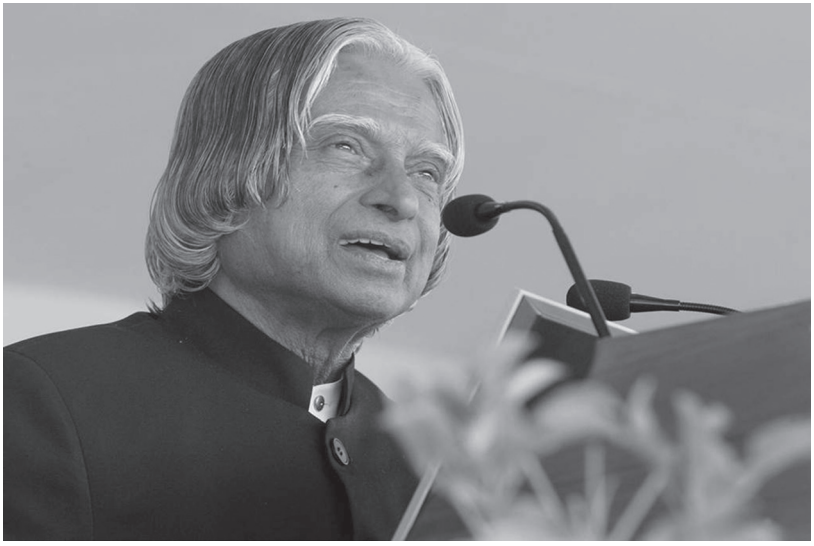
BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. A.P.J. ABDUL KALAM

THE MISSILE MAN OF INDIA



Manasvi Vohra

V&S PUBLISHERS

Published by:

V&S PUBLISHERS
VALUE & SUBSTANCE

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New Delhi-110002 ☎ 23240026, 27, 28
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ISBN 978-93-711945-8-7
New Edition

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Printed at : Param Offsetters, Okhla, New Delhi–110020

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Our latest offering, APJ Abdul Kalam – The Missile Man of India, seeks to provide an insight into the extraordinary life journey of an extraordinary man, AvulPakirJainulabdeen Abdul Kalam. Five years since his passing, Dr. Kalam's future-forward philosophy of laying emphasis on education to build a strong, advanced, self-reliant India continues to inspire generations of people across the country. Through this book, we aim to bring out the essence of his life experiences to our readers to stimulate a holistic understanding of his thinking and his mission in life.

Towards this end, we have ensured the presentation and chronology of chapters is arranged in a way that facilitates an easy understanding and ready referencing. Each of the chapters is supplemented with images from Dr. Kalam's life to provide the readers with a peek into his lived experiences. Further, we have added a section on some of his famous quotes down the years to lend you motivation in accomplishing your endeavours in life.

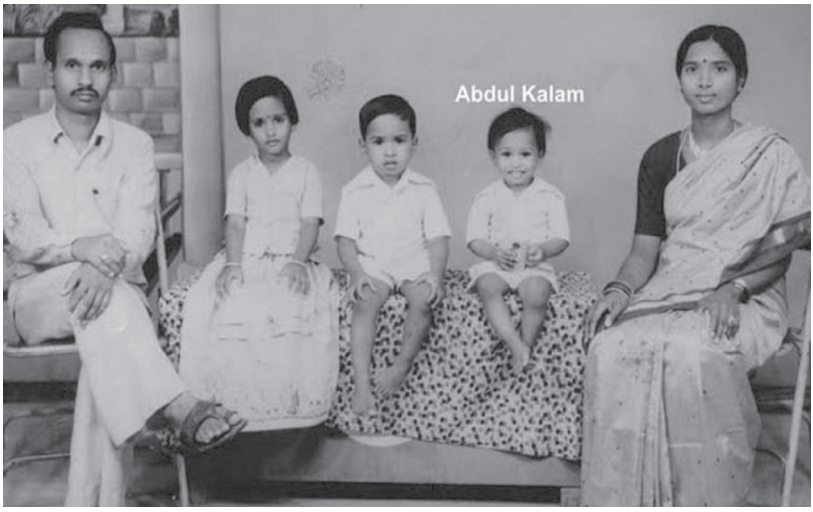
We sincerely hope our effort in bringing out this offering will be greeted by the warm and enthusiastic reception of our readers.

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Childhood and Early Life



Born into a Muslim family on 15th October 1931, Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam, better known as A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, lived in Dhanushkodi, the south-eastern coast of India. Born to a boat owner named Jainulabdeen and his wife Ashiamma, Kalam was the youngest among five children. While Kalam's forefathers were once wealthy traders, his family lost most of their fortune by the early 20th century. Kalam grew up in humble surroundings and had to take up work to contribute to his family's income, while he was still in school. He was always

eager to learn new things and had a thirst for knowledge. Very early, he developed a keen interest in flight when he used to watch the birds fly. A newspaper article about a British fighter plane further fuelled his interest in aeronautics.

Early Childhood

As a child, Kalam used to work part-time after school and distribute newspapers in order to contribute to his education and help his family with their household expenses.

Kalam has spoken extensively about his childhood in his autobiography, 'Wings of Fire: An Autobiography'. He speaks about his father who did not possess wealth or formal education, but had innate wisdom. He mentions that his kind-hearted mother fed a large number of people every day. He lived with his parents in his ancestral house which was located at the Mosque Street of Rameswaram — a large *pucca* structure made of limestone and brick. He recollects that while his father avoided luxuries, the family had all the essentials they needed in terms of food, clothes, and medicines.

Early to Rise

As a student, Kalam used to wake up 4 a.m., take a bath, and then attend his mathematics class, taught by a teacher who took only five students in the whole session. Bathing before the class was a condition that the teacher had laid for all his students.

Kalam labels his childhood as "materially and emotionally secure". He further credits his parents and well-wishers for his views and scientific accomplishments. He believed that the socio-economic and emotional environment and training provided to a child by authority figures helped shape them into individuals. He and his siblings inherited goodness and deep kindness from his mother and they learned honesty and self-discipline from his father.

Kalam cherished the time spent with his cousin Samsuddin and his close friend Jallaluddin, who contributed the most to the uniqueness of his childhood. He credited Jallaluddin's unschooled wisdom and Samsuddin's intuitiveness for his creativity.

Tryst with Discrimination

Kalam had three close childhood friends — Ramanadha Sastry, Aravindan, and Sivaprakasan — who belonged to orthodox Hindu Brahmin families. Kalam mentioned an incident in school where he had to face discrimination. As a child, he used to wear a cap to school, which revealed his identity as a Muslim, while his friend Ramanadha Sastry wore a sacred thread which indicated that he was a Brahmin. A new teacher who had joined their school saw them sitting together in class and was baffled at the sight of a Muslim boy sitting with a Hindu priest's son. Kalam was immediately asked to go and sit on the back bench, which he did. However, this instruction from the teacher made both children feel very bad. Kalam talked about how his friend Ramanadha's weeping image at this incident left a deep impact on him.

When the children went home that day, they told their respective parents about this incident. Ramanadha's father, Lakshmana Sastry immediately called the teacher and asked him not to promote social inequality and communal intolerance in the minds of young children. The teacher was told to either apologise or leave the job and island. Kalam goes on to say that the teacher regretted his behaviour and this incident reformed him.

Kalam went on to say that while Rameswaram was highly stratified and very rigid in terms of segregation of different social groups, his science teacher Sivasubramania Iyer was a rebel. Though Iyer himself was an orthodox Brahmin with a very conservative wife, he tried his best to break social barriers so that people from different backgrounds could mingle with

each other freely. His teacher used to spend a lot of time with him and encourage him to learn, so that he could be at par with the highly educated people from big cities.

Once Sivasubramania Iyer invited Kalam to his house for a meal. Iyer's conservative wife was horrified that a Muslim boy had been invited to her kitchen for a meal and refused to serve him food. However, instead of getting angry at her, Iyer served food to Kalam himself and sat down beside him to have his food. After the meal when Kalam was leaving their house, his teacher invited him to join him for dinner again next weekend. Sensing Kalam's hesitation, he asked the young boy to not be upset at such incidents. He told him that in order to change the system, problems have to be tackled. When Kalam visited his teacher's house the next time, Iyer's wife took him inside the kitchen and served him with her own hands.

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