

MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD: POLITICS, RELIGION AND SOCIALISM

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ABSTRACT : Maulana Abul Kalam Azad has been one of the most prominent figures in the first half of the 20th Century. He had a revolutionary's burning passion for freedom. He said that, we cannot have an intellectual mould without religion. Maulana discovered for Muslims a world of religious thought to redress the balance of the old. Maulana's political behaviour was rooted in his unity of the Indian Nation. To him India was one and all. Indian's constituted a single nation. He rejected obscurantism, fanaticism and blind adherence to tradition and stood for free and independent enquiry of religious verities and trust without any inhibitions. He looked upon religion both as a personal morality and a social ideal. He also stood for all mankind.

INTRODUCTION : Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, one of the tallest stalwarts of India's freedom struggle, was born in 1888. He received an orthodox Islamic education but his independent, questing mind led him to an interest in Pan-Islamic thought and he traveled widely in the Middle East. On his return he joined Aurobindo Ghosh's revolutionary movement. His revolutionary views led the British to intern him. He subsequently joined the Indian National Congress in 1920 and was active in the Quit India Movement becoming one of the congress's most prominent leaders. He was bitterly opposed to partition, convinced that a united India would serve the interest of all communities' best¹.

POLITICS AND RELIGION : Maulana Azad was essentially a scholar – enjoying pageants of thought, ego-centric and seclusion-loving. The circumstances of his life, however, pushed him into politics and the freedom struggle. He used to say :

“*mai ne siyasi zindagi ke hangama ko nahi dhoondatha,*

siyasi zindagi ke hangama ne mujhe dhoond nikala”.

(I did not go after the disordered crowd of political life; political confusions and noisy disturbance among themselves searched me out.)

He realized fully the contradiction of this situation, and wrote in *Tarjuman ul-Quran*.

“The uproar of political activity and the calmness of literary life could not proceed together. Conciliation between fire and flake of cotton is never possible. I wished to bring the two together. On the one hand, I went on piling up the efforts of my thought, and on the other, invoked incessantly the scorching lightning to touch them. I knew the result. I have therefore no right to complain².

Most of his ancestors were religious divines. However, Azad had a political bent of mind. At a very early age he showed interest in politics. He developed interest in the pan-Islamic doctrines of Jamaluddin Afghani and the Aligarh thought of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. Imbued with the pan-Islamic spirit, he visited Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Turkey. But he returned to Calcutta with an altogether new perception of life and politics. In Iraq he met the exiled revolutionaries who were fighting to establish a constitutional government in Iran. In Egypt he met Shaikh Muhammad Abduh and Saeed Pasha and other revolutionary activists of the Arab World. He had first hand knowledge of the ideals and spirit of the Young Turks in Constantinople. All these contacts turned him into a Nationalist Revolutionary³.

Maulana Azad was well aware of the basic fallacies of both the dominant trends of the Muslim society in those days, i.e. the religious orthodoxy of the Ulama in politics and political hypocrisy of the Aligarh School. Al-Hilal and his other writings during 1911-1920, raised a different slogan with which Muslim leadership were not familiar. It was indeed a new language to them as has been rightly described by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Mahmudul Hasan, the President of Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind, a towering personality of Indian National Movement was reported to have said, “we ulema were sleeping but Azad has roused us from slumber.” All his political views and strategies were based upon his religion and on his understanding of Quran. Maulana said in 1940 at the session of Indian National Congress, “I would remind my co-religionists that I stand today exactly where I stood in 1912”⁴.

Maulana did not agree with Sir Syed’s advising the Muslims to keep themselves away from politics or his stubborn opposition to the policies of Indian National Congress and his soft attitude towards the British Government. Contrary to Sir Syed, Maulana was opposed to the British rule tooth and nail and he never compromised on this point. He fought against the British rule like a crusader considering it as a part of his religious duty. For him opposing British rule has religious sanction. “For those to whom God, His Order, His Code and belief in Him are dear, they would never accept the obedience and loyalty to and subjugation of British rule or their survival”, he declared in Lahore in 1921 while delivering a Presidential address at the annual session of the Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind.⁵

Azad’s political activities continued to be inspired by his religious faith, even though he now learned how to eliminate irrelevant religious considerations when thinking of or discussing purely political issues’. Azad had advanced beyond the type of religious motivation he had advocated in the al-Hilal period, when he claimed that the Quran gave specific guidance on all political issues with a full knowledge, he had proved that his religious faith could guide him in the area of general principles, and give him strength for the difficulties he had to face. As for the policy of Hindu-Muslim unity in a united free India, on which he was at variance with the Muslim League. He shared with the Ulama of Deoband

and the Jamiat ul-Ulama-e-Hind three general reasons for opposition to the Muslim League and the Pakistan idea: first, the ulama felt that they represented the longest Islamic tradition of opposition to the British in India; second, they distrusted the western educated League leaders and felt they were not Islamically motivated; finally, they were concerned about the position of Muslims who would be left in a predominantly Hindu India if a separate Pakistan were formed. When Azad later stated his reasons for supporting the Congress and rejecting the idea of Pakistan, his primary argument was in terms of the best interests of the Muslims. He wrote of safeguarding their future, and said that the Pakistan solution would not remedy the ills of Muslims.⁶

RELIGION AND SOCIETY : James Pratt, a well known author on religious psychology has discussed four temperamental kinds of religion : traditional, rational mystical and practical. Maulana Azad had his own categorization. He says:

“One religion is *hereditary*, you believe in it because your forefathers had believed in it. Another (type of) religion is *geographical*, you believe in that because it is the path chosen by the people of a particular geographical area and you follow it as others of that area did. There is (yet another type of) of religion which is (based) on *Census*. There is a column of religion in census-papers and you just get Islam entered in it. There is *customary* religion-a structure of customs and ceremonies which you should not disturb, but allow yourself to be moulded by it. But besides all these types, there is one other but real religion which is generally lost sight of (in assessment of religious attitudes).”

This last type of religion, according to the Maulana, is the result of the inner quest of man to unlock the mysteries of nature and to understand God, Man and Universe through his own intellectual effort.⁷

Maulana Azad believed that the role of religion in society should be to integrate rather than disintegrate and create chaos. He firmly believed that religion has a positive and constructive function to perform in society. Delivering his Presidential speech at the Fourteenth Session of the Central Advisory Board of Education on January 13, 1948, he brought out some basic aspects of his approach to education and religion. He said :

“.... The nineteenth century liberal point of view concerning the imparting of religious education has already lost weight. Even after the World War I a new approach had begun to assert itself and the intellectual revolution brought in the wake of the World War II has given it a decisive shape. At first it was considered that religions would stand in the way of the free intellectual development of a child but now it has been admitted that religious education cannot altogether be dispensed with. If national education was devoid of this element, there would be no appreciation of moral values or moulding of character on human line.

In fact he had evaluated the dimensions of religious education in the light of historical developments.

Maulana Azad believed in the essential *unity of purpose* of all religions-self-realization of man. He quoted both from Gita and Arab sources to substantiate his point of view. He quoted the Arabic saying :

“Man arafa nafsahu faqad arafa rabbahu”

(He who knows himself knows God)

And Gita :

"Here today behold the whole universe, moving and unmoving and whatever else thou desirest to see, O Gudakesa (Arjuna), are all unified in My body."

Maulana told his co-religionist that, Islam was opposed to slavery and it was religious duty to work for liberation of the country. They should either exist a free people or choose extinction, there is no 3rd alternative in Islam⁸.

CONCLUSION : Maulana Azad's anxiety all through his life was to create national consciousness and solidarity among the Indians. Universalism in knowledge, federalism in political system, secularism in political ideas, humanism in social relationship and *laissez faire* in religious life were the watchwords of Maulana Azad's life and through them he sought to strengthen the fabric of the Indian Nation.

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