

## CHAPTER 6: MY CHILDHOOD



## MY CHILDHOOD

~Summary~

**-by APJ Abdul Kalam**

### Birth, Childhood and First Earning of Abdul Kalam

Abdul Kalam was born in a middle class Muslim family in 1931 in the island town of Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu. In his childhood, he was greatly influenced by his parents, his teachers and his friends.

Abdul's father, Jainulabdeen, was not much educated but he was a very generous and kind person. He was not rich but provided a secure childhood to Abdul and his brothers and sisters. Abdul's mother's name was Ashiamma. Abdul inherited honesty and self-discipline from his father and faith in goodness and deep kindness from his mother.

Abdul earned his first wages by working as a helper to his cousin, Samsuddin, who distributed newspapers in Rameswaram. When the Second World War broke out in 1939, Abdul was only eight years old. There was a great demand of tamarind seeds at that time. Abdul used to collect these seeds and sell them in market.

### Incidents of Abdul Childhood

In his childhood, he had three close friends - Ramanadha Sastry, Aravindam and Sivaprakashan. All these boys were from orthodox Hindu Brahmin families. Once when he was in the fifth standard, a new teacher asked him not to sit in the front row along with the high caste Brahmin boys. Abdul found Ramanadha Sastry crying when he got up and went to the last row. This made a lasting impression on Abdul. This matter was brought to the knowledge of Lakshmana Sastry (Ramanadha Sastry's father). He was the head priest of the Rameswaram temple.

He told the teacher that he should not spread the poison of social inequality and communal intolerance in the minds of innocent children. The teacher accepted his mistake.

### Anti-Casteist Action of Abdul's Science Teacher

On the other hand, Abdul was greatly influenced by his science teacher, Sivasubramania Iyer. He learnt the lesson of breaking social barriers from him. Iyer invited him to his home for a meal. His wife was an orthodox Brahmin who refused to serve food to a Muslim boy in her so-called 'ritually pure' kitchen. Iyer served him with his own hands and sat down beside him to eat his meal. He

convinced his wife to serve Abdul with her own hands next time he came, thus, successfully changing the conservative attitude of his wife.

### Abdul gets Permission for Higher Education

For higher education, Abdul asked permission from his father to leave Rameswaram and study at the district headquarters in Ramanathapuram. His father happily gave permission, so that Abdul could develop his own career. His father convinced his hesitant mother by quoting Khalil Gibran, who had said that parents are a means for children to become independent from them - they don't belong to the parents themselves.

### Conclusion of My Childhood

The chapter – My Childhood portrays the childhood memories of one of India's greatest aerospace scientists, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and how he spent his early days. He also served as the eleventh President of India from the year 2002 to 2007.

## NCERT SOLUTIONS

### Questions (Page No. 74-75)

#### (Thinking about the Text)

I. Answer these questions in one or two sentences each.

Question 1. Where was Abdul Kalam's house?

Answer: Abdul Kalam's house was on the Mosque Street in Rameswaram.

Question 2. What do you think Dinamani is the name of? Give a reason for your answer.

Answer: I think Dinamani is the name of a newspaper because Kalam says that when his brother-in-law would tell his stories of the War, he would later try to trace it in the 'headlines' of Dinamani. This implies that Dinamani would have been a newspaper.

Question 3. Who were Abdul Kalam's school friends? What did they later become?

Answer: Ramanadha Sastry, Aravindan and Sivaprakasan were Abdul Kalam's school friends.

Ramanadha Sastry took over the priesthood of the Rameswaram temple from his father. Aravindan went into the business of arranging transport for visiting pilgrims. Sivaprakasan became a catering contractor for the Southern Railways.

Question 4. How did Abdul Kalam earn his first wages?

Answer: Abdul Kalam earned his first wages by catching bundles of the newspapers thrown out from the moving train on the Rameswaram Road between Rameswaram and Dhanuskodi and distributing them.

Question 5. Had he earned any money before that? In what way?

Answer: Yes, he had earned money before that too. He used to collect tamarind seeds and sell them to a provision shop on Mosque Street. A day's collection would let him earn one anna.

II. Answer each of these questions in a short paragraph (about 30 words)

Question 1. How does the author describe: (i) his father (ii) his mother (iii) himself?

Answer:

- i. The author describes his father as honest and self-disciplined. His father used to avoid inessential comforts and luxuries. The author tells that his father never had a formal education or much wealth but he possessed great wisdom and was very generous.
- ii. The author describes his mother as being an ideal helpmate to his father. She used to feed a lot of outsiders along with her family members.
- iii. The author describes himself as a short boy with undistinguished looks born to tall and handsome parents.

Question 2. What characteristics does he say he inherited from his parents?

Answer: He says that he inherited honesty and self-discipline from his father; and faith in goodness and deep kindness from his mother.

III. Discuss these questions in class with your teacher and then write down your answers in two or three paragraphs each.

Question 1: "On the whole, the small society of Rameswaram was very rigid in terms of the segregation of different social groups," says the author.

- i. Which social groups does he mention? Were these groups easily identifiable (for example, by the way they dressed)?
- ii. Were they aware only of their differences or did they also naturally share friendships and experiences? (Think of the bedtime stories in Kalam's house; of who his friends were; and of what used to take place in the pond near his house.)
- iii. The author speaks both of people who were very aware of the differences among them and those who tried to bridge these differences. Can you identify such people in the text?
- iv. Narrate two incidents that show how differences can be created, and also how they can be resolved. How can people change their attitudes?

Answer:

- i. The social groups that he mentions are Hindus and Muslims. Yes, these groups were easily identifiable by their dressing, tradition, culture, etc. For instance, Kalam used to wear a cap on his head which identified him as a Muslim. Ramanadha Sastry wore a sacred thread.

- ii. They were not aware only of their differences. They also naturally share friendships and experiences. Kalam's mother and grandmother would tell events from the Ramayana and from the life of the Prophet as bedtime stories. All his friends belonged to orthodox Hindu families. During the annual Sita Rama Kalyanam Ceremony, his family would arrange boats with a special platform for carrying idols of the Lord from the temple to the marriage site situated in the middle of the pond called Rama Tirtha which was near his house.
- iii. The author speaks both of people who were very aware of the differences among them and those who tried to bridge these differences. Yes, we can identify such people in the text. The new school teacher and Sivasubramania Iyer's wife were very aware of the differences among the social groups but Sivasubramania Iyer and Lakshamana Sastry tried to bridge these differences.
- iv. Two incidents that show how differences can be created, and also how they can be resolved are:

When Lakshamana Sastry got to know about the way the new school teacher had made Kalam sit on the back bench because he was a Muslim, he asked the teacher to apologize or quit the school. The new teacher not only regret his behavior but also was reformed by the Lakshamana Sastry's strong sense of conviction.

Kalam's science teacher, Sivasubramania Iyer, asked Kalam to his home for a meal. His wife was horrified at the idea of a Muslim boy being invited to her pure kitchen. Sivasubramania Iyer served Kalam food with his own hands and sat down beside him to eat his meal.

The next time he invited Kalam to his home, Sivasubramania Iyer's wife served him food with her own hands inside the kitchen.

Question 2:

- i. Why did Abdul Kalam want to leave Rameswaram?
- ii. What did his father say to this?
- iii. What do you think his words mean? Why do you think he spoke those words?

Answer:

- i. Abdul Kalam wanted to leave Rameswaram because he wanted to study at the district headquarters in Ramanathapuram.
- ii. His father said, "“Abul ! I know you have to go away to grow. Does the seagull not fly across the sun, alone and without a nest?”"

- iii. His words meant he understood that Kalam had to leave his house and get a good higher education to grow. He spoke these words because he knew the harsh reality of life that the children need to move away from their home and parents to make a career and earn.

### Questions (Page No. 75-77) (Thinking about Language)

I. Find the sentences in the text where these words occur:

Erupt, surge, trace, undistinguished, casualty

Look these words up in a dictionary which gives examples of how they are used.

Now answer the following questions.

Answer: Sentences in the text where these words occur are:

Erupt: "For reasons I have never been able to understand, a sudden demand for tamarind seeds erupted in the market."

Surge: "Half a century later, I can still feel the surge of pride in earning my own money for the first time."

Trace: "My brother-in-law Jallaluddin would tell me stories about the War which I would later attempt to trace in the headlines in Dinamani."

Undistinguished: "I was one of many children — a short boy with rather undistinguished looks, born to tall and handsome parents."

Casualty: "The first casualty came in the form of the suspension of the train halt at Rameswaram station."

Question 1. What are the things that can erupt? Use examples to explain the various meanings of erupt. Now do the same for the word surge. What things can surge?

Answer: Things that can erupt are: volcanoes, emotions, anger.

- A volcano erupted in the Mauna Kea last night.

- Ranjan’s anger erupted as a result of Ashima’s continuous nagging.

Things that can surge are: prices, wave, crowd, storm, etc.

Question 2: What are the meanings of the word trace and which of the meanings is closest to the word in the text?

Answer: The meanings of the word ‘trace’ are:

- to draw an outline
- to copy
- to find out

The meaning that is closest to the word in the text is ‘finding out’.

Question 3. Can you find the word undistinguished in your dictionary? (If not, look up the word distinguished and say what undistinguished must mean.)

Answer: No, I cannot find the word undistinguished in my dictionary.

The meaning of the word distinguished as given in the dictionary is specific, distinct.

Thus, undistinguished must mean ‘not specific’, ‘not distinct’.

II.

Question 1. Match the phrases in Column A with their meanings in Column B.

A	B
(i) broke out	(a) an attitude of kindness, a readiness to give freely
(ii) in accordance with	(b) was not able to tolerate



(iii) a helping hand	(c) began suddenly in a violent way
(iv) could not stomach	(d) assistance
(v) generosity of spirit	(e) persons with power to make decisions
(vi) figures of authority	(f) according to a particular rule, principle, or system

Answer:

A	B
(i) broke out	(c) began suddenly in a violent way
(ii) in accordance with	(f) according to a particular rule, principle, or system
(iii) a helping hand	(d) assistance
(iv) could not stomach	(b) was not able to tolerate
(v) generosity of spirit	(a) an attitude of kindness, a readiness to give freely
(vi) figures of authority	(e) persons with power to make decisions

Question 2. Study the words in italics in the sentences below. They are formed by prefixing un – or in – to their antonyms (words opposite in meaning).

- I was a short boy with rather *undistinguished* looks. (un + distinguished)
- My *austere* father used to avoid all *inessential* comforts.(in + essential)
- The area was completely *unaffected* by the war.(un + affected)
- He should not spread the poison of social *inequality* and *communal intolerance*. (in + equality, in + tolerance)

Now form the opposites of the words below by prefixing un- or in-. The prefix in-can also have the forms il-, ir-, or im- (for example: illiterate–il + literate, impractical –im + practical, irrational –ir + rational). You may consult a dictionary if you wish.

__adequate	__acceptable	__regular	__tolerant
__demanding	__active	__true	__permanent
__patriotic	__disputed	__accessible	__coherent
__logical	__legal	__responsible	__possible

Answer:

inadequate	unacceptable	irregular	intolerant
undemanding	inactive	untrue	impermanent
unpatriotic	undisputed	inaccessible	incoherent

illogical

illegal

irresponsible

impossible

### III. Passive Voice

Study these sentences:

- My parents were regarded as an ideal couple.
- I was asked to go and sit on the back bench.
- Such problems have to be confronted.

The italicised verbs in these sentences are made up of a form of the verb be and a past participle. (For example: were + regarded, was + asked, be + confronted)

These sentences focus on what happens, rather than who does what. Notice that the doer of the action is not included in the sentences.

If necessary, we can mention the doer of the action in a by-phrase. For example:

- The tree was struck by lightning.
- The flag was unfurled by the Chief Guest.

### IV. Rewrite the sentences below, changing the verbs in brackets into the passive form.

1. In yesterday's competition the prizes (give away) by the Principal.
2. In spite of financial difficulties, the labourers (pay) on time.
3. On Republic Day, vehicles (not allow) beyond this point.
4. Second-hand books (buy and sell) on the pavement every Saturday.
5. Elections to the Lok Sabha (hold) every five years.
6. Our National Anthem (compose) Rabindranath Tagore.

Answer:

1. In yesterday's competition the prizes were given away by the Principal.
2. In spite of financial difficulties, the labourers were paid on time.
3. On Republic Day, vehicles were not allowed beyond this point.

4. Second-hand books were bought and sold on the pavement every Saturday.
5. Elections to the Lok Sabha are held every five years.
6. Our National Anthem was composed by Rabindranath Tagore.

V. Rewrite the paragraphs below, using the correct form of the verb given in brackets.

Question 1. How Helmets Came To Be Used in Cricket

Nari Contractor was the Captain and an opening batsman for India in the 1960s. The Indian cricket team went on a tour to the West Indies in 1962. In a match against Barbados in Bridgetown, Nari Contractor (seriously injure and collapse). In those days helmets (not wear). Contractor (hit) on the head by a bouncer from Charlie Griffith. Contractor's skull (fracture). The entire team (deeply concern). The West Indies players (worry). Contractor (rush) to hospital. He (accompany) by Frank Worrell, the Captain of the West Indies Team. Blood (donate) by the West Indies players. Thanks to the timely help, Contractor (save). Nowadays helmets (routinely use) against bowlers.

Answer: How Helmets Came To Be Used in Cricket

Nari Contractor was the Captain and an opening batsman for India in the 1960s. The Indian cricket team went on a tour to the West Indies in 1962. In a match against Barbados in Bridgetown, Nari Contractor was seriously injured and collapsed. In those days helmets were not worn. Contractor was hit on the head by a bouncer from Charlie Griffith. Contractor's skull was fractured. The entire team was deeply concerned. The West Indies players were worried. Contractor was rushed to hospital. He was accompanied by Frank Worrell, the Captain of the West Indies Team. Blood was donated by the West Indies players. Thanks to the timely help, Contractor was saved. Nowadays helmets are routinely used against bowlers.

Question 2. Oil from Seeds

Vegetable oils (make) from seeds and fruits of many plants growing all over the world, from tiny sesame seeds to big, juicy coconuts. Oil (produce) from cotton seeds, groundnuts, soya beans and sunflower seeds. Olive oil (use) for cooking, salad dressing etc. Olives (shake) from the trees and (gather) up, usually by hand. The olives (ground) to a thick paste which is spread onto special mats. Then the mats (layer) up on the pressing machine which will gently squeeze them to produce olive oil.

Answer: Oil from Seeds

Vegetable oils are made from seeds and fruits of many plants growing all over the world, from tiny sesame seeds to big, juicy coconuts. Oil is produced from cotton seeds, groundnuts, soya beans and sunflower seeds. Olive oil is used for cooking, salad dressing etc. Olives are shaken from the trees and gathered up, usually by hand. The olives are grounded to a thick paste which is spread onto special mats. Then the mats are layered up on the pressing machine which will gently squeeze them to produce olive oil.

### Questions (Page No. 77-78) (Dictation)

Question 1. Let the class divide itself into three groups. Let each group take down one passage that the teacher dictates. Then put the passages together in the right order.

To Sir, with Love

1. From Rameswaram to the Rashtrapati Bhavan, it's been a long journey. Talking to Nona Walia on the eve of Teacher's Day, President Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam talks about life's toughest lessons learnt and his mission — being a teacher to the Indian youth. "A proper education would help nurture a sense of dignity and self-respect among our youth," says President Kalam.

There's still a child in him though, and he's still curious about learning new things. Life's a mission for President Kalam.

2. Nonetheless, he remembers his first lesson in life and how it changed his destiny. "I was studying in Standard V, and must have been all of 10. My teacher, Sri Sivasubramania Iyer was telling us how birds fly. He drew a diagram of a bird on the blackboard, depicting the wings, tail and the body with the head and then explained how birds soar to the sky. At the end of the class, I said I didn't understand. Then he asked the other students if they had understood, but nobody had understood how birds fly," he recalls.
3. "That evening, the entire class was taken to Rameswaram shore," the President continues. "My teacher showed us sea birds. We saw marvellous formations of them flying and how their wings flapped. Then my teacher asked us, 'Where is the birds' engine and how is it powered?' I knew then that birds are powered by their own life and motivation. I understood all about birds' dynamics. This was real teaching — a theoretical lesson coupled with a live practical example. Sri Siva Subramania Iyer was a great teacher."

That day, my future was decided. My destiny was changed. I knew my future had to be about flight and flight systems.

Answer:

To Sir, with Love

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There's still a child in him though, and he's still curious about learning new things. Life's a mission for President Kalam.

Nonetheless, he remembers his first lesson in life and how it changed his destiny. "I was studying in Standard V, and must have been all of 10. My teacher, Sri Sivasubramania Iyer was telling us how birds fly. He drew a diagram of a bird on the blackboard, depicting the wings, tail and the body with the head and then explained how birds soar to the sky. At the end of the class, I said I didn't understand. Then he asked the other students if they had understood, but nobody had understood how birds fly," he recalls.

"That evening, the entire class was taken to Rameswaram shore," the President continues. "My teacher showed us sea birds. We saw marvellous formations of them flying and how their wings flapped. Then my teacher asked us, 'Where is the birds' engine and how is it powered?' I knew then that birds are powered by their own life and motivation. I understood all about birds' dynamics. This was real teaching — a theoretical lesson coupled with a live practical example. Sri Siva Subramania Iyer was a great teacher."

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## Questions (Page No. 78-79) (Speaking)

Question 1. Here is a topic for you to

1. think about;

2. give your opinion on.

Find out what other people think about it. Ask your friends/seniors/parents to give you their opinion.

‘Career Building Is the Only Goal of Education.’

or

‘Getting a Good Job Is More Important than Being a Good Human Being.’

You can use the following phrases

- i. while giving your opinion:
  - I think that...
  - In my opinion...
  - It seems to me that...
  - I am of the view that...
  - As far as I know...
  - If you ask me...
- ii. saying what other people think:
  - According to some...
  - Quite a few think...
  - Some others favour...
  - Thirty per cent of the people disagree...
  - Fifty per cent of them strongly feel...
- iii. asking for others’ opinions:
  - What do you think about...
  - What do you think of...
  - What is your opinion about...
  - Do you agree...
  - Does this make you believe...

Answer: Do it yourself.

## Questions (Page No. 79) (Writing)

Question 1. Think and write a short account of what life in Rameswaram in the 1940s must have been like. (Were people rich or poor? Hard working or lazy? Hopeful of change, or resistant to it?).

Answer: I think that life in Rameswaram in the 1940s must have been very different from how it must be today. People were orthodox and did not accept changes in their way of living. They would have been hard working and poor. The story mentions the way some people at Rameswaram used to differentiate among various social groups. They were more religious.

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