

Title: A.P.J. Abdul Kalam: A Life of Vision, Science, and Service

A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, born Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam on October 15, 1931, in Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu, emerged from a modest background to become one of Indias most celebrated scientists and a national icon. His father, a boat owner, instilled in him a sense of integrity and discipline. Despite financial hardships, Kalam was an exceptionally bright student with a profound interest in mathematics and science. He completed his graduation in Physics from St. Joseph's College, Tiruchirappalli, and went on to study Aerospace Engineering at the prestigious Madras Institute of Technology (MIT).

Dr. Kalam began his career in 1958 at the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), where he worked on developing hovercrafts. However, it was his move to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in 1969 that marked the beginning of a transformative phase in his professional journey. At ISRO, he was instrumental in developing Indias first indigenous Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV-III), which successfully deployed the Rohini satellite in 1980, placing India in the elite space club.

Returning to DRDO, he spearheaded the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP), which led to the successful development of missiles like Agni and Prithvi. These milestones earned him the moniker Missile Man of India. His strategic vision and leadership transformed Indias defense capabilities, making the nation self-reliant in missile technology. As the Chief Scientific Advisor to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of the DRDO, he played a critical role in Indias 1998 Pokhran-II nuclear tests, reinforcing India's position as a nuclear power.

Beyond his scientific contributions, Kalam had a profound vision for Indias future. His book *India 2020: A Vision for the New Millennium* presented a roadmap for transforming India into a developed nation through the integration of technology and national resources. He advocated the concept of PURA (Providing Urban Amenities to Rural Areas), emphasizing sustainable rural development through technological integration.

In 2002, Dr. Kalam was elected as the 11th President of India, a role he served with distinction until 2007. He became affectionately known as the Peoples President for his approachability and dedication to the citizens of India, especially the youth. His presidency was marked by efforts to promote education, e-governance, and anti-corruption initiatives. Even after completing his term, Kalam remained deeply involved in academic and public life, serving as a visiting professor at institutions like the Indian Institute of Management (IIMs), Anna University, and several others. He continued to inspire through his lectures and writings.

Dr. Kalam's speeches often resonated deeply with the youth. Among his most memorable messages is his exhortation: Dream, Dream, Dream. Dreams transform into thoughts and thoughts result in action. His address at the European Parliament in 2007 and numerous convocation addresses in India highlighted his unwavering belief in the power of young minds to shape the future.

His contributions to literature include a range of inspirational books such as *Wings of Fire*, his autobiography; *Ignited Minds*, which focused on youth empowerment; and *Turning Points*, which chronicled his journey as President. In all his writings, he emphasized the importance of hard work, integrity, and service to the nation.

Kalam was deeply spiritual, drawing strength from both the Quran and the Bhagavad Gita. He lived a life of simplicity and humility, despite being one of the most decorated individuals in the country. His numerous accolades include the Padma Bhushan (1981), Padma Vibhushan (1990), and Bharat Ratna (1997), as well as honorary doctorates from more than 40 universities.

On July 27, 2015, while delivering a lecture at IIM Shillong, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam collapsed and passed away, doing what he loved most—interacting with students. He was laid to rest at Pei Karumbu Ground in Rameswaram, his hometown.

Throughout his life, Dr. Kalam remained a beacon of inspiration. His message to the youth—to dream big, remain curious, and serve the nation—continues to guide and influence generations. He envisioned an India that was self-reliant, technologically advanced, and ethically strong.

Dr. Kalam's life story is not just about scientific achievements but is a testament to how one person's dedication, vision, and humility can profoundly shape a nation's destiny. His legacy lives on in the hearts of millions who were touched by his work, his words, and his unwavering commitment to India's progress.

"Let us sacrifice our today so that our children can have a better tomorrow." A.P.J. Abdul Kalam