

My Childhood

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

1. Where was Abdul Kalam's house?

Answer: Abdul Kalam's house was on mosque street in Rameshwaram.

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

Answer: The fact that Abdul Kalam used to read headlines, to know about the WWII and the fact that he assisted his cousin in collecting newspaper bundles thrown from the train indicate that Dinamani is the name of a newspaper.

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

Answer: One of his friends Ramanadha Shasrty became a priest in Rameshwaram, Arvindam went into a business of tour operator and Shivaprakasham became a catering contractor with Southern Railways.

4. How did Abdul Kalam earn his first wages?

Answer: When stoppage of trains was cancelled at Rameshwaram because of WWII, then his cousin asked him for help in collecting newspaper bundles which were thrown from the moving train. This task helped Abdul Kalam earn his first wages.

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

Answer: Before the newspaper episode there was unusually huge demand of tamarind seeds. Abdul Kalam used to collect tamarind seeds and used to sell them for a princely some of one annah a day.

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

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

Answer: The author has described his father as a man following austerity, but giving due care to all needs of his family. He has described his mother as a woman with a large heart who used to cook for everyone visiting the household. Moreover, Abdul Kalam has described himself as a short and thin boy from tall and handsome parents.

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

Answer: He inherited honesty and self discipline from his father. From his mother he inherited a sense of kindness and faith.

III. Answer in two or three paragraphs each.

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?

Answer: Kalam has mentioned Hindus and Muslims as two distinct social groups living in Rameshwaram. They had their different dress codes and rituals. For example Kalam used to wear a cap while his friend Ramanadham used to wear the sacred thread.

(ii) Were they aware only of their differences or did they also naturally share friendships and experiences?

Answer: Kalam has mentioned three childhood friends and all of them have Hindu names, so their friendship is evident. Kalam has also mentioned about bedtime stories from Ramayana being told by his mother. Moreover, Kalam's family used to arrange for carrying idols of Hindu gods. This explains the natural Hindu Muslim cooperation in most parts of India. They were aware of their different identities but they were living harmoniously as people do in any normal society.

(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?

Answer: The first person mentioned was Ramanadhan's father. He, after hearing that the new teacher tried to segregate pupils on the basis of religious divisions, called the teacher and convinced him to revert his decision.

The second person was Shivasubramania Iyer, the science teacher. He invited Kalam to have meal with him. This way he changed his conservative wife's mindset.

(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: The new teacher in Kalam's school tried to create communal differences among students. Science teacher's wife did not want to serve food to Kalam as he was a Muslim boy.

In both incidences the persons who are trying to change the mindsets stood firm on their ground. They did the straight talk and practiced what they preached. This created a change of attitude among people who were of old thoughts.

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: Kalam wanted to get a better ambience to study which was available in the city. So he wanted to leave Rameshawaram. His father encouraged him to leave Rameshwaram. He took example of young seagulls who leave their parents' nest to learn to fly.

His words have very deep meanings. Unlike human beings most of the animals grow on their own after a certain age. This makes them more independent and courageous. Even in the plant kingdom most of the seeds cannot germinate if they are left lying under the mother tree. They get spread by various means and then only they are able to sprout to become a new plant and ultimately a tree.

For human also after a certain age certain degree of responsibility and independence is always helpful in making a perfect adult.

No Men Are Foreign

Remember, no men are strange, no countries foreign
Beneath all uniforms, a single body breathes

This poem is about the fact that all human beings are same. This is a message for armies fighting in the battlefield and a message for those political leaders who instigate wars. The poet says that beneath the uniforms of any colour there is similar body.

Like ours: the land our brothers walk upon
Is earth like this, in which we all shall lie.

Everywhere the land is same upon which all of us walk and all of us will be buried some day under it.

They, too, aware of sun and air and water,
Are fed by peaceful harvests, by war's long winter starv'd.

No matter if it is a friend or an enemy everyone is aware of the same sun, the same air and the same water. Everyone gets the food from the harvest which gets prepared in peaceful lands.

Their hands are ours, and in their lines we read
A labour not different from our own.

Enemy's hands are similar to friend's hands and their lines also tell the same story of hardwork which is similar to ours.

Remember they have eyes like ours that wake
Or sleep, and strength that can be won
By love. In every land is common life
That all can recognise and understand.

Everyone's eyes see dreams in the same way and when awake can ooze love in the similar manner. The common life is same everywhere.

Let us remember, whenever we are told
To hate our brothers, it is ourselves
That we shall dispossess, betray, condemn.
Remember, we who take arms against each other
It is the human earth that we defile.
Our hells of fire and dust outrage the innocence
Of air that is everywhere our own,
Remember, no men are foreign, and no countries strange.

Whenever someone is told to fight a war against the so called enemy, then he is told to betray his own brother and in the process defile the mother earth. The innocent air present everywhere is destroyed by the fire of our internal hells in the process.

JAMES KIRKUP

