



Educational Thoughts of Abul Kalam Azad and Its Relevance in Modern Era

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Abstract

This paper explores the educational thoughts of Abul Kalam Azad, a visionary Indian scholar, freedom fighter, and the first Minister of Education in post-independence India. Azad's educational philosophy, deeply rooted in inclusivity, cultural preservation, and the cultivation of critical thinking, retains remarkable relevance in the modern era. He advocated for education as a powerful instrument for breaking down social, economic, and cultural barriers, a perspective that aligns perfectly with the contemporary global call for equitable and accessible education. Azad's commitment to the preservation and celebration of cultural diversity within educational frameworks echoes the need for recognizing and sustaining cultural traditions in today's interconnected world. Moreover, his emphasis on nurturing critical thinking and innovative skills resonates with modern educational theories that prioritize creativity and problem-solving. Furthermore, Azad's vision of education encompassed the promotion of ethical and humanitarian values, countering extremism, and fostering tolerance – all of which are increasingly important in today's complex and interconnected world. In essence, Abul Kalam Azad's educational ideas provide invaluable guidance for shaping more inclusive, culturally rich, and socially conscious education systems to meet the challenges and aspirations of the modern age.

Keywords: *Educational thoughts, Critical thinking, Cultural diversity, Innovative skills, Creativity*

1. Introduction

The world of education has historically been a paramount arena for nurturing individuals and shaping societies. In this context, the educational thoughts of Abul Kalam Azad, a towering intellectual and a key figure in India's struggle for independence, have left an indelible mark on the course of educational discourse and policy. Azad's life and work embody the spirit of intellectual curiosity, social reform, and nation-building. His ideas about education, deeply rooted in inclusivity, cultural preservation, and the promotion of critical thinking, continue to be a source of inspiration and guidance in the modern era.

Abul Kalam Azad, affectionately known as Maulana Azad, was a polymath whose legacy extends far beyond his time. As the first Minister of Education in independent India, he played an instrumental role in shaping the country's educational landscape. Azad envisioned education as a means of empowerment, fostering a sense of unity in diversity and equipping individuals with the tools to navigate a rapidly changing world. His philosophy, enriched by a deep commitment to pluralism, harmonious coexistence, and the preservation of cultural traditions, offers profound insights into contemporary challenges in the field of education.

In this paper, we embark on a comprehensive exploration of Abul Kalam Azad's educational thoughts and their relevance in the modern era. We delve into the core tenets of his philosophy, which span inclusivity, cultural heritage, critical thinking, and the nurturing of moral values. We endeavor to elucidate how these principles remain highly pertinent in the context of today's globalized and interconnected world. Azad's ideas continue to resonate with contemporary educational needs, offering a blueprint for crafting more equitable, culturally vibrant, and socially responsible educational systems. By studying and contextualizing Azad's educational vision, we aim to draw valuable insights for reshaping educational policies and practices that address the ever-evolving needs of our modern age.

2. Objectives of the Study

This paper represents the researchers' endeavour to explore a previously overlooked area of study, pursued with the following objectives -

- a) To gain insights into Abul Kalam Azad's Educational Thoughts regarding Meaning of Education, Aims, Curriculum, Methods of Teaching, Role of Teachers and Women Education.
- b) To explore the relevance of Azad's Educational Thoughts in Modern era.

3. Research Questions

On the basis of Research Objectives, researchers has prepared the following Research Questions for this study -

- a) What are the Educational Thoughts of Abul Kalam Azad regarding Meaning of Education, Aims, Curriculum, Methods of Teaching, Role of Teachers and Women Education?

b) What are the Relevance of Azad's Educational Thoughts in Modern Era?

4. Methodology

This study is fundamentally theoretical and adopts a qualitative research approach. The primary sources of data for this research predominantly include the writings and various works of Abul Kalam Azad. Additionally, complementary information has been gathered from a variety of resources such as books, diaries, and articles authored by experts and scholars who have explored the life and works of Azad.

5. Discussions

Objective No.1: Educational Thoughts of Abul Kalam Azad

A. Meaning of Education:

Abul Kalam Azad, a visionary scholar and freedom fighter, regarded education as a profound and multifaceted endeavor. He believed that the meaning of education extended far beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge and skills. According to Azad, education encompassed the holistic development of an individual's intellectual, moral, and spiritual faculties. He emphasized the cultivation of a well-rounded and enlightened individual who not only had a deep understanding of academic subjects but also possessed a strong moral and ethical compass.

Azad's concept of education was deeply rooted in the promotion of values like tolerance, compassion, and social responsibility. He saw education as a means to foster unity in a diverse society, advocating for an inclusive and equitable educational system that transcended socio-economic and cultural divides. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage of a nation through education, believing that a strong cultural foundation was essential for a nation's progress and identity. In essence, Abul Kalam Azad's view of education was characterized by its role in nurturing individuals who were not only knowledgeable but also ethical, culturally aware, and socially responsible, contributing to the betterment of both individuals and society as a whole.

B. Aims of Education:

Abul Kalam Azad, the first Education Minister of independent India, made significant efforts to revolutionize the educational landscape of the country during his decade-long tenure. He aimed to transform the Department of Education into a comprehensive Ministry that would provide leadership in both education and culture. Azad's vision for educational reform was based on four fundamental aims -

- **Democratization of Education:** Azad recognized the deep-rooted inequalities in Indian society, including class discrimination and caste-based prejudices. He believed that education had the power to break down these barriers and uplift marginalized communities. He emphasized the state's responsibility to ensure that every individual had equal access to educational opportunities, enabling them to acquire knowledge and better themselves. Azad also advocated for special stipends and

scholarships for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and stressed the importance of extending educational facilities to women, thereby promoting a more inclusive and equitable society.

- **Maintenance of Educational Standards:** While Azad sought to democratize education, he was equally committed to maintaining high standards of learning. He believed that an unprecedented expansion of education was necessary to meet the demands of democracy. Azad proposed that educational excellence should not be compromised, and he did not favour universal enrollment in higher education. Instead, he argued that universities should be centers of knowledge and intellectual growth, attracting individuals driven by a thirst for learning. He emphasized the importance of aligning educational facilities with the needs of society to achieve a harmonious balance.
- **Broadening of Educational Outlook:** Azad envisioned education as a multi-dimensional tool for societal advancement. He emphasized the need to broaden educational perspectives at all levels, from basic to secondary and university education. Azad particularly appreciated the basic pattern of education as an effective system for primary education in India, one that promoted cooperative action for the greater social good.
- **Promotion of Mutual Understanding:** Azad was a staunch advocate of international unity and amity. His worldview transcended religious, cultural, and national boundaries. He believed in the essential unity of humanity, placing it above all other goals such as religious salvation, economic prosperity, cultural advancement, and political emancipation. Azad's vision of universalism found resonance in both Islamic and Hindu worldviews, as he interpreted Islam as a message of love and brotherhood that transcended divisions of race, community, language, and land.

Abul Kalam Azad's visionary educational ideals encompassed the democratization of education, the maintenance of high standards, the broadening of educational horizons, and the promotion of global understanding. His legacy continues to inspire educational thought and policy in India and beyond, as his principles offer a roadmap for a more inclusive, equitable, and enlightened society.

C. Curriculum:

Abul Kalam Azad was unwavering in his belief that the content and curriculum of education needed a transformative overhaul, departing from the colonial-era model to align with his vision for education. He articulated several key ideas to enrich and adapt the curriculum to meet his educational objectives -

- **Elementary Education:** Azad advocated for a curriculum at the elementary level that embraced the principles of basic education, focusing on "learning by doing." This approach aimed to provide students with practical, hands-on learning experiences to foster their holistic development.
- **Secondary Education:** At the secondary stage, Azad proposed a reorientation of the curriculum, as suggested by the Secondary Education Commission. This reorientation would emphasize training in diverse skills and aptitudes while preparing students for higher educational pursuits.

- **Higher Education:** Azad stressed the need to elevate educational standards at the university level, calling for broader and more enriched curricula that would prepare students for more complex and specialized fields of study.
- **Adult Literacy and Social Education:** Azad believed that adult literacy and social education programs should be thoughtfully designed to raise awareness and enhance productivity among the adult population, thereby promoting social development.
- **Rural Education:** Azad stressed the importance of tailoring education to meet the unique needs of rural areas, with a specific focus on agriculture and crafts, acknowledging the significance of vocational and practical skills in these settings.
- **Physical Education and Recreation:** Physical education, recreation, and opportunities for games and sports were viewed as integral components of educational programs at all levels, contributing to students' physical health and overall development.

Abul Kalam Azad's ideas on curriculum reform were forward-thinking and aimed at providing a more inclusive, holistic, and relevant education system that would equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

D. Methods of Teaching:

Immediately after India's independence, the Education Department faced a contentious issue regarding the medium of instruction. However, Abul Kalam Azad had a clear stance on this matter. He firmly believed that the mother tongue should serve as the initial medium of instruction, with a gradual transition to regional languages for higher studies. In 1947, Azad was confident that Indian languages had sufficiently developed to be used as the medium of instruction up to advanced levels of education, making education accessible to people in their native languages. In December 1947, he proposed the following formula:

- Regional languages should be the primary medium of instruction.
- A five-year time frame should be established to implement regional languages as the medium of instruction for all branches of higher education.
- To stay connected with global developments, many would continue to rely on English.

In another speech, Azad emphasized two certainties: first, that English could not be the medium of instruction in the future, and second, any transition should be gradual, especially in higher education. He suggested maintaining the status quo for five years with universities preparing for the impending change. Azad acknowledged that while English was a foreign language for Indian students, it had facilitated national unity by unifying educated individuals who could think and communicate in the same language. He recognized its role in uniting the nation. However, he unequivocally stated that English had no place as a medium of instruction in the future. Simultaneously, he was aware of the potential disruption that a sudden shift could cause to the educational system. Thus, he advocated a

gradual and staged replacement of English as the medium of instruction to minimize disruptions and ensure a seamless transition in the country's educational process.

E. Role of Teachers:

Abul Kalam Azad held a profound and visionary perspective on the role of teachers in the educational process. He believed that teachers were not just disseminators of knowledge but were instrumental in shaping the character and intellect of their students. Azad's view on the role of teachers can be summarized as follows:

- **Moral Exemplars:** Azad emphasized that teachers should serve as moral exemplars. They should uphold the highest ethical standards and values, becoming role models for their students. He believed that the character of teachers profoundly influenced the character development of their pupils.
- **Cultivators of Critical Thinking:** Teachers were expected to foster critical thinking and independent judgment in their students. Azad believed that education should encourage individuals to question, analyze, and evaluate information, promoting intellectual growth and curiosity.
- **Nurturers of National Unity:** Azad stressed that teachers played a crucial role in promoting national unity and social cohesion. They were responsible for instilling a sense of patriotism and a commitment to the welfare of the nation among their students.
- **Language and Culture Preservers:** In line with his emphasis on promoting regional languages and cultures, Azad believed that teachers should actively preserve and promote their native languages and cultural heritage. They were entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding India's diverse linguistic and cultural identity.
- **Innovators in Teaching:** Teachers were encouraged to be innovative in their teaching methods, adapting to evolving pedagogical practices and technologies to make learning engaging and effective.
- **Empowerers of Women:** Azad advocated for the empowerment of women through education, and he expected teachers to actively contribute to women's education, supporting gender equality in the classroom.
- **Bridge to Global Knowledge:** While advocating for the use of regional languages, Azad recognized the importance of staying connected with global advancements. He believed that teachers should bridge the gap between regional languages and the knowledge generated worldwide, ensuring that students had access to a broad spectrum of information and ideas.

Abul Kalam Azad regarded teachers as not just educators but as moral guides, nurturers of critical thinking, promoters of national unity, preservers of language and culture, and enablers of individual and societal progress. His vision for the role of teachers encompassed both the intellectual and moral

development of students and their vital contribution to the betterment of society and the nation as a whole.

F. Women Education:

Azad placed significant emphasis on the education of women. In 1949, while addressing the Central Assembly, he underscored the importance of providing women with instruction in modern sciences and knowledge. He explicitly stated that "no program 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, women."

Azad's views on women's education were twofold. Firstly, he recognized that women needed education as citizens of free India, as it was their fundamental right. Secondly, he pointed out that educating women played a pivotal role in simplifying the task of educating the younger generation. In 1949, he raised this issue in the Constituent Assembly, advocating for an expansion of educational opportunities for women. He acknowledged that the ultimate success of any educational program hinged upon the proper education of women.

Furthermore, Azad astutely noted that a significant portion of the world's problems could be resolved through the education of women. He argued that educated mothers would give rise to literate children, and this cascading effect could address numerous societal challenges. Azad went so far as to assert that the education of women held more significance than that of men because it had the potential to ignite a new awareness and a transformative change throughout the entire nation. His views on women's education were not only progressive but also deeply rooted in the belief that empowering women through education was key to the progress and enlightenment of the entire society.

Objective No.2: Relevance of Azad's Educational Thoughts in Modern Era

Maulana Azad aspired to bridge the divide between the East and the West through the prism of education. Undoubtedly, his ideology holds the potential to reconcile the historical antagonism between materialism and spiritualism that has persisted in the human world. It can also serve as a guiding light for humanity's progress towards higher realms of existence.

Maulana Azad embodied the roles of a patriot, a leader, a philosopher-statesman, and a distinguished scholar. His profound erudition and "luminous intelligence" enabled him to contribute significantly to Islam by dispelling the clouds of prejudice and bigotry that had accumulated over its eleven-century history in India. He was a rightful heir to the intellectual legacies of the past, with his intellectual journey reflecting the entire spectrum of Islamic thought.

Azad's deep understanding of Indian philosophies, along with his insight into various world religions, allowed him to discern the authentic and essential elements from the superfluous. In essence, he stood as one of the select few who possessed a holistic perspective on intellectual thought, serving as a bridge between diverse philosophies and religions.

Abul Kalam Azad's educational thoughts continue to hold remarkable relevance in the modern era, addressing several pressing issues and providing valuable insights for contemporary education -

- **Inclusivity and Equality:** Azad's emphasis on democratizing education and providing equal opportunities aligns with the global call for inclusive education. In an era where educational disparities persist, Azad's vision of accessible education for all remains highly pertinent.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Azad's commitment to preserving and celebrating cultural diversity is vital in today's globalized world. As societies grapple with the challenges of cultural assimilation, his ideas on maintaining cultural identity through education are valuable.
- **Critical Thinking:** Azad's advocacy for critical thinking and independent judgment corresponds with modern pedagogical theories that prioritize the development of 21st-century skills, including problem-solving, creativity, and analytical thinking.
- **Moral and Ethical Education:** The need to instill ethical values, social responsibility, and compassion in students is increasingly recognized in the modern era. Azad's focus on nurturing these qualities is in line with contemporary efforts to create responsible and empathetic citizens.
- **Gender Equality:** Azad's strong support for women's education resonates with ongoing efforts to promote gender equality in education. The empowerment of women through education remains a global priority.
- **Language and Cultural Education:** As the world becomes more interconnected, Azad's emphasis on language and cultural preservation is pertinent. In the context of preserving languages and heritage, Azad's ideas offer valuable insights.
- **Global Connectivity:** Azad's recognition of the need to connect regional languages with global knowledge is particularly relevant in the digital age, where the dissemination of information and ideas across linguistic and cultural boundaries is commonplace.
- **Teacher's Role:** Azad's vision of teachers as moral guides, critical thinking cultivators, and promoters of national unity corresponds with contemporary discussions on teacher quality and their pivotal role in shaping students' character and intellect.
- **Transition to Regional Languages:** As the debate on the medium of instruction continues, Azad's idea of a gradual shift from English to regional languages in education reflects the challenges and opportunities posed by language choices in modern education systems.
- **Empowerment through Education:** Azad's belief that the education of women holds the potential to address a wide range of societal issues remains relevant. The global focus on women's education as a catalyst for progress underscores the timeless relevance of his thoughts.

Abul Kalam Azad's educational thoughts provide a valuable framework for addressing contemporary challenges and shaping education systems that are inclusive, culturally rich, and aligned with the needs

of the modern era. His ideas continue to serve as a source of inspiration and guidance for educators, policymakers, and scholars worldwide.

6. Conclusion

This paper sheds light on the enduring significance of Azad's visionary ideas in the contemporary educational landscape. Abul Kalam Azad, a multifaceted leader, scholar, and freedom fighter, left an indelible mark on India's educational philosophy, and his insights continue to offer valuable guidance for modern educational practices. His vision, though rooted in India's historical context, transcends time and remains highly pertinent for several reasons. First and foremost, Azad's resolute commitment to inclusivity and equal access to education aligns with the global imperative of providing quality education for all, irrespective of background or circumstances. In an era marked by persistent educational disparities, his vision for democratizing education is more relevant than ever.

Azad's emphasis on preserving and celebrating cultural diversity resonates with contemporary debates on the importance of multicultural education and the preservation of linguistic and cultural heritage. In an increasingly interconnected world, his ideas provide a foundation for nurturing cultural identities while embracing the benefits of global connectivity. His advocacy for critical thinking, moral values, and character development in education corresponds with the modern emphasis on fostering 21st-century skills, ethical education, and social responsibility. In an era defined by complex challenges, Azad's vision for holistic education remains highly applicable. Azad's unwavering support for women's education continues to be a vital component of gender equality efforts in education worldwide. His conviction that educated women can drive societal progress is a message that transcends borders and cultures.

Furthermore, Azad's nuanced perspective on language and the gradual transition from English to regional languages for instruction reflects contemporary discussions on the medium of instruction and the preservation of linguistic diversity.

In essence, Abul Kalam Azad's educational thoughts, infused with a profound commitment to inclusivity, cultural preservation, critical thinking, and moral values, offer a blueprint for crafting contemporary educational systems that are inclusive, culturally rich, and aligned with the needs of the modern era. His legacy continues to inspire educators, policymakers, and scholars, contributing to the ongoing dialogue on education's pivotal role in shaping societies and individuals in the 21st century. Azad's ideas bridge the past and the present, demonstrating their timeless relevance in the pursuit of a more enlightened and equitable world.

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