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### A Motivational Message for Youths in His Autobiography “Wings of Fire” By Abdul Kalam

Abstract: In Wings of Fire, Abdul Kalam presented himself as a good motivator, a good leader, a good project manager, a good scientist and above all someone with penchant towards work. The major aspects of Kalam’s personality in Wings of Fire with reference to the notion of identity, intention, memory, gender, amenability, spontaneity, youth, patriotism, self, self-consciousness, hopefulness, work strategy, motivation, philosophy of life, spirituality, etc. It also searched the forms of Kalam’s personality through his descriptions. Kalam explained the major aspects of his personality that transformed him from a humble and rural person to a remarkable talented scientist, quick-witted guru and the President of India in Wings of Fire (1999). He explained his personal, psychological, physical and professional struggles that stirred his spirit to obtain his noble goals. He described the ways in which Kalam portrayed his characters as well as the characteristics of “others” that acted as his internal and external motivators. He identified and shared the nature, attitudes, secrets and will power which acted as the agents of his success. He explained the methods that he followed to narrate the journey of his self which aims at attaining universality by harmonizing it with the development of the humanity and nation. He noted the importance of “collective effort” that evolved a special identity for him in India and in the globe, mainly in the

field of missile technology. He opened his spiritual thoughts and personal philosophies deeply based in altruism. Abdul Kalam explained his personality in *Wings of Fire* to achieve his aim of motivating Indians, particularly the youth to dream high for a developed nation.

Keywords: Amenability, harmonizing, spontaneity, self-consciousness

## Introduction

Kalam chose the task of writing *Wings of Fire*, at the age of sixty. He said: “I have acquired nothing, built nothing, possess nothing, no family, sons and daughters” (Kalam 1999). It is obvious that he has engaged his life completely for the development of India. He has nobody, for whom he has to earn money or save property. He gained the status of self-fulfillment, in which a person would question “what is there in pleasure and property by knowing the truth what is there in it”.

Kalam explained himself as an obedient son, a good friend, an obedient, intelligent and lovable student of many visionary teachers and professors, a powerful team leader, an excellent project leader, a project director, and director of various scientific organizations. He did not overstate that his sense of self alone was responsible for his greatness. He was so generous that his life was shaping by the guidance and motivation of many people. The characteristics and positions of the shaping forces changed from time to time. He became a successful missile man, and then the President of India.

*Wings of Fire* revealed Kalam’s multi- dimensional conceptions. As an author, Abdul Kalam notified his views and intellectual maturity for the betterment of the society and as a descriptor he recorded the account of his life history and highlighted his personality and achievements. Abdul Kalam believed that his thoughts would “liberate the Indian industry from

the self-created image of being mere fabricating factories” and “liberate the poor children” who live in the “underprivileged social settings.” He informed his gratitude to the shaping forces of his destiny, his parents, imminent family members, his teachers, professors, scientists and directors. In addition, he depicted the success and setbacks of science establishment of modern India.

Kalam shared his thoughts by examining his educational and professional career. He showed his mind that hopes nothing, receives no enjoyment in anything hope in serving the humanity to lead a peaceful life and that sweated and enjoyed the success beyond its level. He also interpreted the result of his eternal energy and spirit consumed for the success of Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV) and Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (IGMDP). He hopes to infuse a spirit of integrity, unity, teamwork and honesty in the minds of young students, managers, scientists and technocrats to embellish their dreams. He recorded his love and passion for his parents, mentors, teachers, colleagues and nation. He explained the struggles of independent India for technological self-adequacy. Wings of Fire is as a motivating tool. Kalam (1999) organized the materials as if it would provide an emphatic positive answer to the question “Can India be a leader in the field of technology?”

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Kalam revealed Wings of Fire with the problem and solution method of narrative. He registered the barriers of education, responsibility and the difficulties of nation’s development. He recognized the problems, found out solutions out of his experience and shared the solutions for the benefit of the society. Being a member of the middle class society, Abdul Kalam passed the difficult situations and came out of them with the assistance of his observation, skills and great dreams. Kalam was a poor and middle class village person as he was also a victim of the communal

discrimination found in India. Social and financial status of the students and their physical, mental and psychological changes and challenges are the problems that most often direct the Indians and educational status of India towards disappointment.

Abdul Kalam said, "... I was unaware of any other option for higher education. Nor did I have any information about career opportunities available to a student" and "...but admission to this prestigious institution was an expensive affair... and my father could not spare that much money". These words reveal the financial condition of Kalam in particular and the financial status and innocence of village people in general. Kalam also faced a lot of problems due to his humble background, lack of standard sources and materials, communal partiality, homesick, ignorance, doubt and confusion about higher education and career opportunities, the act of delay, poor financial condition, lack of communication, internal and external changes, teachers' ill-treatment and the expectation of the fascinating age during his educational career. These problems at one time "darkened his future". Due to these problems, many students end their course and go in different directions even today. Abdul Kalam described that his parents, relations and teachers helped him to overcome the problems through motivation, care and help. Kalam said, "the teacher should not spread the poison of social inequality and communal intolerance in the minds of innocent children".

Abdul Kalam also remembered many obstacles he had faced in his professional career. Abdul Kalam wrote *Wings of Fire* by asking himself "Why not write about the victimization which is a hallmark of the tragedy of Indian science and technology?" He revealed the ways to organizational success by describing his interview experience in Directorate of Technical Development and Production (DTD&P), Indian Air Force (IAF) and Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR) and his work experience in DTD&P, Vikram Sarabhai Space

Centre (VSSC), Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL).

Some of the serious problems that Kalam revealed in detail are the discouragement of the senior colleagues, lack of a prime organization to look after the working conditions of Indian scientific organizations and India sometimes forgetting to recognize the achievements of Indians. He believed that the discouragement of the envious senior colleagues discouraged him from dreaming high. Through the words of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai who set a vision for SLV-3 and interviewed Kalam in INCOPSAR, Kalam expressed that the lack of a “single roof to carry out system integration for the rocket stages and systems” was the root cause for the failure of the Pyro timer circuit. He also expressed his dissatisfaction when he observed National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) recognized Tipu Sultan as a hero of warfare rocketry which India did not. He said, “The painting depicted a fact forgotten in Tipu’s own country but remised here on the other side of the planet”. Kalam brought many strategies to the light to win the barriers. He praised Sarabhai for his analytical ability and his efficiency for redefining norms in a short period. He learnt the value of tolerance and patience from Dr. Brahm Praksh before undertaking the responsibility for SLV-3project. He took strong decisions to make opportunities for himself and for the scientists to put forth their effort with fully devotion. He made a space for collaboration with a few prestigious institutions and organizations in India and abroad. He evolved the ability to make use of the skills of the talented scientists for a noble cause. Moreover, Kalam’s nationalism prompted him to ask “why not in India?” when he saw developments in foreign countries. His heart was always for a developed India. These are a few aspects that helped in the success of SLV-3 which was launched on 17th July 1980.

Through hard work, he and his team set valuable goals and ambitions like involving in indigenous missile programs in order to get fund and co-operation from the government. Abdul Kalam arranged special lectures by the eminent personalities of qualitative institutions and organizations to stress “the goal of India, having her own missile systems” in the mind of the doubting Thomases. Through the strategy ‘partnership’, he used the sources like Prof. S.M. Deshpande and Prof I. G. Sharma from Indian Institute of Science (IISc.), and many experts from other institutions like Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras. The team of Deshpande developed the software for Computational Fluid Dynamics for Hypersonic Regimes within six months. Prof. I G Sharma developed “Anukalpana” a Missile Trajectory Simulation Software, to evaluate multi-target acquisition capabilities of an Akash-type weapon system and the young team from IIT, Madras developed the re-entry vehicle system design methodology for Agni.

Abdul Kalam appreciated the eminent personalities worked for the achievement through partnership. He invoked his collaboration as “three - fold strategy - multi- institutional participation”. These were the stones rubbed together to create Agni. Abdul Kalam provided a number of solutions to free India from the technological supremacy of the developed countries. As a sans-culotterie, Kalam also revealed many factors that enslave human beings. He wanted every human being to be free from personal bondage and other oppressing forces. He behaved every human being as human being. Abdul Kalam explained his opinion on equality as, “You, me and everyone on this planet is sent free by him to develop all the creative potential within us and live at peace with our own conscience”. He emphasized that “everyman should retain his/her birthright to be a person in order to attain his/her desire in real life.” Man’s freedom reveals the freedom of a community, organization and nation. Similarly, the human brain can be used for small or greater purposes. Resolution also decides the level of freedom and struggle a person or a country has to

face. Kalam anticipated his countrymen to use their brain which is the deciding agent to get impossible tasks of personal freedom as well as national freedom.

Abdul Kalam explained the problems of Indian youth in *Wings of Fire*. As a young man, he faced challenges, because of his lack of assertiveness, humble background, failures, loneliness, negative comments, etc. He was so frustrated when he lost the opportunity to join the Indian Air Force at Dehradun. He felt sad when senior colleagues targeted him and commented negatively on the Ground Equipment Machine (GEM) Project, as "... a group of eccentric inventors in pursuit of an impossible dream". But Kalam's optimistic mind utilized the negative comments to generate positive energy from his team. Kalam blamed Indian's attitude towards hard work by saying "As the process of confronting and solving the problems often requires hard work and it is painful we have endless procrastination." The great problems, he found in Indian youth are lack of clarity of vision and a lack of direction. He also observed that most of the Indians are suffering unnecessary misery throughout their lives due to their ignorance of the techniques to manage their emotions and the value of selecting "the next best alternative". Kalam called this problem "psychological inertia". Abdul Kalam gave a solution by comparing the attitude of Americans and Indians in facing problems. Abdul Kalam noted the difference: "I realized that people in this part (India) of the world meet their problems head on ... They (Americans) attempt to get out of them rather than suffer them". He aimed to spread the seeds of ambition, vision, desire and thirst for achievement in the hearts of Indian youth. Believing in their power, he made use of young research scholars' cooperation for the success of IGMDP. Kalam found a way to reduce the average age of young scientists from 42 to 33 to join in DRDL. He showed much interest in visiting many places, particularly to meet the youth of India and he tried to tie their minds with big dreams for his nation's development. He showed the national pride in them. Kalam recommended them to un-

learn the “self-defeating way of living life” and to have belief in the Almighty’s power to overcome the problems.

Apart from desire and dedication, Kalam preserved a great pride for his nation. All of Kalam’s efforts, ideas and activities were added with the development of India, like all the rivers mingled with ocean. For example, Kalam concentrated on completing the nation’s prestigious Project SLV, by suppressing the unbearable pain he had due to the loss of his father, mother and cousin. Kalam expressed the condition of his determined mind as “... physically exhausted, emotionally shattered, but determined to fulfill our ambition of flying an Indian rocket motor on foreign soil” This nature of Kalam motivated him to work for the nation despite his personal sufferings. The great secret behind the success of Kalam’s life is that he did not like to become a great personality, but he liked to do great things for his nation to transform his fellow citizens as great personalities. He watched the notable qualities, admirable, positive and useful characteristics of the visionary leaders and successful personalities. Finally, Kalam grew up as a visionary leader and a good human being. He infused these qualities in the minds of Indian children and youth to produce more good human beings, visionary leaders and successful personalities for India and to create an egalitarian Indian society.

Abdul Kalam identified many things to be done “for the first time in India”. He revealed his understanding on the importance of research and development in the field of science and technology, when he watched “a piece of sculpture depicting a charioteer driving two horses” at Longley Research Centre (LRC), NASA. His understanding matched with Sarabhai’s dream project of the Indian Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV). As a result, the collective capabilities and effort of Indian scientists launched SLV-3 on 18 July 1980, from SHAR Rocket Launch Station. This achievement made India as a “fifth country in the world to achieve satellite launch capability”.

Kalam explained his joy by saying “It was both the culmination of a national dream and the beginning of a very important phase in our nation’s history”. The strategies he learned in ISRO helped Kalam to devote his effort to combine and to utilize the efforts of the scientists of DRDL for the success of IGMDP. When Prithvi, a surface-to surface missile was launched on 25 February 1988, Kalam realized that “it was an epoch-making event in the history of rocketry in the country”. He wrote the importance of determination in a poem after the successful launching Agni missile on 22 May 1989 as.

Do not look at Agni

As an entity directed upward

.....

It is fire

in the heart of an Indian

.....

as it clings to the

burning pride of this nation.

Former President R. Venkataraman praised Kalam: “it is a tribute to your dedication, hard work and talent”. But, Kalam’s inner mind seemed unsatisfied with his past achievements and his spirit looked forward to do greater things. The visionary in Kalam said “if Indians were to play a meaningful role in the community of nations, they must be second to none in the application of advanced technologies to their real-life problems”. Kalam felt that “the great country will make enormous strides in all fields if we think like a united nation of 900 million people”. Wings of Fire has many plots joining with philosophies of spirituality, work and life. There is one plot which describes how an ordinary village student became the leader of India’s prominent organization. He

added many leadership qualities of visionary leaders in his autobiographies. Kalam's views about leadership are summarized here: A leader must have strength in staffing, introduce new blood into the organization, deal with problems and new concepts, skill in handling these complex entities, capable of instilling passion in his team and praise publicly, but criticize privately. He applied these principles in his work place that brought rewards for his colleagues after the launch of Agni Missile.

Abdul Kalam's *Wings of Fire* is the effect and the role of motivation played in his life. It is also an agent which helped Kalam to view his dream. It made a path to realize his problems and weakness and made many turning points in his life. *Wings of Fire* portrays a successful leader whose life was shaped by internal and external motivators and became a book of motivation for others. According to Kalam, motivation "is a force which is internal to the individual and forms the basis of his behavior in the work environment". Abdul Kalam created his autobiography, in which the plot of motivation is introduced as if Kalam was motivated by his father, brother-in-law, teachers and professors, his reaction through the success of SLV project and Kalam becoming a tool of motivation through IGMDP. Kalam was motivated by both positive and hurting words of teachers and colleagues. Kalam earned the confidence of others too. For example, the Defence Minister, out of his confidence in Kalam recommended the cabinet to sanction Rs. 388 crores for the project under IGMDP. Shrimathi Gandhi explained her confidence in Kalam: "Your fast pace of work is the hope of the entire nation".

One way or the other, the motivation of others encouraged him to contribute great things to his nation. Many top level politicians and scientists appreciated Kalam for his remarkable achievements. After the success of SLV-3, Prof. Dhawan, appreciated Kalam "You are beautifully clothed in your success." Dr. Brahm Prakash praised Kalam, when the Home Ministry announced

the conferment of the Padma Bhushan award on Kalam on the Republic Day in 1981. He said, “I feel as if my son has got the award”. After the success of Agni launch, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi said that Agni launch is “a major achievement in our continuing efforts to safeguard our independence and security by self-reliant means... The country is proud of your efforts”. Kalam also showed his transformation from being motivated to be a motivator. For example, Kalam shared his SLV experience to motivate the members of DRDL, who were unhappy about the failure of Agni launch on 20 April 1989. Kalam said, “I lost my launch vehicle in the sea but recovered successfully. Your missile is in front of you. In fact, you have lost nothing but a few weeks of rework”. Kalam’s sharing like this and his guidance recovered the scientists in DRDL and recharged them with new energy to work for success. Kalam’s great strength lies in his understanding on himself, and other individuals, society and the nature of work. He has a mind which can practically accept anything. He is spiritually bound and was not affected by the ordinary events of the world, including the death of his brother-in-law. Kalam (1999) said, “Death had never frightened me. After all everyone has to go one day”. Kalam viewed life “as a mixture of unsolved problems, ambiguous victories and amorphous defeats”. He also revealed that “setbacks and despairs have always been and always will be an inherent part of any career”. What Kalam watched from his experience is that people analyze the problems and failures instead of dealing with them. Kalam showed the paths to face failures. Kalam’s life teaches many strategies to lead a challenging but a successful and fruitful life. He treated facing failure as a learning strategy. He practically applied the idea of single-minded devotion to his goal throughout his life. According to Kalam, there are two possible reasons for failure: “setting a goal when one is at low ebb” and asking “wrong questions for right answers”. Delayed response can also be a reason for failure.

## Conclusion

Abdul Kalam's narration in his autobiography shows him as a spiritualist, student, scientist, leader, human being, politician, patriotic person and writer. His spiritualism, humanism, nationalism, and hard work did not change throughout his life though there was a transformation of personalities from student to a scientist, a leader, a politician, a writer, etc. In spite of being a Muslim, he appreciated the religious of others. Although he was a bachelor, he understood the difficulties of married people. His self as an individual transcended to encompass the national self through his vision 2020. Abdul Kalam accepted all the circumstances and mingled with all kinds of human beings. Self-realization, self-believe and self-thirst are a few aspects that served Kalam to identify and build his self. These aspects instilled courage and dedication in Kalam and motivated him to achieve his desires and to face all the circumstances. Kalam's educational experience and positions in various places and his intentions to look at all human beings as the creation of God gave him strength to adopt the culture of globalization which did not pollute his purity. In the process of his narration, he did not fail to note the root causes behind generating each and every sense of self. The early stage of his focused mind was rooted through his observation of the seagulls flying in the sea-shore. Kalam (1999) said, "Simple, provincial boy though I was, I was convinced that one day I, too would soar up into the skies; indeed I was the first child from Rameshwaram to fly". It was this dream that increased his patience and stimulated his spirit for success. It also became the best example for Kalam's self-realization.

Kalam is a person who always bothers about society. The history of his life confirms his total dedication for the nation. Throughout his career, he was not charged by the blame, nepotism, though he worked in the positions, where there were chances to involve in the act of nepotism. It does not mean that Kalam is not a selfish man. Kalam had selfishness which is visible when Kalam

emotionally talked as “I never used any outside influence to advance my career” but, Kalam’s peculiar nature is revealed in utilizing his “selfishness” in the positive and useful way for himself as well as for his nation. His optimistic nature allowed him to use his “selfishness” to upgrade his knowledge. Kalam explained his selfishness by saying that “I desired to feel more, learn more, express more. I desire to grow, improve, purify and expand”. The most admirable nature of Kalam is his optimism. He used his optimism to console the disturbed people at the time of their crisis and to motivate himself when egoistic colleagues and reporters commented on him negatively. It strengthened his self-confidence. For example, Kalam answered “yes we can.”

Kalam’s explanation for the exposure of talent is different. He believed that talent could be revealed in how one handles his crisis. His best choice is the “renewal energy” His thirst for this renewal energy is expressed when he said, “An inner voice told me that the time had come for a long felt, but ignored, need for renewal. Let me clean my slate and write new sums”. He also suggested the collective wisdom in order to avoid the setbacks and disappointments. Finally, he showed a key point to become a person. Personal willingness to use one’s own uniquely individual standpoint will make a person. Kalam believes that the difficulties will provide a chance to show the “super-intelligence” which is within everybody and to stimulate or “to examine man’s deepest thoughts, desires and beliefs”. He believes that “difficulties and problems are given by God as an opportunity to grow”.

Abdul Kalam explained the nature of positive thinking through the words “So when your hopes and dreams and goals are dashed, search among the wreckage, you may find a golden opportunity hidden in the ruins”. Abdul Kalam closed *Wings of Fire* with the words,

“I am a well in this great land

Looking forward at its millions of boys and girls to draw from me

The inexhaustible divinity.”

These words of wisdom clearly indicate Kalam’s attainment of spiritual fulfillment.

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