

Birth of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: This Day in History – Nov 11

On 11 November 1888, freedom fighter Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was born in Mecca, present-day Saudi Arabia. He was a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity, and a staunch opponent of the country's partition. Read more about the life and contribution of Maulana Azad for the IAS exam.

Biography of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

- Maulana Azad was born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia to a Muslim scholar from Bengal with Afghan ancestry, Maulana Muhammad Khairuddin and his Arab wife.
- The family had moved to Saudi Arabia after the Revolt of 1857. In 1890 they returned to Calcutta.
- Azad mastered several languages like Urdu, Persian, Hindi, English, Bengali and Arabic. He showed erudition at a young age and was contributing articles to magazines and teaching while in his teens itself. He was publishing a popular monthly magazine Lissan-us-Sidq when he was just 12.

Role during the Independence Struggle

- He developed interest in nationalism quite early itself. He was a vehement critic of the British government for its racial policies and its blatant disregard for the needs of the common Indians.
- He was also for Hindu-Muslim unity. He was vehemently against the Muslim League's idea that Muslims were a separate nation and so was against the partition of India. He censured the League leaders for putting their own interests ahead of the country's.
- He was influenced by revolutionaries like Aurobindo Ghosh and Shyam Sunder Chakravarty. He protested against the partition of Bengal which went against popular Muslim sentiment of the day.
- Even though he was educated towards becoming a cleric, he steered towards journalism and politics.
- His journals Al-Hilal and Al-Balagh were banned by the government.
- He supported the Khilafat Movement. He also took part in the non-cooperation movement against the Rowlatt Act of 1919. He supported Mahatma Gandhi's views of non-violent satyagraha and was committed to the civil disobedience movement. He also promoted Swaraj and the Swadeshi movement.
- In 1923, he became the youngest president of the Congress Party at the age of 35.
- He was an active leader of the party and was imprisoned by the government many times.

- Azad believed in the unity of the country along with its diverse inhabitants. He said, *"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 is incomplete. I am an essential element, which has gone to build India. I can never surrender this claim."*
- He also took part in the Quit India movement for which he, along with most other Congress leaders, was arrested.
- M A Jinnah was antagonistic to Azad and famously referred to him as 'Congress Showboy'.
- He was against separate communal electorates and said that Islam too had a 'claim on the soil of India'.
- A staunch proponent of a united India, he believed that partition would become a permanent barrier between the two countries. He said, *"The politics of Partition itself will act as a barrier between the two countries. It will not be possible for Pakistan to accommodate all the Muslims of India, a task beyond her territorial capability. On the other hand, it will not be possible for the Hindus to stay especially in West Pakistan. They will be thrown out or leave on their own."*
- Azad was appointed the minister for education under the Nehru government. Under his stint as education minister, the University Grants Commission and the Indian Institute of Technology were set up.
- This champion of national integrity passed away on 22 February 1958 owing to a stroke.
- Maulana Azad's birth anniversary is celebrated as National Education Day in India. He was awarded the Bharat Ratna posthumously in 1992.