consider myself fortunate as I had known Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam well over the years.

I first met him during my student days at the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad in the sixties. But it was only when I became chairman at the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and he was head of DRDO, that we started meeting regularly. Whenever I came to Delhi, we would have dinner at Hotel Janpath and he always paid the bills.

When he became President, he once invited me to have dinner with him. Even though there were only the two of us, he made me sit at the head of the table. “You are my guest today, you are the most important person here,” he said. After dinner he took me around the President’s house and I could clearly see marks of his frugal and Spartan way of life even though he was the President of the country.

When I became a member of the Rajya Sabha, I went to the Rashtrapati Bhavan to seek Dr. Kalam’s blessings. He was very glad to note that I had become a nominated member, nominated by the then NDA Government and by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayeeji.

During our conversation, he was very particular about how I perform in the august forum of the Indian parliament. He said I should never shirk my role of participating in important discussions where I could positively contribute. This was very well proved when I participated in the 123 Nuclear Deal discussions that took place in Rajya Sabha where I made my longest speech of 29 minutes. Nearly all the divergent political views represented by different parties appreciated my speech and the observations I made. The then Honourable Prime Minister Shri Manmohan Singh himself was very happy that he specifically expressed his appreciation.

Another point that Dr. Kalam made was that I should fully use the MP-LAD funds. Since I had the flexibility of giving the funds to any place within the country, I should be generous in supporting schools for children, hospitals and orphanages. Here too, I virtually fulfilled his suggestions.

Even at a deeper personal level, when I had invited Dr. Kalam for the marriage of my second son, he came all the way from Delhi to Trichy and spent nearly the whole of the morning mixing with my relatives and blessing my son and daughter-in-law.

Recently, when I went to meet him, he asked me for a copy of my report on the Western Ghats. But what amazed me was that there was a crowd of students at his house. He was taking some classes for them. I could see his passion for teaching.

I can only say that he was a very humane, affectionate individual who worried about his colleagues and friends even as he wanted to do his best for the sake of our country.