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CHAINS CANNOT BIND THE MIND: MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD AND THE POWER
OF PATRIOTISM

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ABSTRACT

This paper is aim at the study of Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad's imprisonment during Ahmednagar Fort Jail in Maharastra by British Raj. The contributions of Azad are reckoned with his sense of nationalism. He believed in Hindu-Muslim unity that made him the champion of irrespective of community. His work for educational and social uplift in India made him and influence in guiding India's economic and social development. He is celebrated as one of the founders and greatest patrons of the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi. Jawaharlal Nehraui regarded him as Mir-i-Karawan, Mahatma Gandhi referred to him as a person of calibre of Plato, Aristotle and Pythagarous. Azad was arrested in 1942 after math his speech enthusing Indian to rise to occasion to fight against the British and along entire Congress leadership. Azad and the Congress Working Committee were imprisoned at a fort in Ahmednagar, in isolation with security beefed up and were at the watch ward for nearly four years. He was rendered out of communication with rest of society. With all humiliation at heart with isolation, Azad and his friends were content with utmost satisfaction for the services rendered by him for the country and people. Azad was rejoicing by playing bridge and to umpire tennis matches in with friends. In every mornings, Azad used to work on his classic Urdu work, the *Ghubhar-i-Khatir*. He was sharing daily chores, and also taken up to teach Persian and Urdu languages, besides Indian and world history to several of his associates. The leaders hardly used to talk of politics, though not interested to argue to overcome the agony of getting imprisoned.

Key words: freedom, education, imprisonment, nationalists.

Introduction

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was one of the most influential independence activists during India's freedom struggle. He was also a noted writer, poet and journalist. He was a prominent political leader of the Indian National Congress and was elected as Congress President in 1923 and 1940. Despite being a Muslim, Azad often stood against the radicalizing policies of other prominent Muslims leaders like Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Azad was

the first education minister of independent India. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was posthumously awarded 'Bharat Ratna', India's highest civilian honour, in 1992.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was born Abul Kalam Ghulam Muhiyuddin on November 11, 1888 in Mecca, Islam's main centre of pilgrimage. His mother was the daughter of a rich Arabian Sheikh and his father, Maulana Khairuddin, was a Bengali Muslim of Afghan origin. His forefathers came to India during the reign of Mughal Emperor Babar, from Herat, Afghanistan. Azads were the descendent of eminent Ulama or scholars of Islam. In 1890, he returned to Calcutta (now Kolkata) along with the family.

Maulana Azad had his initial formal education in Arabic, Persian and Urdu with theological orientation and then philosophy, geometry, mathematics and algebra. He also learnt English language, world history, and politics on his own. Maulana Azad had a natural inclination towards writing and this resulted in the start of the monthly magazine "Nairang-e-Alam" in 1899. He was eleven years old when his mother passed away. Two years later, at the age of thirteen, Azad was married to young Zuleikha Begum.

Ahmednagar Fort Jail experiences of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

Maulana Azad, along with nine other prominent congress Working Committee members, was arrested in Patna and brought to Ahmednagar jail under detention. The Fort, where they were brought down was like a military barrack. A courtyard about 200 feet long was encompassed with rooms. They were given to understand that foreign prisoners were detained there during the First World War. While my belongings were allowed inside but he radio was confiscated on a measure of communication from rest of world.

Dinner was served to them soon after on iron platters. They did not like them and he told the jailor that they were accustomed to eat from china plates. The jailor apologized and said that he could not supply them with a dinner-set then but it would be obtained next day. The place, where they were detained was kept a secret. Azad thought it as a foolish act as the facts could not be concealed too long. The Inspector-General of Prisons from Bombay came to visit them. He told them that Government orders were that they could not address to their kith and kin nor get acknowledged by them. Azad was taken to illness after arriving in Bombay for Calcutta. However, seriously he was ailing sick, he denied to show up to the physician.

Jawaharlal proposed that they should raise a flower garden as it would keep them occupied and also beautify the place. They planted some thirty or forty kinds of seeds, watered them every day and cleaned them the beds. As the plants began to sprout, they watched their growth with much interest. Sooner or later, the compound witnessed a gaiety look with blooming flowers.

On 25 August, Azad addressed the Viceroy. He said that he didn't write to complain him that the Government believed it necessary to arrest them. He complained about the treatment meted to them. Even convicted criminals were allowed to write to correspond their relations. He stated that he would wait for two weeks and if they were not acknowledged by the Government he would decide the future course of action.

He realized that there would be disturbances in the country after their arrest had proved correct. Bengal, Bihar, UP and Bombay had taken the lead in the struggle against the Government. Communications were disrupted and factories ceased to work. Police stations were raided and burnt. Railway stations had been attacked and destroyed. The country reacted turned into an aggressive stage of carnage. The movement took its violent inferno. This was what he had anticipated and to some extent even advised and discussed with their workers.

In 1943 witnessed a regained momentum, they read in the newspaper that Gandhiji had written to the Viceroy that he would undertake a fast for twenty-one days. He described it as a fast for self-purification. They were content that Gandhiji was prompted to take that step for two reasons chiefly. Gandhi did not expect that Government would arrest the Congress leader so suddenly. He had also hoped that he would get time to develop the movement non-violent lines according to his own ideas. Both his hopes had been shattered. He accepted the responsibility for what had happened and as was usual with him, he was planning to undergo the fast as an expiation for the situation. However, Azad had disapproved the purpose or acceded to Gandhian hypothesis.

The Government thought that Gandhi might not risk his life in the existing state of his health undertake a fast for twenty-one days. The Government thought that this was Gandhi's intention and he wanted the Government to be held responsible for his death. Later they learnt and convinced that he would not survive the fast, they even brought sandalwood for his cremation. Their reaction was that if Gandhi wanted to place the responsibility of his death on the Government, Government would not change their policy on that account. His last rites would be performed within the Aga Khan Palace where he was held and his ashes delivered to his sons.

Nairn Jail in 1941, his wife had been unwell and her condition had become very serious. When he was released, he consulted doctors and they advised a change. She went to Ranchi and her health became somewhat better. He started for Bombay in the first week of August, her health was again causing anxiety. The news of his arrest on 9 August must have made her health upset further. The news about the death of his wife was brought by Cheeta Khan. He wrote to the Viceroy that the Government of India could easily have arranged for his transfer to Calcutta on a temporary basis so that he could have seen his wife before she died, and it was never got acknowledged. After three months, his sister Abru Begum who lived in Bhopal fell ill, she also was dead.

Azad opposed the thought that Gandhi would support British at the war if India were given freedom. He rightly thought that Gandhi's approach to Mr. Jinnah on the agenda of strengthening relationship with Muslim league under the Stewardship of Mohd Ali Jinnah. This had enabled the Muslim community to develop confidence in Jinnah towards the communal settlement of forming a new nation. He was also not in favour of Jinnah being exalted with the title of Qaid-i-Azam.

When Azad is writing in 1957 and by looking at events of past he visualized that there was an astonishing transformation in the mind set of some of his close followers on the aspects of violence and non-violence. Sardar Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Acharya Kripalani and Dr. Profulla Ghosh wanted to resign from the Working Committee upon the resolution of Congress Committee that it would support the war effort if the British declared India free. They wrote to Azad that they were inclined and give credence to non-violence more than Indian independence.

Azad firmly believed that his colleagues and friends did not apply their minds on most political issues. They were staunchly supportive to Gandhi's view points. Whenever a question arose they waited to see how he would react, but Azad was not and he never had allegiance to them in his regard and admiration for Gandhi but he could never accept a position that one should follow Gandhi blindly.

In June 1944, Azad and other Congress Working Committee members read reports about 'D' Day. This was the turning point of the war. The Allied victory was now certain and in sight. There was suddenly an unexpected incident took place in the prison, whereas, Cheeta Khan (the jailor) came one day and said that he had received orders for Dr. Syed Mahmud's release. They were all surprised for they could not understand why he was singled out for such treatment.

Some months ago, there had been the risk of a cholera epidemic in Ahmednagar. Cheeta Khan advised them to be inoculated against the disease. Five of them- Jawaharlal, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Asaf Ali, Dr. Syed Mahmud and he- acted according to his advice. Four others— Sardar Patel, Acharya Kripalani, Shankar Rao Deo and Dr. Profulla Ghosh refused on grounds of conscience. He had a touch of fever as a reaction but it seemed Dr. Mahmud had an allergy to the inoculation. He had unusually high and persistent fever for almost a fortnight. They were all worried about him and Jawaharlal with his customary friendliness acted as his nurse and mentor. Finally the fever left him but he continued to bleed from his gums. He was under Cheeta Khan's treatment and had almost recovered when the order for his release came. His illness could not therefore be sufficient ground for his release. He thought that perhaps it meant a change in Government's policy. They were now prepared to act more leniently and had released Dr. Syed Mahmud on the grounds of health. He later came to know the real reason, but after the lapse of so many years, he does not think it necessary to go into the details of this unhappy incident.

Though they did not know it for certain, they felt that the days of their imprisonment were also drawing to a close. During 1944, the Government of India came to the conclusion that it was no longer necessary to detain them in Ahmednagar. They had been taken there for different reasons. Government had thought that their detention there would remain anonymous. They also thought that if they were kept in a Civil jail, there was possibility to contact with the world outside. Detention under military control would prevent this. In Ahmednagar camp jail, there were only European army men and they would surely prevent any communication with the outside world. They had evidence of the Government's anxiety to block physical contacts with the world outside as soon as they arrived at Ahmednagar. The barracks in which they were kept had skylights through which one could see the compound of the Fort. These were completely blocked before they were brought there. The plaster was so new that it was still damp when they arrived. During their 3½ years' detention in Ahmednagar they hardly ever saw an Indian from outside. Once or twice some small repairs had to be undertaken to the buildings. Even for this no Indian labour was used. Azad and others were thus completely cut off from the world.

The Government had succeeded in preventing any contacts with the outside world but their first objective had failed. The public knew within a week of their arrival that they were all held in Ahmednagar Fort jail. By now the need for secrecy had also gone. British victory was now in sight. The Government of India therefore felt that it was no longer necessary to keep them in this military prison and they could safely be transferred to the Civil jails in their respective area and own provinces.

Sardar Patel and Shankar Rao Deo were the first to move into Poona jail. Asaf Ali was sent to Batala where political prisoners from Delhi were generally held. Jawaharlal was taken first to Naini near Allahabad and then to Almora. As he was leaving, Jawaharlal said that the time of their release was approaching. He requested Azad that he should not call a meeting of the Working Committee immediately on release. Nehru also expressed his inclination to spend a few recreating days so as to complete a work on India which he was authoring.

During the days of his transfer, Cheeta Khan advised Azad that Calcutta with its damp climate would not be a suitable place for him. Cheeta Khan opined that I should be sent to a warmer place in Bengal. One day he asked him to get ready for leaving Ahmednagar jail. Most of the time Azad spent in the Ahmednagar jail was passed under conditions of great mental strain. This had a very adverse effect on his health. When he was arrested, his weight was 170 lbs. When he was transferred from Ahmednagar he was reduced to 130 lbs. he had no appetite and could hardly eat.

A C.I.D. Inspector from Bengal had come with four constables to escort him. When they reached the station, Cheeta Khan handed him over to their charge. They travelled from Ahmednagar to Asansol via Kalyani. At Asansol, he was taken to the retiring room, where special arrangements had been made for him. In spite of Government's attempt to keep the whole matter secret, the Press had somehow got hold of the news. He found in Asansol some Press reporters from Calcutta and some friends from Allahabad. A crowd of local people had also collected.

The Superintendent of Police, Asansol received him at the station and made a personal appeal. He said that if Azad wanted to meet the public, he could not stop him but if Azad did so, the Government would come down heavily on him. He would therefore be very grateful if he agreed to go upstairs to a room and avoided the public. He assured him that he did not want to harm him or make him the subject of the Government's displeasure. Accordingly he went with him to an upstairs room.

The Superintendent of Police was a connection of the Nawab of Dacca. Both he and his wife attended him and his wife insisted that he should sign an autograph book. They did everything to make Azad comfortable. Azad now learnt that he was being taken to Bankura. The train came to the platform at about 4 p.m. and soon after he was brought to his compartment. By now a huge crowd had collected on the platform. Apart from the local people, many had come from Calcutta, Allahabad and Lucknow. The Superintendent of Police and his Inspector seemed to be very anxious that Azad should not meet anybody. The sun was very hot and they had brought an umbrella for him. The Inspector held it but in his anxiety to hide him from the crowd, he brought it down lower and lower till it rested almost on his head. His object was that the people should not see Azad's face.

He thought that in this way they could take him to the compartment without attracting notice. He had no interest to meet anyone, but when he saw that people had come from Calcutta, Allahabad and Lucknow only to see him, he thought it was very unfair that they should not get even a glimpse.

Azad therefore took the umbrella from the Inspector and closed it. The people now ran towards him, but he asked them to stop. It was obviously impossible for him to greet everyone individually, but he spoke to them generally and laughingly said, The Superintendent of Police and the Inspector are getting more and more worried every moment and he does not want them to get a headache on this hot day. After waving to the people, he got into his compartment but the crowd surged all round.

It was the beginning of April and the days were getting warm. When, however, he sat on the verandah of the first floor, he felt the pleasant evening breeze play on his face. Mornings and evenings were not too bad, but during the day it grew very hot. he had an electric fan and ice was also available but it was so hot at midday that they were of little use. The Collector used to visit him once a week. One day he said that he had already written to the Government that he could not stay in Bankura any longer. He was waiting for a reply and would send him to a cooler place as soon as this was received. In Bankura also there was some difficulty in the beginning, but soon a good cook was engaged. he liked his work so much that after his release, he brought him with Azad to Calcutta.

Azad has already mentioned that when he entered Ahmednagar Fort, his radio set was taken away from him. After a few days, Cheeta Khan had asked him if he could use it. He gladly gave him permission, but he did not see that radio again till he left Ahmednagar. When he was being transferred to Bengal, the radio set was placed among his luggage. When he tried to use it, he found it had gone out of order. The District Magistrate of Bankura supplied him with another set and after so long a time he could hear directly the news from other countries.

Towards the end of April, he learnt from Press reports that Asaf Ali was very seriously ill in Batala jail. He was unconscious for a long period and there was apprehension for his life. Government decided to release him and return him to Delhi.

In May 1945, Lord Wavell went to London to have further discussions on the Indian political situation. Towards the end of May, he returned to India. One evening in June, Azad was listening to the Delhi broadcast when he heard that the Viceroy had declared that in accordance with earlier British assurances, fresh steps would be taken to solve the Indian political problem. A conference would be held at Simla to which leaders of the Congress, the Muslim League and other political parties were to be invited. The President and Members of the Working Committee would be released so that Congress could participate in that conference.

The next day he heard that orders had been passed for him and his colleagues' release. He heard this news at about 9 p.m. The District Magistrate also heard the broadcast and sent him a message at 10 p.m. that although he had heard the news, he had not received any official order. He would inform him as soon as he was received. Accordingly at midnight, the jailor came and informed him that orders of release had come. No action could be taken at this late hour and the District Magistrate came to see him early next morning. He read out the order of release and informed him that the Calcutta Express left Bankura at 5 p.m. A first class coupe was being reserved for him on this train.

Within a few hours, Press correspondents from Calcutta arrived to meet him. Local people also came in their thousands. At 3.30 that afternoon the local Congress Committee organized a meeting which he attended and addressed briefly. He left for Calcutta by the Express and reached Howrah next morning.

The platform and station at Howrah were a welter of humanity. It was with the greatest difficulty that he could get out of my compartment and enter his car. The President of the Bengal Congress, Mrs. Labanya Prabha Datta and several other local leaders were in the car with him. Just as they were about to move, he noticed that there was a band playing in front of his car. He asked Mrs. Datta why they had brought a band. She replied that it was to celebrate his release. He did not like this and told her that this was no occasion for festivities. It is true that he was released, but thousands of his friends and colleagues were still in jail.

The band was stopped and removed at his request. As the car was crossing the Howrah bridge, his mind moved back to days of the past. He remembered the day when three years ago he started for Bombay to attend the meetings of the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. His wife had come up to the gate of his house to bid him farewell. He was now returning after three years but she was in her grave and his home was empty. He remembered the lines of Wordsworth:

'But she's in her grave and oh

The difference to me.'

He told his companions to turn the car, for he wished to visit her grave before he went home. His car was full of garlands; he took one and placed it on her grave and silently read the Fateha.

Conclusion:

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. By Tennyson

Azad is remembered as one of the leading Indian nationalists of his time. His firm belief in Hindu-Muslim unity earned him the respect of the Hindu community and he still remains one of the most important symbols of communal harmony in modern India. His work for education and social uplift in India made him an important influence in guiding India's economic and social development. Azad remained a close confidante, supporter and advisor to Prime Minister Nehru, and played an important role in framing national policies. Azad masterminded the creation of national programmes of school and college construction and spreading the enrolment of children and young adults into schools, to promote universal primary education. Azad spent the final years of his life focusing on writing his book *India Wins Freedom*, an exhaustive account of India's freedom struggle.

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