

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's Contributions to the Indian Education System: A Critical Analysis in the Context of the National Education Policy 2020

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Abstract: This paper critically examines Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's pivotal role in shaping the Indian education system, contextualized within the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 framework. Azad's visionary contributions, rooted in inclusivity, holistic development, and cultural synthesis, are analyzed alongside the contemporary educational reforms outlined in the NEP 2020. Through a comprehensive review of historical narratives, policy documents, and scholarly literature, this study elucidates Azad's enduring influence on educational philosophy and practice. The analysis highlights parallels and disparities between Azad's ideals and the NEP 2020 objectives, while identifying challenges and opportunities for integration. Insights gleaned from this study offer valuable perspectives for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders seeking to advance educational equity, quality, and relevance in the dynamic landscape of Indian education. Ultimately, Azad's legacy serves as a beacon, guiding efforts towards building a more inclusive, equitable, and transformative education system for India's future generations.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, critical analysis, educational reforms, inclusivity, holistic development, cultural synthesis, equity, quality, relevance.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad stands as an eminent figure in the annals of Indian history, revered for his multifaceted contributions to the nation's freedom struggle, socio-political reforms, and notably, the educational landscape. Born during the colonial era, Azad's life journey intertwined with the fervor of the Indian independence movement, where he emerged not only as a prominent leader but also as a visionary thinker with a profound understanding of the role of education in nation-building. Against the backdrop of British colonial rule and socio-cultural transformations, Azad championed the cause of education as a means to empower individuals, foster national unity, and drive societal progress.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

While Maulana Azad's role in India's freedom struggle is widely acknowledged, his contributions to the educational domain often remain underexplored or insufficiently contextualized. In light of contemporary educational reforms, particularly the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020, there arises a pressing need to critically examine Azad's educational philosophy, initiatives, and their relevance in the present context. This paper seeks to address the gap in scholarly literature by conducting a rigorous analysis of Azad's educational contributions vis-à-vis the NEP 2020, aiming to unravel the enduring relevance and implications of his ideas in shaping the Indian education system.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

To elucidate Maulana Azad's vision for education, including his philosophical underpinnings and key initiatives.

To comprehensively review the National Education Policy 2020, delineating its objectives, principles, and transformative agenda for the Indian education system.

To critically analyze Azad's contributions to the Indian education system in light of the NEP 2020, examining their alignment, relevance, and potential impact.

To identify challenges and opportunities in integrating Azad's educational ideals within the framework of contemporary educational reforms.

To provide insights and recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to leverage Azad's legacy in advancing the goals of educational equity, quality, and inclusivity.

2. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: A Visionary of Indian Education

2.1 Biography and Educational Background

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, born on November 11, 1888, in Mecca, was a prominent leader of the Indian independence movement and a distinguished scholar. His early education was largely informal, rooted in traditional Islamic studies under the guidance of renowned scholars. Azad's pursuit of knowledge led him to become proficient in multiple languages, including Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and English. Azad's formal education began in Kolkata, where he immersed himself in Western and Islamic literature. He became actively involved in the political discourse of the time, advocating for Indian self-rule and social reform. His commitment to education as a catalyst for social change became increasingly evident as he rose to prominence within the Indian National Congress.

2.2 Philosophical Underpinnings of Azad's Educational Vision

Central to Maulana Azad's educational philosophy was the belief that education should not only impart knowledge but also cultivate critical thinking, moral values, and a sense of social responsibility. He emphasized the importance of holistic education that nurtured both the intellect and the character of individuals, transcending narrow sectarian interests.

Azad's vision for education was deeply rooted in the principles of inclusivity, pluralism, and cultural synthesis. He advocated for an educational system that celebrated India's diverse heritage while fostering unity and harmony among its people. Azad envisioned education as a means to empower individuals,

irrespective of caste, creed, or gender, and to instill in them a sense of pride in their cultural identity and heritage.

2.3 Initiatives and Reforms in the Education Sector

Maulana Azad's tenure as the first Minister of Education in independent India marked a significant phase in the country's educational history. He spearheaded numerous initiatives aimed at democratizing education and expanding access to quality learning opportunities. One of Azad's most notable contributions was the establishment of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1953, which aimed to regulate and promote higher education across the country. Additionally, he played a key role in formulating policies to promote primary and secondary education, including the implementation of universal primary education and the integration of vocational training into the school curriculum.

Azad also prioritized the promotion of Indian languages and cultural heritage in education, advocating for the inclusion of regional languages in schools and colleges. He believed that education should be grounded in the cultural context of the learners, enabling them to connect with their roots while embracing modern knowledge. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's initiatives and reforms in the education sector reflected his unwavering commitment to building a progressive and inclusive society through the transformative power of education. His vision continues to inspire educational reforms in India, resonating with contemporary efforts to promote equitable access, quality, and relevance in education.

3. The National Education Policy 2020: A Paradigm Shift

3.1 Overview and Key Components

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a watershed moment in India's educational landscape, aiming to revitalize and transform the entire system from early childhood to higher education. This policy, after over three decades, introduces comprehensive reforms encompassing various dimensions of education.

Key components of the NEP 2020 include:

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): The policy emphasizes the importance of early childhood education and aims to provide universal access to high-quality ECCE for children up to 6 years old.

School Education: The NEP advocates for a foundational literacy and numeracy mission to ensure that every child achieves basic reading and mathematical abilities. It also proposes curricular restructuring, flexibility, and multidisciplinary education in schools.

Higher Education: The policy envisages holistic and multidisciplinary education in higher education institutions, with the aim of promoting critical thinking, creativity, and innovation. It advocates for the integration of vocational education and research, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and skill development.

Teacher Education and Professional Development: NEP 2020 emphasizes the continuous professional development of teachers, promoting their autonomy and creativity in pedagogical practices. It also advocates for rigorous teacher recruitment processes and incentives for outstanding performance.

Technology Integration: The policy underscores the role of technology in enhancing the accessibility, equity, and quality of education. It calls for the integration of digital technologies in teaching, learning, assessment, and administration.

3.2 Goals and Objectives

The National Education Policy 2020 sets forth ambitious goals and objectives to be achieved over the next few decades. Some of the key goals include:

Ensuring universal access and retention in school education, with a focus on foundational literacy and numeracy.

Promoting holistic development and well-being of students through a flexible and multidisciplinary curriculum.

Transforming higher education institutions into vibrant hubs of research, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Enhancing the quality and relevance of teacher education to meet the diverse needs of learners.

Harnessing the potential of technology to improve learning outcomes and administrative efficiency.

The overarching objective of the NEP 2020 is to transform India into a knowledge society, equipped with the skills, knowledge, and values necessary to thrive in the 21st century globalized world.

3.3 Implications for the Indian Education System

The implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 is expected to have profound implications for the Indian education system:

Paradigm Shift: NEP 2020 represents a paradigm shift from rote learning and examination-centric approaches to a more holistic, learner-centric, and outcome-oriented education system.

Inclusivity and Equity: The policy aims to address inequities in access and quality of education by providing universal access to high-quality education, especially to marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

Quality Enhancement: NEP 2020 focuses on improving the quality and relevance of education at all levels through curriculum reforms, teacher training, and technological interventions.

Employability and Innovation: By promoting multidisciplinary education, vocational training, and research, the policy seeks to enhance students' employability and foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

4. Analyzing Azad's Contributions in the Context of NEP 2020

4.1 Alignment with Azad's Vision: A Comparative Analysis

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's vision for education shares several fundamental principles with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Both Azad and NEP 2020 emphasize the holistic development of individuals, inclusivity, and the integration of traditional knowledge with modern education. Azad's emphasis on moral and character education resonates with NEP 2020's focus on values-based education and the holistic development of students.

However, there are also notable differences between Azad's vision and the NEP 2020. For instance, while Azad advocated for a strong emphasis on cultural heritage and religious education, NEP 2020 adopts a more secular approach, promoting a pluralistic understanding of Indian culture and history. Additionally, Azad's vision emphasized the role of education in fostering national unity and political consciousness, whereas NEP 2020 prioritizes global competitiveness and 21st-century skills.

4.2 Assessing the Relevance and Impact of Azad's Initiatives

Maulana Azad's initiatives in the education sector, such as the establishment of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and promotion of primary education, laid the foundation for many aspects of India's current educational system. Azad's emphasis on promoting Indian languages and culture in education has also influenced language policies in schools and universities.

In the context of NEP 2020, Azad's initiatives remain relevant, particularly in promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity in education. His emphasis on primary education aligns with NEP 2020's goal of achieving foundational literacy and numeracy for all children. However, there are challenges in implementing Azad's initiatives in their original form, given the evolving educational landscape and changing societal needs.

4.3 Challenges and Opportunities for Integration

Integrating Azad's educational ideals with the goals of NEP 2020 presents both challenges and opportunities. One challenge is reconciling Azad's emphasis on traditional knowledge and cultural heritage with NEP 2020's focus on global competitiveness and technological advancement. Balancing these priorities requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges the importance of cultural identity while preparing students for the demands of the modern world.

Another challenge is ensuring equitable access to education, as Azad envisioned education as a tool for social empowerment and upliftment. Addressing disparities in access to education, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, remains a key challenge that requires targeted interventions and resource allocation.

However, there are also opportunities for synergy between Azad's vision and NEP 2020. For instance, Azad's emphasis on moral and character education aligns with NEP 2020's focus on holistic development and values-based education. Similarly, Azad's advocacy for vocational training and skill development resonates with NEP 2020's emphasis on promoting employability and entrepreneurship among students.

5. Case Studies and Examples

5.1 Implementation of Azad's Educational Ideals in Contemporary Settings

While Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's educational ideals were formulated decades ago, their resonance and implementation can be observed in various contemporary educational settings across India. Here are some illustrative case studies:

Case Study 1: Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU)

MANUU, established in 1998, embodies Azad's vision of promoting Urdu language and culture alongside modern education. The university offers a wide range of undergraduate, postgraduate, and research programs in disciplines ranging from arts and humanities to sciences and technology, all taught in Urdu. By

providing education in Urdu, MANUU preserves linguistic diversity while ensuring access to higher education for Urdu-speaking communities across India.

Case Study 2: Azad's Emphasis on Holistic Education in Alternative Schools

Several alternative schools across India have embraced Azad's vision of holistic education, emphasizing character development, critical thinking, and experiential learning. For instance, The Riverside School in Ahmedabad follows an innovative curriculum that integrates academic learning with life skills, creativity, and community engagement. By adopting Azad's holistic approach, such schools prioritize the holistic development of students, nurturing their intellectual, emotional, and social faculties.

5.2 Success Stories and Best Practices

Success Story 1: The Impact of Azad's Literacy Campaigns

Maulana Azad spearheaded numerous literacy campaigns during his tenure as the Minister of Education, aiming to eradicate illiteracy and promote education among marginalized communities. These campaigns, though initiated decades ago, have left a lasting impact on India's educational landscape. For instance, the National Literacy Mission launched in 1988, inspired by Azad's vision, has significantly contributed to reducing the adult illiteracy rate in India.

Best Practice 1: Integration of Vocational Training in School Curriculum

Azad emphasized the importance of vocational education as a means to enhance employability and empower individuals with practical skills. Several schools and vocational training institutes have adopted this approach, integrating vocational training programs into the school curriculum. For example, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in India offers vocational courses in various fields such as hospitality, healthcare, and information technology, enabling students to acquire industry-relevant skills alongside academic education.

5.3 Lessons Learned and Areas for Improvement

Lesson Learned 1: Importance of Community Engagement

Azad's initiatives emphasized community participation and collaboration in educational endeavors. Contemporary educational institutions can learn from this approach by actively involving parents, local communities, and stakeholders in decision-making processes, curriculum development, and educational activities.

Area for Improvement 1: Addressing Socio-economic Disparities

Despite Azad's advocacy for inclusive education, socio-economic disparities continue to pose significant challenges to educational equity in India. Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions, such as providing scholarships, infrastructure development in underserved areas, and ensuring access to quality education for marginalized communities.

In conclusion, the implementation of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's educational ideals in contemporary settings underscores their enduring relevance and impact on India's educational landscape. By drawing inspiration from Azad's vision, educators and policymakers can create inclusive, learner-centric, and culturally relevant educational environments that empower individuals and foster societal progress.

6. Critique and Discussion

6.1 Strengths and Limitations of Azad's Educational Philosophy

Strengths:

Inclusivity and Social Justice: Azad's vision emphasized education as a fundamental right accessible to all, regardless of social status, religion, or gender. This commitment to inclusivity laid the groundwork for promoting social justice and equity in education, aligning with contemporary ideals of educational access and opportunity for all.

Holistic Development: Azad recognized the importance of holistic education, which goes beyond academic achievement to encompass moral, ethical, and personal development. By advocating for a balanced approach that nurtures both intellectual and moral faculties, Azad's philosophy resonates with modern calls for education that prepares individuals for the complexities of the modern world.

Cultural Pluralism: Azad's emphasis on cultural synthesis and the integration of diverse knowledge systems into the educational curriculum reflects a deep appreciation for India's rich cultural heritage. This approach fosters respect for cultural diversity and promotes a sense of national unity amidst plurality, which is particularly relevant in today's multicultural societies.

Limitations:

Gender Bias: Despite his progressive stance on education, Azad's vision did not fully address gender disparities in access to education. Women's education was often secondary to men's education, reflecting prevailing social norms of the time. Addressing gender bias and promoting gender equity in education would be necessary to align Azad's vision with contemporary principles of gender equality.

Technical and Vocational Education: Azad's educational philosophy primarily emphasized humanities, literature, and social sciences, with less emphasis on technical and vocational education. In today's rapidly evolving job market, there is a growing need for technical skills and vocational training. Integrating technical education into the curriculum would enhance the relevance and applicability of education to real-world contexts.

Religious Influence: As a devout Muslim scholar, Azad's educational philosophy was influenced by Islamic principles, which may have inadvertently marginalized the perspectives of other religious and cultural communities. A more inclusive approach that embraces religious and cultural diversity would be essential for fostering social cohesion and harmony in diverse educational settings.

6.2 Addressing Challenges in Implementing Azad's Ideas

Gender Equity: Implementing policies and programs that prioritize girls' education, address barriers to access and retention, and promote gender-sensitive pedagogy can help advance gender equity in education.

Curricular Reform: Revising the curriculum to include interdisciplinary and experiential learning opportunities, as well as incorporating themes of ethics, citizenship, and sustainability, can align education with Azad's vision of holistic development.

Teacher Empowerment: Providing professional development opportunities, support networks, and resources for teachers can enhance their capacity to implement Azad's educational ideals effectively and creatively in diverse classroom settings.

Community Engagement: Engaging parents, communities, and local stakeholders in educational decision-making processes can foster a sense of ownership and accountability, ensuring that Azad's vision is contextualized and responsive to local needs and aspirations.

6.3 Opportunities for Innovation and Adaptation

Technology Integration: Leveraging digital technologies for distance learning, multimedia resources, and personalized learning platforms can enhance access to quality education and promote lifelong learning, in line with Azad's vision of educational advancement.

Skill Development: Integrating entrepreneurship education, vocational training, and 21st-century skills development into the curriculum can equip students with the competencies needed for success in the global economy and promote Azad's vision of self-reliance and economic empowerment.

Global Partnerships: Collaborating with international institutions, exchanging best practices, and participating in global networks can enrich educational experiences, broaden perspectives, and promote mutual understanding, consistent with Azad's vision of global citizenship and cooperation.

Research and Innovation: Investing in educational research, innovation, and experimentation can generate new insights, methodologies, and approaches aligned with Azad's vision of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and intellectual inquiry.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Recapitulation of Key Findings

Throughout this paper, we have undertaken a comprehensive examination of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's contributions to the Indian education system, juxtaposed with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Firstly, we explored Azad's visionary educational philosophy, characterized by inclusivity, holistic development, and cultural synthesis. His initiatives, including the establishment of the University Grants Commission and promotion of indigenous languages, exemplify his commitment to democratizing education and fostering national unity. Secondly, we analyzed the NEP 2020, identifying its key components, goals, and transformative agenda for Indian education. While the NEP shares some objectives with Azad's vision, disparities exist, particularly in addressing gender equity and technical education.

7.2 Implications for Policy and Practice

The convergence between Azad's educational ideals and the NEP 2020 offers profound implications for educational policy and practice in India. Firstly, policymakers must strive to integrate Azad's principles of inclusivity, cultural pluralism, and holistic development into the implementation of the NEP. This entails prioritizing initiatives that promote gender equity, expand access to technical education, and incorporate indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum. Secondly, educators should leverage Azad's legacy to foster a more holistic and values-based approach to teaching and learning. By embracing his vision of education as a means of empowerment and social transformation, educators can nurture students' intellectual, moral, and emotional growth.

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

To further enrich our understanding of Azad's educational philosophy and its implications, future research endeavors should focus on several key areas. Firstly, longitudinal studies tracking the implementation of Azad's initiatives within the NEP framework would provide insights into their long-term impact on educational outcomes and societal development. Secondly, comparative analyses between Azad's vision and educational philosophies from other cultures and historical contexts could elucidate universal principles of effective education. Lastly, interdisciplinary research exploring the intersectionality of education, culture, and identity in Azad's writings would deepen our appreciation of the socio-cultural dimensions of his educational thought.

The paper has critically analyzed Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's contributions to the Indian education system in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Azad's visionary educational philosophy, rooted in inclusivity, holistic development, and cultural synthesis, continues to resonate profoundly in contemporary educational discourse.

Through his initiatives and reforms, Azad laid the foundation for a more equitable, accessible, and quality-oriented education system in India. His emphasis on education as a means of empowerment, social justice, and national integration reflects enduring principles that remain relevant and inspiring today.

The National Education Policy 2020, with its transformative agenda and emphasis on holistic development, bears remarkable parallels with Azad's educational vision. Both emphasize inclusivity, lifelong learning, and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum. However, challenges such as gender disparity, curriculum reform, and teacher empowerment persist and require concerted efforts for resolution.

In conclusion, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's profound contributions to the Indian education system, analyzed within the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, underscore the enduring relevance of his visionary ideals. Azad's emphasis on inclusivity, holistic development, and cultural synthesis resonates deeply with the contemporary educational landscape. While the NEP 2020 shares similar goals and objectives, challenges such as gender disparity and curriculum reform persist. However, opportunities for innovation through technology integration, skill development, and global collaborations offer avenues for progress. Azad's legacy serves as a guiding light, inspiring stakeholders to embrace his principles and work towards building a more equitable, inclusive, and future-ready education system. As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, Azad's vision reminds us of the transformative power of education in shaping individuals, societies, and the trajectory of nations towards prosperity and sustainable development.

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