

**Headline: Former president of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam speaks at Carleton University**  
**By, Mike Lapointe**

The former president of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, told a group of Carleton University students last month that they must take responsibility for their place in a changing world.

“Science and technology enhance the purpose and quality of human life,” Kalam said during the Inaugural Bugh Singh and Kashmir Kaur Dhahan Lecture presented by the Canada-India Centre for Excellence in Science, Technology, Trade and Policy.

Elected as president of India in 2002, Kalam served in office for five years.

The 82 year-old lifelong educator and former president of the second most populous country in the world began his speech with a note of caution. Kalam outlined a number of the problems afflicting developing nations today, and posed a question to the audience that helped frame his vision for the world.

“In this environment of conflict, I’m asking myself, in the presence of such an enlightened audience on Carleton campus: can we collectively make it possible in every part of the world, to have people living in a green environment without pollution, to have prosperity without poverty, and to have peace with no fear of war.”

“That is the theme of the talk.”

Kalam’s knowledge of historical events and his unique insight into the convergence of religious experience and modern culture was on full display that evening. In the opening minutes of his speech, Kalam touched on theology and spirituality, science and technology, and the legacies of Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, and Mahatma Gandhi.

“In the last 150 years, we have witnessed two world wars, hundreds of battles between hostile societies, and the beginnings of 133 democratic nations being freed from foreign dominations.” Kalam said.

Three Carleton graduate students studying sustainable-engineering arrived at the event almost a full hour early. As they anxiously awaited the arrival of the former president, their enthusiasm for listening to the iconic Indian was nothing short of infectious. And that enthusiasm only grew as Kalam concluded his remarks.

“He’s a visionary, and we love to hear him,” said Binita Desai, 27. “He’s so inspiring when he gives us the stories of how he grew up and how he learns things. That is something that we completely look forward to and we would love to have the same morals as he does.”

Gurjan Kak said that she’d never seen a leader give such a lecture.

“He’s not a person that a few handful of people know or want to talk to. I saw people who might be his age who were so curious about what he thought. Even people who were my age were asking questions. And that’s a beautiful thing.”

For Fuad Ahmed, Kalam is “basically an enigma for youngsters. I think you saw the enthusiasm when he asked the youngsters to stand up at the end more than anyone else. Because he wants young people to develop their thought processes.”

“The way he spoke, the way he talks, there’s just so much humility and humbleness there.”

They all shared a deep knowledge of Kalam’s work, not only as the former president of the ancient nation, but as an educator and leader of youth. Throughout the evening, their faces betrayed just how enthralled they were with stories of his travels throughout India, inspiring millions of youth in villages and cities alike to work toward a more prosperous and peaceful society.

At the end of the night a middle-aged man stood up and posed a question to the esteemed educator. Kalam was asked what he thought was the largest obstacle to progress in the world today. His answer was simple.

“The day the youth say it cannot be done is the day it cannot be done. I am confident.”

His faith in the power of ideas brought him to one of the highest offices in India, and he came to Carleton to impart that wisdom upon a crowd eager to take up his challenge. Kalam ended his talk with an affirmation of his faith in future generations to rise to that challenge ahead of them.