Chapter - VI

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Maulana Azad was an outstanding Muslim intellectual of modern Indian. His mind was encyclopedic. He was an embodiment of the comprehensive genius of present age with a unique synthesis of the East and the West. By training he was religious and by conclusion rational. Hence he tried to reconcile religion with reason without injuring either. He was very close to Gandhi and Nehru alike. There was a confluence of tradition and the force of change. He served as a bridge between the new and old worlds of thought. In the shaping of Azad’s mind the influence of his ancestors can not be ignored. He had great respect for certain fundamental value which he derived from his ancestors. Truth was more dearer to him than anything else. Three families Azad wrote, “Combine in my ancestry whose member were framed in India and Arabia for their scholarship and learning but none of them ever cared or wished for worldly wealth”.¹ He mentioned Maulana Jamaluddin with pride who had refused to sign the Infallibility degree of Akbar. His son Shaikh Mohammad did not hesitate to go against Jehangir and supported Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi. The grand father of Azad Quazi Sirajuddin was champion of Islam, and grandfather of Maulana Munnuarddin was a great critic of the absurdities of the un-Islamic practice prevailing in contemporary time. He was very critical of Bahadur Shah’s shiaism.² Azad inherited from his
ancestors a legacy of orthodoxy and rigid adherence to the letter of scriptures. Being a genius Azad mastered all the subjects taught to him within few years; His logical bent of mind, infinite vastness of knowledge and tremendous command over expression led him to discussions with notable theologians of the time. He was not blind follower of his father. His restless mind was not satisfied with orthodox religious approach. As he was gifted with the faculty of original thinking and independent judgment he openly expressed his repugnance to imitation (Taqlid) even if it be the invitation of his father.³

He was inspired by the nationalism of the Mutazzilites but did not consider their cult as atheistic. Azad inclined towards nationalism due to his acceptance of Sir Syed’s religious approach. He had great regard for Sir Syed’s efforts aimed at intellectual revolution in the Muslim mind. He had no trust in the anachronistic institution of the ulema.⁴ He believed that Knowledge of modern sciences revolutionized faith. Many old concepts and values have become outmoded. Modern science and technology have rocked the foundations of religion, Azad therefore considered Sir Syed as a great Mujjadid.⁵ Azad’s association with Sir Syed lasted for a short period of time. As he came into contact with the writings of Rashid Raza of Egypt, he began to deviate from Sir Syed. He found that the application of rationalism results in scepticism and then leads to the negation of religion. He could not reconcile himself to such possibilities. He began to think that Sir Syed’s approach to religion was faulty and unconceivevag.⁶ This became the basis of differences in
political approach as well. He held that the political lead given to the Muslims by Sir Syed was misdirected.\(^7\) The Aligarh movement was confined to the problems of the Muslims of India. Azad believed that no local or national movement can benefit Muslims on the contrary he advocated need for a universal movement in the Islamic world. He held that the object of higher education of Muslims under Aligarh movement was futile. The influence of Sir Syed’s thoughts on Azad was abiding. Under Sir Syed influence Azad felt that there is no conflict between Quran and Science. Azad never denied the lasting value of Sir Syed’s thoughts to do away with imitation (Taqleed) and strong support to Ijtehad.\(^8\) Azad’s political and religious philosophy was guided by these principles. He emphasised that this legacy of Sir Syed should never be lost sight off.

Azad was also influenced and inspired by the teachings of Jamaluddin Afghani. An anti-imperialist, by conviction, Jamaluddin Afghani could never reconcile himself with pro-British attitude of Sir Syed. He under the influence of Afghani propounded the concept of pan-Islamism. He borrowed from Mohammed Abduh the method of study of religion and its presentation in modern age. Azad regarded Mohammed Abduh and Rashid Raza in high esteem for their unsparing criticism about the modernist India.

Azad outlined his own programme of Islamic politics through his journal Al-Hilal. Al-Hilal’s political mission clearly revealed the influence of Jamaluddin Afghani and Shibli. In Al-Hilal, one finds a metamorphosis of
earlier ideas of Azad under the impact of pan-Islamism and Shibli’s anti-
Aligarh attitude. Azad’s earlier political attitude was in accordance with the
sanctions of conventional religion which, he regarded as unfailing guide for all
action and as the final and eternal word of God. This view of Islam represents
the romantic ideals of the Indian Muslims. This further forms the basis of the
idealist and pan-Islamic trends of Muslim politics. In Islam, according to
Azad religion and politics are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. Azad’s
earlier life, political thought and programmes are characterised by this
romanticism the chief aim was the realization of shariat and integration of
Muslim. Azad made a minute analysis of the stagnant conditions of Muslims
and the Crisis the Community was facing and stimulated them for fresh action.
Azad attempted to develop a systematic Islamic theory of politics along the
lines of romanticism. He was perhaps the only Muslim intellectual who applied
this theory to the existing problems with this he tried to understand the
 complication of political life in India. When he found that the social and
political life of the Muslims is divorced from Islam, he tried to establish an
Islamic party for a comprehensive reorientation on the intellectual plane
anticipating that this would be the only remedy to overcome the serious
deficiencies of Muslim society. Consequently he advocated unity in the ranks
of his countrymen to reach the goal of independence. He thought that
nationalism is not inconsistent with spirit of Islam and that pan-Islamism was
misnomer. This change in his outlook resulted from his study of the
developments in the Islamic countries. Azad believed that in India there were
safeguards for the survival of Muslim culture and there is no harm in Muslim joining the Indian National Congress. That would not amount to an un-Islamic act. This marked the end of Azad’s utopian and sentimental romanticism and paved the way for combined fight for national freedom. Within the country the British Government displayed scant respect for the liberties of the people. Azad was convinced that an imperialist Government was anti-democratic. The abolition of the institution of Khilafat shocked Mohd. Ali and diverted him like Iqbal to Muslim Nationalism, but brought Azad closer to Indian Nationalism Indian Nationalism according to Azad was neither Hindu nor Islamic. It was secular and a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim cultures. This made him an advocate of Islam in the liberal and progressive sense. Earlier political ideas of Azad were the logical outcome of his traditional religious philosophy. But the secular approach of his later life made his religious views liberal and flexible.

Azad’s monumental work Tarjuman-ul-Quran presents the best exposition of Azad’s religious thought. There were three major elements in Azad’s philosophy of religion. The first is the unity of God, second, right action and the third is life after death. Azad’s philosophy of religion was rational. He regarded the reasoning faculty in man as the noblest of his faculties.\textsuperscript{10} As is observed by K. G. Saiyidain, “Azad is a rationalist but his rationalism does not clash with his belief in religion but draws strength and inspiration from it”.\textsuperscript{11} Azad held that religion would never lose its importance in human life as it is essential for the development and satisfaction of the human spirit. Unlike, philosophy and science religion supplies faith to man.\textsuperscript{12}
There are two aspects of Azad’s concept of nationalism, one is his attitude towards the British Raj and the other his attitudes towards his countrymen. He accepted Indian nationalism as a reality. His approach to religion gave a distinctive shape to his political ideas. The principle of tolerance and brotherhood, growth of composite culture which had forged unity between Hindus and Muslims against alien rule made him realize the significance of unity in diversity. At this stage he came into contact with Mahatma Gandhi. Indian nationalism according to Azad was democratic and secular, In this respect there is similarity between the attitudes of Azad and CR Das. Azad also believed that nationalism is the goal and struggle for freedom of India, its end is self Government or independence. The spirit of Indian nationalism was developed by imperialist exploitation and the suffering of the people. Azad never had any misgivings about the efficacy of his view of nationalism. He advocated that such nationalism would not kill the spirit of Islamic brotherhood but would rather strengthen it. He also believed that nationalism was Capable of being a progressive force if liberated from religious orthodoxy and narrow-mindedness. Gandhi had described Azad’s faith in nationalism “as robust as his faith in Islam”. He strongly believed that Islam fosters nationalism avoiding communal and racial prejudice. He felt that the Muslim minority cannot and should not brand Indian Nationalism as un-Islamic as it embodies the broad vision of Islam. His conviction was that nationalism in India was impossible to realize without Hindu-Muslim unity. Azad emphasised Hindu-Muslim unity so much that it became dearer to him than the freedom of the country. Azad like
C. R. Das, never adopted communal approach for the solution of political and economic problems. He always stressed on equality of opportunity and economic freedom for all alike.

Azad supported Khilafat Movement. It was not a religious issue, but a movement for the freedom of the country. He believed that Khilafat Movement would inspire Muslims to fight against the alien rulers and unite them with their countrymen. It had also awakened an awareness about Indian problems among the people of the country. Azad did not suggest hostility towards British, but drafted a plan of non-violent non-cooperation. It was characterized by conviction of unity, righteous action, patience, organization and the spirit of sacrifice for the cause of freedom. This approach of Azad brought him very close to Gandhi. Though Gandhi became the sole exponent and practitioner of non-cooperation, the idea did not originate with him. The same programme was suggested by Azad in one of the articles in Al-Hilal.

Azad unlike Gandhi regarded non-violence as a policy and not as a creed.

Azad held that democracy was a form of Government based not on force but on the will of the people, characterised by tolerance, equality and liberty. He believed that liberty is essential for the development of the personality of the individual in every society. Absence of liberty results in slavery which is contrary to the teachings of Islam. For Azad neither Islam nor liberty was an abstract concept. Both demand faith and action. He therefore supported the movement for the freedom of the country and championed the
cause of Khilafat and also joined Indian National Congress. He pointed out that
Islam recognizes the value of equality and held that all human beings are equal
in rank and possessed equal rights. Unlike Gandhi, Azad held that opposing of
violence with violence is fully in conformity with the national laws. Hence,
Azad supported democracy and was more inclined towards the secular basis of
democratic order. He believed that aristocracy of merit and talent may not
supplant democracy but enrich it for democracy is not opposed to aristocracy if
it serves the later and seeks to fulfill its purpose Azad advocates for the
establishment of parliamentary Government in India. He stood for federalism
too. He regarded Muslim problem as essentially an economic problem of a
minority. It could be solved in a federal form of Government. There would be
no question of domination of majority community over the minorities. It will
also save the country from partition. Azad is perhaps the only politician or
theologian who did not propound ideal state. He always advocated a
progressive democracy. He believed that democracy could control the economy
of the nation with being bound by laissez faire. Azad did not accept socialism
minus democracy.

In fact, the inadequacies of democracy constrained him to support
socialism which is complimentary and not repugnant to the spirit of democracy.

The internationalism of Azad is neither pan-Islamism nor the world
wide unity of the working class. What is basic in it is man and his thought. Man
across the world adopted common methods of reasoning and thought. The
human reason is one and identical. Human feelings are largely similar and operate in similar manner everywhere.

Azad is regarded as a great leader of nationalist Muslims. His attitude was progressive and in line with the policy and spirit of Indian National Congress. It was opposed to the separatist Muslim nationalism which asserted itself under the leadership of Jinnah. There are striking similarities between Hindu and Muslim nationalism. Both of them have a strong tinge of religiosity. Pandit Nehru rightly said that both Hindu and Muslim nationalism tried to fit in as far as possible, the new scientific and political ideas derived from the west with their old religious nations and habits.\textsuperscript{16} Even in the Congress the Muslims never united with Hindus for fear of losing their identity like the parsies.\textsuperscript{17} The tragedy of the nationalist Muslims was that they could neither influence Muslims and their leaders nor the Hindus and their leaders. The greatest single factor weakening the nationalist Muslims was Congress itself. W.C. Smith has dealt with them with special reference to Gandhi’s attitude to the Muslim problem in India.\textsuperscript{18} Besides this the Congress never had a clear policy on the Hindu-Muslim question. Congress was under the influence of the militant leaders of Hindu-Mahasabha who were also members of the Congress, more often than not the influence has been great. The uncompromising attitude of the Congress and its wishful thinking antagonized a large section of Muslims which indirectly weakened the position of the nationalist Muslims. Till 1937 no attempt was made by the Congress for mutual understanding as well as
Congress-league coalitions, hence the Muslims felt excluded from office because the Congress was a Hindu body.\textsuperscript{19}

Azad was opposed to the partition of the country not only on political and cultural but also on religious grounds. He held that the scheme of Pakistan is harmful not only for India as a whole, but also for Muslims in particular and in fact, it creates more problems than it solves.\textsuperscript{20}

Azad also argued that the Muslims are a minority of 90 million people, who are in quality and quantity a sufficiently important element in Indian life to influence decisively all questions of administration and policy. This shows that Azad’s political ideas were in complete harmony with his philosophy of religion.

Azad no doubt supported Khilafat Movement. For him it was not a religious issue. He believed that it was a movement for the freedom of the country, which could inspire Muslims to fight against the British rulers and unite them with their countrymen. Azad made a plea for the establishment of parliamentary Government in India. The National Government must be a Cabinet Government. He held that Indian situation demands a parliamentary executive. Azad also stood for federalism. He regarded it as a constitutional device to solve the communal problem in India. He regarded Muslims problem as essentially economic problem. This could be solved by adopting a federation where the centre will be weak and the states will enjoy greater autonomy. Under this agreement there would be no question of the domination of the
majority community over the minorities. Further federalism would also save the country from partition.²¹

After the partition of the country Azad advised Muslims that they are now living in an independent country. Independence brought for them new opportunities of life and the need for greater loyalty and devotion to the state. Being the citizen of free India their first duty was to develop the country on democratic and secular lines because it provides equal opportunities to its citizens irrespective of their race, cast, religions and community. Azad was confident that freedom will definitely bring in widening of mind and enlargement of ambitions of its citizens. He advised that Muslims to use their talent in the manner best suited to the nation. If the Muslims adopt this spirit of progressive liberalism and tolerance they can serve their community, religion, nation and humanity in a better way. Azad believed that separate political organization will not help Muslims. This may cause another blunder at the cost of whole community. Now they are part and parcel of the whole nation and it is impossible that the nation is unaffected due to their activities even if they do it in isolation- separation promotes doubts and suspicion which is based on misunderstanding. There is no end to vicious circles of suspicion and misunderstanding. This gulf of misunderstanding can be abridged only when two communities come closer and know more about each other with unprejudiced mind. Muslims should participate actively in their national life with consciousness and should not fall prey to the attempt of reactionaries. The real problem of the country was as Azad observed was economic, not
communal. The differences were related to classes not to communities the struggle for the emancipation of the sub-continent is still going on. The situation is more or less same. Still the country needs united efforts of all countrymen to overcome giant problems like hunger, misery, poverty and illiteracy. It seems that the object of the freedom is not yet achieved. Still the religion is an impediment on the way to progress and development. Still the best of world’s ideologies are fraught with danger. The best of minds are unable to give humanity a true secular approach. The religious fanatics still have strong hold on innocent masses. A war of liberation is essential for the emancipation of the masses from the shackles of orthodoxy and reaction. But this would be a war to liberate those who themselves do not want their liberation. The good people of every religion are all alike, similarly are the bad ones. Azad hit hard at this weakness of mankind. He believes that, once they are intellectually free they can serve humanity in a much better way. The liberalization of the principles of religion is in fact the first step against reaction and orthodoxy on the way to complete emancipation.

From practical point of view, it is no doubt that Azad’s life has been a failure. Throughout his life he exhorted Hindu-Muslim Unity and stood for united India and a composite Indian Nation. But he could not succeed in achieving what he had longed so passionately for India and her people. He could neither draw the Muslim masses religious scholars think in a new way. He was not only ignored but was shown even utter distrust by his non-Muslims compatriots. He could not win the confidence of Hindus in the movement.
either in united or in divided India. He was considered merely a romanticist and utopian thinker, away from pragmatism. His life in post independent India was more pitiable seeming his ability, achievement and seniority in Congress, he deserved more than education ministry but nothing more was given to him. He was not consulted on vital decisions like Kashmir, Hyderabad etc.

In fact, the object of his life was not to acquire a big position on the contrary he had expressed that he would prefer death rather to be involved in selfish motives. He desired thorn not the flower beds. He had rightly remarked that the action of partitioning India was governed more by consideration of British than Indian interest. If a united India had become free, according to the cabinet mission plan, there was little chance for British to retain their economic and industrial life of India. The partition is more a result of failure on the part of Indian leaders and less the work of the forces of history. In the midst of communal flare-ups, this great son of India continued to chant that the nation is one and its cultural life is and will remain one. He had the nature’s gift of aesthetics. His behavior was always immaculate. Nehru and Azad were affectionate friends. Azad was one of the few to whom Nehru had opened his heart both on public and private questions. Nehru used to consult him on domestic matters and foreign affairs as well.

Azad was a staunch nationalist and a man of unique personality. He was associated with the national movement since Gandhiji appeared on the political scene of India. He was a seasoned statesman counted among the forefront leaders like Gandhiji, Nehru and Patel and he is counted in the ranks of
architects of free India. A devout Muslim Azad had great respect for vedic
religion and Indian culture. Because of personality traits virtues charm of
manners and fascinating principles he enjoys enduring respect and affection
from his countrymen.
Reference

12. Moin Shakir – Khilafat to partition, P.149.
20. J.P. Chunder – India steps forward, P.85.