be fostered through education.

A man like Maulana Azad is born rarely. Throughout his life he stood for the unity of India and its composite culture. He wants to strengthen this composite culture through education. In the words of Iqbal : Hazaron sal Nargis apni benoori par roti hai, Bari Mushkil sey hota hai chaman mein

deeda var paida. (For a thousand years the Narcissus weeps for her blindness, with great difficulty is born in the garden a man with vision). The three major issues of education in today's world, namely access, equity and quality need to be addressed in a holistic manner to ensure that our systems of education and research not only contribute to nation building but also to create a knowledge society, with values of sustainability, peace and development. This was the vision of Maulana Azad.

Conclusion

Maulan Azad was a patriot, a leader, a philosopher-statesman, a great scholar and above all a great educationist. He was the "Mir-i- Karawan" (the caravan leader), as said by Pt. Nehru. By a profound learning and "luminous intelligence" he did a real good job for education in India. Maulana Azad's legacy serves as an inspiration for patriotism, harmony, opportunity in general and for education in particular. The greatest contribution of this towering personality is the consistency of his character, his unswerving loyalty to the cause of communal harmony and a great vision on education, and to Mahatma Gandhi, he was 'the Emperor of Learning' and 'a giant in the shadows of other giants' but whereas others winced at times of trial, the Maulana Ajad was unswerving in his vision. His work for education and social upliftment in India made him an important influence in guiding India's economic, social and educational development. Maulana Ajad's vision, ideas and action will always continue to inspire us in translating our endeavours to provide quality education for all.

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