

Kazi Ghiyas: A Musician in Painting

by Ziaul Karim

(Continued from the last week)
KAZI Ghiyas is never an easy subject to interview. His conversation mirrors his abstract painting style which is lyrical yet complex and shrouded in esoteric beauty.

His nervousness as an interviewee probably stems from chronic shyness in childhood and he still avoids such questions relating his commissioned work and the pecuniary figure associated with it. Though Ghiyas enjoys to be among people he is cautiously avoided by many mostly because he is straightforward and does not hide his feelings about anything. His detractors consider him to be pompous and arrogant and completely lacking in humility.

It turned out to be a blessing in disguise, for he is seldom visited by people when he is in Bangladesh and can make the most of his time concentrating on his larger canvas. For a couple of years now he has been coming back to his own soil and his studio regularly to spend some time away from the Tokyo's claustrophobic environment to the lush green space of his atelier to work on larger canvas. He is now signed up with Marunouchi Gallery for the next 6 years and for a series of shows in America.

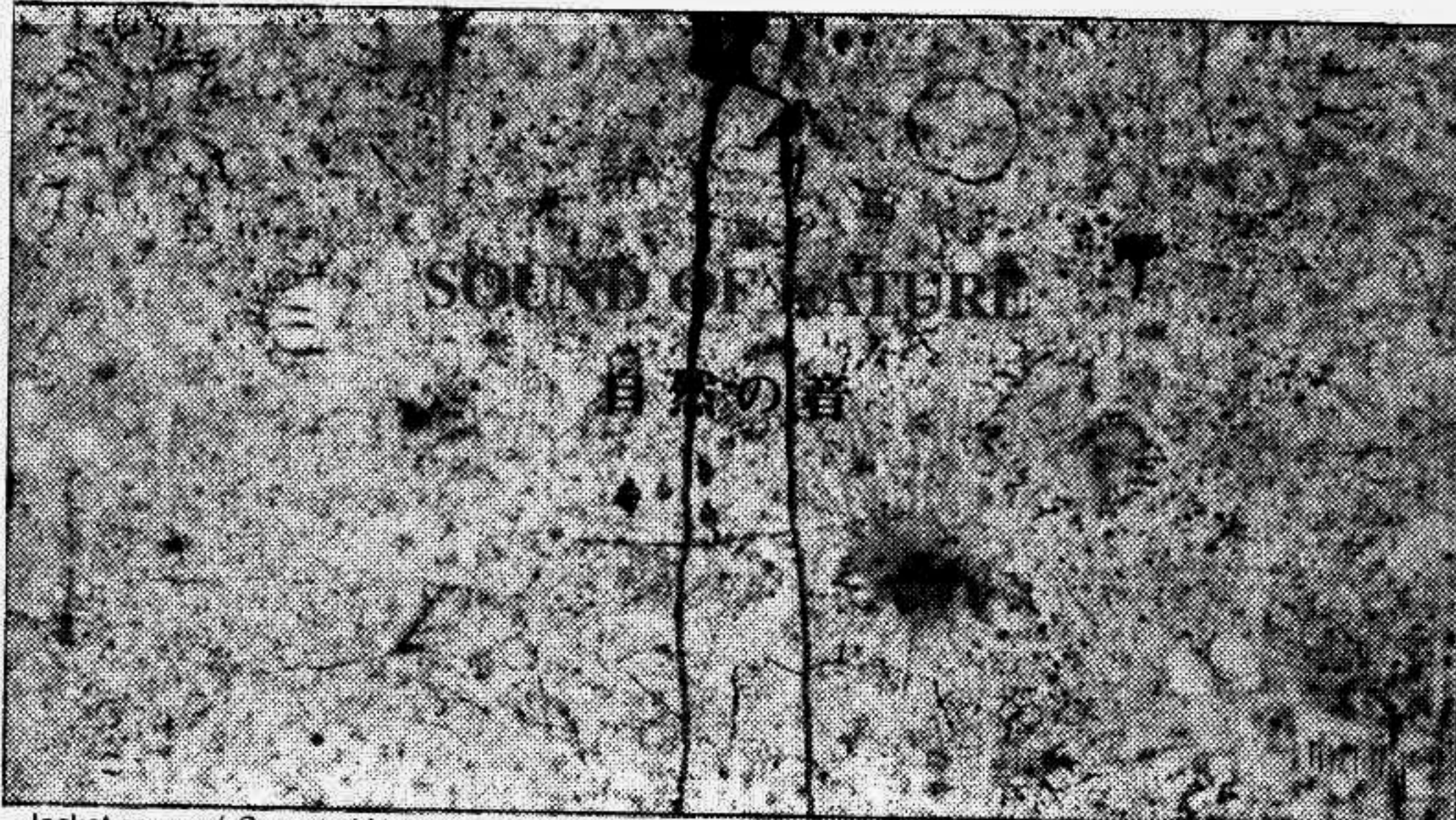
"I don't feel like working on larger canvas in my small studio in Tokyo. The sense of space is very important for me," says Ghiyas in his usual fumbling manner.

Is work place as important as the source of inspiration?

"Yes indeed. The place where you are staying must have a bearing on your work. See, when I stay in Japan my smaller works find their expression smoothly. But when I am in Savar, I don't get much pleasure working on the smaller canvas."

What really awakened Ghiyas's interest in lyrical abstraction?

It was through an encounter with the works of Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, their style left an indelible mark on my artistic psyche. But it is in nature and the landscape of my country form where I draw my inspiration and it is also from there that I capture its sensual pleasures. But by nature I don't mean the nature we can see and feel but the image of it in my spiritual being," Ghiyas declares triumphantly. "It is the artistic desire of a poet or a painter or a



Jacket cover of *Sound of Nature* published by famous Japanese imprint Chikoma Sobo. The book has over 400 colour plates and write-ups by leading Japanese critics on Ghiyas's life and works

musician is to express their admiration for the beauty of nature.

Ghiyas's works are now as spontaneous as a fruit to a tree. But it was not the case with his early works. He was more crafty and careful about his designed structures. He used to think hard about some images and put a lot of efforts in constructing shapes into his head before being actually working on them on the canvas.

So what was the turning point?

"My exposure to Greek-born American artist Cy Tombly in a museum in Madrid was the eye opener for me. I am not the same Ghiyas after that visual experience. His works inspired me about playfulness: Now I constantly play with colour, shape and everything that comes my way to express myself. I'm much more free now as a painter."

Ghiyas was the first Bangladeshi to be awarded prestigious Mombasu scholarship from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in 1975. It was basically the large number of art lovers of the country which inspired him to settle in Japan. But when asked how he was affected by Japanese culture he says shrugging his shoulder, "I don't know. The only meaningful language I can speak is painting. Maybe my works holds the answer to this question". But even a casual onlooker would say his canvas is very different compared to anything Japanese. Maybe the influence is spiritual in his sense of minimalism. When Pakistani military regime un-

leashed the most mindless and brutal attack of the history on the innocent civilians of East Pakistan now Bangladesh on the dreadful night of 25th March 1971, Ghiyas was a student at recently opened MA degree (mainly at the initiative of artist Rashid Chowdhury) in painting at Chittagong University. Who were his contemporaries then? Aparajito Bangla fame Abdullah Khalid and Dr Rafiq were my close compatriots from Dhaka Art College.

As the war of independence started what did he do? "Well, firstly I fled Chittagong came to Dhaka and from there to my birthplace Faridpur. I came to know that one of my friend is leaving for Calcutta. I joined him and we reached the neighbouring city on a motorbike two days later. There I was with external publicity department of the temporary Bangladesh mission for a while before being baptized as a freedom fighter. I was in Satkhira which is known more as sector 9".

How come the reflection of war so conspicuously absent in your oeuvre? "My country is always present in my work. If you take Bangladesh out of me, I don't exist as a painter. The nature of my country with its infinite variety construct the elements of my painting. Look at my composition they are invariably inspired by the traditional motifs of my country. I paint Bangladesh in Japan. To create you have to look at from a distance to your subject. I do that. I see my country from Japan and paint it."

(To be continued)

Girish Karnad: A Man for All Seasons and Senses

by Sudhamahi Reghunathan

In the television adaptation of R.K. Narayan's "Swami and his Friends," he came through as a traditional man. In Ketan Mehta's "Mirch Masala" or Shyam Benegal's "Manthan", he was earthy and sensual. His play "Tale Danda" sets him apart as a serious thinker. And, as a director he is, perhaps, a narrator par excellence. He is Girish Karnad, the Kannada playwright who has been awarded the 1998 Jnanpith, India's highest literary honour. The Jnanpith award, conferred by the all-India cultural organisation Bharatiya Jnanpith since 1944, is given to the best creative writing by an Indian citizen in any of the languages included in Schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution. The selection for the award this year was made by a committee headed by Karan Singh, former Ambassador to the United States. Currently, Karnad is in a small village called Mooduvalli in Karnataka's Thirthahalli 'taluka' (division), where he is directing a teleserial and film based on the work of Kuvubu, another Kannada writer. The coincidence that has struck people, including Karnad's wife, Saraswathi, is that Kuvubu was the first litterateur to be honoured with the annual Jnanpith award. Karnad is the 34th. Born at Mathern, Maharashtra, on May 19, 1938, Karnad had most of his education in Karnataka. For a man so varied and creative in his approach to life, the subjects Karnad chose for his graduation come as a surprise. He received his Bachelor in Arts degree in mathematics and statistics in 1958, of course topping Karnataka University!

The subjects for his Masters degree, however, indicate how the man of numbers fitted words into his calculations. He received his Masters in philosophy, politics and economics in 1963 from Oxford University, while on a Rhodes scholarship. Even at Oxford, Karnad pursued a variety of interests. He was president of Magdalen Junior Common Room during 1962-63 and president of Oxford Union Society in 1963. He then worked as a manager at the Oxford University Press (OUP), Madras, from 1963 to 1970. It was during this time that he

wrote two plays. Perhaps, the pull of the theatre proved too hard to resist, and Karnad decided to give up his job at the OUP. In 1970, Karnad won the two-year Homi Bhabha fellowship for creative work in folk theatre, and in 1972, he won the Sangeet Natak Academy award for playwrights. In fact, the Jnanpith committee is reported to have taken into consideration his literary works, including plays such as "Yayati" and "Tughlaq." The play "Yayati" was written in 1961 and was his first. Karnad has gone on record saying that the pressures of his own situation provided the content for the father-son conflict in the play, which won the Mysore state award in 1962.

The play was an indication of things to come. Although his fond desire was to become a poet writing in English, the Kannada play "nailed me to my past." His second play, "Tughlaq," also written while Karnad was still working with the OUP, narrates the story of Mohammed Bin Tughlaq, the medieval king who ruled in Delhi. The play is entirely historical. Seeing himself as a committed left-wing playwright like Bertolt Brecht, Karnad feels that the audience could respond enthusiastically to "Tughlaq" since it evoked part of their own cultural history. Karnad's writings have their roots in social, emotional or political crises. In fact, it is these that inspire him. Critics say what makes Karnad's work really exciting is that he is able to place history and mythology in the context of present-day issues. That is precisely what Karnad says he sets out to do. While reconciling the past with the present, Karnad has his eyes well set on the future too, for he tackles questions that are relevant at all times and for all times. He chooses a localised theme, but generalises its import.

Karnad was influenced by Basavanna, the founder of the Lingayat cult in Karnataka. The Lingayats are considered upper caste in the Hindu system. This experience helped him discern how certain movements remain with the people, long after they have actually passed into history. Therefore, he feels that the notion of Indian theater, where language and location do not matter, is

viable, because a lot of history and mythology are common to the Indian ethos. For instance, the Ayodhya issue—the destruction of a mosque in 1992 by Hindu fanatics who claimed it was built on the ruins of a temple—had led to "Tale Danda," since this seemed to be a question facing people of all ages. The other plays which he wrote in the 1970s and 1980s were "Hayavadana," "Anjumallige," "Hittina Hunja" and "Nagmandala." The play "Agni Mattu Male" was written in 1995. Each of his plays was a success. "Hayavadana" won him the Kamaladevi Award of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh for the "Best Indian Play" in 1972. "Tale Danda" won him the Sahitya Academy award in 1994. Even while he was writing his plays, he started working with the visual medium too. In 1969, he scripted and played the lead role in the hit Kannada movie "Samskara." The film won the national award for the best Indian film in 1970. Subsequent films that he acted in and directed included, "Vamsha Vrikshawere" (which won the national award for excellence in direction), "Kaadu" (which was the Indian entry at the International Film Festival in New Delhi in 1975) and "Ondanodu Kaaladalli" (which was the Indian entry at the International Film Festival in New Delhi and won the national award for the "Best Kannada Film" in 1979). Other works included "Utsav" (Hindi, the Indian entry at the 1984 London Film Festival) "Woh Ghar" (television play in Hindi) and "Cheluvu" (Hindi script and direction). There are several Hindi feature films, television films and serials in which Karnad has acted for directors like Mrinal Sen, Satyajit Ray or Shyam Benegal.

The Jnanpith award is just an addition to a very long list of awards the Kannada playwright has won. He was awarded the Padmashri in 1972 and the Padmabhushan in 1992. In 1994, he was awarded a Doctor of Letters degree by Karnataka University, was honoured by the Karnataka Sahitya Academy and elected fellow of the Sangeet Natak Academy. He won the Gubbi Veeranna Award of the government of Karnataka in 1996.

— India Abroad News Service

A Limited Perspective

by R. Ramachandran

Wings of Fire: An Autobiography by A.P.J. Abdul Kalam with Arun Tiwari; Universities Press (India) Ltd, Hyderabad, 1999; pages 180, Rs. 200.

PUBLISHED in the wake of the nuclear tests conducted by India in May 1998, of which Avul Pakir Janulabdeen Abdul Kalam was one of the key architects, one expected this autobiography to provide personal insights into the scientific, technological and politico-strategic compulsions that led to India's nuclearisation. Sadly, the book falls well short of that. Indeed, but for a passing mention in the epilogue, the nuclear tests do not figure in the book at all.

In fact, the book omits the period after 1991, when Kalam assumed the office of Scientific Adviser to the Defence Minister and Secretary of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). The autobiography is a major disappointment on this count - besides on other counts - because only since Kalam came close to the corridors of power in New Delhi and emerge as a major public figure. It was only after he moved from Hyderabad, where he was the Director of the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL) for nine years, to head the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP) that was launched in 1982, that he began to play an active role in the country's science and technology (S&T) system through his Vision 2020 Programme at the Technology Information and Forecasting Council (TIFAC) of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the Self Reliance Mission in Defence Systems, 1995-2005. The book fails to give any insights into Kalam's ideas in shaping these major programmes which, he says in the epilogue, will make India a "developed nation", strong and prosperous. (Even his other book - titled Vision 2020 and co-authored with Y.S. Rajan - that was released last year did not go a great deal beyond what had been set as goals for the country by the task force studies in 17 different disciplines by groups of scientists).

The book reflects Kalam's reminiscences on turning 60, as narrated to Arun Tiwari, his former associate at

In the book, Kalam has dwelt at length on how Agni was conceived as a delivery system for conventional warheads. We now know that Agni project is being continued as a delivery system for nuclear warheads. In a post-Pokhran interview, he had remarked that Agni "can deliver all kinds of warheads, even flowers." As a participant in the nuclear weaponisation programme, he is certain to have contributed to the changed strategic perception vis-a-vis Agni. But we are not to know how and when this altered perception evolved. Indeed, the book is remarkable for the things it leaves unsaid about the events that Kalam was closely associated with than what it actually says.

the DRDL, on the important events that have shaped his life. Tiwari, who was associated with the Air Force development of the Akash missile, one of the five missiles in the IGMDP established in 1982 under Kalam, is currently helping realise Kalam's vision of developing cost-effective medical devices through the use of spin-offs from defence research and development, at the Cardiovascular Technology Institute, Hyderabad.

Why Tiwari chose to put to print only now what he penned eight years ago remains unexplained because these eight years would seem to be the most eventful years of Kalam's life. It was during this period that the major DRDO programmes - the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), the Main Battle Tank (MBT) and the IGMDP itself - witnessed their critical phases and, with the exception of the surface-to-surface missile Prithvi, none of them is close to being produced for the Services. If one is looking for answers to questions regarding problems faced by these programmes - technological, industrial or political - the answers are not in the book. In the epilogue, Kalam says: "This book is interwoven with my deep involvement with India's first Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV-3) and Agni (the intermediate range ballistic missile under the IGMDP) programmes, an involvement which eventually led to my participation in the recent important national event related to the nuclear tests in May." It is generally believed that it was the scientists (Kalam and R. Chidambaram) who had been pressing successive governments since 1995 to go ahead with the tests. Was it really so? If yes, why did Kalam think that the nuclear tests were a necessity? Unfortunately, the book provides no answers. One gets the impression that it is precisely to avoid the predicament of

answering this question that the book has been published now - before the consequences of the nuclear tests begin to overshadow all the other events in Kalam's life.

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Dev was not the Director even during the last ASLV-D4 flight. PERHAPS it is Kalam's good nature that inhibits him from passing judgment on anyone. He only speaks good about all people. If he does have any criticisms to voice, he has kept them to himself. However, when he describes the events that followed the successful launch of SLV-3, one can sense his bitterness. In spite of the successful launch and the Padma Bhushan that followed, he did not continue as the Director of the SLV project. He left the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and moved to the DRDO. Why did he choose to move when major launch vehicle programmes such as the ASLV

and the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) were on the anvil in ISRO? There are no clear answers to these questions. In an interview he gave a business magazine recently, he said: "Basically it was because of the urge to design and develop a missile system... At ISRO, the feeling grew in a sort of integrated way. I had felt that missile was the right thing to do..."

The book brings out Kalam's fascination with missiles from the day he happened to see a painting at the offices of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) depicting Tipu Sultan's army battling with missiles. At ISRO, he carried out conceptualisation studies on Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) and Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) after the SLV's success. In the book he says that his recommendation for building 1.8 m diameter solid motor was never considered, but "it paved the way for the formulation of the Re-Entry Experiment (REX) which, much later on, became Agni." But his introspective remarks about the next SLV-3 flight, which he witnessed from outside the Control Centre for the first time, are revealing, albeit in a subdued sort of way. "Was I hurt at the coldness of the new environment? Perhaps yes, but I was willing to accept what I couldn't change. The unpalatable truth I had to face was that by becoming the focus of media attention, I had become the cause of bitterness among some of my senior colleagues, all of who had equally contributed to the success of SLV-3. And because bitterness was real I had to reason it out. But can these things be reasoned out?" It would seem that Kalam took the first opportunity to move out of ISRO following the bitter aftermath of the SLV success. Kalam, however, refrains from elaborating on the issue. (Incidentally, there is some

editorial lapse around these parts in the book where there is some repetition, (pages 102-103).

There are also a few other bloomers like "Ammonium percholate", "Impact diode" and "Diamond missile." Another striking fact is that Kalam does not talk about how the team zeroed in on the third design (SLV-3). Did Werner von Braun's remarks result in some changes? Kalam does not also talk about how the various missile designs in IGMDP were arrived at. The book implies that the decision to launch an integrated programme was taken overnight. What gave Kalam the conviction that five missiles could be developed concurrently? Does Prithvi belong to the Devil heritage? There is one paradox in ISRO's and the DRDO's rocket programmes. ISRO seems to have concentrated on solid fuel instead of liquid fuel when the DRDO should have followed that route because solid fuel is good for missiles and liquid for launchers. And how did Agni, Kalam's dream, come to be designed as a two-stage rocket with both solid and liquid fuel, and what was the basis on which SLV was chosen as its first stage? Kalam prefers not to provide these details. NOTWITHSTANDING these omissions, the autobiography does provide a good deal of insight into Kalam's nature, both as a human being and as a man-manager of great patience, besides his perseverance and judgment. It is true that technology management in India has acquired a new paradigm following the IGMDP's approach to tapping talent from across the country rather than from within the confines of a given organisation. Kalam talks at length about how his understanding of human nature and what he calls an ability to communicate laterally, helped bring together disparate groups to work on a single mission, with

dedication.

Kalam may have only had a peripheral interest in a book on management he found in a hotel lobby while waiting to meet Vikram Sarabhai. But it seems to have triggered in him a sub-conscious and continuing interest in managing technology and has successfully evolved a paradigm that suits the Indian context. Kalam would have us believe that God willed it so. Indeed, this intense facet of religiosity and his unbending faith in God comes across loud and clear in the book. He says in his introduction: "All these rockets and missiles are His work through a small person called Kalam in order to tell the several million mass of India to not ever feel small or helpless. We are born with a divine fire in us. Our efforts should be to give wings to this fire and fill the world with the glow of its Goodness." Another facet is his interest in literature; he freely quotes from various poems. There is also a sprinkling of Kalam's own verses in the book. His verse, "If you want to leave your footprints On the sands of time Do not drag your feet perhaps sums up his attitude towards commitment to achievement. The disappointing end to his successes with the hovercraft project, the Rocket Assisted Take-Off (RATO) project, and the re-designing of the SLV fourth stage for the French Diamant rocket, did not deter Kalam's conviction, confidence and will to reach any new goal he set for himself. Was carrying out a nuclear test one such goal? We may never know. But his words will certainly inspire young people and enable them to shed the "all-pervasive self-defeatist attitude in the Indian scientific community" - as Kalam himself would like them to. It may be Kalam's simplicity (call it naivete) and his ascetic existence that are the key to his achievements in whatever tasks he took up. The book is certainly a window to the man's character if not into his technological mind which many readers would have expected the autobiography to reveal. Perhaps that was Kalam's intention. One only wishes that it had addressed his experiences over the last eight important years as well.

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