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Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam

Dr.A.P.J Abdul Kalam at Swearing in Ceremony as President of India

We have made significant achievements in the last fifty years in food production, health sector, higher education, media and mass communication, industrial infrastructure, information technology, science and technology and defence. Our nation is endowed with natural resources, vibrant people and traditional value system. In spite of these resources, a number of our people are below the poverty line, undernourished and lack primary education…Along with speedy development aimed at elimination of poverty and unemployment, national security has to be recognized by every Indian as a national priority. Indeed, making India strong and self-reliant—economically, socially and militarily—is our foremost duty to our motherland and to us and to our future generations.

Dr. Kalam in his speech on the occasion of his assumption of office as President of India on July 25, 2002

Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam, popularly known as Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the son of a little educated boat-owner in Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu, has become the 11th President of the Republic of India. The names of the earlier Presidents of India are: Dr. Rajendra Prasad, S. Radhakrishnan, Zakeer Hussain, Fakuruddin Ali Ahmed, V. V. Giri, Neelam Sanjeev Reddy, Gyani Zail Singh, R. Venkataraman, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma and K. R. Narayanan. Some of our Presidents rose even from much humbler beginning than Dr. Kalam. It is very significant that he is the first scientist to occupy the Rashtrapati Bhavan. He is a man one, who has taken unto himself, the task of changing the destiny of India. He is a man with a vision.

His vision is to make India a developed country. He has given his plan of action and a road map for realizing his vision. He has articulated his thoughts in his three books: India 2020: A Vision for the New Millennium, Wings of Fire: An Autobiography of A. P. J. Abdul Kalam and Ignited Minds: Unleashing the Power Within India. India has already started looking to Dr. Kalam for inspiration and guidance.

Dr. Kalam was born on October 15, 1931. He had a secured childhood both materially and emotionally. To quote from his autobiography Wings of Fire: “I was born into a middle-class Tamil family in the island town of Rameswaram in Madras state. My father, Jainulabdeen, possessed neither much formal education nor much wealth; despite these disadvantages, he possessed great innate wisdom and a true generosity of spirit. He had an ideal helpmate in my mother, Ashiamma. I do not recall the exact number of people she fed everyday, but I am quite certain that far more outsiders ate with us than all the members of our own family…We lived in our ancestral house, which was built in the middle of the 19th century. It was a fairly large pucca house, made of limestone and brick, on the Mosque Street of Rameswaram. My austere father used to avoid all inessential comforts and luxuries. However, all that was needed was provided for, in terms of food, medicine or cloths. In fact, I would say mine was a very secure childhood, both materially and emotionally.” Dr. Kalam’s father commanded a high respect as a religious man. Dr, Kalam has acknowledged that his scientific accomplishment and his views are very much influenced by his parents and other well-wishers. To quote him from his autobiography : “Every child is born, with some characteristics, into a specific socio-economic and emotional environment, and trained along the way, in certain ways by figures of authority. I inherited honesty and self-discipline from my father; from my mother, I inherited faith in goodness and deep kindness as did my three brothers

and sisters. But it was the time I spent with Jallaluddin and Samsuddin that perhaps contributed most to the uniqueness of my childhood and made all the difference in my later life. The unschooled wisdom of Jallauddin and Samsuddin was so intuitive, responsive to non-verbal messages that I can unhesitatingly attribute my subsequently manifested creativity to their company in my childhood." It may be noted that Ahmed Jallaluddin was a close friend of Dr. Kalam and Somesuddin was his first cousins.

After studying in a primary school in Ramaeswaran, Dr. Kalam went to Schwartz High School at Ramanathpuram from where he went to Tiruchchirapalli for his higher studies. Dr. Kalam wrote : "By the time I completed my education at Schwartz, I was a self-confident boy with the determination to be successful. The decision to go in for further education was taken without a second thought. To us, in those days, the awarness of the possibilities for a professional education did not exist; higher education simply meant going to college. The nearest college was at Tiruchchirapalli, spelled Trichinopoly those days, and called Trichi for short. "

After completing his BSc from St. Joseph's college he joined the Madras Institute of Technology (MIT), for studying aeronautical engineering. From MIT, he went to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) at Bangalore as a trainee. As aeronautical engineer Dr. Kalam had two options -- in short, to join the Directorate of Technical Development and Production, or DTD & P (Air) of the Ministry of Defence or the Indian Air Force. As he could not make it to Indian Air Force, Dr. Kalam joined the Technical Centre (Civil Aviation) of the DTD&P (Air) as Senior Scientific Assistant on a basic salary of Rs. 250/-. While working at the Air force Directorate he got a chance to realise his dream. He joined the Indian Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR), the predecessor of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). And thus Kalam started his much talked about career in rocket and missile technology.

Before he became President of the country, Dr. Kalam had divided his career in four phases. In the first phase (1963-82) he worked with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). At ISRO he served in various capacities. After initiating Fibre Reinforced Plastics (FRP) activities and spending some time with the aerodynamics and design group he joined the satellite launching vehicle team at Thumba. Here he was made the Project Director of the Mission for SLV-3. He played a crucial role in developing satellite launch vehicle technology and expertise in control, propulsion and aerodynamics. The SLV-3 project managed to put Rohini, a scientific satellite, into orbit in July 1980. India also acquired the ability to design various kinds of rocket systems. Commenting on the first phase of his career Dr. Kalam wrote: "This was my first stage, in which I learnt leadership from three great teachers—Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, Prof. Satish Dhawan and Dr. Brahm Prakash. This was the time of learning and acquisition of knowledge for me."

The second phase of his career started when he joined the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in 1982. As Director of DRDO, Dr. Kalam was entrusted with the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP). Under his leadership India has been able to develop strategic missiles. Like Nag (an anti-tank guided missile), Prithvi (a surface to surface battlefield missile), Akash (a swift, medium - range surface-to-air missile), Trishul (a quick-reaction surface – to – air missile) and Agni (an intermediate range ballistic missile).Three new laboratories/facilities in the area of missile technology were established. About this phase Dr. Kalam wrote: "During this stage, I have gone through many successes and failures. I learnt from failures and hardened myself with courage to face them. This was my second stage, which taught me the crucial lesson of managing failures." Dr. Kalam's contribution to India's defence capabilities is very significant.

Dr. Kalam identifies his third phase with his participation with India's mission to become a nuclear weapon state, jointly undertaken by DRDO and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) with the active support of the armed forces. During this phase he, as Chairman of the Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC), also got involved with the creation of Technology Vision 2020 and the India Millennium Missions (IMM 2020), which is an integratied version of technology vision and India's security concerns. In November 1999 Dr. Kalam was appointed as Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India.

His fourth phase started after he left the post of Principal Scientific Adviser. He joined the Anna University at Chennai as Professor of Technology and Societal Transformation. As part of realizing

his mission he decided to ignite the minds of the young. For this purpose he wanted to reach at least 100,000 students in different parts of the country before August 2003. He has already met about 40,000 students. His fourth phase took a sudden turn, which he himself perhaps did not visualize. He became the President of India.

In 1997 Dr. Kalam was given the highest civilian award of India, the Bharat Ratna

Vigyan Prasar, while felicitating this humble and great scientist ; and now first citizen, takes the pledge to fully dedicate it self to turn his Dream of transforming our country into a developed nation.

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