

## A Visionary – Well Grounded in Reality

Dr. A. P. J. Kalam in his book “Wings of Fire,” talks in admiration about the visionary scientist Prof. Vikram Sarabhai. In particular, I quote Dr. Kalam’s memories of his interview with Prof. Sarabhai, “...Dr. Sarabhai’s questions did not probe my existing knowledge or skills; rather they were an exploration of the possibilities I was filled with. He was looking at me as if in reference to a larger whole. The entire encounter seemed to me a total moment in truth, in which my dream was enveloped by the larger dream of a bigger person.” [1]

In an era when all eyes were focused on the realities on the ground, one man had an eye on possibilities that lay in outer space. The key aspect of Prof. Sarabhai, is that he knew exactly what was needed to take India to the next frontier, and sure enough, we eventually did get there. Prof. Sarabhai was indeed a visionary who was also firmly grounded in reality.

Dr. Kalam seems to have learnt rather well from the experience of working under the great visionary scientist Prof. Sarabhai. In fact, Dr. Kalam has learnt so well, that he is able to go that step further. Space or missiles are no longer the only frontiers within his realm of influence. Dr. Kalam, has indeed set his eyes firmly on our entire nation.

This may not sound like news to most of us for we have long known about his vision 2020. However, it is only after listening to his acceptance during the honorary degree ceremony (at Carnegie Mellon University) [2], that the firm reality of his vision truly sunk in to my conscience. During his speech, Dr. Kalam presented various models for development that he has just presented to our nation.

Key aspects of this model include the connectivity aspect and the energy security aspect. However, it was the third aspect that spoke a lot about the breadth and power of the vision. Dr. Kalam realizes that the current indices to measure development are not entirely capable of capturing all aspects of a nation’s growth. He mentions that although India is performing well on these indices, we need a new form of measurement. He then introduces the National Prosperity Index (NPI).

“It is evident” he says, “that economic growth is not fully reflected in the quality of life of a large number of people, particularly in rural areas and even in urban areas.” He goes on to include the particulars of the model—  $NPI=a+b+c$ .

Where,

(a) Annual growth rate of GDP

(b) Improvement in quality of life of the needy people

(c) The adoption of a value system derived from our civilization’s heritage in every walk of life which is unique to India.

This, again, might come across as a fairly idealistic model that consists of variables that are hard to quantify (e.g. (b) and (c)). So, Dr. Kalam goes on to list the particulars of those two variables in particular.

“Particularly,” he says:

“‘b’ is a function of availability of housing, good water, nutrition, proper sanitation, quality education, quality healthcare and employment potential. ‘c’ is a function of promoting the joint family system, creation of a spirit of working together, leading a righteous way of life, removing social inequities, and above all promoting a conflict free, harmonious society. This will be indicated by peace in families and communities, reduction in corruption index, reduction in court cases, elimination of violence against children and women and communal tensions.” [2]

At this point, I would like us to recall these familiar words by Rabindranath Tagore, “Let My Country Awake”

“Where the mind is without fear and the head held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come out from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-widening thought and action;  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”

Inspiring and visionary words. They unite you with a great soul who had a sincere dream for our country. These words inspire all of us to act. The words of a poet and a visionary.

It is not surprising that a man who is himself a noted scientist, poet, writer and visionary, was able to translate those famous words we all remember so well, into variables of an equation for our nation.

A visionary sees beyond what is apparent, beyond that which is measurable. But science (or at least modern science) is all about measurement—seeing is everything. To measure the immeasurable—therein lays Dr. Kalam’s contribution.

The variables (b) and (c) are something that has also concerned us at Silent Change, where we have often spoken of a “beautiful society” [3] [4]. Silent Change was inspired by both, Dr. Kalam’s vision and our history as a civilization. An incremental GDP growth rate was not comfort enough for us. We wanted our country to truly awake.

Today I can say with quantifiable certainty—our history has shown us the way and our leaders are actively setting the path in stone. It is left to us to awake<sup>1</sup> and walk this path with them.

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**References:**

- [1] Dr. A. P. J. Kalam & Arun Tiwari (1999). *Wings of Fire*. University Press, India.
- [2] Dr. A. P. J. Kalam (2007). *Transforming billion people to prosperity*. Acceptance Speech during Honorary Degree Ceremony McConomy Auditorium [Rangos Hall], Pittsburgh, USA  
16/Oct/2007 : Pittsburgh, USA. Retrieved from <http://www.abdulkalam.com/kalam/index.jsp> on 18th October 2007.
- [3] SilentChange- <http://www.silentchange.org/articles/html/entrepreneurship.html>
- [4] <http://www.silentchange.org/articles/html/pessimist.html>

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Kalam realizes the value of the individual and youth in India. In just two month’s since retiring from presidency, he has visited more than 200,000 citizens of our country