

Leadership-Ataturk

Ataturk was the surname given to Mustafa Kemal Pasha by the Parliament of Türkiye. He became the first President of Türkiye in 1923, when he established Türkiye as a modern republic.

Mustafa Kemal was born in Salonica in the year 1881. Salonica was a Greek port which was captured by the Ottoman Sultanate of Turkey in the year 1430. In 1912 the Greeks defeated the Ottomans and took the city back. They then gave it its original Greek name of Thessaloniki.

Young Mustafa lost his father at the age of seven. His mother sent him to a religious school at first. But later, he went to a secular school, from which he went to military high school. There, he excelled throughout. In one of his classes, the mathematics teacher was so impressed by him that he gave him the name, Kemal, which means 'perfection'. Thereafter, Mustafa was known as Mustafa Kemal.

After he left military high school, Mustafa Kemal joined the Military Academy in Istanbul, then the capital of Turkey. He passed out with flying colours from there as well. Next, he was admitted to the War College, which launched his career in the military.

During his military career, Mustafa Kemal took part in some political movements, one of them was the Young Turks Revolution, which ended the reign of the Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid II, who was then replaced by his brother. This happened after WW1.

The First World War began in July 1914 and lasted until November 1918. Türkiye joined the war on the side of the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria). The Central Powers lost the war. The defeated Ottoman Empire was too weak to stop the victorious Allies, specifically Britain and France, from planning to divide it up and seize portions of it themselves.

However, Mustafa Kemal, who was leading the Turkish National Movement, wrecked their plans by launching the Turkish War of Independence. Mustafa Kemal's National Assembly then ended the Ottoman Sultanate in 1922.

In 1923, Turkey's new borders, and self-rule were recognized. The same year the Republic of Turkey was declared, with Ankara as its capital, and Mustafa Kemal its first President.

As President, Mustafa Kemal wasted no time in making reforms that he felt would bring his country into the modern age.

He opened thousands of schools, where primary education was free and compulsory for all children. (In those days literacy was less than 10% in Türkiye; for women, close to 0).

The Turkish language used to be written in the Arabic script, but Mustafa Kemal replaced it with the Latin script in 1928. Various reasons are given for this, e.g. 1. Latin script can more easily express the many vowels in the Turkish language, than Arabic can. 2. The Latin script is easier to learn for Turkish readers and writers. 3. The Latin script is used by the

West and the North European countries (Britain, France, Germany, Sweden and some others). These European countries were advancing fast, and Mustafa Kemal wanted Türkiye to be able to make equal progress.

There used to be many madrassas in Ottoman Turkey. Mustafa Kemal closed them. Only a few were left open for students who wanted to be Imams. The rest of the schools taught secular subjects, like modern science, mathematics, language, etc.

One result of introducing the Latin script was that literacy improved fast in Türkiye. In the days of the Ottomans, literacy was less than 10% (much less in rural areas, and even less for women). However, when Mustafa Kemal died in 1938, it was over 30%, (in just 10 years).

literacy rates in 20/25: Turkey: 97%, Iran: 91%, Bangladesh: 75%, India: 66%, Pakistan: 60 %, Afghanistan: 43%

Mustafa Kemal had noticed that children learned much faster when the Latin script was used. So keen was he to raise literary standards in Türkiye that he worked hands-on to implement the reform, going from school to school with a blackboard to teach children the new alphabet. The students, motivated by the presence of the President probably learned faster.

He was also concerned about literacy among Turkish women, which was even lower than among men; so, he encouraged coeducation.

A believer in the equality of men and women, he changed the older, Islamic legal rights of women, of inheritance and divorce, and gave them

the same legal rights as men. He also established full political rights for men and women in 1934, giving women and men equal rights to vote This reform was made well before it was introduced in several European countries.

Also in 1934, Türkiye passed a law requiring all citizens of the country to have surnames. The Turkish Parliament gave Mustafa Kemal the surname, Ataturk, which means 'Father of the Turks'.

As a leader who brought his country into the modern age, he gave them education, freedom from greedy imperialism, abject poverty, and a better life, Ataturk worked extremely hard. In addition, he studied, and wrote books. All of which he did before his relevantly early death at the age of 57, in 1938.

Amina Azfar