



## Fusion of empowering visions: Presidential ways and the means of a Scientist

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**ABSTRACT:** In A P J Abdul Kalam India realized the personification of scientific temper and vision in the position of President of India. Visions for a nascent nation, analysis of the past and examination of the present evils has been triangular policy discourse Kalam undertakes in his texts of practicality and clarity. Growth of the Indian nation on material plane and society on the ethical dimension and the citizen on spiritual fiber is the three pronged approach that challenges the policy makers as well as readers of his texts and discourse. A nation famed for its glory shall not rest on those lost laurels but launch onto new scalable heights for which a route map and vision document the first Scientist President of India prepares. The paper studies the vital parameters and pedagogy of that discourse of dreams, minds and materials in the run up to rejuvenation of the spirit of India.

**KEY WORDS:** Vision, dream, empowerment, scientific temper, ills of India, nation, citizen, route map, a new state

### INTRODUCTION

A.P. J. Abdul Kalam, the eleventh President of India, was a scientist who boosted India's self reliance in space and missile technologies. He was the one person without any political background to assume office as President. Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) under Kalam's leadership developed and launched India's first Satellite Launch Vehicle in 1980. He spearheaded the Integrated Guided Missile Development Project and played a key role in the Pokhran Nuclear Tests of 1998. Kalam was at his best in visualizing a disease free, wealthy, productive, harmonized and strong India in his presidential speech and strived to steer the nation in that avowed direction and offered the intellectual momentum needed at the right leverage angles of policy making during his perceptive tenure replete with more

### Writings

Kalam authored *India 2020 – A Vision for the New Millennium* (1998), *Wings of Fire* (1999) *Ignited Minds* (2002), *Envisioning an Empowered Nation* (2004), *Mission India – A Vision for Indian Youth* (2005) *Guiding Souls* (2005), *Indomitable Spirit* (2008), and *Spirit of India* (2010). His writings have become a source of inspiration to youth and advocate the power of dream and vision for their success. In his autobiography he avers: "To succeed in life and achieve results, you must understand and master three mighty forces – desire, belief and expectation. ...before anything I wanted ...I had to desire it intensely and be positively certain it would

happen. ...I had been fascinated by the mysteries of the sky and the flight of birds since early childhood. I used to watch cranes and seagulls soar into flight and longed to fly. 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 of Rameswaram to fly.”

### *Ignited Minds*

Through *Ignited Minds*, Kalam shares his ideas for national development and argues for energizing the nation towards that vision. Poverty is the enemy and top priority should be given to its eradication. India shall rise to its potential by shaking inertia and unleashing its strength. He finds fault with the Indian mindset of subjugation and limited achievement and attempts to encourage a spirit of conviction which can free the nation from stale thought. Kalam advises self-respect for home bred solutions than imitation of foreign models of development. He says, “Scarcity of resources is not the cause of our problem. Our problems originate in our approach toward them. We are diluting the content, stretching it and spreading into all directions...But we have to operate in a ‘mission mode’ with a vision for the nation.”

### The Dream

By the metaphor of a dream Kalam digs deep into knowledge of the past and filters the message from the lives of five fine examples of humanity namely, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Emperor Asoka, Abraham Lincoln and Caliph Omar. Human race is torn asunder by violence, wars and suffering. Kalam questions whether God has faltered in his creation or the destruction of humanity is essential for a second creation. Asoka, the ruthless conqueror turned into a compassionate ruler, symbolized the split in the human mind. Humanity has not learnt any lesson out of the gory past nor has it shown any intent to do so. The conquest of enemy resulted in suffering but did not yield any peace. The western civilization has achieved material comfort and luxurious living but missed on spiritual splendor. On one side of the globe, opulence is attendant with black holes of unrest, anger and suspicion and on the other, dearth of bare necessities and the weight of philosophical principles. Kalam notes that the quality of public life has reached a low point with paucity of sagacious leadership and a number of mediocre leaders in every nation. A Vidura of the Mahabharata fame is found wanting among the present day leaders to advise humanity on taking the right path.

### Stages of Nation

Taking Wayne W. Dyer’s division of man’s life into four stages, Kalam visualizes four stages in the life of a nation: athlete, warrior, statesperson and spirit. In the athlete stage, a nation after its birth embarks on a path of high performance and achievement. This is evident in the case of Japan, Singapore and Malaysia. When a nation moves into the warrior stage it tries to dominate other nations to prove its superiority. In the third stage of statesmanship its ego is mellowed and tries to help other nations rise to a comfortable status of living. The erstwhile Soviet Union played this role in the life of some of the developing countries. Finally in the stage of spirit

where a nation comes out of the view that the earth is no single nation's inheritance and shows responsibility towards fellow human beings. Kalam estimates that India can realize its potential to achieve it. Just like a rocket, a nation has to jettison the old stage and move onto higher stages.

#### Motivation for Vision

Stabilizing the inner self with a sustaining emotive force is the idea that Kalam emphasized in his interactions with children across the country. Western standards of material development are not created in one day but have taken decades of hard struggle and collective will force. They believed that they should do better and they deserve the best and this had worked wonders. For Kalam who is familiar with the tradition of ascetics and saints this is not a turnaround to advocate a life of abundance. He, like Gandhi, chose to lead a life of simplicity; but he does not impose it as an ideal on others to follow. It is not shameful to desire material prosperity; material prosperity brings along with it a sense of security and confidence; preaching philosophy to an empty stomach is useless. For development, one needs to have a road map - a vision. A burning desire to realize this vision is what is called motivation and moving force.

#### Vision and Role models

Children require motivation and guidance from their parents, family members and teachers. Kalam mentions from his own life the examples of how his mother and sister have taken care of him and his education. He inspires young students to dream and to make their dreams come true they must have role models and to emulate them. Teacher, parent and student triangle needs to be visualized and vitalized in the ultimate interests of the nation. There are many role models in ancient India and in modern India too such as successful I.T. professionals. Abdul Kalam suggests that leaders from various walks of contemporary life should interact with children and share their creative visions in order to inspire them so that the younger generation can cross the threshold of the impossible at which the older generation has stopped. Nehru and Kalam's interactions with children demonstrate their infectious creative potential. Kalam affirms, "...one student asked me, 'In Jharkhand, it is green everywhere. We have forest, streams and hills. Why is it that we have a desert in Rajasthan? Why cannot the Brahmaputra's water be taken to Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan?'" A larger concern for the nation should not exclude the concerns of future citizens.

Great national figures would be good role models for the young. Kalam demonstrates that the Indian Independence struggle had shaped many a man of excellent character and vision. India once again is in need of visionaries like Vikram Sarabhai, Homi J Bhabha and Verghese Kurien. When Sarabhai started his career, there was no provision for space science in the national policy. But his desire to see the country as a space power to reckon with transformed the scientific scenario of India within two decades. In *Indomitable Spirit*, Kalam writes that "Transformation is the outcome of a farsighted vision, innovating mind and guiding spirit."

### Saint and Scientist

Abdul Kalam states that the holistic development of a nation must involve material as well as spiritual prosperity. The *Vidya* (knowledge) of *Para* (the other world) and *Apara* (the worldly) shall coexist with each other. Value based and ethic centered lives of citizens form the bulwark of the nation. India's strength lies in its spiritual foundations and its ability to accept diverse paths to realize divinity. This is exemplified in Kanchi Paramacharya's acceptance of the mosque standing beside his *math*. The creative convergence of science and spirituality is paramount to augment the wealth of humanity. Kalam opines that ancient Sanskrit literature is a treasure house of science and technology which contains texts on making of *vimana* (aero plane) which it should be thoroughly examined and made available for study as part of science.

### Patriotism beyond politics and religion

Kalam opines that the greatest danger to Indian sense of unity is from ideologies that seek to tear people apart on caste, community and political lines. He is much concerned about the recent trend of giving a religious color to all issues and dividing people on these lines. A pertinent question that he raises is, "Why can't we develop a cultural – not religious – context for our heritage that serves to make Indians of us all?" In India, the 'core culture' precedes Islam, Christianity and other religions. There exists something of value that can be claimed as Indian value system which goes beyond the narrow practices of today. Kalam calls for the inculcation of a collective pride, unity of purpose and ability for combined action in the people of India and hopes for the-political leadership to rise above narrow party considerations.

### Knowledge Society

During the last two centuries the world has shifted from an agricultural to an industrial to a knowledge society. Ancient India was hailed as a knowledge society and Kalam urges the present generation to regain that lost status. The capacity to create and maintain knowledge infrastructure, expand the skills spectrum, increase the productivity through the exploitation of advanced technologies are the key components of a knowledge society. He wants the preservation of abundance of the unorthodox and earthy wisdom which is the pride of India. He suggests that there should be a unified approach to intellectual property rights and patent laws.

The vision of a developed India will inspire confidence and lead to many achievements. Kalam, drawing inspiration from Maharishi Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* writes: "When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, and all your thoughts break their bounds: Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties, and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be."

## A New State

In this era of globalization Indian industrialists should rise to the occasion and face international challenges. India should capitalize on its strengths like Information Technology and utilize it to eradicate poverty and illiteracy. Indian industries should be globally competitive and locally sensitive.

Answering a student's question Kalam says: "...an entire generation of people representing excellence in all fields – politics, industry, sciences, and the arts – emerged in the years leading to independence. Mahatma Gandhi, CV Raman, JRD Tata, Godrej, Laxman Rao Kirloskar, Ramakrishna Bajaj, Tagore, Dr. S Radhakrishnan, Madan Mohan Malavia.....it is a long list. Suddenly there was excellence in every sphere of society and the circumstance making such flowering possible was the vision that the nation had set for itself."<sup>7</sup> If the nation has another such vision, leaders of stature will once again appear. Shanker Dayal Sharma, former President of India, echoes the same sentiments when exhorting the present day youth to have a vision and equip themselves for the development of the nation. Kalam's concept of enlightened citizenship has three components: value based education system, religion transformed into spiritual force and creating economic prosperity through development. Kalam, in his vision of a new India envisages that *punya-netas* (good leaders), *punya-tmas* (good souls), and *punya-dhikaris* (good officers) will raise the level of purity in public life.

## CONCLUSION

In his book, *Ignited Minds*, Kalam inspires the readers by assessing the value of the past, analyzing the nature of the present problems and showing a way forward for the nation especially the young. On the surface, he speaks about ways of gaining material prosperity of the nation visible in the economic indices of development and stresses on giving the individual mind a spiritual bent.

Kalam advises that the process of harnessing both spiritual and material forces though difficult should be initiated. He sums up his view in the following words: "A spiritual experience is the goal of a deeply religious person whereas a major discovery or an invention is the goal of a scientific mind. If both the aspects are unified, we can then transcend to that level of thinking where there is unity of purpose and action." Kalam's faith in the people and the country is convincingly presented in the book *Ignited Minds*.

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