

## Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the Partition of India

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**Abstract:** *One of the greatest scholars of Muslim culture and finest interpreters of the Quran and Islamic theology, a leading Muslim journalist, a distinguished 'servant' of Indian nationalism, a champion of Hindu-Muslim unity and communal harmony, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad ranks together with Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru as one of the prominent and dignified leaders of Indian freedom movement and shines as a 'secular polestar' in the political canvas of India. Although he was a 'Maulana', his religion was absolutely free from narrow-mindedness and he was the greatest among the nationalist Muslims who fought for a united India. When Jinnah was fighting for a separate homeland for the Muslims, Azad proposed a completely different plan in order to prevent the partition but finally failed to avert it in 1947. The present paper makes a sincere attempt to highlight the role of Azad in national liberation movement, analyze his mind and approach towards the partition scheme and also tries to evaluate and relate his philosophy and activities in the present context.*

**Key words:** Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, wahdat-e-deen, ummatun wahidatun, Khilafat, Swaraj, Hindu-Muslim unity, partition

*"Today, if an angel were to descend from the heaven and declare from the top of the Qutab Minar, that India will get Swaraj within twenty-four hours, provided she relinquishes Hindu-Muslim unity, I will relinquish Swaraj rather than give up Hindu-Muslim unity. Delay in the attainment of Swaraj will be a loss to India, but if our unity is lost, it will be a loss for entire mankind."*

These were the soul-full words of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad which he uttered 92 years ago while giving his Presidential Address at the Special Session of the Congress in Delhi on 15 December 1923 but these emphatic words are pertinent even today. Born and brought up in a conservative family and deeply read in Islamic theology and Arabic and Persian classics, Abul Kalam (literally means the "Lord of dialogue") Azad (i.e. 'free') stood "for almost fifty years.....as the champion of nationalism and progress, freedom and democracy" and was considered by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as one "of the great men of Renaissance" and "of the Encyclopaedists who preceded the French Revolution", "a person.....should be so rational and keen-minded....."<sup>1</sup> He was undoubtedly a champion of Hindu-Muslim unity, a strong exponent of religious toleration

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and considered as one of the architects of modern secular India. Though he was a 'Maulana' or *alim-e-din* (religious scholar), his religious belief was completely free from dogmatism and for him, "Islam meant freedom from political bondage, economic exploitation and intellectual obscurantism. It was the emphasis on freedom in all aspects which dragged him from the cloister of the recluse into the battleground of politics".<sup>2</sup> He was no longer blurred by religious beliefs and prejudices, his goals were no longer confused by his allegiance to the Turkish Khalifa, rather he believed in *wahdat-e-deen* or the essential oneness of all religions and *ummatun wahidatun* (i.e. one nation). Azad was firmly anchored in nationalist politics with the Indian National Congress throughout his life and not at all associated himself with any 'communal' party like the Muslim League or the Jamaat-e-Islami. He put emphasis on the principle of multi-religious co-operation and harmony which was reflected in his unfinished *Tarjuman al-Quran* and strongly advocated for 'inclusive nationalism' and 'secular nationalism'. He vehemently opposed and disapproved of Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah's 'Two Nation Theory' as he was obsessed with Hindu-Muslim unity. Azad was not at all interested to fulfill either his own political gain or the interests of his own community, rather he thought for the country and the nation as a whole and likely, he fought for a united India and in doing so, he became 'an emblem of national unity'. So in 1923 he raised<sup>2</sup> the question: "Instead of Swaraj and Khilafat, slogans of *Shudhi* are being raised. "Save the Hindus from Muslims" says one group, "Save Islam from Hinduism", says another. When the order of the day is, "protect Hindus" and "Protect Muslims", who cares about protecting the nation?"<sup>3</sup> In the galaxy of the patriots of India's struggle for independence, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad ranks together with Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru and he along with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Muhammad Iqbal, Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari were the four great figures of Indo-Muslim life in the first half of the twentieth century.

The first major turning point for Maulana Azad came after the partition of Bengal (1905) which he strongly opposed as it was pursued on communal lines, severely criticized the British for their policy of racial discrimination and associated himself with the anti-British movement. He highly condemned the Muslim leaders who collaborated with the British and gave greater importance to the communal issues than the national interest. He also rejected the collaborative, submissive and pro-British approach of the Aligarh movement (led by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan) which expressed its unconditional support to the British against the Hindus who mostly controlled and dominated the freedom struggle. His fierce hatred towards the British was possibly the result of many factors, including his coming into contact with the writings of Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905, particularly his *Risalah at-Tawhid*), Sayyid Jamaluddin Afghani (his writings published in his edited "Pan-Islamic" journal, *al-Urwah al-Wuthqa*) and Shibli Numani's *Safar Namah* and the followers of the great nationalist Egyptian, Mustafa Kamil Pasha (founder of *Hizb al Watani* or the Nationalist Party) and also his close association with

the Arab and Turkish revolutionaries.<sup>4</sup> He was totally against of the British policy of 'Divide and Rule' which widened the gap between the Hindus and Muslims and made both the communities antagonist to each other. According to him, "A Muslim will abandon the cities in which he dwells, will move into the forests, will make peace with serpents and scorpions, but he will not make peace with the British Government". Azad therefore, urged (particularly through his writings published in the *Al-Hilal* and *Al-Balagh*), both the communities to set up a united front to fight against the British who were completely responsible for bringing ruination of their country.

Meanwhile, the Indians had become very angry and started agitation against the passing of the Rowlatt Act of 1919 which severely restricted civil liberties and individual rights and was considered as the 'Black Act'. One such agitation took place at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar on 13 April 1919 where the British officials mercilessly killed the unarmed civilians (known as "the Punjab atrocities") which had ultimately provoked intense outrage all over the country and in the words of S.N. Banerjea "..... kindled a conflagration throughout India. It penetrated north, south, east and west, and for a time stirred the hearts of all".<sup>5</sup> When all these incidents were taking place, Azad was interned at Ranchi (during April 1916 to 31 December 1919) under the Defence of India Regulations<sup>6</sup> and before his release from internment, two all- India Muslim bodies, the Khilafat Committee and the Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind<sup>7</sup> were formed in 1919. The main aims of the Khilafat Committee were: i) to preserve the *Khilafat*; ii) to keep *Jazirat-ul-Arab* free from non-Muslim control; and iii) to support and actively participate in the movements aimed at self-government in India<sup>8</sup> etc. Azad being fully aware of the situation in 1920 at home and abroad, particularly in the Middle East, could not sit idle and he plunged himself into it. He happened to meet Gandhiji for the first time in Delhi on 18 January 1920, accompanied Gandhiji to Principal Rudra's house where the programme of Non-Cooperation was conceived.<sup>9</sup> He became actively involved in the Khilafat Movement which was also supported by Gandhiji who considered it as "an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Mohammedans as would not arise in a hundred years". Azad became the President of the Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee and convened a meeting at Calcutta on February 28-29, 1920. In his Presidential address, he made an appeal to all the Muslims to uphold and defend the *Khilafat* by means of *jihad* which, he said, 'did not always necessarily mean violence' and pleaded not to co-operate with the British who became ambitious to invade their lands and destroy their centuries-old Islamic institution of the *Khilafat*.<sup>10</sup> It was resolved in that meeting that 19 March 1920 was to be observed as *Khilafat* Day and thereafter (if their demands were not fulfilled), they would "sever all connections with the government, including resignation from the titles, legislative councils, and civil and military service".<sup>11</sup> Later the Central Khilafat Committee decided to launch a four-stage programme: "(1) Renunciation of titles; (2) Resignation from the government service; (3) Resignation from police and military; and (4) Non-payment of taxes".<sup>12</sup> Gandhiji being a member of the Central Khilafat

Committee, tried his best to convince the leadership of the Indian National Congress to adopt similar plan of action to win over the confidence of the Muslims and the Congress ultimately decided to endorse the Non-Cooperation programme in its Nagpur session. Azad and Ali Brothers warmly welcomed the Congress decision, travelled intensively with Gandhiji in different parts of the country to popularize the Non-Cooperation programme. Azad also issued the *fatwa* urging the Indian Muslims not to serve the British army. He emphasized that the real purpose of the Khilafat Movement was Indian independence. He was hopeful that *Swaraj* had to be won by the end of December 1921 and asked all the Indians to work hard for Hindu-Muslim unity. In his Presidential address to the Bengal Khilafat Conference in 1920 Azad said: "The tragedy is that world worships words instead of meanings, and even though all are seeking and worshipping but one truth, they quarrel with one another over differences in mere names..... If one day the veils of 'externals and names' can be lifted so that truth and reality (*haqiqat*) come before all unveiled, then, at once, all quarrels of the world will end, and all who quarrel will see that what we all seek is one and the same". During the course of the movement, the people were asked to boycott government educational institutions, Courts and Councils, boycott of foreign goods and to practise hand spinning and hand-weaving for producing *Khadi*. Azad was deeply influenced by Gandhian ideas of *Satyagraha* and *ahimsha* (non-violence) and his way of living. He adopted the Prophet Muhammad's ideas by living simply, rejecting material possessions, pleasures and luxuries, began to spin his own clothes using *Khadi* on the *charkha* like Gandhiji and gave a new dimension to the Khilafat Non-Cooperation Movement. But the arrival of the Prince of Wales (heir to the British throne) at Bombay in November 1921 vitiated the political atmosphere of the country. Both Azad and C.R. Das declared that a *hartal* would be observed in Calcutta on 24 December (the proposed day of Prince of Wales' visit to Calcutta). He along with C.R.Das, B.N.Sasmal and the like, were arrested on 10 December 1921 under Section 124A of the Penal Code for sedition and he was sentenced to one year imprisonment on 9 February 1922 and kept in the European ward of Alipore Central Jail. In his defence speech which was published as *Qaul-i-Faisal* (the decisive word), Azad said: "I firmly believe that liberty is the birth-right of every nation and each individual and that no man or man-made bureaucracy has the right to keep God's creatures in bondage- Consequently, I refuse to acknowledge the present government as the rightful one and deem it my national, my religious and my human duty to liberate my country and my people from its servitude".<sup>13</sup> He was still on trial when the Chauri Chaura incident of violence took place in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh, and then, a few days later, he learnt that Gandhiji was so shocked of the gruesome violence that he had decided to suspend the Non-Cooperation Movement on 11 February 1922. Very soon, the Khilafat question also lost its relevance as the people of Turkey rose up under the leadership of Mustafa Kamal in November 1922 who abolished the institution of the *Khilafat* and set up a secular republican government there.

The political environment in India became rejuvenated in 1928 when a Tory Government in London appointed an 'all-white' Statutory Commission under Sir John Simon to 'review the operation of the constitutional system in India'. As the Commission did not include any Indian members, all the leading political groups, including the Congress and the Muslim League organized nationwide boycott movement. When the Simon Commission arrived in Bombay on 3 February 1928, it was greeted with the slogans like "Go Back Simon". In response, the Congress and other political parties appointed a Commission under Motilal Nehru to propose constitutional reforms from the Indians' point of view which were ultimately finalized at an All-Parties Conference in Lucknow (in 28-31 August 1928) and came to be known as the 'Nehru Report'. The Congress Working Committee and nationalist Muslim leaders including Azad, Dr. Ansari, Sir Ali Imam, Dr. Kichlu and the like endorsed the Nehru Report which was criticized by Ali Brothers and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Not only that, Azad strongly wanted the ending of separate electorates based on religion and called for an independent India based on secularism. At the Congress session in Guwahati in 1928, Azad agreed to Gandhiji's call for dominion status for India within a year. In spite of his close relationship with Gandhiji, Azad also came into close contact with the young radical Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose who believed in socialism as the means to fight against inequality, poverty, injustice, exploitation etc. Both Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose criticized the delay in demanding complete independence or *Poorna Swaraj* which was ultimately raised by Jawaharlal Nehru on 31 December 1929 at the Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress. The Lahore Congress was presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru and on that day at mid night, he hoisted the Tri-Colour Flag (which was the symbol of independence) on the banks of the river Ravi. On 2 January 1930, the newly formed Congress Working Committee decided that January 26, hereafter, would be observed as the day of *Poorna Swaraj* till the attainment of complete independence from the British. At the same time, Gandhiji also placed before the Government a number of demands through his journal *Young India* published in January 1930. But the British Government refused to comply with their demands. So the Congress Working Committee decided to organize the Civil Disobedience Movement and violate the Salt Laws in a meeting held in February 1930 at the Sabarmati Ashram. The Movement started on 12 March 1930, the day on which 61 years old Gandhiji along with 78 chosen followers started his march from the Sabarmati Ashram and the entire team walked nearly 241 miles in just 24 days to reach Dandi on 5 April. This episode in Indian history is known as the famous 'Dandi March'. On the next day, Gandhiji along with his followers, went to the sea-shore, violated the Salt Law and picked up some salt that had dried on the beach. The nationalist minded Muslim leaders like Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Ansari and others (except the Ali Brothers) whole heartedly participated in the Movement. Azad himself led the Salt Satyagraha Movement on the Dharasana Salt Works in order to protest the Salt tax and restriction on its production and sale. As the Government became nervous, it took strict measures to suppress the

Movement and immediately declared the Congress an unlawful organization. Azad was arrested along with many others, on the basis of a speech he had delivered in Meerut. He was therefore 'detained in the Meerut jail for about a year and a half'.<sup>14</sup> He was released following the Gandhi-Irwin Pact (5 March 1931) but was re-arrested after the failure of the Round Table Conference in London (1932) and detained over one year in the Delhi jail.<sup>15</sup>

In August, 1932, in order to weaken the growing nationalist upsurge, the British Prime Minister Ramsay Mac Donald declared a 'Communal Award' which ensured separate communal electorates for the Muslims, Europeans, Sikhs, Indian Christians and Anglo-Indians and proposed 'special seats for the 'Depressed Classes'. In order to avoid division among the Hindus, few days later Gandhiji concluded the 'Poona Pact' (on 25 September 1932) with B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of the 'Depressed Classes' which proposed for the replacement of the system of 'special seats' for the 'Depressed Classes' by the system of joint electorate with greater number of seats (twice the number of the seats allotted to them by the 'Communal Award'). Thus the 'Depressed Classes' were to vote in the 'general constituencies' and they would not be segregated from the 'Caste Hindus', but they would have seats reserved for persons of their choice. This arrangement was accepted by the British Government as an agreed modification of the 'Communal Award'. In 1935, the Government of India Act was passed by the British Parliament which provided 'a framework for the establishment of an All India Federation and a new system of government for the provinces on the basis of provincial autonomy'. But the Act of 1935 did not please the Congress leaders like Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Azad etc. (for the inclusion of a high proportion of un-elected members in the Central Legislature) and a strong section of the Congress leaders opposed to participate in the elections of 1937. Azad was, however, of the view that 'it would be a mistake to boycott the elections. If the Congress did so, less desirable elements would capture the Central and Provincial Legislatures and speak in the name of the Indian people'.<sup>16</sup> Finally the Congress decided to contest the elections of 1937 and the election campaign began towards the end of 1936. Although Azad himself declined to contest in the elections of 1937, he was appointed to organize election campaigns, raise funds and select the candidates, to mobilize the volunteers and organize rallies in favour of the Congress candidates throughout India.

In the elections of 1937 (which were held in the month of February), the Congress won 'overwhelming victory' and swept the polls in most of the provinces, except Punjab and Sind. The Congress won and bagged 706 seats out of 1585 seats in the eleven provinces and won absolute majorities in Madras, U.P, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa and it became the largest single party in Bombay, Bengal, Assam, and North Western Frontier Province and finally formed Congress ministries (in July 1937) in 7 out of 11 provinces and coalition governments in two others. Only Punjab (ruled by the Unionist Party) and Bengal (ruled by a coalition of the Krishak Praja Party and the

Muslim League) had non-Congress ministries.<sup>17</sup> The Muslim League, on the other hand, could not perform well in the elections and bagged only 109 seats out of 482 seats reserved for the Muslims (while the Congress contested only in 58 of these seats and won in 26 seats out of them). The Congress ministries in different provinces performed a herculean task within a short period of 27 months between July 1937 and November 1939 and Azad was sworn as a member of the Congress Parliamentary Board which supervised the work of the Congress ministries. But the Party at that time was going through severe ideological and leadership crises which became acute in the Tripuri session of the Congress. Azad at that time, served as an intermediary between the supporters of Gandhiji and the Congress faction led by the then Congress President Subhas Chandra Bose who became successful in getting himself re-elected as the Congress President in March 1939. In November 1939, the Congress ministries in all provinces resigned in protest of the Viceroy's decision to join in the Second World War. To celebrate the occasion Jinnah (who raised the cry of 'Islam in Danger' and accused Gandhiji of "turning the Congress into an instrument for the revival of Hinduism") appealed to the Muslims to observe Friday, 22 December 1939 as the 'Day of Deliverance and thanksgiving'. Enthusiastic Muslim League leaders ultimately passed the 'Pakistan' Resolution on 23 March 1940 at its Lahore session which insisted on the acceptance of the principle of division of the country. At this critical juncture, Gandhiji requested Azad to become the Congress President and he was easily elected the Congress President (by defeating M.N.Roy and continued as such till 1946) in its session at Ramgarh (Bihar) in March 1940 where the Congress reiterated its objective in even clearer and stronger terms in the resolution adopted by it. The Resolution declared that "nothing short of complete independence can be accepted by the people of India", and they "alone can properly shape their own constitution and determine their relations to the other countries of the world, through a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult suffrage".<sup>18</sup> In his presidential address, Azad vehemently opposed Jinnah's 'Two-Nation Theory', criticized religious separatism and made an appeal to all the Muslims to maintain communal harmony and peace. He said: "If Hinduism has been the religion of its people for several thousands of years, Islam, too, has been its religion for a thousand years. Just as a Hindu can say with legitimate pride that he is an Indian and a follower of Hinduism, so can a Muslim proudly claim being an Indian and a follower of Islam..... Whether we like it or not, we have now become an Indian nation, united and indivisible. No false idea of separatism can break our oneness. We must accept the inexorable logic of facts and apply ourselves to fashioning our future destiny....."<sup>19</sup> Not only that, as the President of the Congress, he declared openly "that the Indian National Congress was not a pacifist organization but an instrument for achieving India's freedom" and that the Indians had the "right to take to the sword"<sup>20</sup> if they had no other alternative.

On 8 August 1940, the then Viceroy Lord Linlithgow (1936-1943), issued a new statement which proposed for an immediate expansion of the Governor-General's

Executive Council, establishment of a War Advisory Council and a Constituent Assembly to frame the Indian constitution. The 'August Offer' ultimately failed to satisfy both the Congress and the Muslim League and Gandhiji made an appeal to all the countrymen 'to refrain from assisting India's war effort' and launched *Individual Satyagraha* (on 17 October 1940). About 600 *Satyagrahis* were arrested and imprisoned including Abul Kalam Azad and Rajagopalachari. Azad was arrested at Lahore before he could offer *Individual Satyagraha*. He was sentenced to imprisonment for two years and detained in the Naini Jail<sup>21</sup> and was released in December 1941. At that time, two important incidents took place- the first was Germany's attack on Soviet Russia in June 1941 and the second was Japan's attack on U.S.A at Pearl Harbour in December 1941. As the Allied Powers wanted to ensure the fullest cooperation of the Indians in the Second World War, American President Franklin Roosevelt and the Chinese leader Chiang Kai Shek put pressure on the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to come to some settlements with the Indian leaders. At this crucial hour, Great Britain decided to send Sir Stafford Cripps, a member of British Cabinet to visit India to solve the deadlock who ultimately arrived on the Indian soil on 23 March 1942. As the Congress President, Azad took a leading role in the negotiations with the Cripps' Mission but its proposal failed to satisfy both the Congress (non-acceptance of the Congress demand for the immediate transfer of effective power to the Indians) and the Muslim League (no assurance of a separate Muslim State). As a result, the negotiations between Cripps and the Indian leaders broke down and disappointed Gandhiji henceforth demanded for the complete British withdrawal from India. The All-India Congress Committee at its historic meeting in Bombay (on 8 August 1942) finally approved of the Quit India Resolution. Gandhiji captivated the hearts of thousands of Indians by saying "..... The mantra is: "Do or Die". We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery....." The next morning (i.e. 9 August 1942), Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Patel, Azad, Asoke Mehta, Asaf Ali, Dr. Syed Mahmud, Mrs. Naidu, and all other national and provincial Congress leaders were arrested under the Defence of India Rules. While Gandhiji was sent to Aga Khan Palace in Pune, Azad and nine other AICWC members were detained at Ahmednagar Fort Jail for nearly four years and later he was transferred to Bankura and was released on 15 June 1945. Azad represented the Congress at the Simla Conference on 25 June which was convened to discuss the transfer of power and the composition of a new Executive Council of the Governor-General. The Conference ultimately bore no fruit as Jinnah chose firmly to stick to the demand for Pakistan. So Azad suggested a plan to avert the partition and immediately he sent it Gandhiji on 2 August 1945 envisaging: (a) a federal constitution for the country 'with fully autonomous units in which the Central subjects must be only of an all- India nature and agreed upon by the constituent units'; (b) 'the units must be given the right of secession'; (c) 'there must be joint electorates in both the Centre and the Provinces with reservation of seats'; (d) 'there must be parity of Hindus and Muslims in the Central Legislature and the Central Executive till such time as communal suspicion disappears

and parties are formed on economic and political lines'; (e) 'there should be convention by which the head of the Indian Federation should in the initial period be Hindu and Muslim by turn'.<sup>22</sup> But his proposals failed to get the support and win the confidence either of most of the Congress leaders, including Gandhiji<sup>23</sup> or the Muslim League leaders, including Jinnah.

In July 1945, the general elections in Great Britain took place. The Conservatives were defeated and the Labour Party came to power. The newly formed Government was in favour of conceding to the Indian demands and the new British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee soon decided to send to India a high-power delegation (earlier announced by Lord Pethwick Lawrence, the new Secretary of State for India) consisting of three members of the British Parliament (known as the 'Cabinet Mission') to discuss with the Indian nationalist leaders the matters relating to Indian independence. On 24 March 1946, the members of the Cabinet Mission arrived in India and started discussions with the Viceroy and the Governors and other 472 prominent persons (Azad headed the delegation and played a significant role in the negotiations) and finally announced its plan on 16 May 1946. The main recommendations of the Cabinet Mission were as follows: 1) A Federation would be formed comprising the British Indian Provinces and the Indian States; 2) The Central Government would be in-charge of defence, foreign policy and communication. In all other matters, the provinces would enjoy complete self-government; 3) The provinces would be classified into three categories, a) the Hindu dominated provinces would form the 'A' category, b) the Muslim dominated provinces would form the 'B' category, c) Bengal and the North-East would form the 'C' category; 4) It made provision for a Constitution-making body which was to be elected by the Provincial Assemblies; 5) It also proposed for setting up of an Interim Government consisting of 14 members (6 members from the Congress, 5 from the Muslim League, 1 from the Christians, 1 from the Sikhs, and 1 from the Parsees and all of them were to be Indians) and the Interim Government would govern until the new Constitution was implemented. The Muslim League on 6 June and the Congress Working Committee on 25 June 1946 accepted the long-term plan put forward by the Cabinet Mission. In the meantime, both the Muslim League and the Congress had become more intolerant about their contradictory political agenda. The Muslim League defined (7- 9 April 1946) Pakistan as "a sovereign independent state" consisting of the Muslim majority provinces of Bengal and Assam in the northeast and the Punjab, North- West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the northwest.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Maulana Azad, the Congress President, declared (on 15 April) that complete independence for a united India was the demand of their Party.<sup>25</sup> The elections to the Constituent Assembly were held in July 1946 and the Congress led by Azad won the elections by a huge margin. On 29 July 1946, the Muslim League Working Committee withdrew its acceptance of the long-term plan in response to Nehru's statement (on 10 July 1946 that Congress had "agreed to nothing else" other than participation in the Constituent Assembly) and gave a call for

'Direct Action' from August 16 to achieve Pakistan. For four days (i.e. 16 -19 August), the Indian scenario was rapidly transformed as there were communal riots on an unprecedented scale in Calcutta (known as "The Great Calcutta Killing"), Chittagong, Dacca, Mymensingh, Barisal, Pabna, Tippera, Noakhali, Bombay, Bihar, Assam, Garhmukteshwar (U.P.) etc. which had taken away the lives of around 5000 people and left 15000 wounded. This communal holocaust deeply shocked Azad and he wrote in a broken-hearted and melancholic tone: "16 August was a black day in the history of India. Mob violence unprecedented in the history of India plunged the great city of Calcutta into an orgy of bloodshed, murder and terror. Hundreds of lives were lost. Thousands were injured and property worth crores of rupees was destroyed. Processions were taken out by the League which began to loot and commit acts of arson. Soon the whole city was in the grip of goondas of both the communities".<sup>26</sup> When the communal violence continued to ravage the country, the Interim Government led by Nehru was sworn in on 2 September 1946. But Azad decided not to join the Cabinet.<sup>27</sup> The Muslim League which initially declined to join the Interim Government was later persuaded by Lord Wavell to join it (on 26 October 1946). But the League followed an obstructionist approach in order to hamper the smooth functioning of the Government so as to create a deadlock. In order to get rid of this situation, British Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced in the British Parliament on 20 February 1947, that the British would transfer power to the Indians by a date not later than June 1948. Accordingly Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the new Viceroy, reached India on 22 March 1947 and held discussions with the then political leaders. At the end, he came to the conclusion that partition was inevitable and a few days later, made the formal announcement of his Plan on 3 June 1947. But Gandhiji strongly announced: "They can not have Pakistan at the point of the sword. They must first cut me to pieces before they vivisect the country....." Azad too, was wholeheartedly and vehemently opposed to the creation of Pakistan and he said: "Considering the scheme in all its aspects I have come to the conclusion that it is harmful not only for India as a whole but for Muslims in particular. And in fact it creates more problems than it solves. I must confess that the very term Pakistan goes against my grain. It suggests that some portions of the world are pure while others are impure. Such a division of territories into pure and impure is un-Islamic and is more in keeping with orthodox Brahmanism which divides men and countries into holy and unholy- a division which is a repudiation of the very spirit of Islam. Islam recognizes no such division and the prophet says, 'God has made the whole world a mosque for me'..... As a Muslim, I for one am not prepared for a moment to give up my right to treat the whole of India as my domain and to share in the shaping of its political and economic life. To me it seems a sure sign of cowardice to give up what is my patrimony and content myself with a mere fragment of it".<sup>28</sup> Not only that, from the point of view of Muslim interest, Azad rejected the partition proposal and the creation of Pakistan. He reiterated: "Let us consider dispassionately the consequences which will follow if we give effect to the Pakistan scheme. India will be divided into two States, one with a majority of Muslims and the other of Hindus. In the Hindustan State

there will remain three and a half crores of Muslims scattered in small minorities all over the land. With 17 per cent in U.P, 12 per cent in Bihar and 9 per cent in Madras, they will be weaker than they are today in the Hindu majority provinces. They have had their homelands in these regions for almost a thousand years and built up well known centres of Muslim culture and civilization there”.<sup>29</sup> Going against his sentiment, when the AICC held its meeting on 14 June 1947 and voted in favour of the partition proposal (For-157, Against 28, Neutral-32) on the next day, Azad recollected: “I have attended many meetings of the AICC but this was one of the strangest sessions that it was my misfortune to attend. Congress which had always fought for the unity and independence of India was now considering an official resolution for dividing the country..... It was impossible for me to tolerate this abject surrender on the part of the Congress..... Partition was a tragedy for India and the only thing that could be said in its favour was that we had done our best to avoid division but we had failed.....”<sup>30</sup> But at that point of time, he had strong conviction: “We must not however forget that the nation is one and its cultural life is and will remain one ... If we put a stick in the water, it may appear that the water has been divided but the water remains the same and the moment the stick is removed, even the appearance of division disappears”.<sup>31</sup> At last India was bifurcated and Pakistan, a separate homeland for the Muslims emerged on the ruins of Hindu – Muslim amity and we are still bearing the wounds of this bifurcation.

Thus we can say without any doubt that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was an enigmatic, extraordinary and incomparable figure in Indian politics, an untiring and unparalleled freedom fighter, a champion of Hindu- Muslim unity, ‘the Emperor of learning’ and above all, a great patriot. By his profound learning and sheer intelligence, he advocated really a good job for Islam ‘by clearing it of the dust of prejudice and bigotry which had gathered upon it during the eleven hundred years of its history in India’. Not only that, he brought the Muslim masses into the mainstream of national struggle for independence and he played the chief instrumental role in converting a ‘passive’ and sometimes ‘collaborationist’ section of the Indian society into very active, effective and vocal opponents of the British Raj. Acknowledging Azad’s unique qualities and paying tribute to him in the Rajya Sabha on 24 February 1958, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the then Chairman of the House made his assessment in this fashion: “Maulana Saheb was an outstanding figure of great courage, fearlessness, integrity and passionate love for freedom. He noticed the defects which make for subjection and struggled to the best of his ability to remove them. National dissensions have been a frequent cause of our repeated humiliation and subjection. He stood against them; he wanted to bring about the consolidation of our country. He made no difference between Hindu and Muslim, Sikh or Christian. He felt that all those who are in this country belonged to one country and that national spirit was the driving force of his life. He was an apostle of national unity and communal harmony, the lessons which we have to remember even, since there are forces which are still at work in this country to divide us, one from another. This is one great

lesson of his life". One may raise questions or profoundly differ from Azad's ideas, his line of thinking and his course of actions, but one cannot doubt his integrity, sincerity or commitment towards India and the Indians. He also stood firmly like a solid rock in his opposition to the partition of India both on theological and on moral and material grounds, fully committed to the cause of united India in the face of strong opposition by the Muslim League led by M.A. Jinnah and tried his best to save the country from the evils of the partition. He firmly believed that nobody would be benefitted by this partition rather it would harm Islam in Pakistan and the Muslims in India which is clearly reflected in his own statement: *Wahaan Islam majrooh hoga, Yahaan Musalmaan majrooh hoga*. In spite of his valiant effort, Azad failed to avert the partition in 1947 and disdainfully achieved his long-cherished freedom on 15 August and on that historic day, no one could forget 'the sad face of Maulana Azad, to whom the occasion was something of a tragedy, sticking out from the sea of happy faces like a gaunt and ravaged rock'.<sup>32</sup> To me, the most striking feature of his life is that it was only Azad who faced and countered the powerful *Hindutva* elements within the Congress and outside and the wild forces of Muslim separatism (promoted mainly under the banner of the Muslim League). He never made compromise with the communal and fundamentalist forces rather he believed in religious toleration, communal harmony, national unity and diversity and was very keen to acclaim himself: "I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. I am indispensable to this noble edifice and without me this splendid structure of India is incomplete. I am an essential element which has gone to build India. I can never surrender this claim".<sup>33</sup> All these words still sound like a *mantra* to every citizen of India and give us a lesson to feel for the country, to live for the country and to protect our 'unity in diversity' at any cost. Today when our country is facing great crises like separatism, communalism, fundamentalism, provincialism etc., the life, philosophy and activities of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad will show us the right path to fight against all these evil forces and uproot all these dangers from our society, to promote communal harmony and peaceful co-existence, to believe in religious pluralism and above all, to remain united under one roof so that we can show our integrity and solidarity to the rest of the world and hold our heads high as a 'nation'. That will be the best way to pay our tribute to this great scholar, patriot, political activist and freedom fighter of modern India who always dreamt for, stood for and fought for a united India and secular India.

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