

**MAULANA AZAD’S VIEWS AS AN EDUCATIONIST:
“AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT WHICH HAS GONE TO BUILD INDIA”**

Suparna Bhattacharya
Assistant Professor in English
Calcutta Girls’ College,
Goaltuli Lane, Kolkata 700013

Abstract

Though education has come to be viewed either from Althusserian or Derridean perspective, it can also be seen as vision of man committed to the envisioning of a nation as an ideal province free from prejudices as true learning is. While it has become customary to tag the novel with the nation coming into being, accommodating the plurality of voices, it will be interesting to explore Maulana Azad’s views on formulating a national educational system that appropriates English, scientific and technological know-how, develops the regional languages, emphasizes universal compulsory education for better citizenry and redefines religion, nationalism and modernity. This paper will try to relate the educational program envisaged by Maulana Azad as the combined outcome of a true nationalist’s pragmatic search for socio-economic development and also the quest of an emancipated thinker for unprejudiced modes of attaining true learning.

As the *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009* (RTE) becomes a fundamental right, the IITs and IIS of our times nurture students into brilliant scientists whose ideas and innovations continue to establish India in the forefront of the global scientific and technological arena, as Indians we need to remember that when India won freedom, the first Minister for Education had envisaged a “truly liberal and humanitarian” (“Education”¹, 1969) educational structure resting upon a base of compulsory universal basic education and culminating in provision for modern scientific and technical education. When the defence budget stands today at a staggering Rs. 2,46,727 crore, there is a 2% cut in the education budget which stands at 69074.76 crore, we need to remember Maulana Abul Kalam Azad’s (1888-1958) remark that education “should have the highest priority in our national budget and should take its place immediately after food and clothing” (“Education” 177). Upon assuming the nation-

¹ Press Conference, February 18, 1947

building task of the first Minister for Education of independent India, he set upon the mammoth task of weaving “the fabric of a secular, liberal, modern and universal education system”, as Sri Pranab Mukherjee, the hon’ble President of India remarked in his speech at the National Educations Day celebrations on 11 November, 2013 (pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease). This paper will try to relate the educational program envisaged by Maulana Azad as the combined outcome of a true nationalist’s pragmatic search for socio-economic development and also the quest of an emancipated thinker for unprejudiced modes of attaining true learning.

Views of Maulana Azad as an Educationist

Maulana Azad became the Minister of Education in 1947 and in May 1952 he was given the additional charge of the portfolio of Natural Resources and Scientific Research. A review of Maulana Azad’s contribution to the development of educational programme in post-independent India reminds of justifies the view that

Educational thinkers generally don’t come from the rank of the professional educationists but from philosophers, writers and creative thinker. Neither Plato, nor Rousseau nor Freud not Montessori, Spencer, Tagore, Gandhi or Iqbal can be described as professional Educationists...yet their impact on education has been tremendous.
(Saiyidain 66)

Maulana Azad envisioned a five-fold programme for the expansion of education in the country comprising of the following:

- 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.

Maulana Azad was himself an ardent quester for true knowledge, an unbiased mode of learning but within the immediate context of post-independent India he laid emphasis on knowledge as a means to an end with his prioritization of universal basic education. He declared that is “necessary to wipe out the illiteracy of 150 years and make our people efficient, productive and responsible citizens of a democratic State” (“Programme”² 210). Not only is compulsory universal basic education a State responsibility, but “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.” (qtd. in Raina 36), as Maulana Azad observed in his address during the conference on All India Education on January 16, 1948. Education, thus, comes to be viewed as the basic criteria for rising consciousness among the population of a nation burdened with economic stagnation, poverty, illiteracy, where the English educational programme is a “strategy of containment” (Viswanathan 10).

² Address at the Central Advisory Board of Education, Cuttack, January 8, 1950.

Maulana Azad's views and programmes are strongly rooted in ground reality and hence his emphasis on universal basic education is not a fantasy or a grand empty verbosity. Instead, he clearly lays down the aim and objective of such a vision and outlines the financial provision to materialize the idea into reality. At the meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education in January, 1949 he remarked that the "first and foremost task of the National Government is the provision of free and compulsory basic education for all." (qtd. in Chatterjee 3) The epithet "national" resonates Maulana Azad's deep concern with national identity based on Hindu-Muslim identity since the times of his publication of *Al-hilal* (1912) and his involvement with the revolutionaries in Bengal. He was aware that dissemination of quality compulsory universal education, the elementary and primary schools needs to be reformed so as to provide a strong foundation so that the whole structure of national education can be erected. Maulana Azad believed that "a good school is a national asset of the highest value" and the quality of the nation "depends upon the quality of such laboratories" (qtd. in Chatterjee 6). The elaborate and lofty scheme needed a mammoth funding and during his address at the Central Advisory Board of Education on January 8, 1950 Maulana Azad referred to the report of the Post-War Development Plan that laid a time frame of 40 years for implementing a scheme of basic education that would cost the nation a sum of Rs. 8,000 crore at the rate of about Rs. 200 crore a year. He was acutely aware of the paucity of funds for infrastructure and at least and nine lac teachers but an optimist he believed in the optimum utilization of resources and hence he appealed to: all educated men and women of this country to come forward to meet this deficiency.

I would urge upon every educated men and women to regard it as a sacred national service to come forward and serve as a teacher for at least two years. They should regard it as a sacrifice to the national cause and accept for their service whatever allowance the state may afford. We may also consider some kind of conscription for the purpose. If every matriculate is required to put in one years and every Graduate two years service in education before he or she obtain his or her certificate, we would get a large supply of teachers for our purpose. If two laths of educated men and women come forward every year we can in five years have the minimum number of teachers necessary for fulfilling our plans. This will, however, be an emergency measure and cannot continue indefinitely. We must therefore devote these five years for the greatest possible expansion in the provision of facilities for training teachers, so that, by the end of that period we may gradually replace volunteer teachers by teachers who have taken up teaching as their vocation. ("Plan"³ 191-2).

Parallel to the foundational edifice, Maulana Azad laid emphasis upon science and technology and became a seminal force behind the establishment of the Indian Institutes of Technology as "a landmark in the progress of higher technological education and research in the country" (qtd. in Chatterjee 4). Inaugurating the Indian Institute of Technology at Kharagpur on 18 August 1951 Maulana Azad in his address emphasized on three inter-related issues: brain drain, technological improvement and the consequent attainment of self-reliance: "We must

³ Opening Address at the All India Educational Conference, New Delhi, January 16, 1948

improve the facilities for higher technical education in the country so that we could ourselves meet most of our needs. The large number of our young men who had been going abroad for higher training could have received such training in the country itself. Indeed, I looked and still look forward to the day when the facilities for technical education in India will be of such a level that people from abroad will come to India for higher scientific and technical training.”⁴ Maulana Azad also laid emphasis on the development of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore and the Faculty of Technology, Delhi University (1952), and strengthening of AICTE, established in 1945, as an advisory body. He was instrumental in transforming Visva Bharati into a Central University in 1952 and was one of the founders and the greatest patrons of Jamila Milia Islamia. He is also remembered for founding of the University Grants Commission (1953) to supervise and advance the higher education in the nation.

Maulana Azad also realized the significance of art and cultural activities in promoting and strengthening the educational edifice of the nation. Along with these bodies for higher education Azad established most of the major cultural and literary academies we have today, including the Sangeet Natak Akademi (1953), Lalit Kala Akademi (1954), and Sahitya Akademi (1954) as well as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (1950). While setting up these Academies, Azad was clear that all these institutions of creative talent need to be autonomous and free from official government control and interference. He categorically pointed out at the First All India Conference of Letters that “even a National Government cannot, and should not be, expected to develop literature and culture through official fiats. The government should certainly help both by material assistance and by creating an atmosphere which is congenial to cultural activities, but the main work of the development of literature and culture must be the responsibility of individuals endowed with talent and genius.”⁵

Maulana Azad’s Search for Ideal Educational System

Maulana Azad’s views and his contributions as an educationist can be seen as a culmination of his preoccupation with educational system in colonial India and also his independent and individual quest from naïve conformity to rational questioning for modernity. Belonging to an illustrious family of Sufi pirs, he grew up during a significant period of colonial modernity and experienced the deep conflict between the Indian and western mode of education in the post-1835 English Education Act phase.

The major decisions of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad regarding education can be related to his lifetime concern for an adequately balanced, modern and liberal educational system for modern India. Growing up in fin de siècle Calcutta, the second capital of Britain’s global empire and the cradle of the Bengal Renaissance, Azad was passionately patriotic with strong empathies for anti-colonial politics and also a liberal humanist that made him admire Tagore’s “lofty humanism which arose above all sectarian and communal limitations” (“Tagore” 217). Since his formative years, Maulana Azad, born as Firoz Bakht to Maulana Khairuddin, a widely revered sufi pir of the Qadiri and Naqshbandi orders, was critical of the old educational pattern into which his father inducted him:”My father was a man who believed in the old ways of life.

⁴ Proceedings of the 19th meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education, New Delhi, March 15-6, 1952.

⁵ Inaugural address at the First All India Conference on Letters, New Delhi, March 15, 1951.

He had no faith in western education and never thought of giving me an education of the modern type. He held that modern education would destroy religious faith and arranged for my education in the old traditional manner.” *India Wins Freedom* 2) At a very young age of 16 Azad completed *Dars-e-Nizamia* after which came across the writings of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and was “greatly impressed by his views on modern education.” (*India Wins Freedom* 3). Another major early influence on Maulana Azad was Ibn Khaldun, the 15th century Moroccan philosopher, historian and traveler, who inspired him to question the traditional methods of teaching as well as the curriculum. Maulana Azad agreed with him in holding the view that what led to stagnation in religious and secular learning was an unquestioning acceptance of theology. He found education to be the sole means for rectifying this error. Azad was critical of the omission of mathematics from the curricula in the Islamic madrasas. He also realized “that a man could not be truly educated in the modern world unless he studied modern science, philosophy and literature” (*India Wins Freedom* 3) and this can be seen at the root of his lifelong belief in a balanced educational approach involving science, technology and humanities. His interrogating and analytical mind soon cast him into “a period of great mental crisis” and his “heart was full of a new sense of revolt” that led him to realize that he “must find the truth for” himself” (*India Wins Freedom* 3). In an epiphanic moment of freedom from all conventional ties he decided “to adopt the pen name ‘Azad’ or ‘Free’ to indicate that I (he) was no longer tied to my (his) inherited beliefs” (*India Wins Freedom* 4). Thus, in his weekly journal *Al-Hilal* Azad imbued a “new note of strong nationalism” (*India Wins Freedom* 8) and started a column on scientific view, “Mazakira-Ilmiya” which included articles on radium, Scott’s expedition to the South Pole, Montessori’s institutions and educational experiments, J.C. Bose’s investigations and Darwin’s contribution to science.

Colonial Educational Programme and Maulana Azad’s Response

The thirteenth resolution of the Charter Act of 1813 enjoined the responsibility of educating Indian subjects upon the British colonial administration, emphasis is laid on adopting measures “as may tend to the introduction among them of useful knowledge and moral improvement” (qtd. in Naik and Narullah 55). In his prefatorial letter to the *Reports on Vernacular Education* (1835), prepared at the behest of the General Committee of Public Instruction, Adam had observed:

It is assumed that Government is desirous of encouraging education ,amongst all classes of its subjects, whether Christians, Mahomedans or Hindoos, as a means of improving their condition by & better knowledge of the arts of life that minister to human wants; of purifying and elevating their character by moral, and intellectual instruction; and of qualifying them at once to appreciate the benevolent intentions and salutary measures of Government, and to give to those measures the moral force derived from the support of -an intelligent and instructed population.(1)

However, the educational programme of the British government strategically marginalized the indigenous centres of learning in Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. Macaulay’s Minute on Education aimed towards formulating “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Macaulay 205). Despite the governmental claim that western education is a means of improving India, a perception develops among the native intelligentsia that western education is failing as an instrument of modernity and instilling

intellectual and moral confusion. In such a state, the colonial native needed to develop an individualistic stance based upon a synthesizing perception and this comes to be reflected in the views of Maulana Azad and Nehru.

Azad's views as an educationist are based upon his synthesis of western and indigenous views of learning and knowledge. He was aware of the European preoccupation with children's education as voiced by Locke and Rousseau. Rousseau voiced the innate goodness of man and advocated the child's necessity and ability to grasp the truth through his own insight instead of disciplining him with a regimenting schedule. Azad was impressed by this emphasis of Rousseau on the individual mind. Azad's response to the colonial educational policy is neither prejudiced nor reactionary and this can be seen in his evaluation of Macaulay's Minute in his address at the Press Conference on 18 February 1947. He praises Macaulay's Minute for introducing Indians to a "world of science and modern technology" (Azad, "Plan" 170). However, he is critical of the British educational program that has "led to the creation of a small intelligentsia separated from the mass of the Indian people" and "divorced the educated class from the currents of Indian traditional life" (Azad, "Plan" 170) so as to disown or look down upon our national heritage. Such an approach to Macaulay's Minute reveals a broad holistic vision that Maulana Azad had conceived for using education as an effective tool for social change and rapid economic growth of our country.

Simultaneously, Azad was conscious of the fact that colonial education system, particularly the post-Macaulayan phase, had done tremendous harm to the Indian education, most importantly the medium of instruction. He concedes that different "provincial languages were not at the time sufficiently developed to serve as the medium of instruction but there can be no doubt that a National Government would have taken these languages in hand and gradually developed them to serve the purpose." (Azad, "Plan" 170) On the issue of medium of instruction in educational institutions, he proposed in August 1948 that "a child should be instructed, in the early stage of his education, through the medium of the mother tongue as has been accepted by the Government as its policy" (qtd. in Chatterjee 4). According to him any departure from this principle was bound to be harmful to the child. He further observed that "if within a State there are people speaking in different languages, any attempt to adopt one language as the medium of instruction will lead to discontent and bitterness and "will affect inter-provincial relations and set up vicious circles of retaliation, and thereby provincialism will grow and Indian nationalism will suffer" (qtd. in Chatterjee 4). He posited immense faith in the potential of the regional languages as medium of instruction and comparing colonized India with Turkey, China and Japan, who had the freedom of choice to go ahead and impart modern education through their own languages, he observed, "If the Indian languages had been made the medium of instruction a hundred and fifty years ago they would have come in line with the progressive languages of the world" (Azad, "Education" 179).

Azad's National Education System: a Dream Unfulfilled?

Maulana Azad's visions and views as an educationist can be read as the expression of a liberal humanist and scholar who devoted his life in discovering India, synthesizing the philosophies of East and West, understanding the role of education in redefining modernity, religion, and nationalism within the twentieth century Indian context. Maulana Azad's encomium to religion, humanism and nationalism: "I am a Muslim and proud of the fact. Islam's splendid tradition of

thirteen hundred years are my inheritance. I am unwilling to lose even the smallest part of this inheritance. In addition I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. . . . I am indispensable in this noble edifice. Without me this splendid structure of India is incomplete. I am an essential element which has gone to build India. I can never surrender this claim” provides a wide backdrop for estimating the forces that moulded his views as an educationist and Minister for Education. After nearly 68 years of India winning freedom it is time we ask we ask whether we been able to translate Maulana Azad’s vision of national educational system into reality? The former speaker of our Lok Sabha, Sri Somnath Chatterjee observed that 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” and added that “we are unfortunately still to reach the goal and to fulfill what he laid down as the objectives of the country’s educational policy for the all round progress of the country” (7).

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Bionote

Suparna Bhattacharya is presently working as Head of the Department of English, at Calcutta Girls College, Kolkata, West Bengal. Interested in Fairy Tales, & Women's narratives, she is working on European and Bengali fairy tales for her doctoral dissertation and has recently edited a collection of articles entitled *Prose Writings of Seventeenth Century England and New England* (ISBN 978-93-84106-10-2) (2014). Her articles have been published in books like *Critical Essays on Contemporary Indian Women Novelists* (ISBN 978-81-8387-280-5) (2010), *The Indian ImagiNation: Colonial and Postcolonial Literature & Culture*, (SBN 81-8043-042-1 2007) and various refereed national and international journals.