

The IAF has been at the forefront of empowering women. While they were always enrolled in the medical branch, in 1992 the IAF started the induction of women to other branches initially in Ground Duties, and later to train for flying transport aircrafts and helicopters as well. Even though these roles were directed towards combat supports only. The IAF was the first defence service to do so. It is yet again paving the path for women by enrolling them in front-line combat roles, thereby putting India on the world map. Though the Indian Armed Forces continues to disallow its women soldiers into combat roles, yet on October 2015, the government decided to open the fighter pilot stream for women on an experimental basis. Since the three women in their early twenties, who were selected from a batch of 125 are the country's first fighter pilots.

Flight Lieutenant Avani Chaturvedi from Madhya Pradesh

Flight Lieutenant Bhawana Kanth from Bihar

Flight Lieutenant Mohana Singh from Rajasthan

WOMEN FIGHTER PILOTS IN INDIAN AIR FORCE



FLIGHT LIEUTENANT AVANI CHATURVEDI
NO. 23 SQUADRON: PANTHERS
HOMETOWN: REWA, MADHYA PRADESH

This 24-year-old fighter pilot from Madhya Pradesh always wanted to take control of an aircraft. and she made it. On being asked if she knew that she is now a hashtag, a symbol of girl power, she was pleasantly surprised she said, "It's a privilege to be considered an inspiration," Her fascination with flying started when she was studying for her B Tech in computer science at Banasthali Vidyapith in Rajasthan. "My college had a flying club where I learnt to fly the Cessna 152. It was so thrilling. That's when I realized I wanted to become a pilot." Avani made it big by taking control over one of the heaviest aircrafts to handle MIG-21 all by herself. She said, "You cannot become a fighter pilot in a day or two, it is a long process. A person needs to be mentally and physically fit and fine." Chaturvedi became the first woman pilot to fly a solo sortie for 30 minutes on a MiG-21 Bison, a supersonic jet fighter and interceptor aircraft, in Jamnagar. Avani says "Getting into MiG-21 Bison is not the ultimate goal, it's the first step there is a long huge syllabus for me to become a fully operational pilot,". She has been following Kalpana Chawla since she was 10.

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT BHAWANA KANTH
NO.03 SQUADRON: COBRAS
HOMETOWN: DARBHANGA, BIHAR

Among the first three fighter pilots in the country, Bhawana Khanth was inducted into the Indian Air Force in 2016. Despite coming from a small town Barauni, Bihar. Khanth has always been ambitious in life. Being an avid sports player, she cleared the UPSC Combined Defence Services competitive examination. Immediately after her selection, she joined the fighter stream, underwent a six-month rigorous training at Air Force Station in Hyderabad and achieved the Combined Graduation Parade Spring Term at the Air Force Academy in Dundigal in the same year. She became the second woman pilot to fly the fighter aircraft solo from Air Force Station, Ambala. She had to choose between taking up a career at Tata Consultancy Services (she studied medical electronic engineering at BMS College of Engineering, Bengaluru) or make it through the strenuous medical tests required to clear the IAF. Finally, she preferred a to be an officer.



LIGHT LIEUTENANT MOHANA SINGH
OPERATIONAL CONVERSION UNIT- ALPHA
HOMETOWN: JHUNJHUNU, RAJASTHAN

Mohana is taking her family legacy forward. Both her father and grandfather served in the IAF. After her B Tech in Electronics and Communications, Singh landed a job with Cognizant in Pune. She took the AFCAT five times and cleared it each time, but she got stuck during the SSB and she didn't give up and finally made it in her birthday month. She is one of the motivational female fighter pilot of this generation. Subsequently, she graduated from the Global Institute of Management and Emerging Technologies, Amritsar to pursue her dream to fly high in MiG-21 Bison. Today, she has been posted to the Hawks squadron. When her grandfather seen her in uniform? "Oh yes," she beams. "It was a proud moment for him."



All three girls are stellar examples of humility. Born and raised in small towns, it is the sheer perseverance of their dreams that has got them this far. Salute to their courage and bravery. Jai hind

VIVEK THAKUR
CSE 3rd YEAR