

Books are unseen close friends

—shares Dr APJ Abdul Kalam in an exclusive interview with AABP.

Dr APJ Kalam needs no introduction; he is one of the most admired people in India, an icon and an inspiration for many. A distinguished scientist, a well-known academician, the ex-president of India and a literary person - Dr Kalam has penned many interesting and knowledgeable books for the masses. Some of them being *Wings of Fire*, *India 2020 - A Vision for the New Millennium*, *My Journey* and *Ignited Minds - Unleashing the power within India*. His latest book is *Spirit of India*, published by Rajpal & Sons. Here, Dr Kalam share his views on his various pursuits and of-course his latest book. Excerpts.

AABP: Tell us something about your new book *Spirit of India*?

Dr Kalam: *Spirit of India* is a result of meeting about 9.5 million youth and interaction with millions of students. This book expresses the dream and the pain of the young in the form of their questions and my answers. One clear message comes out that the young minds can be ignited to work for the national development with a mission.

AABP: What is the role of books in the life of teachers imparting education, besides giving them facts and figures?

Dr Kalam: Books have two components. One - about the subject matter, and the other how the author evolved the thoughts. It is the responsibility of the teacher to study the books and present it in an interesting way, how the great books emanated based on the intellectual level, hard work, and continuous knowledge acquisition.

AABP: Can books help teachers hone their teaching skills?

Dr Kalam: Yes, I have seen, a good teacher, for a one hour lecture in the class room, prepares at-least for three hours referring many books.

AABP: What was the book that most influenced your life—and why?

Dr Kalam: Lillian Watson's *Light from many lamps*. This book is my companion for more than 50 years. I purchased this second hand book from Moore Market, Chennai, for a few rupees, when I was a student. Of course, in later years *Thirukural*

Quick bytes on 'Spirit of India'

- Over 15,000 copies sold in first ten days.
- Being translated into four Indian languages – Hindi, Assamese, Gujarati and Marathi.
- Two foreign publishers have expressed interest in bringing out Chinese and Thai language editions of the book.



APJ Abdul Kalam releasing the book with Meera Johri, managing director, Rajpal & Sons

by a great Saint Poet Thiruvalluvar became my guide.

AABP: We live in a time when young people have numerous choices for entertainment. What would you like to say to people who may be hesitant about reading a book?

Dr Kalam: While addressing a two lakh gathering of parents, students and teachers at the Erode Book Festival in 2009, I gave the following suggestions in a form of an Oath.

- Today onwards, I will start a home library with 20 books and out of which ten books will be children's books.
- My daughter and son will enlarge this home library with 200 books.
- My grand children will lead a great home library to 2000 books.
- I consider our home library as a life long treasure and precious property of our family.
- We will spend at-least one hour at home library to study along with our family members.

AABP: What is your take on the possibility of a rural library project in India, something on the lines of one in China?

Dr Kalam: We have to start a Library with 100 books out of which 50 should be children books, in every Panchayat. That means, about 200,000 rural libraries have to be established. Each district should have at least 10 mobile libraries which can go to village to village on specified days. Each village can also have a book reading volunteer who can coordinate with mobile library and help inculcate the habit of reading amongst children in villages.

AABP: What advice do you give to aspiring writers of any age?

Dr Kalam: Research, Research and Research. I would like to share with the young writers, that when I started writing my first book, I had to meet many people and share their experiences. Also, in those days, I was not having my own library and the present internet capacities were limited in content. I had to refer 40 to 60 good books from various libraries. Hence, research is very important for any aspiring writer.

AABP: What message would you like to give to our readers from the publishing industry to publishers, teachers etc?

Dr Kalam: Books are unseen close friends. When there is pain and cloudy problems, good books touches you and helps removing the pain. Also, when there is elation, good books sustain the happiness.

AABP: Which is going to be your next book, when and on what topic?

Dr Kalam: I am already working on a project. You will come to know soon. ■

'Indomitable Spirit' by APJ Abdul Kalam

Rajpal & Sons has also launched the paperback edition of *Indomitable Spirit*, which is an international bestseller by APJ Abdul Kalam, India's largest selling non-fiction author. The first edition of the book was published in November 2006, when Kalam was the president of India, with initial print run of 25,000 copies. So far, it has been published in eight Indian languages and three foreign languages – Chinese, Thai, and Korean. The 100,000th copy of the book was presented to author Abdul Kalam on July 14, 2010 and marks the launch of the paperback edition of the book. One of the quotes in the book reads, "A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle."

