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## THE EDUCATION IDEAS OF ‘MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD’

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**Abstract:** Swami Vivekananda said, “Education ... is a process of man-making, character-forming and life-building assimilation of ideas.” Only through education we can equip ourselves to face the challenges of life and only a good educational system can establish a healthy relationship between the individuals and the society. It is education, which makes us better citizens and inculcates in us virtues of tolerance, discipline, commitment, culture, compassion and sensitivity, “Education”, as Nobel Laureate, Prof. Amartya Sen has said, is essentially about “capacity building and it widens the choice of people and empowers the nations.” Maulana Azad the first education minister of free India was eminently suited to lead the country in the field of education, learning and culture. He was at the helm of affairs till he breathed his last on 22 February, 1958, Eleven years of his ceaseless struggle to reconstruct the educational edifice of free India, ensured a bright future for the youth of the nation and the generation that followed.

**Keywords:** Education policy, Maulana Azad, Social reform, women education.

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**Introduction:** It is essential to realize that education alone can bring about democratic consolidation, social cohesiveness and sustained growth. We have to take our whole society along on the path of education and development and should not allow any section to lag behind. Of special importance is women’s education, as they constitute nearly fifty per cent of our population. There is an unacceptably wide disparity between the literacy levels of men and women in our country. Removing the factors that inhibit the full participation of women in the various spheres of society is a very important step for the empowerment of women in our society. Today, we appreciate that great leaders of our country like Maulana Azad not only dreamt of a fully literate India but also of competent citizenry and laid the foundation for the progress of the country on the appropriate direction. As Maulana Azad became free India’s first Education Minister, it is appropriate to examine the educational aspect of his philosophy of universalism. His synthesis, the coherent and consistent evolution of his ideas, fusing the Islamic, the Indian and the Western single pattern, is worthy of investigation and evolution in depth. Azad devoted the best of his time to the cause of India’s independence from foreign domination, without finding any opportunity to arrange, as promised earlier, his ideas on education, which are, therefore, scattered in thousand and of pages of his literary works, speeches and letters. The ideas on education from a cross-section of disciplines like religious, philosophy, History and Science are interwoven in a style marked for its uniqueness and literary fineness. Not ordinarily amenable to classification into distinctly demarcated branches, Azad’s ideas have been here studied and systematised from educational point of view. We are unfortunately still to reach the goal and to fulfil what he laid down as the objectives of the country’s educational policy for the all round

progress of the country. Let us all take a pledge to complete the task which he laid down for the country’s progress and which still remains to be fully achieved

- a. Universal compulsory basic education for all children of school age,
- b. Social education for our adult illiterates,
- c. Measures for improvement in the quality of and expansion of facilities for secondary and higher education,
- d. Technical and scientific education on a scale adequate to the nation’s needs, and
- e. Measures for the enrichment of the cultural life of the community by encouraging the arts and providing facilities for recreation and other amenities. As a Minister of education he devoted to the future shape of things to come and envisaged the various possibilities for the country: “Today India is free. She can have any kind of mental mould she please. Will it be exclusive or will it be inclusive which has been the characteristic of Indian culture through the ages?.. In the advancement of nations there is no greater hindrance than narrow-mindedness. It is our duty to keep ourselves free from this disease in the new era of independence.” One of the major early influences on Azad was *Ibn Khaldun*, the 14th/15th century Moroccan philosopher, historian and traveller, who inspired Azad to question the traditional methods of teaching as well as the curriculum. Maulana Azad agreed with him in holding that what led to stagnation in religious and secular learning was an unquestioning acceptance of theology. He found education to be the sole means to rectifying this error. Azad found the curricula in the Islamic *madrasa*’s fundamentally narrow, with a significant omission of mathematics, which is the basis of science and technology. Another significant influence, in the context of science and education was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, which attracted Azad towards

modern education and modern science for the Muslims; however he later got out of the community concerns alone due to his commitment to the anti-imperialist and nationalist politics. He admitted in his writings like *Azad ki Kahani* that Sir Syed's writings brought about an intense revolution in his thought, both in his religious as well intellectual life. There is no doubt that Azad's educational perspective was fundamentally Islamic in inspiration, yet he synthesized happily anything of value anywhere. He was not 'exclusively an "Islamic" mind or even an "oriental" mind, unacquainted with, or insensitive to, the rich streams of influences emanating from other sources'. He was deeply impressed by the advances made in the West in the realm of elementary education for children. He was firmly committed to what was scientific in the Western system, and the two factors that most inspired him were the idea of freedom as the technique of education, and the all embracing importance of primary education.

The corner-stone of Maulana Azad's educational policy was his conviction that democracy cannot function without eradication of illiteracy. This supplied the motive power of his efforts in the field of national education. He often approvingly quoted Disraeli who used to say that a democracy has no future unless it educates its masses. Addressing the All India Educational Conference on January 16, 1948 he said: "*We must not, for a moment, forget that it is the birthright of every individual to receive at least the basic education without which he cannot fully discharge his duties as a citizen.*"

**Education of Women:** It was Maulana's firm view that the success of all educational programmes ultimately depended upon the proper education of women. "Educated mother," he used to say, "will mean children who can be easily made literate." He was as concerned about the education of girls as of boys. Maulana Azad gave special stress on the teaching of modern sciences and also on the education of women. In 1949, in the Central Assembly he emphasized on the importance of imparting instruction in modern sciences and knowledge and also observed that: "*No programme 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 the women.*"

**Unity of Azad's outlook:** His ideas, Azad tried to weave them round the central value of *Adal* or Justice. As universal value, justice pervades the gamut of creation and crowns the creative process after providence and Benevolence have played their part. In tune with the scheme of creation, a programme of education must be imbued with the value of justice so as to reach its perfection. As the arch-stone of his educational axiology, justice is composed of three

constituents: harmonisation, integration and co-ordination.

**Education beyond caste and class:**

Education, for the Maulana, was not intellectual recreation but an instrument of social reform, a method of economic development and a process of building individual character and personality.

Maulana Azad's educational conceptions covered all segments of Indian population and dealt alike with the village and the towns. He gave his attention to every important problem whether it concerned medium of instruction, syllabi, future of graduates, linguistic tension, adult illiteracy, sports, festivals, roads, house, etc. The most important aspect of his endeavour in the fields was to create an awareness of what India was in the past and how rich was its contribution to world's thought. He emphasised again and again the need of developing an international perspective and rise above all petty considerations of language and creed. All through his tenure of Ministership he was guided by the supreme motive that: "The essence of a secular and democratic state is freedom of opportunity for the individual without regards to race, religion, casts or community." Being primarily an Islamic scholar, he used Islam as a democratic and modernist movement, quite in contrast to what is being done in the name of Islam today all over the world. Maulana Azad observed Islam as "a perfect system of freedom and democracy whose function consists in bringing back to mankind the freedom snatched away from it". At another place he defined Islam as "the message of democracy and human equality to the world suffering from chronic type of class discriminations". Azad expanded Islamic values on a national scale, going beyond the narrow confines of the faith, to explain and understand the problems of the newly independent nation, particularly the access to education on a universal scale. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, as I have tried to bring out in this brief survey, occupies a key position in the educational, cultural and scientific development of independent India. We find that he institutionalized crucial Indian sectors like education and culture and laid the foundations of a future network of scientific and technological institutions. However, I feel that a more extensive research is needed to do justice with the multifaceted contributions of Maulana Azad and his role in the growth of robust and pluralist independent India.

Apart from providing motive and direction to the education programmes of free India,

**Expansion of Facilities for education in Science and Technology:** Maulana Azad realised the value of scientific and technological education in the advancement of the country and took necessary measure to provide facilities for education in these

branches of knowledge, addressing a meeting of Central Advisory Board on November 9, 1953, he said: "It appears to me that increasing emphasis will have to be placed on providing higher education in the fields of agriculture, medicine, engineering, technology and science." As minister of education, he had very clear priorities including for UNESCON and other forms of inter-national co-operation. This area, it was his view which has lasted to this day, that the major area for India to co-operate with UNESCO and other countries is in areas of science and technology. He helped to initiate the network of National Science Research Institute and technology and technological educational Institutions of the country. In these he used UNESCO and bilateral aid fully and optimally. Maulana Azad gave a new orientation to the all India council of Technical education. It was result of Maulana Azad's initiative and encouragement that a number of institution and Labourites of Science Research were established in India. Dr Rajendra Parsad wrote about him: "the great impetus and encouragement he was able to give to the development of arts, literature and cultural activates and scientific research are demonstrated by the establishment of various academies and research laboratories and institute, and the commission which were appointed from time to time to deal with educational problems. Maulana Azad established/strengthened /or reoriented a number of scientific, literary and cultural organizations. Particularly to be noted are the following:

1. Central Institute of Education.
2. Central Advisory Board of Education.
3. All India Educational Conference.
4. Museum Association of India.
5. Indian Historical Records Commission.
6. Central Advisory Board of Archaeology.
7. Indian Institute of Technology.
8. India Council for Cultural Relation.
9. All India Conference on Letters.
10. All India Conference on Arts.
11. National Art Treasures Fund.
12. Central Road Research Institute.
13. Indian Academy of Dance, Drama and Music.
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5. *Ghubar-Khatir*, p. 121.
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15. All India Council of Scientific and Industrial Research.
  16. All India Council for Technical Education.
  17. University Grant Commission.
  18. Sahitya Akademi.
  19. Lalit Kala Akademi.
  20. University Education Commission.
  21. Secondary Education Commission.
  22. Kharagpur Institute of Higher Technology.
  23. Indian Institute of Science.
  24. Delhi Polytechnic.
  25. Western Higher Technological Institute, Bombay.
  26. Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.
  27. Central Building Research Institute, Roorkee.
- The India of Maulana's dream was a country proudly following its past tradition of scholarship and culture but keeping itself abreast of all intellectual and scientific developments in the worlds.

**Conclusion:** We need crusaders for removing the various ills plaguing our society and to provide leadership to change the system for the better. It is of little use to be just critical of the aberrations or non achievements in the society. Well meaning people, especially the youth have to be participants in bringing about the change and not be mere bystanders or critics. The country has great expectations from its youth to bring in the freshness of their approach along with youthful energy and passion to address the imperfections in the institutions of democracy and especially in our educational system. They have to realize their obligations and become more proactive participants at all levels of political and other institutions, which can be only through value-based education. We shall be paying true tribute to Maulana Azad if we continue to effectively carry out the policies and programmes that he laid down as India's first Education Minister and we shall succeed only when we will be able to produce committed, responsible, disciplined, well integrated and socially sensitive citizens who will be assets of our country. Till then the endeavour should continue and that will be paying true homage to one of our outstanding leaders – Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

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