

Moulana Abul Kalam Azad and His Struggle for Indian Independence: An Analytical Study

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Abstract:

Moulana Azad is regarded as one of the Indian independence activists, Islamic theologians, writers, and also one of the top most senior leaders of the Indian National Congress. His full name is Abul Kalam Ghulam Muhiyuddin Ahmed bin Khairuddin Al-Hussaini Azad. He became the First Minister of Education in the Indian government. He is commonly known 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 recognized by celebrating his birthday as National Education Day across India. As a young man, Azad composed poetry in Urdu, as well as treatises on religion and philosophy. He rose to prominence through his work as a journalist, publishing works critical of the British Raj and espousing the causes of Indian nationalism. Azad became the leader of the Khilafat Movement, during which he came into close contact with the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi. After the failure of the Khilafat Movement, he became closer to the Congress. Azad became an enthusiastic supporter of Gandhi's ideas of non-violent civil disobedience, and worked to organize the non-co-operation movement in protest of the 1919 Rowlatt Acts. Azad committed himself to Gandhi's ideals, including promoting Swadeshi (indigenous) products and the cause of Swaraj (Self-rule) for India. In 1923, at an age of 35, he became the youngest person to serve as the President of the Indian National Congress. In October 1920, Azad was elected as a member of foundation committee to establish Jamia Millia Islamia at Aligarh in U. P. without taking help from British colonial government. He assisted in shifting the campus of the university from Aligarh to New Delhi in 1934. The main gate (Gate No. 7) to the main campus of the university is named after him. Moulana Azad was one of the main organizers of the Dharasana Satyagraha in 1931, and emerged as one of the most important national leaders of the time, prominently leading the causes of Hindu-Muslim unity as well as espousing secularism and socialism. He served as Congress president from 1940 to 1945, during which the Quit India rebellion was launched. Azad was imprisoned, together with the entire Congress leadership. He also worked for Hindu-Muslim unity through the Al-Hilal newspaper.

Key words: Moulana azad, Khilafat Movement, Al-Hilal, Rowlatt Act, Indian national Congress.

Introduction:

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was one of the most influential independence activists during India's freedom struggle. He was also a noted writer, poet and journalist. He was a prominent political leader of the Indian National Congress and was elected as Congress President in 1923 and 1940. Despite being a Muslim, Azad often stood against the radicalizing policies of other prominent Muslims leaders like Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Azad was the first education

minister of independent India. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was posthumously awarded 'Bharat Ratna', India's highest civilian honor, in 1992. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was born on November 11, 1888 in Mecca, Islam's main center of pilgrimage. His mother was the daughter of a rich Arabian Sheikh and his father, Maulana Khairuddin, was a Bengali Muslim of Afghan origin. His forefathers came to India during the reign of Mughal Emperor Babar, from Herat, Afghanistan. Azads were the descendent of eminent Ulama or scholars of Islam. In 1890, he returned to Calcutta (now Kolkata) along with the family.

Maulana Azad had his initial formal education in Arabic, Persian and Urdu with theological orientation and then philosophy, geometry, mathematics and algebra. He also learnt English language, world history, and politics on his own. Maulana Azad had a natural inclination towards writing and this resulted in the start of the monthly magazine "Nairang-e-Alam" in 1899. He was eleven years old when his mother passed away. Two years later, at the age of thirteen, Azad was married to young Zuleikha Begum.

Discussion:

In Egypt, Azad came into contact with the followers of Mustafa Kemal Pasha who were publishing a weekly from Cairo. In Turkey, Maulana Azad met the leaders of the Young Turks Movement. After his return to India from an extensive visit of Egypt, Turkey, Syria and France, Azad met prominent Hindu revolutionaries Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and Shyam Sundar Chakraborty. They helped in developing radical political views and he began to participate in the Indian nationalist movement. Azad fiercely criticized the Muslim politicians who were more inclined towards the communal issues without focusing on the national interest. He also rejected the theories of communal separatism advocated by the All-India Muslim League.

Azad, inspired by the passion of Indian as well as foreign revolutionary leaders, started publishing a weekly called "Al-Hilal" in 1912. The weekly was a platform to attack the policies of the British Government and highlight the problems faced by the common Indians. The paper became so popular that its circulation figures went up to 26,000 copies. The unique message of patriotism and nationalism blended with religious commitment gained its acceptance among the masses. But these developments disturbed the British Government and in 1914, the British Government put a ban on the weekly. Unfazed by the move, Maulana Azad, few months later, launched a new weekly, called "Al-Balagh". Failed to put a prohibition on the writings of Maulana Azad, the British Government then finally decided to deport him off Calcutta in 1916. When Maulana Azad reached Bihar, he was arrested and put under house arrest. This detention continued till December 31, 1919. After his release on January 1, 1920, Azad returned to the political atmosphere and actively participated in the movement. In fact, he continued to write provocative articles against the British Government.

Description of the Topic:

In 1908, he took a trip of Egypt, Syria, Turkey and France where he came into contact with several revolutionaries such as followers of Kamal Mustafa Pasha, members of Young Turk Movement and Iranian revolutionaries. Azad developed political views considered radical for most Muslims of the time and became a full-fledged Indian nationalist.^[1] In his writing, Azad proved to be a fierce critic of both the British government and Muslim politicians; the former for its racial discrimination and refusal to provide for the needs of the Indian public, and the later for focusing on communal issues before matter of common-self interest (Azad pointedly rejected the All-India Muslim League's communal separatism). However, his views changed considerably when he met ethnically oriented Sunni revolutionary activists in Iraq

[²] and was influenced by their fervent anti-imperialism and Arab nationalism.[³] Against common Muslim opinion of the time, Azad opposed the partition of Bengal in 1905 and became increasingly active in revolutionary activities, to which he was introduced by the prominent Hindu revolutionaries Aurobindo Ghosh and Shyam Sundar Chakravarty. Azad initially evoked surprise from other revolutionaries, but Azad won their praise and confidence by working secretly to organise revolutionaries' activities and meetings in Bengal, Bihar and Bombay (now called Mumbai).[⁴]

1. AL-HILAL AND KHILAFAT MOVEMENT

He established an Urdu weekly newspaper in 1912 called Al-Hilal from Calcutta, and openly attacked British policies while exploring the challenges facing common people. Espousing the ideals of Indian nationalism, Azad's publications were aimed at encouraging young Muslims into fighting for independence and Hindu-Muslim unity. With the onset of World War I, the British stiffened censorship and restrictions on political activity. Azad's Al-Hilal was consequently banned in 1914 under the Press Act. In 1913, he was founding member of the Anjuman-i-Ulama-i-Bangala, which would become the Jamiat Ulema-e-Bangala branch of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind in 1921. His work helped improve the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal, which had been soured by the controversy surrounding the partition of Bengal and the issue of separate communal electorates. In this period Azad also became active in his support for the Khilafat agitation to protect the position of the Sultan of Ottoman Turkey, who was considered the Caliph or Khalifa for Muslims worldwide. The Sultan had sided against the British in the war and the continuity of his rule came under serious threat, causing distress amongst Muslim conservatives. Azad saw an opportunity to energise Indian Muslims and achieve major political and social reform through the struggle. Azad started a new journal, the Al-Balagh, which also got banned in 1916 under the Defense of India Regulations Act and he was arrested. The governments of the Bombay Presidency, United Provinces, Punjab and Delhi prohibited his entry into the provinces and Azad was moved to a jail in Ranchi, where he was incarcerated until 1 January 1920.

2. NON-CO-OPERATION MOVEMENT

This section needs additional citations for verification. Please help improve this article by adding citations to reliable sources in this section. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. Upon his release, Azad returned to a political atmosphere charged with sentiments of outrage and rebellion against British rule. The Indian public had been angered by the passage of the Rowlatt Acts in 1919, which severely restricted civil liberties and individual rights. Consequently, thousands of political activists had been arrested and many publications banned. The killing of unarmed civilians at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar on 13 April 1919 had provoked intense outrage all over India, alienating most Indians, including long-time British supporters, from the authorities. The Khilafat struggle had also peaked with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I and the raging Turkish War of Independence, which had made the caliphate's position precarious. India's main political party, the Indian National Congress came under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, who had aroused excitement all over India when he led the farmers of Champaran and Kheda in a successful revolt against British authorities in 1918. Gandhi organized the people of the region and pioneered the art of Satyagraha— combining mass civil disobedience with complete non-violence and self-reliance.

Taking charge of the Congress, Gandhi also reached out to support the Khilafat struggle, helping to bridge Hindu-Muslim political divides. Azad and the Ali brothers – Maulana Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali – warmly welcomed Congress support and began working

together on a programme of non-co-operation by asking all Indians to boycott British-run schools, colleges, courts, public services, the civil service, police and military. Non-violence and Hindu-Muslim unity were universally emphasised, while the boycott of foreign goods, especially clothes were organised. Azad joined the Congress and was also elected president of the All-India Khilafat Committee. Although Azad and other leaders were soon arrested, the movement drew out millions of people in peaceful processions, strikes and protests.

This period marked a transformation in Azad's own life. Along with fellow Khilafat leaders Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan and others, Azad grew personally close to Gandhi and his philosophy. The three men founded the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi as an institution of higher education managed entirely by Indians without any British support or control. Both Azad and Gandhi shared a deep passion for religion and Azad developed a close friendship with him. He adopted the Islamic prophet Muhammad's ideas by living simply, rejecting material possessions and pleasures. He began to spin his own clothes using khadi on the charkha, and began frequently living and participating in the ashrams organised by Gandhi. [citation needed] Becoming deeply committed to ahimsa (non-violence) himself, Azad grew close to fellow nationalists like Jawaharlal Nehru, Chittaranjan Das and Subhas Chandra Bose. He strongly criticised the continuing suspicion of the Congress amongst the Muslim intellectuals from the Aligarh Muslim University and the Muslim League. In 1921, he started the weekly Paigham which was also banned by December 1921. He along with the editor of Paigham, Abdul Razzak Mahilabadi was arrested by the government and sentenced to one year imprisonment.

During the course of 1922, both the Khilafat and the non-cooperation movement suffered blow while Azad and other leaders like the Ali brothers were in jail. The movement had a sudden decline with rising incidences of violence; a nationalist mob killed 22 policemen in Chauri Chaura in 1922. Fearing degeneration into violence, Gandhi asked Indians to suspend the revolt and undertook a five-day fast to repent and encourage others to stop the rebellion. Although the movement stopped all over India, several Congress leaders and activists were disillusioned with Gandhi. The following year, the caliphate was overthrown by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Ali brothers grew distant and critical of Gandhi and the Congress. Azad's close friend Chittaranjan Das co-founded the Swaraj Party, breaking from Gandhi's leadership. Despite the circumstances, Azad remained firmly committed to Gandhi's ideals and leadership.

3. QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

In 1938, Azad served as an intermediary between the supporters of and the Congress faction led by Congress president Subhash Bose, who criticised Gandhi for not launching another rebellion against the British and sought to move the Congress away from Gandhi's leadership. Azad stood by Gandhi with most other Congress leaders, but reluctantly endorsed the Congress's exit from the assemblies in 1939 following the inclusion of India in World War II. Nationalists were infuriated that Viceroy Lord Linlithgow had entered India into the war without consulting national leaders. Although willing to support the British effort in return for independence, Azad sided with Gandhi when the British ignored the Congress overtures. Azad's criticism of Jinnah and the League intensified as Jinnah called Congress rule in the provinces as "Hindu Raj", calling the resignation of the Congress ministries as a "Day of Deliverance" for Muslims. Jinnah and the League's separatist agenda was gaining popular support amongst Muslims. Muslim religious and political leaders criticized Azad as being too close to the Congress and placing politics before Muslim welfare.^[5] As the Muslim League adopted a resolution calling for a separate Muslim state (Pakistan) in its session in Lahore in

1940, Azad was elected Congress president in its session in Ramgarh. Speaking vehemently against Jinnah's Two-Nation Theory—the notion that Hindus and Muslims were distinct nations—Azad lambasted religious separatism and exhorted all Muslims to preserve a united India, as all Hindus and Muslims were Indians who shared deep bonds of brotherhood and nationhood. In his presidential address, Azad said:

" Full eleven centuries have passed by since then. Islam has now as great a claim on the soil of India as Hinduism. If Hinduism has been the religion of the people here for several thousands of years, Islam also has been their religion for a thousand years.

Just as a Hindu can say with pride that he is an Indian and follows Hinduism, so also, we can say with equal pride that we are Indians and follow Islam. I shall enlarge this orbit still further. The Indian Christian is equally entitled to say with pride that he is an Indian and is following a religion of India, namely Christianity."⁶

4. AZAD, PATEL AND GANDHI AT AN AICC MEETING IN BOMBAY, 1940.

In face of increasing popular disenchantment with the British across India, Gandhi and Patel advocated an all-out rebellion demanding immediate independence. Azad was wary and skeptical of the idea, aware that India's Muslims were increasingly looking to Jinnah and had supported the war. Feeling that a struggle would not force a British exit, Azad and Nehru warned that such a campaign would divide India and make the war situation even more precarious. Intensive and emotional debates took place between Azad, Nehru, Gandhi and Patel in the Congress Working Committee's meetings in May and June 1942. In the end, Azad became convinced that decisive action in one form or another had to be taken, as the Congress had to provide leadership to India's people and would lose its standing if it did not.

Supporting the call for the British to "Quit India", Azad began exhorting thousands of people in rallies across the nation to prepare for a definitive, all-out struggle. As Congress president, Azad travelled across India and met with local and provincial Congress leaders and grassroots activists, delivering speeches and planning the rebellion. Despite their previous differences, Azad worked closely with Patel and Dr. Rajendra Prasad to make the rebellion as effective as possible. On 7 August 1942 at the Gowalia Tank in Mumbai, Congress president Azad inaugurated the struggle with a vociferous speech exhorting Indians into action. Just two days later, the British arrested Azad and the entire Congress leadership. While Gandhi was incarcerated at the Aga Khan Palace in Pune, Azad and the Congress Working Committee were imprisoned at a fort in Ahmednagar, where they would remain under isolation and intense security for nearly four years. Outside news and communication had been largely prohibited and completely censored. Although frustrated at their incarceration and isolation, Azad and his companions attested to feeling a deep satisfaction at having done their duty to their country and people.^[7]

Azad occupied the time playing bridge and acting as the referee in tennis matches played by his colleagues. In the early mornings, Azad began working on his classic Urdu work, the *Ghubhar-i-Khatir*. Sharing daily chores, Azad also taught the Persian and Urdu languages, as well as Indian and world history to several of his companions. The leaders would generally avoid talking of politics, unwilling to cause any arguments that could exacerbate the pain of their imprisonment. However, each year on 26 January, which was then considered Poorna Swaraj (Complete Independence) Day, the leaders would gather to remember their cause and pray together. Azad, Nehru and Patel would briefly speak about the nation and the future. Azad and Nehru proposed an initiative to forge an agreement with the British in 1943. Arguing that the rebellion had been mistimed, Azad attempted to convince his colleagues that

the Congress should agree to negotiate with the British and call for the suspension of disobedience if the British agreed to transfer power. Although his proposal was overwhelmingly rejected, Azad and a few others agreed that Gandhi and the Congress had not done enough. When they learnt of Gandhi holding talks with Jinnah in Mumbai in 1944, Azad criticized Gandhi's move as counter-productive and ill-advised.^[8]

5. MOULANA AZAD AND PARTITION OF INDIA

At Wardha Railway Station: Maulana Azad, Acharya Kripalani, Sardar Patel, Subhash Bose. With the end of the war, the British agreed to transfer power to Indian hands. All political prisoners were released in 1946 and Azad led the Congress in the elections for the new Constituent Assembly of India, which would draft India's constitution. He headed the delegation to negotiate with the British Cabinet Mission, in his sixth year as Congress president. While attacking Jinnah's demand for Pakistan and the mission's proposal of 16 June 1946 that envisaged the partition of India, Azad became a strong proponent of the mission's earlier proposal of 16 May. The proposal advocated a federal system with a limited central government and autonomy for the provinces. The central government would have Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communication while the provinces would win all other subjects unless they voluntarily relinquished selected subjects to the Central Government. Additionally, the proposal called for the "grouping" of provinces on religious lines, which would informally band together the Muslim-majority provinces in the West as Group B, Muslim-majority provinces of Bengal and Assam as Group C and the rest of India as Group A. While Gandhi and others expressed skepticism of this clause, Azad argued that Jinnah's demand for Pakistan would be buried and the concerns of the Muslim community would be assuaged.^[9] Under Azad and Patel's backing, [citation needed] the Working Committee approved the resolution against Gandhi's advice. Azad also managed to win Jinnah's agreement to the proposal citing the greater good of all Indian Muslims.

Azad had been the Congress president since 1939, so he volunteered to resign in 1946. He nominated Nehru, who replaced him as Congress president and led the Congress into the interim government. Azad was appointed to head the Department of Education. However, Jinnah's Direct-Action Day agitation for Pakistan, launched on 16 August sparked communal violence across India. Thousands of people were killed as Azad travelled across Bengal and Bihar to calm the tensions and heal relations between Muslims and Hindus. Despite Azad's call for Hindu-Muslim unity, Jinnah's popularity amongst Muslims soared and the League entered a coalition with the Congress in December, but continued to boycott the constituent assembly. Later in his autobiography, Azad indicated Patel having become more pro-partition than the Muslim League, largely due to the League's not co-operating with the Congress in the provisional government on any issue.

Azad had grown increasingly hostile to Jinnah, who had described him as the "Muslim Lord Haw-Haw" and a "Congress Showboy." Muslim League politicians accused Azad of allowing Muslims to be culturally and politically dominated by the Hindu community. Azad continued to proclaim his faith in Hindu-Muslim unity: *I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. I am indispensable to this noble edifice and without me this splendid structure is incomplete. I am an essential element, which has gone to build India. I can never surrender this claim.*^{"10}

Amidst more incidences of violence in early 1947, the Congress-League coalition struggled to function. The provinces of Bengal and Punjab were to be partitioned on religious lines, and on 3 June 1947 the British announced a proposal to partition India on religious lines, with the

princely states free to choose between either dominion. The proposal was hotly debated in the All-India Congress Committee, with Muslim leaders Saifuddin Kitchlew and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan expressing fierce opposition. Azad privately discussed the proposal with Gandhi, Patel and Nehru, but despite his opposition was unable to deny the popularity of the League and the unworkability of any coalition with the League. Faced with the serious possibility of a civil war, Azad abstained from voting on the resolution, remaining silent and not speaking throughout the AICC session, which ultimately approved the plan.^[11]

Azad, committed to a united India until his last attempt, was condemned by the advocates of Pakistan, especially the Muslim League. In 1923, he became the youngest man to be elected Congress president. Azad led efforts to organise the Flag Satyagraha in Nagpur. Azad served as president of the 1924 Unity Conference in Delhi, using his position to work to re-unite the Swarajists and the Khilafat leaders under the common banner of the Congress. In the years following the movement, Azad travelled across India, working extensively to promote Gandhi's vision, education and social reform.

Conclusion:

Through the Study we can say that Maulana was a firm believer in the co-existence of religions. His dream was that of a unified independent India where Hindu and Muslims co-habited peacefully. Although this vision of Azad was shattered post partition of India, he remained a believer. He was the founder of the Jamia Milia Islamia Institution in Delhi along with fellow khilafat leaders which has blossomed into a renowned University today. His birthday, November 11, is celebrated as National Education Day in India.

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