

Chapter- 6

My Childhood

STUDY NOTES

- This is the journey of a person from a middle- class Muslim family in Rameswaram to the President’s House. The journey of APJ Abdul Kalam was not smooth. He had to struggle and face several challenges as he moved ahead in life. In his childhood, he was greatly influenced by his parents, his teachers, and his friends.
- Kalam earned his first wages by helping his cousin, Samsuddin, who distributed newspapers in Rameswaram.
- He had three close friends – Ramanadha Sastry, Aravindan and Sivaprakashan. They all belonged to Orthodox Hindu brahmin families. In the story he speaks about a very unfortunate event that affected him and his friends very badly. A teacher showed discrimination in the classroom by separating him from his close friends just because he was a Muslim. The problem was resolved by Ramanadha’s Father, the chief priest of the Rameswaram temple.
- Abdul was also greatly influenced by his science teacher, Sivasubramania Iyer. He learnt the lesson of breaking social barriers from him. Iyer invited Kalam to his home for a meal. His wife was an orthodox brahmin who refused to serve food to a Muslim boy, in her ritually pure kitchen. Iyer served him with his own hands and sat down beside him to eat his meal. He convinced his wife to serve meal with her own hands and thus, was successful in changing the conservative attitude of his wife.
- For higher education, he sought permission from his father to leave Rameswaram and study at the district headquarters in Ramanathapuram. His father quoted Khalil Gibran to his hesitant mother by saying that their children are not theirs but life’s longing for itself. They come through us but not from us. We may give them our love but not our thoughts for they have their own thoughts.

