

NCERT QUESTIONS WITH SOLUTIONS

Thinking About the Text

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

1. Where was Abdul Kalam's house?

Ans. Abdul Kalam's house was on the Mosque Street in Rameswaram in the former Madras state.

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

Ans. Dinamani could be the name of a newspaper because Abdul Kalam tried to trace the stories of the Second World War, which his brother-in-law told him, in the headlines in Dinamani.

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

Ans. Abdul Kalam had three close friends in school - Ramanadha Sastry, Aravindan and Sivaprakasan. Ramanadha Sastry took over the priesthood of the Rameswaram temple from his father; Aravindan started a business of arranging transport for visiting pilgrims and Sivaprakasan became a catering contractor for the Southern Railways.

4. How did Abdul Kalam earn his first wages?

Ans. The Second World War led to the suspension of the train-halt at Rameswaram station. As a result, newspapers had to be bundled up and thrown out from the moving train. This forced Kalam's cousin Samsuddin, who distributed newspapers in Rameswaram, to look for a helping hand to catch the bundles. Abdul Kalam took up this position and earned his first wages in the process.

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

Ans. Yes, he had earned some money when he started helping his cousin. When the Second World War broke out, there was a sudden demand for tamarind seeds in the market. He collected the seeds and sold them at a provision shop on Mosque Street. Usually, a day's collection earned him one Anna.

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?

Ans. (i) Kalam's father, Jainulabdeen neither had much formal education nor much wealth. Despite these disadvantages, he possessed great innate wisdom and a true generosity of spirit. He avoided all inessential comforts and luxuries.

(ii) Kalam's mother, Ashiamma was an ideal helpmate to her husband. She fed many people every day. The author was quite certain that far more outsiders ate with them than all the members of their own family put together.

(iii) The author describes himself as one of many children. He was a short boy with rather undistinguished looks, born to tall and handsome parents. He had a very secure childhood, both materially and emotionally.

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

Ans. The author inherited honesty and self-discipline from his father and faith in goodness and deep kindness from his mother.

III. Discuss these questions in class with your teacher and then write down your answers 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 (for example, by the way they dressed)?
- (ii) Were they aware only of their differences or did they also naturally share friendships and experiences? (Think of the bedtime stories in Kalam's house; of who his friends were; and of what used to take place in the pond near his house.)
- (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?
- (iv) Narrate two incidents that show how differences can be created, and also how they can be resolved. How can people change their attitudes?

Ans. (i) The social groups that he mentioned were the Hindus and the Muslims. Yes, these groups were easily identifiable. Abdul Kalam wore a cap, which marked him as a Muslim. His friend, Ramanadha Sastry, wore the sacred thread as he was a Hindu.

(ii) Kalam has mentioned three childhood friends and all of them were Hindus. So their friendship is evident. They naturally shared friendships and experiences. Abdul Kalam was Muslim and his friends were from orthodox Hindu Brahmin families. However, they were very close friends. During the annual Shri Sita Rama Kalyanam ceremony, Kalam's family arranged boats with a special platform for carrying idols of the Lord from the temple to the marriage site. Events from the Ramayana and from the life of the Prophet were the bedtime stories his mother and grandmother would tell the children of their family. All these incidents show that different social groups naturally co-inhabited Rameswaram.

(iii) There were two people who were very aware of the differences among them. One was the new teacher who came to the class when Kalam was in the fifth standard and did not let him sit with Ramanadha Sastry who was a Brahmin. Also, the wife of Sivasubramania Iyer (his science teacher) was very conservative and did not allow Kalam to eat in her pure Hindu kitchen. The people who tried to bridge these differences were Lakshmana Sastry (Ramanadha's father) and Sivasubramania Iyer (his science teacher).

(iv) When Kalam was in the fifth standard, a new teacher came to their class. Kalam always sat in the front row next to Ramanadha Sastry. The teacher could not digest the fact that a Hindu priest's son was sitting with a Muslim boy. The teacher immediately asked Kalam to sit on the back bench. Both Kalam and Ramanadha were unhappy with this development. When they narrated this story to their respective parents, Lakshmana Sastry summoned the teacher and told him that he should not spread the idea of social inequality and communal intolerance in the minds of innocent children. The teacher apologized and regretted his behaviour. In another incident Kalam's science teacher Sivasubramania Iyer invited him for a meal to his house. His wife, who was very conservative, was horrified at the idea of a Muslim boy eating in her pure Hindu kitchen. Consequently, she refused to serve him in her kitchen. However, Iyer was not disturbed by his wife's behaviour. Instead, he served Kalam with his own hands and sat down beside him to eat his meal. When Kalam was leaving, Sivasubramania Iyer again invited him for dinner the next weekend. On observing Kalam's hesitation, he told him not to get upset and said that once one has decided to change the system, such problems have to be confronted. When Kalam visited the house next week, Sivasubramania Iyer's wife took him inside her kitchen and served him food with her own hands. Hence, in this way, differences can be resolved and people's attitudes can be changed.

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?

Ans. (i) Kalam wanted to leave Rameswaram for further studies. He wanted to study at the district headquarters in Ramanathapuram.

(ii) Kalam's father said that he knew that one day Kalam had to go away to grow. He gave the analogy of a seagull that flies across the sun alone and without a nest. He then quoted Khalil Gibran the Persian philosopher to Kalam's mother saying that nobody's children were their own children. They were the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through their parents, but not from them. They may give them their love, but not their thoughts as the children have their own thoughts.

(iii) His words meant that children have to be separated from their parents at some stage in life. They have to be let free so that they can realize their thoughts and goals. A seagull flies away alone and finds its own food and nest. Parents can nurture their kids with love, but they cannot give them their thoughts. The children have their own thoughts. They should themselves develop these thoughts naturally. Kalam's father spoke these words because Kalam's mother was hesitant about Kalam leaving Rameswaram.