

Vol. 6, Issue-1

ISSN: 0976-8165

February 2015

The Criterion

An International Journal in English



6th Year of Open Access

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Wings of Fire: Autobiography of APJ Abdul Kalam, The Juvenile Reconnoiter

Samra Saeed

Department of English,
Govt. Raza P.G. College,
Rampur, (U.P.), India,
M.J.P. Rohilkhand University, Bareilly,
Uttar Pradesh, India.

Abstract:

APJ Abdul Kalam is renowned Indian scientist and administrator, who served as the 11th President of India from 2002 to 2007. He is compassionate soul with a beautiful mind. His co-authored autobiography with subordinate Arun Tiwari entitles “Wings of Fire”. His majestic tutelage, within modest means of his Patriarch during infantile years attributes to the grandeur accomplishments in his later life. The episodes from his juvenile ages analyzed and explored to determine the genesis of his acumen and eminence in the present context.

Keywords: Genesis, Nurture, Tutelage, Acumen, Eminence, Infantile, Mystics, Attributes, Juvenile, Reconnoiter

Introduction

AVUL PAKIR JAINULABDEEN ABDUL KALAM, the ex-President of India, Missile Man, Bharat Ratan, had co-authored autobiography ‘Wings of Fire’ with Arun Tiwari¹ his associate at DRDL, Hyderabad. He was born in 1931 at Rameswaram, Tamilnadu, in a Tamil Muslim family. He rises from obscurity to fame and has only few parallel in the annals of world history. His existence is a true journey from log cabin to white house, like Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States. The establishment of this great endeavor lays in his good nurture, secure infantile, mystical environment, and compassionate surroundings, dedicated teachers, true guides, encouraging well-wishers who ignite his intellect towards science, mentors as friends, enlighten elders of his town who impart a sense of belonging in him and no discrimination in that society to poison his young mind.

The Genesis of all greatness in humanity depends in their nurture and it is very true in case of Abdul Kalam, as a child he was very inquisitive and always asked his father about divine power, human suffering and spirituality. His father had no formal education but had inborn intelligence with great communication skill and was competent to satiate Abdul Kalam curiosity with simple analogues in complex world of mysticism.

¹Arun Tiwari worked under Dr APJ Abdul Kalam for over a decade in the Defense Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad

“His father, Jainulabdeen and mother Ashiamma provide him secure childhood, both materially and emotionally though he had neither much formal education nor much wealth; despite these disadvantages, he possessed great innate wisdom and a true generosity of spirit”. -Wings of Fire

The Young Mystic

“We are all born with a divine fire in us. Our efforts should be to give wings to this fire and fill the world with the glow of its goodness.”— A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Wings of Fire

He born and brought up in transcendent atmosphere of holy town of Rameswaram and his mother and grandmother feed him with bedtime stories of Ramayana and Prophet Mohammad. His father is modest religious person but hedaily prays in the mosque with his sons, where local folk from different faith approach him after prayers to seek solace and succor. There was often discussion of divine matters and mysticism between his father and his friend, thehead priest of Rameswaram Temple.Abdul feels energy flowing through him whenever he circles round the temple during his casual evening walk with his mentor friend Ahmed Jallaluddin. Inmosque, the prayer was illegible to himbut he always felt the connection with Almighty and he absorbs the divinity within his self. The assimilation of physical and spiritual chargemanifests in his personality and transcends all limits of humanity in him. Abdul Kalamtransformation fromhuman beings to spiritual beings with human experience, thus originates in hisjuvenile years.

“God, our Creator, has stored within our minds and personalities, great potential strength and ability. Prayer helps us to tap and develop these powers.” — A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Wings of Fire

This divine elixir generates zeal within him, to achieve the great featsand borne wantsin him to excel, he integrate all these energies, efforts, corporeal and intellectualfortes to summit the peak of excellence.

“An Excellence is a continuous process and not an Accident”— A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

His Mentors

Ahmed Jallaluddin was a close friend and fifteen years older than him, later he became his brother in law, he was Abdul Kalam mentor, philosopher and guide. Jallauddin was fond of education, but domestic circumstances deprived him of his schooling in spite of this he is the only person on Entire Island in Abdul Kalam’s infancy, who can read and write English. He taught Abdul Kalam art of positive thinking and provide spark to ignite his intellect towards scientific discoveries. Moreover, he encourages him to read about accomplishmentin medical

sciences, English literature and other frontiers of knowledge. He arranges books for Abdul Kalam from STR Manicam personal library. He enlightens and emboldens Abdul Kalam's young mind towards mysteries of cosmos and enchants him to the magical world of creativity. He and his wife Zohara had great faith in the talents and abilities of Abdul Kalam; they had total conviction that he will shine like a rising Sun on their horizon. Ahmed Jallaluddin is the person who burnt his soul to let Abdul Kalam fly to the present heights.

“Jallaluddin schooling had been limited, principally because of his family’s straitened circumstances. This may have been the reason why he always encouraged me to excel in my studies and enjoyed my success vicariously. Never did I find the slightest trace of resentment in Jallaluddin for his deprivation”

“Madras Institute of Technology (MIT), regarded as the crown jewel of technical education in South India at that time. I managed to be on the list of selected candidates, but admission to this prestigious institution was an expensive affair. Around a thousand rupees was required, and my father could not spare that much money. At that time, my sister, Zohara, stood behind me, mortgaging her gold bangles and chain. I was deeply touched by her determination to see me educated and by her faith in my abilities. ----“APJ Abdul Kalam, Wings of Fire”

His Guide

Samsuddin, his first cousin had great influence on boy Abdul Kalam, he trained him in enterprise and economics of trade and labor which had later reflected in his work.

“Thinking is the capital, Enterprise is the way, hard work is the solution”
— A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, *Ignited Minds: Unleashing the Power within India*

In this autobiography, Abdul Kalam admitted his evident ingenuity solely indebted to both Jallaluddin and Samsuddin.

“The unschooled wisdom of Jallaluddin and Samsuddin was so intuitive and responsive to non-verbal messages, that I can unhesitatingly attribute my subsequently manifested creativity to their company in my childhood. -“APJ Abdul Kalam, Wings of Fire”.

His Inspiration

Jainulabdeen, his father was not a man of letters but blessed with sharp intellect, attitude and enterprise skillfulness. He managed to augment his income, by building a wooden boat using ingenious method and ply pilgrims from coast to the island, he also managed a coconut grove four miles from his home, and daily at dawn brought coconuts from there for family consumption. His

innovative and imaginative ideas help him to provide materially and emotionally secure upbringing to all his children. He is hardworking, rational and resourceful person and Abdul Kalam inherited these virtues and attitude. He wants to emulate his father in the world of Science and Technology. His feet were firmly on ground, in later years as a scientist he works eighteen hours daily, without minding about outcome or result thus borne a Jewel, a *Kohinoor*, among scientist of India.

“The sides of the mountain sustain life, not the peak. This is where things grow, experience is gained, and technologies are mastered. The importance of the peak lies only in the fact that it defines the sides.”

“All Birds find shelter during a rain. Nevertheless, Eagle avoids rain by flying above the Clouds. Problems are common, but attitude makes the difference” - “A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Wings of Fire”

Ashiamma, his mother is a humble and pious woman with a magnanimous heart, this propagates through his spirit and deeply influences his nurture and makes him humble, austere, modest and a tranquil person. This serene atmosphere cast his personality and nurtured his beautiful mind.

“Poli, a South Indian sweet my mother made. In fact, she used to prepare twelve distinctly different varieties of it, bringing out the flavor of every single ingredient used in the best possible combinations. I normally ate with my mother, sitting on the floor of the kitchen. She would place a banana leaf before me, on which she then ladled rice and aromatic Sāmbhar, a variety of sharp, homemade pickles and a dollop of fresh coconut chutney. I do not recall the exact number of people she fed every day, but I am quite certain that far more outsiders ate with us than all the members of our own family put together.— A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Wings of Fire”

His dissent

Sivasubramania Iyer, his science teacher was an illuminated soul though he belongs to an orthodox Brahmin family and had a very conservative wife. He wants to homogenize the stratified society of Rameswaram, by breaking social barriers. Therefore, he invites Abdul Kalam to his house for a meal, but his wife did not allow entrance of a Muslim boy inside her Kitchen, Sivasubramania Iyer was not perturbed, nor did he get angry with his wife, but instead, he served Abdul Kalam with his own hands and sat down beside, to eat his meal. His wife watched from behind the kitchen door. He wants to confront and destroy this abominable conduct of his wife, and invited Abdul Kalam again for a meal next weekend. Meantime his wife had reformed, the woman not only cooks or allows him a meal in the kitchen but she sat beside him to serve a meal with her own hands. This incidence penetrates deep within his heart and he feels weightlessness, free and equal, a sense of comradeship germinates inside him. This impression makes him a successful team member, which results in his triumph during later years.

“What makes life in Indian organizations difficult is the widespread prevalence of this very contemptuous pride. It stops us from listening to our juniors, subordinates and people down the line. You cannot expect a person to deliver results if you humiliate him, nor can you expect him to be creative if you abuse him or despise him. The line between firmness and harshness, between strong leadership and bullying, between discipline and vindictiveness is very fine, but it has to be drawn. — A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Wings of Fire”

“A house divided against itself cannot stand” – Abraham Lincoln²

His Schooling

Rameswaram Elementary School was where child Abdul Kalam studied, a very calm and peaceful place, there exist no class or religious discrimination. There was no cobweb of hate poison in the mind of children, they play and study together without any distinguish ion and differentiation.

“A new teacher came to our class. I used to wear a cap, which marked me as a Muslim, and I always sat in the front row next to Ramanadha Sastry, who wore a sacred thread. I was asked to go and sit on the backbench. Lakshmana Sastry summoned the teacher, and in our presence, told the teacher that he should not spread the poison of social inequality and communal intolerance in the minds of innocent children, — A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Wings of Fire”

The Abdul Kalam tutelage was sprinting on knowledgesuper highway owing to grace of all his well-wishers, diverse information carpet bomb on this highway from the books ofSTR Manicam personal library, Samsuddin Newspaper agency and from the vast batteries of intelligence in possession of un-schooled Jallaluddin. His acumen and insight sprout evolution of a beautiful mind and instigate the visualization offuture,which was well focus in the center of crosshair in his far-sight.

“When learning is purposeful, creativity blossoms,when creativity blossoms, thinking emanates. When thinking emanates, knowledge is fully lit,when knowledge is lit, economy flourishes.”
— A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, *Indomitable Spirit*

His Heritage

His ancestors, from generation to generation were in trade of building and plying boats, they use fire to mould wood into hulk and bulk of the boat. Their innate wisdom, skill, patience and persistence nature transmigrate into his blood.The dynamics of sea, the gen about fluid

² Abraham Lincoln speech in Union Convention 16 June 1858

characteristics, its rein, strength and ferociousness began to seed in his infant brain. His flight from anonymity to eminence immensely owes to his inheritance.

Conclusion

The source of all greatness in Abdul Kalam lies in his humble and magnificent beginning. He is our living legend, who in defiance of the sanctions from superpower develops Missile Systems and Nuclear deterrents to safeguard and secure frontiers of our nation for next thousands of years and he was responsible for providing solid research base for ingenious sciences and technologies. Thus, he preserves our independence, democracy and economic developments of our young nation. He elected as President, Republic of India in 2002. In the philosophy of Allama Iqbal,³ the Abdul Kalam rightfully entitled God's Vice-regent on Earth. He had transcended self to reach higher stage of existence and achieved the apex.

*“Tis sweet to be God's vicegerent in the world,
He knows the mysteries of part and whole;
His genius abounds with life and desires to manifest itself:
He will bring another world into existence.
A hundred worlds like this world of parts and wholes
Spring up, like roses, from the seed of his imagination”*
–Allama Iqbal, *Secret of the Self*⁴

End Notes:

1. Wings of Fire, Autobiography of APJ Abdul Kalam with Arun Tiwari, University Press
2. "The Secrets of the Self, English translation of Asrar-i-Khudi by Reynod Nicholson" (<http://www.allamaiqbal.com/works/poetry/Persian/Asrar/translation/index>)
3. Abraham Lincoln, Speeches and Writings, Selected and Annotated by Austin Avrashow

³ Iqbal (1877-1938) is the great Iqbal-philosopher of India. During his stay in the West, he studied modern philosophy; in this subject, he holds degrees from the Universities of Cambridge and Munich.

⁴ Secret of the Self: Iqbal wrote this in Persian because he felt the language was well suited for the expression of these ideas. This book deals mainly with the individual; it is concerned with the philosophy of evolution of life and self.