



### MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD

One of the early ancestors of Maulana Azad, Sheikh Jamaluddin , a profound scholar and a Muslim divine of great repute, having to his credit a number of books which are held in high esteem to this day and among which is celebrated commentary on the most trustworthy text of hadith (Islamic Traditions) ---

recognised as an authority by which most Muslim divines swear, revolted against the innovation of Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi, thus incurring the displeasure of the Great Emperor. He was patronised by Akbar's foster-brother, Mirza Aziz Kokaltash, but anticipating some trouble in future, he left for Mecca. This first known ancestor of the Maulana left the proud legacy of *Satyagraha* for him.

Later on in the times of Jehangir another ancestor of the Maulana, Sheikh Muhammad refused to do *Kornish* (obeisance) to the Emperor as in his view, it did not behove the learned to lay prostrate before wealth. He refused to bend his knees to Baal and was sentenced to be imprisoned in the fort of Gwalior for four years.

It also remained a kind of family tradition not to accept any office or position of power; but Shaikh Sirajuddin , a great grandfather of the Maulana, accepted the Chief Judgeship and broke the tradition.

### Parentage

The Maulana's father, Maulana Muhammad Khairuddin was a learned divine and a sufi. He wrote numerous books both in Arabic and Persian and his life and temperament were coloured by stoic simplicity and contemplation of the Sufis. He lived in Delhi, where he had thousands of disciples and his clientele extended up to Gujarat, Kathiawar and Bombay.

The Indian War of Independence waged in 1857 left a special scar-mark on the scholars of those days, who were specially chosen for persecution and victimisation by the British Government. Shamsul Ulema Maulana Muhammad Hussain Azad narrates in his own facile way as to how his father, Mulla Baqir was shot dead in public ;Dr Nazir Ahmad and Sir Syed Ahmad insinuate to the hardships meted out to the learned in those troublous days. The descriptions of Ghalib bear clear testimony to this fact that because the scholars wielded great power in those days both with the public and the monarchy, they were picked up

specially for the torture. The natural consequence of this indiscriminate victimization was that many scholars had no other choice but to leave Delhi. Muhammad Hussain Hali to Lahore and the celebrated father of Maulana Azad, Maulana Muhammad Khairuddin went away to Mecca to settle down there permanently. Nawab Yusuf Ali Khan of Rampur, who was one of his disciples, made all arrangements for him so that he could safely be escorted to Bombay and from there to Mecca.

The then Sultan of Turkey, Abdul Hamid, who had heard of Maulana Khairuddin's learning and scholarship invited him to Constantinople and with his munificent patronage many of his books were printed in Cairo. On his return from there, the Maulana helped in the collection of funds for the Zubaida canal in Mecca. In Mecca, he married the daughter of a very famous divine, Shaikh Wetri. Of this noble lady was Maulana Abul Kalam Azad born on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1888. Thus from both of his parents, Maulana Azad inherited the grand legacy of learning.

**"I have had the privilege of being associated with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in national work since 1920. In the knowledge of Islam, he is surpassed by no one. He is a profound Arabic scholar. His nationalism is as robust as his faith in Islam. That he is today the supreme head of the Indian National Congress has deep meaning which should not be lost of by every student of Indian politics."(Mahatma Gandhi on May 18,1940).**

### EARLY LIFE

Maulana Azad was named Ahmad originally and commonly called by his father as '**Firoz Bakht**'. He spent his childhood in Mecca and Medina where his father's house was considered to be a great centre of learning. For his early education, he bent his knees before his renowned father and was bred up in Arabic atmosphere and culture for the first ten years of his life.

Maulana Khairuddin yielding to the pressure of his ardent disciple, Haji Abdul Wahid from Bombay and importunate demands of many like him, decided to return to India in 1898 and settle down in Calcutta. Here the Maulana (Abul Kalam Azad) spent the formative years of his life. Arabic was his mother-tongue, as his mother knew no other language and he learnt Urdu from his father which enabled Azad to carry on his schooling here. He under the strict and disciplined care of his father, made a phenomenal progress in his studies and qualified for the *Darse Nizami* in 4 years, which normally takes 14 years to complete. He became the pupil-teacher at the early age of 14 and started studying and teaching every branch of knowledge in the Oriental Style. His father abhorred the idea of imparting English education to him, so in 1905 he sent him to the world-famous university of Al-Azhar in Cairo for two years. It was after the death of his father in 1909, that Maulana Azad started learning English language, and his insatiable thirst for knowledge accomplished him with all modern standards of scholarship. With all these literary equipments, he could not reconcile himself to the life of a divine. He was writing articles on varied topics which attracted the attention of many scholars including Altaf Hussain Hali, Muhammad Iqbal, Nazir Ahmad and others.

## AS A WRITER

At the early age of 14 or 15, he brought out *Lisaus Sidq*, (The Voice of Truth) a journal which stands out as a landmark in his literary career. He ventured to review the famous *Life of Sir Syed Ahamd Khan* written by **Khaja Altaf Hussain Hali**. He came into prominence at Lahore when in the annual sitting of the Anjuman Himayatul Islam, the editor of *Lisanus Sidq*, was requested to deliver the main oration of the year on the topic of "The Rational Basis of Religion". To the utter surprise of the celebrated old scholars of the country, this young stripling came out marvellously successful in his assignment. Maulana Hali thought that the lad must be the son of Maulana Azad, who reviewed his book, but there was no limit to his astonishment when he came to know that the lad was no other than the Maulana himself. Poet Hali described him as 'an old head on young shoulders' and predicted for him to be the 'coming man in Muslim India' a prophecy which came out to be too true and precise.

## AS A POET

Maulana in the early years of his life, composed Urdu poetry also. It was his poetical compositions and his writings in *Makhzan* of Lahore a journal brought by Sir Abdul Qadir in the early years of this century which gave to the world writers like Azad, Prem Chand, Iqbal, Swami Rama Tirtha, Nairang and Zfar Ali Khan that Maulana Shibli came to know about this genius in prose and poetry. He had the same misconception about him when he met him first in Bombay as Maulana Hali had, that the lad was Maulana Azad's son. *Azad* was his Takhallus (poetic name). He took part in many Urdu mushairas of Calcutta. His pseudonym *Azad* survived his period of poetry and was attached to him more than his original name.

## AS MINISTER OF EDUCATION

In January 1947 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad joined the Interim Government when Mr. Asaf Ali was appointed as India's Ambassador in Washington. He became Minister of Education and later on in May 1952 was given additional charge of the portfolio of Natural Resources and Scientific Research. He started the Indian Council for Cultural Relation\_ an organization to establish and strengthen cultural contacts between India and other countries of the East. It gave an impetus to the study of Asiatic problems as they presented themselves at various times. As a matter of fact, even the *pancha shila* \_ the principle of peaceful-co-existence is the outcome of the efforts of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. *The Indo-Asian Culture* in English, *Al-Thaqafat-ul-Hind* in Arabic languages are the main journal published by the Council and the *Indo-Iranica* in English and Persian\_ the quarterly of the Iran Society \_ is published under the patronage of the Council and they all go a long way in creating goodwill and harmony between India and other countries in general and Middle-Eastern and Far-Eastern countries in particular.

It was under the inspiration of the late Maulana that the I.C.C.R. started lectures under the auspices of its local branches on topics cultural and literary. Today in every big town of India, the branches of the Council are functioning very successfully and affording people to understand their neighbour-countries in a

better way. The Council purchases valuable publications and disburses them in other countries to establish closer cultural contacts. Teachers and scholars are exchanged for lectures and studies in Universities of India and countries of the Middle East.

The patronage of the late Maulana Azad given to the Iran Society has enabled the Society to carry out its projects in various ways. In 1952, the Society celebrated the Millenary of Al-Biruni and brought out Al-Biruni commemoration Volume and the I.C.C.R. purchased a large number of copies of the publication for distribution among libraries and important cultural organizations of the World. Encouraged by the success of this celebration, the Society again undertook to commemorate Avicenna's Millenary in 1956. The help offered by the Council on both these occasions was substantial. Besides this, the Council subsidises *Indo-Iranica*, the quarterly of the Iran Society and helps in the distribution of this journal to other countries and Embassies. This was all due to Maulana's special interest in forging a happy cultural union between India and the Islamic world.

Today the name of the I.C.C.R. is a guarantee for sincere efforts in promoting cultural activities in the country and abroad. The Council has been according receptions to various ruling monarchs of the Eastern countries and inviting eminent professors from outside to lecture on Eastern topics. Many Indian scholars are studying today in Eastern and European Universities to equip themselves with modern methods of knowledge, and it is all due to the financial and other help given by the I.C.C.R. under the guidance of the late Maulana.

### **SPEECHES AS MINISTER**

His speeches as Minister of Education have fortunately been collected and published by the Publication Division of the Government of India wherein we find the Maulana's mature thoughts pertaining to various phases of education explained most explicitly. This volume of 340 pages gives a clear idea about the Maulana's plans which he wanted to introduce for the education of country's masses. This will prove to be a beaconlight for the educationists everywhere.

### **PENSIONS TO LITERATEURS**

Maulana Azad introduced a scheme through the Education Ministry by which financial help was given to many literary figures in the country who could not carry on their literary pursuits for want of necessary means. Prominent and old poets and journalists of the country owe their old-age pension to the late Maulana and those who benefited from this scheme of the Maulana, belonged to all denominations without distinction of caste, creed or colour. Litterateurs of note are the recipients of this help due to Maulana's sympathy with Letters and Men of Letters.

### **DIED IN HARNESS**

Maulana Azad was active till his very end. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, 1958 he spoke in the **Indian Council for Cultural Relations** about the strides made by this organisation in various fields of Arts and Culture and on the very next day, i.e. on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, 1958, he addressed a vast concourse of people on the

occasion of the All India Urdu Conference at the time of its inauguration by the Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

The Maulana, on that occasion, made very pregnant remarks about the language problem in this country and clarified the position of Urdu in India. He said that because the Constituent Assembly had adopted Hindi as the national and the official language of India, no other language, much less Urdu, could call itself to be a rival of Hindi. On the adoption of the Constitution, the entire question of rivalry with Hindi had ceased. He spoke and stayed there for about three hours and listened to the speeches of Pt. Nehru, Col. Zaidi, President of the Anjuman Taraqqi-e-Urdu, Pandit Sundar Lai, Maulana Hifzur Rahman, Chairman of the Reception Committee and Dr. Tara Chand, the President of the Conference. .

Maulana Azad died in harness in the service of the country now to serve as beacon-light for posterity to take to his path of love and service and his life be a source of inspiration to the youth of the country for her uplift and betterment. Amen!