

Promoting Multiculturalism in R.Ramanathan's *Who is Kalam?*

A.Edwin Jeevaraj
 Professor & Head,
 Department of English
 Adhiyamaan College of Engineering
 Hosur, Tamil Nadu,
 India.

A general definition of Multiculturalism is, the appreciation, acceptance or promotion of multiple cultures, applied to the demographic make-up of a specific place, usually at the organizational level, e.g. schools, businesses, neighborhoods, cities or nations. A common policy to promote this multiculturalism is that they avoid presenting any specific ethnic, religious, or cultural community values as central. It is the root for forming new cultural phenomenon or "Transculturation", a word coined by Cuban, an anthropologist. Even opposition for this multiculturalism is there under the name of trust, charitable, unstable condition, westernization etc., the current trend and globalization support multiculturalism a lot under the name of equality, broad and updating view point and growth. So many countries like Australia, Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Russia, Germany, Japan, Philippines, and Singapore including India started to adopt the multicultural set up for their policy making system. Though the word 'multiculturalism' is not much used in India in the past it has used the sub- division of multiculturalism, unity in *diversity* is more commonly used and still is being used. Our former president and dedicated scientist, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, also encouraged this policy for the growth of his nation. But he didn't blindly accept all aspects of this cultural system. He simply means to take each aspect on its own merit and determine if it can be acceptable in the whole. R.Ramanathan's, Financial advisor of Dr.Kalam, in his book *Who is Kalam?*, portrayed some important incidents which helped to draw the personality of Dr.Kalam, Kalam's immediate responses to certain situations, his personal habits, his life style, his interests, his way of responding to different kind of people and leaving impressions to youth, children, and to his co- workers, Raman's study on the turning points of Kalam's transformation from a shy young man to the courageous and motivating leader of the nation, and some achievements of this great personality. Among those information shared with an attempt to kindle the interest of the readers, this book, also leaves some place to view Kalam's support for his usage of multicultural set up with a purpose. Thus this paper focuses to bring out some of Kalam's thoughts that how the multicultural set up could be used for the benefit of a country without making any complex issues through a study on R.Ramanathan's *Who is Kalam?*

Promoting Multiculturalism in R.Ramanathan's *Who is Kalam?*

Dr.A.P.J Abdul Kalam, the eleventh President of India teaches, through his own example and percept, the art of living a prosperous, holy, spiritual, successful, happy and divine life. The atrocities by religious extremists have been increasing over the past few decades which resulted in making everyone started uttering anti-religious denunciation against some religions. So the development index, including moral, ethical and humanitarian goals is at the bottom in so many countries that are unwilling to accept the multicultural set up for leading their life style. Without the abundant existing of natural resources in those countries they would be at the bottom of the wealth ladder too. These countries are the dredges of humanity, they are cesspools of intolerance, foment and murder. These countries are in the drainage and stink worse than sewage. And what is astounding is the fact that some personalities with the broad view of the religion outside the religious based countries hold as a goal to make their host country into becoming these sewers and thus take away the very

prosperity that allows them such freedom of thinking and action. One such personality is Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam.

India is the most culturally, linguistically and genetically diverse geographical entity after the African continent. While Pakistan had to acquire the nuclear bomb from China because it expelled most Hindus, India which did not expel the Muslims in return was able to develop the nuclear bomb indigenously with the help of Abdul Kalam, a Muslim, it did not expel. The point is that it was a person from the minority who helped India to make the bomb. All the countries of the world are a very long way away from the multicultural diversity of India. We have just about every religion of the world here and just about every culture of the world here. India is the only country in the world where other religious people have not faced egotistical Anti-Semitism. When we talk of power we always refer to a dominance that would begin to give us the status of a developed country. It is also implied that we would begin to live and behave like the most powerful amongst the developed countries of the world.

At the same time, we have stopped dreaming of inventing a good life for ourselves independent of what obtains in a few countries abroad. We tend to overlook the difference between our initial condition and those of countries we would like to emulate when we prescribe methodologies for a fast pace of economic progress. When Kalam was traveling in an Aircraft in the United States, he was told that much of its controls were software driven and most probably developed in India. When he presented his credit card, he was told that it was being processed in the backend server located in Mauritius. When he walked into one of the multinational software company in Bangalore, he was fascinated to find that it truly presented a multicultural environment that, a software developer from china working under a project leader from Korea working with a software engineer from India and a hardware architect from the US and the communication expert from Germany where all working together to solve the banking problem in Australia.

Kalam encouraged scientists to travel abroad frequently may be with intention to insist the importance of multicultural set up for every field. For example, Ramanathan R. who worked with Dr. Kalam, for seven years as Financial Advisor in the Defense Research and Development Organization, in *Who is Kalam?*, says about Kalam's interest about the fusion of foreign and Indian technology

He wanted them to go out and present research papers
and attend as many conferences as possible, to get exposed
to as much new information as available. He wanted all
the scientists who went abroad to give, on return, a
one page report to him on their experience[...] More than
400 scientists went abroad every year from the DRDO. (30-31)

Another best example to prove the result that multicultural set up and thinking will be the best solution for the development of a country could be justified when Kalam watched the fighter planes of many countries roar past the skies of Paris in the air show. His watching of the roaring planes created a burning longing for the day when the Indian planes will adorn the skies at the Paris show.

In his farewell address to the nation, he said his mission in life would be to bring connectivity between billion hearts and minds of people in the multicultural society and to embed the self confidence that we can do it. Kalam did not forget to mention the 100-million dollar pan-African E-Network Project, designed to help bridge the digital divide in Africa, a project considered as his brain child [...] as part of the project 12 universities -- seven from India and five from Africa, 17 super-specialty hospitals -- 12 from India, five from Africa, 53 tele-medicine centres and 53 tele-education centres in Africa will be connected. The project will use Indian expertise in IT, education and healthcare to deliver affordable distance

education and tele-medical services in 53 countries across the continent via a network of satellite, fibre optics and wireless. The President expressed happiness that Indian experience was beginning benefits of technology to the people in Africa to bring about societal transformation in the entire African continent. While concluding his speech, Kalam said he was touched by the variety of Indian panorama, emotional content to the tune, cultural diversity and unity of minds in the vast land of ours.

Kalam stressed bridging the rural-urban divide, equitable distribution of an adequate access to energy and quality water, harmonious working of the agricultural, industry and services sectors, and total eradication of poverty and illiteracy. We are the largest pool of skilled technical personnel after the USA because of which we have a burgeoning and prospering Indian professional diaspora in the West. Nations tend to be successful in activities and industries that people admire or depend on the activities from which the nation's heroes emerge. Japan's heroes work for Toyota, Sony and Honda; German heroes work for BMW, Audi and Mercedes. While we did not have national heroes in our traditional exporting business, we did begin in the nineties to make our software warriors into national icons. People like Narayana Murthy and Premji increasingly became role models. Dr.K.venkatasubramanian praises Kalam in *Who is Kalam?* that

Kalam will perhaps be an Abraham Lincoln of the Bharat
to uplift the blossoms in the dust on the strength of his
great intellect and spotless integrity, a very rare combination
indeed. (100)

Culture is not one definable thing based on one race or religion, but is the result of multiple factors that change as the world changes. The road to India's status as a great power therefore, lies through a judicious and balanced building of both its soft and hard power attributes. Indian leadership in the coming decade or so will have to demonstrate that while adjusting with the unipolar world order, they have not compromised on India's independence and self-respect; that they are capable of resolving the dilemma of dealing with the immediate neighborhood; that the forces tearing India's democratic credentials and plural, multicultural, secular identity have been contained; and that the pace of capacity building in economic and military sectors will not be slackened.

Failing on any of these four counts will delude the aspirations of a great power. In that case, 2020 or 2030, India would still linger on and muddle through as a 'potential' and 'emerging' great power, rather than being accepted as a nation that has arrived and cannot be ignored in any vital decisions affecting the world order. Multiculturalism is the acceptance or promotion of multiple ethnic cultures, for practical reasons and/or for the sake of diversity and applied to the demographic make-up of a specific place, usually at the organizational level, e.g. schools, businesses, neighborhoods, cities or nations. In this context, multiculturalists advocate extending equitable status to distinct ethnic and religious groups without promoting any specific ethnic, religious, and/or cultural community values as central. The fusion of multiple cultures and civilizations is the unique character of Indian civilization. Living within the embrace of the Indian nation are vast numbers of different regional, social, and economic groups, each with different culture practices. Culture is a powerful human tool for survival, but it is also a very fragile phenomenon. It is constantly changing and is easily lost because it exists only in our minds. Kalam in *The Family and the Nation* remarks that:

When I was ten, three unique personalities would meet in
our house- Pakshi Lakshmana Shastrigal, who was the head
priest of Rameshwaram temple and a vedic scholar, Reverend
Father Bodal, who built the first church in Rameshwaram Island,
And my father, who was an imam in the mosque. They would
discuss the island's problems and find solutions. (53)

India has the advantage of the mixing of minds. Kalam wants India to play her part in developing an international culture based on past trends and modern urges. NPO Mashinostroyenia, Reutov, Moscow was involved in technical consultation for Indian scientists in military and technical cooperation by a decision of the Russian Federation Government. This cooperation is a reliable basis for the future success. He discovers India's ancient spirit of adaptability and inclusiveness, its tolerance and spirit of compromise. He finds this ancient spirit necessary for imbibing modern scientific spirit and urges to establish international outlook. The concrete picture of unity in diversity that Kalam gives is the result of his mind and heart.

Works Cited

- Ramanathan, R .*Who is Kalam?*. New Delhi: Konark, 2003.
Mahapragya, Acharya & A.P.J.Abdul Kalam. *The Family and the Nation.*_Harper Collins: New Delhi, 2008.
Kalam, Abdul. "We can do it, says Kalam in last Press speech." July 24, 2007.

The Criterion