

## Utilitarian Knowledge with a Rhetorical Flourish: An Analytical Study of Dr. APJ AbdulKalam's Selected Speeches

Farhana Easmin Mitu<sup>1</sup>  
Musfeeka Deeba<sup>2</sup>

***Abstract:** This article examines some of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam's selected speeches from thematic, stylistic and linguistic point of view. The intended themes of the speeches have been analyzed with utilitarian, moral, philosophical, social and educational significance. The styles of his oration, usage of rhetorical figures and other literary elements, diction, and structures of language also have been elaborately explained with scrutinizing eyes. The study observes the speeches containing worthy messages and valuable suggestions with pragmatic and inspiring value blended with appealing rhetoric and wonderful linguistic expressions that simultaneously help the audience to be a skilled social being to fitly implement the materialistic value of life, and to be enchanted and entertained as well. The glowing light from each of his famous quotes unceasingly spread the beam of hope and aspirations among the young and old, deprived or frustrated, worried or contended alike.*

***Keywords:** Motivational speeches, utilitarian knowledge, educational significance, rhetoric*

### 1. Introduction

Delivering speeches on political, social, cultural, institutional and motivational issues, though, is a very common phenomenon in the world since time immemorial, inspirational speeches which charm the audience with their authenticity, universal content, utilitarian purposes, and appealing styles including word choice, use of rhetorical figures and linguistic presentation of the speeches produce a long term beneficial effect on the minds of the

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<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Bangladesh University of Business & Technology (BUBT)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Bangladesh University of Business & Technology (BUBT)

audience across the world. These speeches also play a fundamental role in the educational, working, recreational, social, and even in better economic lives of people and of a community. Among hundreds of famous orators, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam is the one whose uneven and struggling life throws rays of wisdom in him, what he later manages to reveal to the public with his charismatic presentations. Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (15 October 1931 – 27 July 2015) was a man of versatile genius i.e. the 11th President of India who served India from 2002 to 2007 (“APJ Abdul Kalam,” n.d.); an inspiring orator whose motivating speeches always work as a catalyst for the progress of both the individual and the country; a great scientist having an educational background on science and technology; a truth-seeker who always suggests logical and practical solutions to the obstacles in the flourish of individual’s potentiality as well as in the process of betterment of the society; and “a man with great sensitivity to art and literature”. Most importantly, he was an educationist who dreamt for a modern concept of education which “prepares an individual to achieve the desired destinations of empowering intellectual capacities” and “molds individual’s innate worthy qualities of personality into utility skill” that empowers the particular individual to attain a sustained survival and spend a purposeful and satisfying life accepted and needed by our societies (Rupainwar, 2011, p.1-6).

However, this paper attempts to explore some of Kalam’s selected speeches with a view to analyzing their thematic, linguistic, and stylistic aspects, and more specifically, it is going to reveal:

- whether the content of the speeches serve utilitarian purposes
- whether the ideas in the speeches provide intrinsic value of education
- how much motivating the oratory style of his speeches is
- the choice of words, and presentation of linguistic structures
- the art of using rhetorical figures and other literary elements

To accomplish the study the present paper, qualitative in nature, has comprised philosophical approach to the analysis and interpretation of the content; and analytical approach to language, style and rhetoric of the speeches of Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. Both the primary sources including the writings and correspondence of Dr.Kalam, original videos of speeches etc., and the secondary sources e.g. research articles and famous quotations related to the study available on websites, biographies, research reports on APJ

Abdul Kalam etc. have been observed to gather information and to scan the available literature.

## **2. Thematic Analysis (Interpretative and Philosophical Approach)**

The speeches of Dr. Kalam are replete with profound knowledge of life and the universe, and with diverse philosophies that serve readers' or listeners' psychological as well as practical needs as they are presented with pleasing styles and contain utilitarian substance. Utilitarianism is concerned with the morally best action 'that makes the most overall happiness or utility' ("Utilitarianism," n.d.). Dr. Kalam's speeches always deal with well-being of an entity e.g. of an individual, an institution, a society, and a country. There is a clear indication of how to perform the best action and thus maximize the utility whatever in one's self, education, workplace, social context, and in the whole span of life. For instance:

**Quote-1:** "Success is a vehicle, which moves on a wheel named hard work, but the journey is impossible without the fuel named self confidence." ("200+ Ultimate Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam Quotes Collection," n.d.)

The analogy of 'success' and 'a vehicle' (in Quote 1) very interestingly provides a concrete shape of an abstract idea to the readers' mind. The imagination instinctively hits one's brain with the clear shape of a vehicle, its wheel, fuel and its speedy advancement on a road. This is how anyone can relate the significance of diligence and confidence, and understand the value of knowledge that is to look back on one's own self to make one's self-esteem firm which communally makes the life's journey smoother to reach its destination i.e. 'success'.

The diction used in Dr. Kalam's speeches gives an indication to avoid procrastination and frustration but to gear up oneself in practical life. For example,

### **Quote-2:**

"Rivers never go reverse. So try to live like river. Forget past and focus on future." ("200+ Ultimate Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam Quotes Collection," n.d.)

**Quote-3:**

“You have to fight the hardest battle until you arrive at your destined place.” (Kalam, 2015) The image of rivers’ one way journey, and changing of their courses if they are threatened by natural or artificial obstacles ( in Quote 2), twitches our wit and reminds us not to indulge time only by gaping backwards. ‘Forgetting past and focusing on future’ is a common maxim that has been quoted from the ancient time, but his selection of images from natural aspects shakes ourselves from inside and enables us to move on. Besides, Quote-3 sorts out four weapons for fighting the battle. They are aiming high, sustainability to acquire knowledge, hard work, and perseverance to realize the achievement. The continuous endeavor for work until reaching the destination here echoes the ideologies of struggle and intuitiveness of life without surrendering oneself into failure.

Dr. Kalam’s speeches are always touched with practical and utilitarian philosophy i.e. ‘pragmatism’ which motivates the audience to become individually competent and socially efficient so that they can achieve social and individual welfare (Shawal, n.d.). For all time he dreams of the young generation to be the leader of the future. Creativity of youth is always appreciated and celebrated with great value. With a fixed vision in mind the youth are always determined to find their ways and audaciously take any risk. Their pragmatic steps in life make them socially efficient and keep influential precepts for the nation. His small words in **Quote-4:** “The ignited minds of the youth are the most powerful resources on earth.” (“Ignited Minds,” n.d.) really ignite spirits. His book titled Ignited Minds ends with a song of youth where he says, “I realize, a small aim is a crime.”

More specifically, Dr. Kalam approaches the field of education with practical zeal. He constantly dreams for a modern education which will make learning purposeful and impart a sense of reality in it, and thus prepare a skilled generation that can contribute to the development of one’s ability as well as of the society and the country to a large extent as observed in **Quote-5.** All knowledge, as also viewed by James Seth (1901), having a practical utility and social value, and being found in the field of activity and life, is indubitable (p. 341). Besides, in **Quote-6** below, nobility is highlighted in the teaching profession as teachers are the architect of polished personality, the lighthouse of merit, and guides for fortune. A high responsibility is infused

in the profession and hence the priority of education is signified. The dignity of a teacher is enhanced when the word is paralleled with the word 'shaper' of the mankind. The educational value of this speech grows innate respect in the minds of common people towards this profession, simultaneously makes the teachers aware of the divine duties of them to the society.

**Quote-5:**

"The purpose of education is to make good human beings with skill and expertise. Enlightened human beings can be created by teachers." ("200+ Ultimate Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam Quotes Collection," n.d.).

**Quote-6:**

"Teaching is a very noble profession that shapes the character, caliber and future of an individual." ("200+ Ultimate Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam Quotes Collection," n.d.)

In one of his addresses to the future citizens of Dakshina Kannada at a Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) program, Dr. Kalam says, "Knowledge equals to creativity, righteousness and courage. These three things together make 'enlighten citizen'." (Kalam, 2017) **(Quote-7)**. This speech actually emphasizes achieving different domains of learning i.e. cognitive, affective and psychomotor. In fact, most of Kalam's speeches provide knowledge to acquire mental and intellectual skills categorized as 'Cognitive domain' (Benjamin Bloom, 1956); make the audience intrinsically motivated to learn, develop readers' attitudes and willingness to receive and response, and take a genuine interest in their work categorized as 'Affective Domain' (David Krathwohl, 1956) as the speeches are always presented rhetorically and in pleasing manner and have beneficiary effect in practical life; and finally, emphasize 'Psychomotor domain' (Anita Harrow, 1972) i.e. acquiring new physical skills and performing the best action as well (qtd. in Wilson, n.d.).

However, in the modern world education is expected to impart skills to be better equipped to meet the challenges of life, to promote general powers of the mind, to make an individual more civilized and cultured, to promote rational thinking and civic sense, to preserve moral and spiritual values, to establish harmony in social and personal relationships, to enhance constructive

participation in sustaining development and equitable social order and processes (Rupainwar, 2011, p.2-3). The utility of education, DR. Kalam observes, is not making a person merely a professional of any kind, but lies in providing intrinsic values. For example, along with the individual development the following quote (Quote-8) has bigger purpose to re-form the society. A very intimate link can be observed between the development of a person and the development of a nation.

**Quote-8:**

“When there’s beauty in the character, there’s harmony in the home.  
When there’s harmony in the home, there’s order in the nation.  
When there’s order in the nation, there’s peace of the world.” (Kalam, 2017)

Here the chronology of ‘character-home-nation-world’ shows how a person’s self-purification leads to the world’s happiness, but at the same time this points out the impossibility of one existence without the existence of the other. Here the parallelism is shown by ‘beauty of character’ with ‘world’s peace’ and ‘harmony in the home’ with ‘order in the nation’. The small units like individual ‘character’ and ‘home’ gradually steer the way to the utmost totality of ‘nation’ and ‘world’. Therefore, the quote gives a formula to build up a peaceful world that is essentially connected with action. This formula cannot be achieved overnight but this needs a systematic formulaic equation.

Besides, Dr. Kamal believed in the fullest development of the personality of an individual and in one’s own capabilities that was reflected in one of his famous speeches, 'Evolution of a unique you', in 2011, at IIT, Madras, India where he said, “I learnt, every youth wants to be unique, that is, YOU! But the world all around you, is doing its best, day and night, to make you just ‘everybody else’. Being like everybody else is convenient at the first glance, but not satisfying in the long vision.” (Kalam, 2015) **(Quote- 9)**. He further said, “Never stop fighting until you arrive at your destined place, that is, A UNIQUE YOU!” (Kalam, 2015) **(Quote- 10)**. Here, being unique means excelling in work that requires self-realization. The title ‘a unique you’ reminds one to be unyieldingly striving for the glorious achievement in life. The specialty of one’s quality raises one high from the ordinary level in order to compete with and contribute to the world at large. The challenges of life and ever difficult fighting to survive here can be achieved from the idealistic

education that aims ‘to discover and develop each individual’s abilities and full moral excellence in order to better serve society’ (Cohen, 1999)

Moreover, “Excellence”, he defined, “is a self-imposed, self-directed life long process. Excellence is not by accident. It is a process, where an individual, organization or nation, continuously strives to better oneself” (Kalam, 2015) **(Quote- 11)**. The zeal for facing the challenge is an attempt to courageously take the risk of life. This brevity never deters the risk takers if they are crashed by failures, at times. The measurement of the excellence is determined by their own, and thus by thematically motivated, the audience set sky as their limit and become a competitor of the ‘self’.

However, Dr. Kalam presents an unfathomable ocean of wisdom in his speeches by using natural imagery from the common facts of human life and from nature so as to treat nature as a teacher enlightening individual’s mind and enhancing understanding of the self and the world. Away of acquiring knowledge, ‘Methodological naturalism’ which is concerned with a cognitive approach to reality and attempts to explain and test an endeavor with reference to natural causes and events (“Naturalism (philosophy),” n.d.) is also reflected in the speeches. The use of nature and natural setting reflects his love for learning in the lap of nature. For example, **Quote-12:**

“Dream is not that which you see while sleeping it is something that does not let you sleep.”

(“Wings of FireQuotes,” n.d.), and

**Quote-13:**

“All birds find shelter during a rain. But Eagle avoids rain by flying above the clouds. Problems are common, but attitude makes the difference.”  
(“A.P.J. Abdul Kalam quotes,” n.d.)

In Quote-12 Dr. Kalam uses natural imagery from the common facts of life to show that learning can be achieved from the natural aspects of life. Human beings’ natural tendency of always living in comfort and luxury is discouraged only if one has aim in future. He successfully motivates people when he establishes the ideas that, going with the aim in life and simultaneously living in luxury are not the good match, rather aiming high and struggling

hard to achieve that initially ruin life's comfort. Unlike picking up ideas from everyday life, Dr. Kalam sees inspiration of life in nature. The images of rain, cloud, birds and river in Quote- 13 & 2 teach us how to conduct our lives. 'Rain' here symbolized as adversity, trains the birds in general to take shelter in safe places but difference is shown by the Eagle who instead of taking shelter changes its way going above the cloud. This 'Eagle', ever striving, ever struggling... teaches us something new i.e. to become individual and unique.

Finally, Kalam's speeches contain worthy messages and suggestions with moral and inspirational values but with meaningful and appealing rhetoric that produce a long term beneficial effect on the minds of the audience as they read or listen to the speeches for the sake of pleasure. His speeches are loaded with ripest wisdom of life's experience, and of achieving self perfection and success. The philosophies that his speeches contain are also practicable in the world. They teach us morality, universal knowledge and experience with the practical use of them. He shows an extraordinary insight and positivity in the negativity regarding the problems that men face in life, and the beliefs that they nurture in their minds. A wonderful quote (Quote-14) fixes our eyes into the words 'black', and 'but'.

**Quote-14:**

"Black colour is sentimentally bad but, every blackboard makes the students' life bright." ("200+ Ultimate Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam Quotes Collection," n.d.)

Does not Mr. Kalam want us to see the twofold meanings of 'black'? One is, no doubt, the value of education but the other is human prejudice. Black cannot always be overlooked as dark but it, obviously, sometimes, is just the opposite i.e. bright. This is how the readers grow in them a powerful motivating zeal which enables them to discover a real world.

**3. Stylistic and Linguistic Analysis**

Stylistics refers to the study of style in language i.e. the distinctive linguistic expressions of a speaker arisen from his unique and individual use of words, and expressions (Verdonk 3) (qtd. in Kumar and Kumar, 2015, p. 227).



Regarding speeches the stylistic analysis reveals “the style of an orator in delivering the speech, in its content matter, structure of speech, figures of speech used and other literary elements while linguistic analysis reveals the language usage, lexical and grammatical elements of language and finding figure of speech” (Kumar and Kumar, 2015, p. 227). While analyzing some selected quotes of Dr. Kalam from the stylistic and linguistic viewpoint they are found to be teemed with a variety of literary terms and linguistic expressions whereas pragmatic wisdom is addressed to the readers in an oracular voice.

The study observes a good number of epigrammatic expressions in the speeches of Dr Kalam. For example, the brief and witty quotes: Quote-1, Quote-14, and **Quote-15** (“You have to dream before your dreams can come true.”) (“200+ Ultimate Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam Quotes Collection,” n.d.) epigrammatically points out three important aspects of human life: an inevitable cycle of self-confidence, hard work and success (Quote-1), ethics and education (Quote-14), and the importance of nurturing aim in one’s life (Quote-15). Besides, these quotes possess proverbial value. Apart from the epigram, the rhythm of the same sound creates melody in the ear. Moreover, In Quote-1 consonance is prominent where the repetitive “h” sound in the words ‘vehicle’, ‘wheel’ and ‘hard’; “s” sound in ‘success’, ‘self’, ‘is’ and ‘impossible’; and “f” sound in ‘fuel’, ‘self’ and ‘confidence’ ring into our sensual organ. Quote-14 comprises beautiful alliterative “b” sound with the words, ‘black’, ‘bad’, ‘but’, ‘board’, and ‘bright’. The use of pun with repetitive use of the word ‘black’ that glows as the ‘light’ of knowledge is also appealing. In Quote-15, again, the use of consonance of the sounds “d”, “r” and “m” are included in the words ‘dream’ and ‘come’, and in ‘true’ and ‘your’. With the antithetical presentation of two ideas the sentence easily emphasizes the value of targeting the goal of life more importantly, than to see the result in reality.

In the Quote 16 below Dr. Kalam also shows his mastery of making contrast between two parallel clauses. Readers might be awestruck at first, when they fall into the complex maze of antithesis which says dream is not seen in sleep but it distracts one’s sleep. However, the meaningful discovery is found in the quote where the two key words ‘dream’ and ‘sleep’ are coated with the layer of metonymy. Going deep into the word ‘dream’ as aim in life and ‘sleep’ as ease and comfort of one’s life, pave the way of the sentence’s actual meaning. Dreaming of is presented here with the literal meaning of

dreaming about. However, paradox is also discovered between two ideas e.g. dream, “is not which you see while sleeping” and “that does not let you sleep”. Here dream is not seen in sleep, is an absurd idea because it is commonly believed that dream is definitely seen in sleep; but the sentence of the quote paradoxically furthering our understanding to another reality of life, which is, staying in comfort and higher aims cannot spread their wings. This brain teaser word-play reminds us of another meaning. The stylistic ornamentation of metonymy and the structural quality of the sentence are the mystery behind the attraction of the quote. **Quote-16:**

“Dream is not that which you see while sleeping it is something that does not let you sleep.” (“Wings of FireQuotes,” n.d.)

In another fragment of his speech (Quote-13) a striking motivating example can only throb with life because of its figurative language. The outstanding symbolic presentation of Eagle’s avoidance of rain shows how a person deals with difficulty. Here ‘rain’ symbolizes crisis; ‘Eagle’, the person of wisdom; and ‘flying above the cloud’ is the way of facing the hardship. Moreover, in Quote-2 the use of pun of two homophones, ‘rivers’ and ‘reverse’ create rhythmical effect but indicates a deeper appreciation of a speaker’s talent and a good grip of language. Besides, Simile is used amusingly to compare the flow and passage of life with the flow of river.

Additionally, asyndeton is used in **Quote-17** (“Learning gives creativity. Creativity leads to thinking. Thinking provides knowledge. Knowledge makes you great.”) (“Kalam, 2017) to make the meaning of each sentence emphatic, and to create a variety of powerful effects on the minds of the readers. Here, the repetition of the last words (‘creativity’, ‘thinking’, ‘knowledge’) at the beginning of the next sentence termed as anadiplosis has eye soothing effect. It, at the same time, is replete with rhythmic tone that makes this quote a joyful read.

The repetitive use of words arrives frequently in his speech. They are eye catching, melodious, thoughtful and motivating, and playfully presented with words. This repetition is of diversifying- one can sharply be differentiated than the other. The use of symploce (a combination of anaphora and epiphora) is observed in the lines of Quote 8 definitely approves Dr. Kalam’s deep literary familiarity. To add more, the use of paradox in his speeches

cannot be denied. The three quotes below, astonishingly amuse the audience with their strange conclusions as the words 'difficulties' in Quote-18; 'adversity' in Quote-19; and 'fail', 'end', & 'no' in Quote-20 end with some

opposite and self-contradictory ideas. Paradoxically, one cannot enjoy success without having the dark stain of hardship in life. The audience becomes aware of the significance of 'difficulties' without which life's success would be stale and insipid (Quote-18); 'opportunities' lie in 'adversity', that is, wisdom and maturity cannot enrich oneself until the unwanted sufferings and experiences engulf life's journey. Therefore, these unwanted sufferings sometimes are valued much as they make people thoughtful (Quote-19). Moreover, 'fail', 'end' and 'rejection' hardly break a person's faith in oneself, rather they ignite the sparks of motivation (Quote-20). Thus, through Dr. Kalam's speeches people are inspired to explore positivity in negativity.

**Quote-18:**

"Man needs his difficulties because they are necessary to enjoy success." ("200+ Ultimate Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam Quotes Collection," n.d.)

**Quote-19:**

"Adversity always presents opportunities for introspection." ("Wings of Fire Quotes," n.d.)

**Quote-20:**

"If you fail, never give up because F.A.I.L. means "first Attempt In Learning"; End is not the end, in fact E.N.D. means "Effort Never Dies"; If you get No as an answer, remember N.O. means "Next Opportunity". So Let's be positive," ("A.P.J. Abdul Kalam quotes," n.d.)

To add more, most of Dr. Kalam's speeches reveal authentic, philosophical or moral truth relevant to real life human experience with a variety of concise and pithy expressions, also called aphorism that make the readers more fascinated and vigilant in their reading. The quote, "Teaching is a very noble profession that shapes the character, caliber and future of an individual." (Quote-6) is terse and bears a unique aphoristic example possessing valuable message of education and of life.

#### 4. Conclusion

Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam whose speeches are embedded with different encouraging messages and educational thoughts with utilitarian and pragmatic worth was a man of wisdom. The enchanting power of communication, the value of practicality, unparalleled importance, moral enhancement and a broader implementing quality of his speeches imprint on his audience's mind. Besides, the elegant style of Kalam's speeches comprising the art of rhetoric, playful uses of language with its balanced cadences, aphorism, natural imagery, metaphor, paradox, and a playful arrangement of letters holds the readers' eyes for a while and is able to spread a long lasting effect on their minds. Utilitarian ideas, sometimes prescriptive or sometimes illustrative in nature, are logically presented through terse, epigrammatic expressions in his speeches whereas clarity and air of ease in expressions give pleasure to the readers at the same time. Word choice and structures of language in his quotes reflect his intelligence and trick but they never lose their spontaneity. Moreover, the themes of his speeches encompassing aspiration of youth, defeating problems in life, achieving success, accelerating development, enlightening self and preserving nation's dignity and pride are endowed with inspiration for the flourish of individual potentiality as well as spirit for the betterment of the society and the country in larger context.

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