

Indian Women (Air) Power

Indian military history was created on 18 June 2016 when the first three women pilots of the Indian Air Force were selected to join the fighter stream of the Service, proudly brandishing their stripes and wings at the Combined Graduation Parade at Air Force Academy, Dundigal on the outskirts of Hyderabad. With their induction into the fighter stream, India has joined a select few nations in the world that have women fighter pilots in their Air Forces. These young women, Flying Officer Avani Chaturvedi, Flying Officer Bhawana Kanth and Flying Officer Mohana Singh are India's first women jet fighter pilots.

Although women pilots have, for over 20 years, been flying fixed wing transport aircraft and helicopters of the IAF, the clearance for Indian women to fly supersonic fighter aircraft was cleared only in October 2015 by the government headed by then Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar and Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha, Chief of the Air Staff. This decision to include women in the fighter stream of the Indian Air Force was on an experimental basis. Just over two years later, on 19 February 2018, Flying Officer Avani Chaturvedi became the first woman pilot to fly a solo 30-minute sortie on a MiG-21 Bison at Air Force Station Jamnagar.

The IAF had in fact begun inducting women pilots into the flying branch in 1994 with the first batch of nine women pilots commissioned in the IAF at the Air Force



As flight cadets, they fly in HAL Kiran basic jet trainers during Stage III

Academy on 16 December 1995. Pilot Officers Priya Nalgundwar, Harita Kaur Deol, Pamela Rodrigues, Anisha Shanh, Archana Kapoor, Bindu Sebastian and Priya Paul then joined the transport (fixed wing) stream while Pilot Officers Cherly Dutta and Simran Sodhi became helicopter pilots. Till now, more than 180 women officers have been inducted as pilots in the transport and helicopter streams, even as there are around 1600 women serving in various branches of the IAF. In the Ground Duty Branches - administrative, Logistics, Accounts and Education - women have been inducted since July 1993 when the first batch of 12 cadets passed out of the AFA. While the first batch of women Aeronautical Engineers consisted of 25 (23 Electronic