**MY CHILDHOOD**

**By- A.P.J. Abdul Kalam**

**INTRODUCTION**

Prof A.P.J.Abdul Kalam is the former President of India. This chapter has been taken from his autobiography, ‘wings of Fire’.  He is one of the world’s greatest scientists. In this chapter, he tells u about his childhood. He talks about his parents, his childhood friends and his experiences at school. He grew up in a traditional society. People of different religions lived in that society. But in spite of different religions, people lived in peace and harmony. He was greatly influenced by his father who taught him honesty and self-discipline.

**Introduction**

“My Childhood” is an extract from A.P.J. Abdul Kalam’s autobiography ‘Wings of Fire’. It describes the childhood days of Kalam in a very simple but vivid manner. Kalam talks about the people, the incidents and the experiences that he had during his childhood which shaped his adult life. Written in a very humble and a modest manner, the extract is very inspirational.

**THEME**

The theme of “My Childhood” is that our life is shaped by our experiences and the people around us. Kalam’s secure childhood, inspiring parents, supportive friends and honest teachers instilled great values in him that gave him ‘wings of fire’.

**TITLE**

Abdul Kalam talks about his childhood days in this autobiographical account. In particular, he talks about some incidents that left an indelible impression on his young mind. He describes his family, his house, his childhood experiences and his childhood friends. Therefore the title “My Childhood” is very apt.

**CHARACTERS**

 **Kalam’s parents**

 Kalam’s parents, Jainulabdeen and Ashiarruna, were tall and good looking. Though they did not have abundant resources, both of them were very generous and fed a lot of outsiders along with their own family members. Practising the values of honesty and self-discipline, they led a simple life which did not have any place for inessential comforts or luxuries. However, Kalam’s father made sure that all basic necessities were provided for. He was very liberal and didn’t believe in thrusting his thoughts on his children. He had a secular approach and contributed fully during the celebration of Hindu festivals like Shri Sita Rama’s Kalyanam ceremony. Kalam’s mother was ideal support to her husband. She had faith in goodness and was a very kindhearted woman.

**Abdul Kalam**

A boy of ordinary looks, Abdul Kalam had many sterling qualities right from his childhood. He had immense affection and respect for his parents. He inherited the values of honesty and self-discipline from his father and faith in goodness and deep kindness from his mother. Kalam was an enterprising and a hard-working child. He collected tamarind seeds, when they were in demand, and sold them to earn small yet significant amounts. Very confident of himself, he did every piece of work assigned to him with full dedication. He helped his cousin to catch bundles from the running trains when the train-halt at Rameswaram was suspended during the Second World War. He was also a sensitive child and learnt valuable lessons from his experiences. He learnt early in life that caste-based segregation is a poison that must not be allowed to thrive. Kalam was also progressive and took the decision at the right time to leave his hometown to study further and grow in life.

**Sivasubramania Iyer**

An orthodox Brahmin, Sivasubramania Iyer, was Kalam’s science teacher in school. He was a very tolerant and broad-minded person. He was a rebel who wished to bring about a transformation in society and was mentally prepared to confront hindrances during this process. He faced challenges even from his own family when his wife refused to serve food to Kalam who had been invited by Iyer himself. But, without losing faith in his belief that caste and religion do not segregate people, he served the child himself. Thus, he reformed his wife not by force but by setting an example.

Iyer was also a dedicated teacher who established a good rapport with his students. He encouraged and inspired them as he taught and spent long hours with them.

**WORD-MEANINGS**

**[PAGE 68] : Middle-class** = neither poor nor very rich,

**island** = a piece of land surrounded by water,

**erstwhile** = former,

**formal** = customary,

**despite**= in spite of,

**disadvantages** = shortcomings,

 **Innate** = inner,

**wisdom**= the property of being wise,

 **generosity** = kindness,

 **ideal** = model,

 **helpmate** = helper,

**recall** =remember,

**Exact** = right,

 **undistinguished**=ordinary,

 **handsome**= good looking,

 **ancestral**= inherited from forefathers,

 **limestone** = white powder stone,

 **austere** = without show

**inessential** =unnecessary,

**luxuries** = items of excessive comfort,

 **secure** = safe,

 **materially** =economically,

 **emotionally** = from the point of view of emotions,

**[PAGE 69]** :

**Broke out** = started,

**tamarind** = tamarind,

 **erupted**= came at once,

 **provision shop** = groceries shop,

 **fetch** = bring

**princely** = royal,

 **anna** – about six paise,

**attempt** = try,

**trace** = search

**isolated** = aloof,

**unaffected** = not influenced,

**forced** = compelled,

**allied forces** = combined army,

**emergency** = state of crisis,

**declared** = announced,

 **casualty** = disaster,

 **suspension** = temporary stop,

**halt**= stop,

**slot** = place,

 **wages**= earnings, **surge** = wave, **inherited** = got from parents,; **characteristics** = qualities, गुण **specific** = particular, **environment** = surroundings; **self-discipline** = self-restraint,; **faith** = belief, = intimate, **orthodox** = traditional, **upbringing** = breeding, **priest** = head of a temple, **took over** = took control,

**[PAGE 70] : Pilgrim** = one who goes to a religious place, **catering** = supplying of provisions, **contractor** = one who works on a contract,; **ceremony** = function, **idols** = images; **site** = place, **situated**= located, **events** = incidents, **prophet** =- messiah, **marked** = showed, **row** = line,

**[PAGE 71] : Sacred thread** = holy yarn worn around the neck, **stomach (verb)** = tolerate, **ranking** = position, **downcast** = disappointed**utterly** = completely,**shifted**= went, **image** = picture, **lasting** = permanent**respective** = own, **summoned** =called, **communal**= sectarian, **intolerance** = not tolerating, **bluntly** = frankly; **apologize** =ask forgiveness, **quit** = leave, **regret** = feel sorry, **behaviour** = conduct, ; **conviction** = faith**ultimately** = in the end, ; **reformed**= improved, **conveyed**= expressed,

**[PAGE 72] : Rigid** = stern, **segregation** = separation, = traditional, **rebel** = revolutionary, **barriers**= obstacles**varying** = different, ; **mingle** = mix, ; **on par**  = equal, **horrified** = frightened, **ritually** = religiously, **refused** = denied, **perturbed** = disturbed,

**[PAGE 73] : Beside**= by the side of

**observed** = saw

**hesitation** = feeling of uncertainty

**upset** = disturbed, **confronted** = faced, **imminent** = going to happen,; **unprecedented**= as never before, **optimism** = hopefulness,

[PAGE 74]: **Seagull** = a seabird, **quoted**= spoke the words of, **longing** = desire