
Book Review

Wings of Fire

A.P.J. ABDUL KALAM with ARUN TIWARI

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India has made great strides in space, nuclear power and, above all, missile technology. Indeed *Agni, Prithvi, Akash, Trishul* and *Nag* have become household names in India and at the same time have contributed to raising the nation to the level of a missile power of international reckoning. The man behind missile technology, aptly called the 'missile man', is none other than our honourable President, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. Born in 1931, the son of a little educated boat-owner in Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu, Dr. Kalam had an unparalleled career as a defence scientist, culminating in the highest civilian award of India – the Bharat Ratna. However, Dr. Kalam rose to the position he is enjoying today by dint of his personal and professional struggles. An account of Dr. Kalam's life can, therefore, be inspiring and motivating to youth, particularly those belonging to the unprivileged section of the society.

The book under review is an autobiography of Dr. Kalam written by Arun Tiwari through a long series of sittings with the former. It is divided into four major chapters titled Orientation, Creation, Propitiation and Contemplation.

The first Chapter 'Orientation' described the struggles of Dr. Kalam's boyhood and youth, bringing alive everyday life in a small town in South India named Rameswaram, and the inspirational roles of educators. Dr. Kalam's dream to become an Air Force pilot, got frustrated and he had to contend with the job of Senior Scientific Assistant at the Directorate of Technical Development & Production [DTD&P (Air)] of the Ministry of Defence. Later, he was selected as a rocket engineer by the Indian Committee of Space Research (INCOSPAR). This chapter also narrates Dr. Kalam's efforts to design and develop a hovercraft christened *Nandi* which, however, did not finally materialise.

The Chapter 'Creation' is mainly about the contribution of Dr. Kalam at Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). He was made the Project Manager of the Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV) Programme. However, the first experimental flight trial of SLV-3 on 10 August 1979 met with failure. This greatly disappointed Dr. Kalam. But, he was not to be cowed down and, on 18 July 1980, SLV-3 was successfully launched.

The third Chapter 'Propitiation' highlights Dr. Kalam's role at Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL) in the development of missiles under India's prestigious Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP). The last Chapter 'Contemplation' summarises some ideas of Dr. Kalam concerning technology, its management and the philosophy behind Technology Management.

The book under review is in essence a story of a scientist who, time and again, was tested by failures and setbacks but was finally crowned with success and fame. As has been rightly remarked in the book, one 'need not be disheartened about life. Problems are a part of life. Suffering is the essence of success.' In this context it is worth quoting the following lines appearing in the book:

God has not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways
All our life through;
God has not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow
Peace without pain.

However, solace is also assured in terms of the following lines:

But God has promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for the labour
Light for the day.

There are words of wisdom scattered here and there in the book. It will be worthwhile quoting the following lines:

Happiness, satisfaction, and success in life depend on making the right choices, the winning choices. There are forces in life working for you and against you. One must distinguish the beneficial forces from the malevolent ones and choose correctly between them.

The following lines may also prove to be rewarding reading indeed:

Total commitment is the common denominator among all successful men

and women. Are you able to manage the stresses you encounter in your life? The difference between an energetic and a confused person is the difference in the way their minds handle their experiences. Man needs his difficulties because they are necessary to enjoy success.

Then, how are the following words from a struggling Dr. Kalam of yesteryears:

So far, I had believed that the sky was the limit, but now it appeared that the limits were much closer. There are boundaries that dictate life: you can only lift so much weight; you can only learn so fast; you can only work so hard; you can only go so far!

Also, reflecting on the title are the following lines in the book:

Let the latent fire in the heart of every Indian acquire Wings, and the glory of this great country light up the sky.

The book ends with the following hope and prayer:

I earnestly hope and pray that the development ... will eventually make our country strong and prosperous, a "developed" nation.

There are many inspiring anecdotes in the book, too. Certainly, a must-read not only for youth but for readers of all age and also those belonging to various cross-sections of the society.

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