

Tribhuvan University

**Writing the Nation into the Self: Blend of Subjectivity and Nation's Identity in
Kalam's *Wings of Fire***

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Letter of Approval

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Introduction

Writing the Nation into the Self: Blend of Subjectivity and Nation's Identity in

Kalam's Wings of Fire

The objective of this research paper is to explore the incorporation of individual self alongside national issues in APJ Abdul Kalam's Wings of Fire: An autobiography. Despite being termed as an autobiography, this book hardly projects about the individual self rather it depicts more about the issues that are concerned with nation. Therefore, it motivates the researcher to make an extensive reading of Wings of Fire. To accomplish the task, as a methodology, the researcher has used autobiographical theories of identity along with Fredric Jameson's concept of national allegory and Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined communities. By making a study of Wings of Fire, the researcher finds out that the author blends national issues with autobiographical elements that helps him to foreground the identity not just of himself but also of the nation to which he belongs and shows his concern for highlighting his nation as emerging global power in the scientific field.

Keywords: identity, nation, collective conscience, science and technology, autobiography.

This paper explores the co-existence of national consciousness alongside subjective elements in APJ Abdul Kalam's autobiography *Wings of Fire*, co-authored with Arun Tiwari. Unlike a traditional biography, the work carefully chronicles Dr. Kamal's growth from childhood into a scientist of national fame. In the process, he forgoes those details of life, which do not contribute to the shaping of his career as a nationally celebrated scientist, especially as a missile man and the significance of those works for India as a nation. There are, therefore, rooms to hypothesize that the book was planned to eventually depict pathways that honed Dr. Kalam to lead Indian

space research and nuclear and missile programs. Obviously therefore, the nation gets featured much more than the autobiographical subject in the work. The work partially revises what Philip Lejuene has said about an autobiography per se: "An autobiography is a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life in particular on the development of his personality" (20). Departing on many avenues from this limiting definition of autobiography, Kalam in *Wings of Fire* rarely gives emphasis more on the subject of national issues rather than his personal accounts. So, the focus of this research shall be on identifying and analyzing issues of national concern, and mapping them with the growth of Dr. Kalam into a man of science and technology.

Unlike personal narratives that tend to authenticate the authorial subject's identity, Kalam foregoes his belongingness to any class, community and race. Instead, he tags his identity with that of the nation, and pays special attention on India as a whole. This implies that he considers his nation to be of more important than his individual life. His narration is dotted with nation-building strategies. It can be read as a modern story of India's scientific field. His narrative portrays and provides techniques for freedom of the nation from the technological colonization of the developed countries. So, this paper argues that Kalam blends national issues with autobiographical elements, thereby foregrounding identity not just of himself but also that of the nation to which he belongs. In other words, Kalam uses his autobiography to present the picture of developing technological prowess of India in the global community.

Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam popularly known as APJ Abdul Kalam, was born in a middle class family, in small village named Rameswaram, India. Belonging from a middle class family, Kalam's dedication and hard work is the

sole reason that led him to be the defence scientist of the country in his near future. He served as President of India from 2002 to 2007. He is well known for his remarkable achievements in the history of science in India. His love for his nation and humanity, his achievements and his views shared in his books for the betterment of the society prove that he is one of the contemporary nation builders and a good human being.

Kalam has authored several books and is a renowned writer. Among many of his books, some of his significant works are *Ignited Minds: Unleashing the Power within India* (2003), *Envisioning and Empowered: Technology for Societal Transformation* (2004), *Guiding Souls: Dialogues on the Purpose of Life* (2005) and *Wings of Fire: An Autobiography* (1999).

Wings of Fire, published in 1999, is a collaborative work of APJ Abdul Kalam and Arun Tiwari, which revolves around the life of Kalam. This book was written and published before he was made President of India. This book particularly registers the major aspects of his personality/identities and the transformation of a humble poor and rural person's life turning from obscurity to be an extra ordinary scientist. Further, he consciously projects the collective efforts of scientist belonging to highly prestigious scientific organizations of India that elevated India's status in the globe, particularly in the field of missile technology. He recognizes numbers of visionaries who guided him to become the person who is now known for. It presents Kalam's lived experiences from his childhood till his retirement under four headings, "Orientation", "Creation", "Propitiation" and "Contemplation". In these four headings he narrates almost all the experienced that he faced, from his personal struggles and hardships to the important invention and discoveries that he made for his nation. But, it gives special attention to the countless effort of Indian scientists in achieving

superiority in aeronautical space and rocket technology. It introduces an important lesson of finding success from failures of Indian space and rocket infrastructural programs. This book celebrates the successful launching of Missile Development Programs by Kalam, along with leaders like Satish Dhawan and other scientist. In overall this book deals with Kalam's development of personality, his love for his nation and dedication towards his work for the betterment of his nation.

Kalam's *Wings of Fire* is one of the autobiographies which is distinguished to have gone into more than twenty impressions and which has so far been translated and published in more than thirteen languages including Gujarati, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Oriya, and Marathi etc. Written in mid seventies of his life, it is an account of an intensely humble, spiritual and brilliantly insightful man. He has written *Wings of Fire* in order to reveal and to recapitulate the past events. He looked behind in order to join the threads of the past to the future. The innermost desire of Prof. Kalam was to peep into the secrets of India's heart and mind.

He narrated this book in the way that the incidents happened in his life were relevant, in not for anything else but because they tell something of the story of modern India. The narrative here deals with the gradual development of nation's supremacy in the field of technology.

Publication of *Wings of Fire* gave a new touch in writing autobiographies. Many critics have claimed it as an inspirational work. Similarly, it also has gained vast popularity among the Indian autobiographies. Pallavi Rastogi, a critic, has classified Indian autobiographies as "political autobiographies, religious autobiographies, sociological autobiographies, motivational autobiographies etc." where *Wings of Fire* is considered as a motivational autobiography (12). Rastogi's views on *Wings of Fire* can be observed as categorical implication of autobiographies.

The narration in this autobiography can be rather observed as a narration equipped with nation building strategies.

Similarly, Satyajit T. Patil in his work that *Wings of Fire* as an "inspiring success story" which motivates its reader by narrating the hard work and perseverance of Kalam (23). He also adds that "This stimulating account of the son of an ordinary boat-owner in a small island-town, who became a model and guiding force for millions of his countrymen, is truly a milestone in the history of Indian English Literature" (43). Many critics have claimed this autobiography as motivational and inspirational work. Kalam's frequent use of motivational quotes in the form of poetry provokes its reader to embrace the life with meaning and purpose. But, it should not be neglected that the whole work is rife with technical details which amicably highlights the missile making projects.

Hari Sharan Mukunda, a celebrated critic of Kalam, has approached *Wings of Fire* in this regard: he praises this work as the lifelike portrayal of the impersonal voice in the guise of the personal. It works as a catalyst to those who are confounded on their ways to struggle, victory and success. So he writes:

The book is the story of a man who did not quite acquire power by climbing through academic corridors, an approach with all its penchant for placing or replacing in its own sanctum-sanctorum of the academics or other positions is practiced assiduously in the country. Even in the absence of this power, he wove together large number of groups, challenged them to do the 'impossible', promoted them to work towards a common goal, and through successes, raised their self esteem enormously. (2)

This autobiographical work is exclusively extraordinary. The way Kalam has narrated it can difficult to penetrate and assimilate by ordinary readers. Despite of the

challenges faced Kalam seems to be determined towards a common goal for the nation as whole.

Regarding *Wings of Fire*, researchers like Monalisha Nayak Jash and V Rama Devi observe Kalam work as a designed narrative for the descendants to construct a better life. They propose that "By sharing the stories of one's life narrative one can be able to construct a better life to their descendants. Just the same one feels when they look into the autobiographies of great persons and among them one is APJ Abdul Kalam's *Wings of Fire*" (4). According to Jash and Devi, Kalam's autobiography is a path for the descendants to walk on. His narration of rise from a rural person's life to be an extra ordinary scientist replicates a visionary dream for the next generations to come. Nonetheless, a great sense of collective efforts dominates the whole narration.

Santosh Kumar, a peer reviewer of Kalam's works, analyzes *Wings of Fire* as an amalgamation of spirituality, science and achievements. He discloses his view in this connection:

Wings of Fire reveals a great imaginative power, looking ahead and grasping the truth that underlies facts. It delineates a vision incorporating spirituality, science, and achievements of APJ Abdul Kalam. What Kalam observed from his experience is that people analyze the problems and failures instead of dealing with them. His life teaches many strategies to face challenges to lead a successful and fruitful life. (63)

It is quite obvious that Kalam's narration is an amalgamation of spirituality and science. The poetic quotes in between the narration clearly show the spiritual anchorage. But, it can also be observed that his narration goes on portraying the missile projects at length.

Similarly, Amita Mishra, argues in her work that how Kalam's writings are work of literature. She argues that being a scientist basically and not a man of letters Kalam has the potential to convey his thoughts to his readers and audience. She puts her view in this regard:

Kalam, an inhabitant of the age of science and technology, urges people to know the real purpose of life. In this age when man is running after material comforts, he invokes people towards the journey to the region of the metaphysical and for their convenience he gives them the liberty to blend the desire of materialistic pleasures with the metaphysical one. He emphasizes the importance of moral values for the evolution of a better person and so, to a better and ignited nation which in the final stage will result in an ignited world. (21)

Mishra views Kalam's work as work of literature. Her claim is that being a scientist also Kalam has the caliber to put forward his views in poetic way. Infact, Kalam is a man, who grew up in a spiritual background where he acquired a great sense of humility. However, his potential of blending the self with nation governs the whole autobiography.

Kalam was well known for his attributes of positive thinking. Rajnish Ganguli treats this autobiography as inspiring work which avoids much of the negative things happening around. The following extract concisely introduces Ganguli's view concerning *Wings of Fire*:

One can find a glimpse of Kalam's positive thinking throughout the book. He held many high ranking positions in various organizations. Yet in the book he rarely mentions anything about corruption of bureaucracy and politicians. The

secret to his success seems to be his ability to ignore negative things around him.

Kalam is simple, secular and inspiring. (2)

Though Kalam positions in many high ranking post, he does not mention about the corruption that is obvious to take place in and out of his offices. It depicts that he conceals the negative things with his positive narration that only presents the brighter side of India's bureaucracy.

Wings of Fire has been examined from different perspectives by all these critics. Examining it with the idea of blending nation's identity in an autobiographical mode, will, however, certainly be a new touchstone. In *Wings of Fire*, we can observe that Kalam takes keen interest in showing how commitment of individuals and communities are essential features for the progress of a nation. He blends his personal story of development with that of a nation marching on the path of progress. His effort in making a self-sufficient nation in matters of space and technology is beautifully articulated through an autobiographical voice. His presentation of 'I' in this autobiography is certainly a larger picture of 'We'. Thus, we can assert that Kalam is presenting a picture just not of himself but of a nation of which he values more than his personal life.

The issue of identity has always been an ambiguous one. Basically, a general understanding about identity is having some kind of individual entity. This idea about identity is drawn from the traditional philosophy and logic that was transplanted by Freud to the theory of Psychology. Later on the basis of Freud's study, Erik Erikson proposed that 'identity' was actually the clear or obscure answer to the question 'who am I'? In Erikson's opinion, identity is not only individual but collective and social. Identity is the difference, character and sense of belonging found in interpersonal interaction and interactions between groups (183). Based on Erikson's theory of

identity, it can be visualized that identity can not only be understood under the rubric of individuality but it steps further into a collective sense.

In terms of identity, Kalam seems to identify himself in the light of nation. As throughout the text, he hints and talks about nation and nationality. To examine this autobiography through the lens of autobiographical tool of identity, Julia Watson and Sidione Smith in their book state that “Autobiographical acts involve narrators in “identifying” themselves to the reader. That is writers make themselves known by acts of identification” (8). In *Wings of Fire*, the narrator too attempts to identify himself to the readers as true Indian. Focusing towards the matter of building nation strength, he narrates the true determination and hardships he faces along with his co-workers. As Smith and Watson claimed in their work “Identities are marked in terms of many categories: gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class etc” (22). Here Kalam in his book identifies himself in terms of nationality. He doesn’t focus on gender, race, ethnicity, class rather he solely represents himself as true citizen. Similarly, Smith and Watson quote Susan Stanford Friedman in their book who notes that “an identity affirms some form of commonality, some shared ground” (13). Kalam narration also reflects that he doesn’t solely talks about himself alone but he consciously projects the collective identity of Indians. His narration represents his nation. He talks from the ground to the top levels of Indian society.

Kalam’s life history reflects his self that felt proud to be ‘an Indian’. He seems to constructing national identity in terms of technology and making it as a national narrative. The technological prowess of a nation is reflected in his narration. He deliberately acknowledges all the major personalities behind the success of their missions. Carol Fleisher Feldman notes in his work “Narratives of national identity as group narratives” that “National narratives are plainly much like other group

narratives in serving as vehicles for self-definition” (141). In case of Kalam's autobiography, his narration can be seen as a national narrative which identifies him as well as the group.

The question then arises here that how a person's life history leads to a national sense of belonging? Most often in autobiographies, we can experience that the author has some kind of ideology behind narrating one's life history. They create identities; narrate experiences which take the shape of one's life story. A narrative of the individual realizing that he is embedded in a larger collective proposes that he\she has a deep attachment towards his society or a sense of collective consciousness. The identity being constructed in the autobiographical text, then, is not just that of the author himself, but also that of the nation to which he belongs, and the narrative can be read as a kind of national allegory.

To expand the meaning of this autobiographical text and to examine it a new dimension, it has to be analyzed with the lens of nationalism and national identity. Therefore, a brief overview of these theoretical concepts seems necessary to be outlined. As this paper will be incorporating the ideas of theorists who deal with the issues of nationalism, national identity and techno-nationalism; this paper will also analyze the text with idea of Fredric Jameson who gave the concept of 'national allegory' prime importance for the proper reading of all third world literary text. For analyzing the text with the idea of national identity and nationalism, this paper employs the ideas of theorists like Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* that how “a nation is an imagined entity.” The idea of techno-nationalism will further elaborate the use of technology as the subject in nationalistic project, with the goal of promoting connectedness and a stronger national identity. Furthermore, it will also borrow ideas from theorist like Yael Tamir, who deals with liberal nationalism and

argues that how it opposes all kind of discrimination and advocates for social progress and is driven by the general will of the people.

Defining nation, nationality, national identity and nationalism is a complicating exercise. These terms are often used to imply a multiplicity of interrelated phenomena leading to ambivalence. One reason for such ambivalence is that they all have the origin in the same Latin word “natio” which implies 'birth' or 'descent'. However, there separate implications can be drawn. A nation has a political meaning which is distinct from nationality. A nationality is transformed into a nation or national identity when it organizes a state or at least cherishes a common will to live together in a nation for future. On the other hand, nationalism is the ideology which incorporates all these ideas. Nationalism as a social phenomenon bears great significance in modern world. A dominant view in the past was that to become a nation a people sharing common race, language, religion must live together in a geographical area. However, this view doesn't have much appropriation now; the generally accepted view today is that rather than sharing attributes like common race, language, religion, it is the sentiment of a common consciousness that forms a basis of a nation. However, finding an operational definition of nationalism is quite complex.

Similarly, the term national identity also does not limit in single definition rather it has multiple dimensions. We usually understand it as something that is related to nation. It is also a person's identity or a sense of belongingness to a nation. *English US Dictionary* states it as a sense of nation as cohesive whole as represented by distinct traditions, culture and language. People construct their identity or identify themselves in many forms. They represent themselves in terms of gender, class, religion, ethnicity, nation etc, and identifying themselves in relation to a nation is something beyond the feeling of 'self'. It is a feeling of collective identity, recognition

of 'we' and 'they'. Similarly, a political scientist Rupert Emerson defines national identity as "a body of people who feel that they are a nation"(27). It highlights the idea that national identity incorporates the feeling of belongingness of a nation in person's identity.

Being complicated and having multi-dimensional matter, researchers define and explain this concept by emphasizing its different perspectives. Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* asserts that national identity is imagined and constructed. His idea is grounded on the view that a nation is an 'imagined political community' that can only be understood within the intersecting dynamics of history, language, ideology and power. He proposes that "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"(6). His idea about nation is constructed within the fellow members' consciences that bind them together and urges for national unity. Furthermore, researchers like Inac and Unal in their work "Constructing National Identity in Modern Times" quote Gunevc who defines national identity as "a kind of socialization manner processing that takes part in individual within any certain community, or, it is a feeling of the state of belonging to any group by means of acculturation"(14). Their idea about national identity hints towards the process of socialization, where an individual within a time frame begin to identify himself\ herself in relation to their nation. Similarly, the researchers also quote Yursudev, who claims that "national identity is the yield of national building" (15). So, we can propose that national identity works as collective force which urges for the prosperity of the nation and of its member.

However, the pursuit of advanced technologies has been persistent occupation of Indian leaders in the modern era. Under leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, APJ Abdul Kalam the country invested in nationalistic efforts to boost indigenous capabilities, hoping to reduce their dependence on outside world. Thus, techno-nationalism assumes that the key unit of analysis for the study of technology is the nation: nations are the units that innovate, that have R&D budgets and cultures of innovation, that diffuse and use technology. The success of nations, it is believed by techno-nationalists, is dependent on how well they do this.

Internalizing all these explanation and definition about national identity, it can be understood that shaping or formation of national identity is not an inborn trait rather it is a social formation. It is gradually developed by a common binding within the member of its nation. People begin to incorporate their personal identity with one's national identity. It results under various social influences; people incorporate national identity into their personal identities by adopting beliefs, values assumptions and expectations which align with one's national identity. Thus, it can be asserted that it results from the process of socialization and is developed as one's love and pride for nation.

Fredric Jameson in his essay "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" suggests and gives the concept of 'national allegory' as prime importance for the proper reading of all third world literary texts. He suggests that "all Third World texts are necessarily ... to be read as ... national allegories" (12). However, Jameson is cautious in his use of the term 'Third-World'. He employs the term rather loosely and is mindful of the fact that it "obliterates profound differences between a whole range of non-western countries and situations" (13). Furthermore, Jameson's opinion about third- world literature has faced criticism for its reductionist

views. Nonetheless, his argument shows some appropriation when one reads Kalam's *Wings of Fire* in that light. Hence, Kalam's autobiography can also be examined in the light of Jameson's argument.

When Jameson recommends that Third World texts be read as national allegories, he is suggesting that we examine the impact of nationalism on the individual. Thus, he points out that:

Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with properly libidinal dynamic - necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society. (6)

Wings of Fire too as being a third world (Indian) autobiographical text, presents an allegorical implication of nation in autobiographical mode. Thus, searching for allegorical structures in this autobiography would be a productive critical approach. Upon evaluating the autobiography, it seemed to be a largely chronological and descriptive account of the invention of Indian missiles. However, what made it profound to is the way in which Kalam entwine the narratives of his life with events, dates and the activities of the history of Indian missiles developmental programs. Thus, Kalam's autobiography also works as a symbolic representation of nation. He portrays the picture of nation's strength in terms of science and technology and narrates the process of making India self reliable in the field of missiles entwining his own life history. For instance, Kalam writes on the launch of the India's first Satellite Launch Vehicle- SLV-3 that

The whole nation was excited India had made its entry into the small group of nations which possessed satellite launch capacity. Newspaper carried news of

the event in their headlines. Radio and television station aired special programs. Parliament greeted the achievement with the thumping of desks. It was both the culmination of a national dream, and the beginning of a very important phase in our nation's history. (53)

However, as soon as he expressed this feeling of national pride of indigenous effort in launching satellite, no sooner he experienced a kind of mixed feelings and he states that he was happy to achieve the success which had been evading him for the past two decades, but he was sad because the people who had inspired me were no longer there to share my joy- my father, my brother in law Jallaludin, and Prof. Srabhai.

Furthermore, Kalam has narrated many such incidents which throw light on how he was determined towards his work and superseded his personal matters. One such incident was when he lost his mother but the next day he was all set with sheer determination to accomplish his project. As he writes:

The SLV-3 Apogee rocket, developed as a common upper stage with Diamant, scheduled to be flight tested in France was mired in a series of knotty problems. I had to rush to France to sort them out. Before I could depart, late in the afternoon, I was informed that my mother had passed away. (48)

But, the very next morning he was back at Thumba, physically exhausted, emotionally shattered, but determined to fulfill nation's ambition of flying an Indian rocket motor on foreign soil, which highlights that Kalam always kept his professional life and his nation at the forefront.

In the words of Benedict Anderson, nations are 'imagined communities', they are imagined as possessing a life. Just like persons, they are born, experience a childhood, grow, mature and develop a certain kind of identity. Thus, just like persons

biographies, nations too have their own and these biographies should be narrated to be remembered. As Anderson points out in his *Imagined Communities*:

As with modern persons, so it is with nations. Awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of 'forgetting' the experience of this continuity - product of the ruptures of the late eighteenth century - engenders the need for a narrative of identity. (205)

Approaching Kalam's *Wings of Fire* taking Anderson's point of view about nation and its narration expresses a parallel relation between both. Kalam's narration can be also enhanced as a narrative of a nation. Just like a person's narrative, Kalam's narration also finds space in constructing national narrative. It is the narration not only about the author's life but the narration about making of Indian Missiles like Agni, Trishul, Nag etc., which have become household names in India. Kalam's narrates mostly about the making of these missiles. So, his narration about the important inventions and discoveries in the field of Indian Space Technology produces a narrative about national struggles that how the efforts were being put in the making of it. As Kalam also mentions it that "This is an account, I hope, not just of my personal triumphs and tribulations but of the successes and setbacks of the science establishment in modern India, struggling to establish itself in the technological forefront" (2). Through these lines it is quite transparent that Kalam is narrating the history of his nation in acquiring technological prowess. Similarly, in the chapter titled 'Torchbearers' his intention are quite clear when he says "Why did India become a missile power is a question that needs to be answered for the future generations" (88).

Furthermore, Anderson opines nation as an "imagined political community"; "imagined because the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the

image of their communion" (95). This statement argues that nations are cultural construction that leads people to believe they have a common heritage and collective responsibility to the nation. This idea can be traced in Kalam's narration, when he writes:

I will not be presumptuous enough to say that my life can be a role model for anybody; but some poor child living in an obscure place, in an underprivileged society setting may find a little solace in the way my destiny has been shaped. It could perhaps help such children liberate themselves from the bondage of their illusory backwardness and hopelessness. (97)

Kalam also believes that he has a common heritage and collective responsibility to the nation. Even though he spends his life in and around missile making projects, he feels and understands the need of a poor child living in some unfavorable condition at some corner of remote Indian village, who needs to be nurtured with proper guidance.

Stuart Hall et. al. in their work *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, argue that narrating the nation gives a certain kind of meaning to which its members can identify themselves with. They put their view in this regard:

National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about 'the nation' with which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connects its present with its past and images which are constructed of it. (613)

Kalam's autobiography also works in the similar line. It narrates about the nation. Kalam's narration provides us a picture of the past, present and vision of the future that how India being a nation under colonial rule in the past was lacking development in the scientific field and how at the present it is in the path of development with a futuristic vision. In the mid-twentieth century, intellectuals in a nation were very

nationalistic about science and technology and the trend still continues in some of the nations. India is a nation that is very nationalistic about science and technology. Thus, these ideas about nation can be acknowledge in the introductory part of *Wings of Fire*, when Kalam interrogates " Can India be a leader in the field of technology?" and he himself asserts to this question by proposing that "My answer is emphatic 'Yes'. And let me validate my answer by narrating some incidents from my life". Then he goes on narrating the incidents that he remembered and found of national importance. He also asserts into the Introduction of this autobiography that "This book is being released at a time when India's technological endeavors, to asserts its sovereignty and strengthen its security are questioned by many in the world" (xii).

Facts have proved that the European-centered monopoly of scientific and technological knowledge is the main stumbling block to the mission of Asian countries, especially India, to make progress in the post-colonial period. Recognizing the need for technological development in the overall development of India, a plan was made to promote R&D in India. Dr. Kalam belongs to the first generation of scientists and represents India's pursuit of self-reliance in these key areas. In the 1960s, India's overall situation was not very good. The country was committed to meeting the basic needs of its vast population. In this, it was difficult to conceive of rocket and space programs. India relied heavily on Western imports. He states, "The defence R & D at that time was heavily dependent on imported equipment. Virtually nothing indigenous was available...was this nation doomed to live with screwdriver technology? Could a poor country like India afford this kind of development? (54)".

In order to overcome this situation of isolation and dependence, after independence, self-reliance on scientific and technological issues was put first under the dynamic leadership of Pundit Nehru. This vision of Nehru was further

consolidated, and the mission of space development had also been developed.

Professor Vikram Sarabhai looked forward to the future of Indian rocket technology and SLV, and selected scientists from different organizations and gave them autonomy. The collective vision was: "If Indians were to play a meaningful role in the community of nations, they must be none in the application of advanced technologies to their real-life problems. They had no intention of using it merely as a means to display our might" (43).

Kalam narrates about how Indian scientists made major breakthroughs under adverse circumstances. He firmly believed that they can accomplish groundbreaking tasks under difficult and tense circumstances. He admitted that they were a team of self-trained engineers that uniquely blend their untrained talents, character and dedication, which was a key requirement of SLV.

In an age in which colonialism and oppressive rule have been dramatically eroded and decolonized nations are asserting themselves in international arena, it is often suggested that national identity is the foundation for their development. But, there remains ambivalent that at which ground these nations should make themselves strong to be recognized in international arena. Generally, what we can observe is that in this modern world, nations trying to acclaim their position globally celebrate their modernity by displaying their scientific prowess. They do not dwell in the past by narrating their productive history but would rather focus to be rooted in modernity and oriented toward future. The words found in Asif A. Siddiqi's work "Competing Technologies, National(ist) Narratives, and Universal claims" properly defines the initiation of modern nations approach towards scientific competence. He puts that:

By the early twentieth century, and especially in the light of experiences during World War I, technology assumed a fundamental role in the projection

of national prowess, a role that was now further complicated by the specter of international competition for global dominance- through science, technology, war and imperial holdings. (433)

India as a country under British Empire was unable to establish herself in the scientific field; it was just after Indian Independence in 1947 the country began to put serious concern over scientific progress. The vision of scientific advancement was however initiated with the futuristic vision of the then Indian first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who attached enormous significance to the 'scientific temper'. Priya Chacko in her work illustrates Nehru's vision in the following lines "According to Nehru, Indian civilization had abandoned scientific methods and rational inquiry for superstition... a mastery of modern science was therefore vital if India was to catch up with the west and successfully become modern" (192).

While going through Kalam's narration one can deliberately find this autobiography as projection of national identity and as well as insight into the collective efforts and importance of technical advancement for a nation. It seems to be a nexus of science and national consciousness. Kalam's narration highlights science and technology as an important aspect for a nation to march towards the path of development. One way or the other he seems to be following the footsteps of his predecessors like, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the first Prime Minister of India and who reserved for himself the Ministry of Science and Technology, was very conscious in the matter of development of a nation through scientific advancement. As Harrison and Johnson stated in their work "Science and National Identity" that "Nehru's gesture drew on a long tradition of founding national identity on a particular claim to an allegedly universal idea of scientific competence" (3). Similarly, Kalam, who emerged as a scientist later was very conscious in terms of technology for the

development of a nation. Furthermore, Harrison and Johnson also add that “The unique achievement of the nation, they maintain, lies in its citizen’ competence, their position on the cutting edge discovery” (10). So, it can be observe that how scientific competence in modern world is a major tool for a nation’s advancement. Kalam in his autobiography too draw similar kind of idea when he proposes:

Rocketry was reborn in India thanks to the technology vision of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Prof. Sarabhai took the challenge of giving physical dimensions to this dream... Their vision was very clear: if Indians were to play a meaningful role in the community of nations, they must be second to none in the application of advanced technologies to their real- life problems. (27)

The narrative can be comprehended as an extremely optimistic attempt to insinuate and guide the youth of the country that marches onward for scientific and technological innovation.

Furthermore, there is indeed a profound relationship between technology and Indian nationalism in this case which is manifested through a painting that Kalam comes across in the reception lobby at Wallops Flight facility at Wallops Island, a NASA facility in East coast Virginia. This place was the base for NASA's sounding rocket programme. The painting depicts a battle scene with rocket flying in the background and the soldiers on the side launching the rockets were not white but dark-skinned with the racial features of people found in South Asia. On closer examination he finds that the painting depicts Tipu Sultan's army fighting the British. Kalam feels happy to see an Indian glorified in NASA as a hero of warfare rocketry although it was a fact that had been forgotten in India. Thus Kalam puts it as "The painting depicted a fact forgotten in Tipu's own country but commemorated here on

the other side of the planet. I was happy to see an Indian glorified by NASA as a hero of warfare rocketry" (24). This exhibits the glorification of the Indian historical past in terms of technological progress and boosts Indian nationalism by showing India to be having an indigenous technological programme even in the eighteenth century thereby negating the theory that India's technological programme is imported. In the process it creates a strong national identity and also talks of a progressive Indian past.

APJ Abdul Kalam stated in the publication of the book "Wings of Fire: Autobiography" that the national identity of a country, India in this case, was recently formulated based on the principles of economic and technological supremacy. A country with the supremacy of economy and technology is considered to be strong and powerful, and it enhances the image of nationalism. In India, the story of Agni, Prithvi, Akash, Trishul and Nag missiles brought India to the level of international accounting capabilities (ii). Therefore, this example emphasizes the importance of the relationship between technology and nationalism in the context of a country's national identity.

This autobiography is a legend in India's search for self-sufficiency in science and technology. Professor Vikram Sarabhai is the mentor of A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, who are all technical nationalists who have made great and valuable contributions to the Indian Science Project. Once Professor Sarabhai came to Thumba on one of his routine visits, he could see the operation of the nose cone projectile. Professor Sarabhai is required to formally activate the system. To their shock, when he pressed the button, nothing happened. They asked him to wait a few minutes, and then they re-established some contacts. When he pressed the button a second time, it fired and the nose cone was abandoned. Professor Sarabhai congratulated the team of Dr. A. P.

J. Kalam and introduced him to rocket launch facilities, such as launch pad, fort, radar, telemetry, etc. He talked about the failure of activating the system to investigate the reason behind it and solve the problem. The obvious reason is that they do not have a roof to carry out the system integration of all rockets and rocket systems, so that Professor Sarabhai decided to establish a rocket engineering department, which further established the rocket engineering department (67). This example demonstrates the vision and commitment of technological nationalists such as Professor Sarabhai and Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in the advancement of technology-based country. They are considered to have real leadership skills, and they have inspired budding scientists and engineers through their ideas and examples, thereby training many scientists and engineers who were later responsible for important scientific projects. The unremitting efforts of scientists and engineers have pushed India to the level of a technologically advanced country, leaving behind the legacy of the scientific progress plan.

India demonstrates technological nationalism by developing rockets, which enables India to produce indigenous sounding rockets. It is seen as a revival of Tip Sultan's 18th-century vision, thereby linking it to nationalism. The Thumba equatorial launching station was developed in active cooperation with France, the United States and the Soviet Union. It is envisioned as the center of India's overall national space program. However, the actual journey began with the Rohini Sounding Rocket Program (RSR). The program is responsible for the development and manufacturing of sounding rockets and related airborne systems in India. Under the RSR program, a series of rocket detection programs were developed. These rockets have a wide range of capabilities, and hundreds of such rockets have been launched for various scientific

and technological research. It is an effort to develop this country and adapt it to the modern, industrial and global world.

The success of a nation is determined by the way a nation tries to innovate and diffuse technology across its people. In the “Epilogue” of Wings of Fire, Kalam states:

A nation needs both economic prosperity and strong security for growth and development. Our Self Reliance Mission in Defence System 1995-2005 will provide the Armed Forces with a state-of-the-art competitive weapons system. The Technology Vision – 2020 plan will put into place certain schemes and plans for the economic growth and prosperity of the nation. These two plans have evolved out of the nation’s dreams and will eventually make our country strong and prosperous, a “developed” nation. (103)

The above example shows the vision of a developing nation as stated by Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. A nation can grow, be self-sufficient and prosperous if it develops technologically which can only happen when there is realization of one’s dream and its fruits are distributed across the people.

The technology affects the Indian society and culture in order to promote connectedness and a stronger national identity. Techno-nationalism also takes other forms leading to the creation of national identities fit for a technological age.

A few nations who have grown very strong technologically, over the past few centuries, have wrested control, for their own purposes. These major powers have become the self-proclaimed leaders of the new world order. What does a country of one billion people, like India, do in such a situation? We have no other option but to be technologically strong. But, can India be a leader in the field of technology? My answer is an emphatic ‘Yes’ (xiii). The above example shows that if a country wants

to establish a strong national identity in the world today, it should be technologically strong. Therefore, a developing country like India will be able to establish a strong image for itself through its struggle at the technological frontier. A technologically advanced country is a powerful country.

Technological nationalists like Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam believe that the existence of national R&D efforts and the effectiveness of these efforts are the key drivers of overall national growth, sustainability and prosperity, which constitute the cornerstone of national growth and development prosperity. In *Wings of Fire*, the concept of techno-nationalism is explained in the context of the Indian milieu. A country has to be technologically powerful to establish its own national identity and to attain growth. It is a necessary prerequisite to establish the growth trajectory of a developing nation like India.

In *Wings of fire*, the concept of technological nationalism is explained in the context of the Indian environment. A country must have strong technical capabilities to establish its own national identity and achieve growth. Establishing a growth trajectory for developing countries like India is a necessary prerequisite.

Despite the urge for scientific competence Kalam also advocates for other important aspects which he prefers for a smooth running of a nation. His narration seems to be a foundation stone for making India great from every aspect. The sequential and chronological structure of his narration covers his childhood, adulthood, middle age and old age stages. But, throughout these stages Kalam gives only a least amount of his personal details and in rest he concentrates upon the missiles making projects. Kalam life history reflect his self that felt proud to be an Indian and beyond as a human being. His narration reveals his liberal ideology. Although, being a Muslim he welcomes and respects every religion. He does not

favor for communal intolerance rather he focuses on bringing every individual under the one umbrella of a nation. He could be considered as a liberal nationalist, who believed in an inclusive form of nationalism that adheres with traditional liberal values of freedom, tolerance, equality and individual rights.

Yael Tamir in her work *Liberal Nationalism* puts her view regarding what is required to be liberal in the matter of nation. She discloses her view in this regard "Liberal nationalism thus celebrates the particularity of culture together with the universality of human rights, the social and cultural embeddedness of individuals together with their personal autonomy" (79). Thus, Kalam's narrative also fosters the liberal values in Indian society. He beautifully presents the liberal aspect of Indian society which thrive in the midst of contradiction. Indian society falls into several religious group. The belief professed by one religion, minority or section differs drastically from that of the other. But they appear to live harmoniously where a slight provocation can result in conflict. Harmony in the midst of contradictory beliefs and creeds is introduced by the narrator as the important aspect of Indian society in his narration. He advocates for cultural and religious embeddedness in the society, which can certainly take the nation in the path of progress. The following extract is the illustrative of this point:

I had three close friends in my childhood... all these boys were from orthodox Hindu Brahmin families. As children, none of us ever felt any difference amongst ourselves because of our religious differences and upbringing...on the whole the small society of Rameswaram was highly stratified and very rigid in terms of the segregation of different social groups. (4)

Furthermore, Kalam also recollected an incident from his childhood where he experienced a communal partiality in the educational institution of rural villages in

India and also narrated that how he managed to overcome it. He narrates that while he was in fifth standard, he encountered a new teacher in his class who made him feel different. He narrates "The new teacher couldn't stomach a Hindu priest's son sitting with a muslim boy. In accordance with our social ranking as the new teacher it, I was asked to go and sit on the back bench." (5), later when the incident was told to their respective parents the teacher was summoned for spreading communal violence.

Kalam has narrated many such incidents which shows that how despite living in a country where communal hatred and social inequality was at its height, he didn't acquire any sense of communal belonging but rather treated nation as a whole and moved forward in shaping his and nation's destination. Similarly, Kalam takes time to highlight about his locality where he grew up, he narrates: "Our locality was predominantly Muslim, but there were quite Hindu families too, living amicably with their Muslim neighbors" (2). These examples shows the environment of Kalam childhood where Hindus and Muslims were living together without any communal hatred, whereas, on the other side, whole India was drowned into communal violence. This narration of Kalam throws light in his instillation of liberal ideologies in him right from his childhood days. As Yael Tamir also asserts in her work that the members of a nation should be liberal in order to be developed, she puts that individuals should be able "to over their egoistic inclination and cooperate for the sake of mutual prosperity" (65). As Kalam said in one of his lecture entitled, "When will India become a developed nation" that "All of them need to think that the nation is greater than an individual or an organization" than only a nation can lead towards the path of development (58).

In case of Indian Nationalism, it can be observed that it is the sentiment of peoples that plays a vital role, Shashi Tharoor, an eminent scholar and politician, puts

his view regarding Indian nationalism that "Indian nationalism is not based on any of the conventional indices of national identity... Indian nationalism has always been the nationalism of idea" (4). Similarly, the nationalism reflected through Kalam's autobiography is the nationalism of idea that doesn't valorize any language, ethnicity, religion but have a common sentiment and love for the nation discarding all the odds. The beautiful aspect of Indian society is its capacity to thrive in the midst of contradiction.

Indian society falls into several religious sects and sectarianisms. People with diverse creeds and doctrines dwell in it. The belief professed by one tribe, minority or section differs drastically from that of the other. Conflict is bound to occur just all the slightest provocation. But they appear to live harmoniously. Within contradictions and diversities, harmony, symmetry and rapport flourish in an enticing way. No one or no minority has to face fatal end just for professing different creed, conviction and doctrine. But that does not mean there is discrimination, minor unrest, state of soft animosity and occasional scuffle. Harmony in the midst of contradictory beliefs and creeds is introduced by the narrator as the most important aspect of Indian society. The following extract is illustrative of this point:

On the whole, the small society of Rameswaram was highly stratified and very rigid in terms of the segregation of different social groups. However, my science teacher Sivasubramania Iyer, though an orthodox Brahmin with a very conservative wife, was something of a rebel. He did his best to break social barriers so that people from varying backgrounds could mingle easily. He used to spend hours with me and would say, "Kalam, I want you to develop so that you are on par with the highly educated people of big cities. (14)

However, *Wings of Fire* is a record of Kalam's spiritual growth and contains too many scientific opinions. It reveals the developments and events of modern science in detail, and personal factors gradually fade out of the background. Kalam fully identified himself as the cause of India's rocket technology and aerospace research program.. He has jumped into the struggle for countdowns headlong and every narration bears the stamp of his great involvement.

Wings of Fire is an attempt at discovery — the discovery of inner self. It is of inestimable value because it offers insights into the 'life' and 'work' by making available a rarer dimension of one of the most notable figures of contemporary history of India's space science. From its pages Kalam emerges as a man of high culture and sophistication with keen intellect and poet's sensibility, very human and great patriot. A man of wide interest, he had great passion for life and greater for motherland. He could lead a life of luxury and ease but he preferred the open sea, with all its storms and tempests. *Wings of Fire* reveals clearly how Prof. Kalam had no other mission in his life than that offered by his profession and how efficient has he been by utilizing the minimal of resources and giving back in exponential proportions.

Wings of Fire reveals a comprehensive picture of the scientific verve of India but Prof. Kalam's personal life is so intimately blended with the verve of the nation that it is impossible to distinguish them as disparate. However, it is remarkable more for the relative privacy and reserve that he maintained in it than what he could have confessed and revealed. It would be hard to say that which part of it reveals the more fascinating story — the early chapters which describe his school days, his adolescence, and his life as a student in the various distinguished institutions, or the absorbing narrative of his moral development and his struggle in pursuit of vocation. Accordingly he is a humanitarian, secular, democratic, simple and inspirational. He

truly gave India a position and voice of 1 billion people to be heard which was otherwise neglected by the west even though it is a great secular peaceful democracy. He has given the country an inspiration on how to dream and realize the dreams.

Thus, it can be concluded that this autobiography provides a picture of national events more than that of author himself. Kalam thought straight of his contemporaries, of his near and dear ones, as well as of the events influencing contemporary scientific history of India, and recorded the bang of men and events, the subtle influences of places, the fascination of nature, and the overwhelming force of rocketry countdowns in soothing prose marked by rare purity. He mentions very rarely about his personal life, rather he focuses more on the events that took place in his professional life. Thus, it can be observed that this autobiography highlights the developing technological prowess of India receding his private life, which reflects Kalam's patriotic zeal of considering nation as of much importance than individual. Therefore, it can be seen that Kalam finds himself not a person of a certain class, community, or race, but a person from greater India. Kalam's special attention to the country and its problems means that he believes that his country is more important than his personal life. His narrative is equipped with a nation-building strategy that asserts modern stories in Indian science. His narrative portrays and provides the technology to free countries from the technological supremacy of developed countries. Therefore, Kalam integrates national issues in an autobiographical way, which not only helps him establish his own identity, but also constructs the identity of his country. Therefore, his narration can also be interpreted as a kind of national fable. Kalam narrates his life history undermining his personal aspects and focuses on collective efforts and the goal of making indigenous rockets at length. Thus, it can be

observed that Kalam has used his autobiography not to narrate his life story but to expose the technological endeavors of a developing country like India.

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