



Wings of Fire by APJ Abdul Kalam

By Cecelia Ahern

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Wings of Fire is an autobiography of APJ Abdul Kalam covering his early life and his work in Indian space research and missile programs. It is the story of a boy from a humble background who went on to become a key player in Indian space research/Indian missile programs and later became the president of India. It was very engaging initially, but tended to drag a bit towards the end with lot of technical details and procedural information of his space research and missile projects.

The initial chapters of "Wings of Fire" give a vivid picture of our country during 1930-1950s. Kalam was born in Rameswaram, a southern religious town in Tamilnadu. The initial chapters provide an interesting glimpse of religious harmony which existed before India's partition. Their locality was predominantly Muslim, but there were quite a few Hindu families too, living amicably with their Muslim neighbours.

In the book we learn how Kalam started his career in Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE) and was involved in the design of a hovercraft. Later he moved to Indian Space Research which was the brain child of Vikram Sarabhai. In 1963, Kalam went to NASA facility in Maryland(USA) as part of a training program on sounding rocket launching techniques. There he came across a painting which depicted Tipu Sultan's rocket warfare against the British.

The book covers a lot of "behind the scene" information and technical details about India's satellite and missile program (SLV-3, Prithvi, Agni, Thrisul, Akash and Nag). This might interest technically inclined readers but is sure to put off readers who bought the book to get to know Kalam or to know his principles/ideas.

Through Wings of Fire, we come across some brilliant people who worked behind Indian space research such as Vikram Sarabhai and Dr. Brahm Prakash. The book also contains about 24 photos. This alone is worth the price of the book.

One of the things that stands out throughout the book is Kalam's positive thinking. He held many high ranking positions in various organizations. Yet in the book he rarely mentions anything about lethargy/corruption of bureaucracy or politicians. The secret to his success seems to be his ability to ignore negative things around him. The book also gives a clue to his popularity in India.

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APJ ABDUL KALAM

WINGS OF FIRE

An Autobiography

