

Ride Into The Sunset

It was a week of excitement, exhilaration, with a mix of trepidation and nervousness thrown in, but one that gave us immense happiness and satisfaction.

Mireille Goyer's Women of Aviation Worldwide Week Celebrations had caught my eye on more than one occasion and this year, we at the India Section decided to "Spread Our Wings".

The plan was to Celebrate History, Raise Awareness and Spark Vocations. It was an idea, waiting to take shape. Some of us have been Airline Pilots almost for three decades now and this was the right time to give back. With more time on our hands as children have grown and fewer responsibilities at home, we roped in a few of the younger and new Ninety-Nines and embarked on a journey to reach the Stars.

This was the first time that such an event had been planned outside of the US or Canada. We, in India wanted it to be really special. We wanted the young girls to know what aviation is all about and how much fun it is. One of our goals was to show them what opportunities exist in the various fields of aviation and how these could help them shape their careers.

So we joined hands with premier Aviation Organisations of India like the Aero Club of India, the Ballooning Club of India, the Indian Air Force, the Airport Authority of India, the Delhi Flying Club, the Aero Modellers Association and the Indian Women Pilots' Association to help us organise the weeklong events. Organisations like the Rotary and even a medical company, East West Rescue chipped in to be a part of our events when they heard about our Aviation Education programme. I have to add at this point, that during the entire planning, the 99s HQ were in constant touch with us, lending their support and guiding us at every stage.

What made this celebration so special was the fact that ALL the girls to be introduced to aviation were from the underprivileged sections of society, and some were even differently abled. These girls were from the village schools, from schools run by non-profit organisations and also from Orphanages. Most of them had never even seen an airplane and of course had neither dreamt of sitting in one.

For the Opening Ceremony, Prof Kiran Walia, the Hon'ble Minister of Education, Social Welfare and Women & Child Development was the Chief Guest. She encouraged the girls to be self sufficient and independent and to think of themselves as equal and as capable as men. The Delhi Flying Club gave simulator rides to all the girls present and they were thrilled to have their first ever "Air Experience". The girls also had the opportunity of sitting in the trainer airplanes and moving the control surfaces. The Aero Club sponsored the printing of a colouring book, designed by the India Section, on the lines of the Air Bear Colouring Book. We replaced the bear with girl characters and each of them was given a name, based on real aviation women personalities in India. The first copy of this book was presented to Sangita Singh, India's pioneer woman Balloon Pilot. Prof Walia also planted the sapling of a "Kachnar" tree, on which beautiful Fuchsia flowers bloom. She compared the flowers to the girls from the orphanage who were present and said she will return again next year to see the flowers and the girls. Each person present was given a Wish Balloon and we all made silent wishes and released them into the blue sky. The Rock Band "Half Step Down" graciously entertained everyone with their foot stamping numbers.

5th of March, was the visit to the Air Traffic Control Tower, which was indeed very exciting as the children got to see the Big Jets landing and taking off, and they also heard their R/T conversation with the Delhi Control Tower.

6th of March was Aviation Activity day, which was organised by the National Bal Bhawan, wherein painting, aero modelling and origami classes were held.

The Indian Air Force hosted a day at the Air Force Museum, on the 7th of March, for the special children from the Institute of Speech and Hearing Impaired. It was so heartening to see these girls asking questions in sign language and wanting to know all about the various airplanes and war equipment in the museum. Two women pilots from the IAF joined us and it was a great exchange of ideas and experiences. "Spread your Wings", we whispered to the girls and they opened up their hearts and souls, to the sights and sounds around them.

Early morning on the 9th, the India Section 99s lead a Cycling event, "Flying Fit" in which 55 riders cycled to the President's House - Rashtrapati Bhawan, emphasizing the importance of fitness. The riders intermingled with each other amongst who was a woman IAF pilot.

Later, the Aero Modellers Association put up a scintillating display of radio controlled planes and jets. This and the flower dropping completely mesmerized the girls present and they were left asking for more. The two women Air Force pilots and our own 99s answered many flying related queries of the students and shared their flying experiences.

10th March was the closing ceremony of the week's celebrations and the Ballooning Club of India kindly gave hot air balloon rides to more than 120 young and excited girls. Capt. RK Wason, an ace Glider Pilot and an experienced Balloonist patiently explained the nuances of ballooning to the young, budding aviation enthusiasts.

Over a period of 7 days, we succeeded in introducing almost 475 girls to flying and its related activities. Each girl received a certificate of participation and gifts for every event, in addition to refreshments packets every day.

These special children are really "God's own children" who warmed our hearts with their beautiful smiles, the memories of which are etched deep in our minds and hearts and we can't help but look forward to next year.

Capt. Nivedita Bhasin
Governor
India Section



1) Mrinalini Devi, India Section 99 and Flight Instructor, giving Simulator rides to the underprivileged children (lovingly called Angels) of Asha Kiran.

2) Children loving the “feel” of sitting in a real airplane, at the Delhi Flying Club, New Delhi.





3) Chief Guest at the Opening Ceremony planting a sapling of the 'Kachnar' flowering tree.

4) The first copy of the Aero Club of India sponsored Colouring Book being presented to Sangita Singh, Balloonist, by Prof Kiran Walia. Seen here L---R: RC Kanda---Secy Aero Club, Sangita Singh, Capt. Nivedita Bhasin (99), Prof Kiran Walia and Capt. Anila Bhatia Cheema (99).





5) Wish Balloons being released by all present at the Opening Ceremony of Women of Aviation Worldwide Week, at the Delhi Flying Club on 4th March.

6) Children of Takshashila with their Teacher Abbey Marsden and Capt. Nivedita Bhasin (99) at the Delhi ATC, 5th March.





7) Don Bosco Auxilium Snehalaya kids getting an insight at the Area Control of Air Traffic Services, Delhi Airport.

8) Airline Pilots of the India Section 99s from L---R: Capt. Anila Bhatia Cheema---JetLite, F/O Miriya Cheema---Air India, F/O Reetika Dwivedi---IndiGo, F/O Niharika Bhasin---IndiGo and Capt. Nivedita Bhasin---Air India.





9) India Section 99s with the enlightened students after the ATC visit. Last row standing L---R: Niharika Bhasin, Reetika Dwivedi, 7th from L---Anila Bhatia, 8th from L---Miriya Cheema, in Blue Shirt---Nivedita Bhasin, Extreme R---Abinaya Nelly, 4th from R---Swati Yadav.

10) 99s Niharika Bhasin (L) and Reetika Dwivedi (R) with Origami Planes at the National Bal Bhawan's Aviation Activity Day at Delhi on 6th March.





11) Keeping the 99s flag flying high ---At the Air Force Museum, India Section 99s from L---R: Reetika Dwivedi, Niharika Bhasin, Nivedita Bhasin and Anila Bhatia.

12) India Section 99s urging the young girls from Takshashila and the Institute for Speech & Hearing Impaired, to “Spread their Wings” with the Indian Air Force Women Pilots.





13) Upright and happy women pilots. L---R: Flt Lt Rakhi Bhandari (Dornier), F/O Reetika Dwivedi (A320), F/O Niharika Bhasin (A320), Capt. Anila Bhatia (B737), Capt. Nivedita Bhasin (B787) and Wg Cdr Nivedita Roy (Avro).

14) Speech & Hearing impaired differently abled girls with the India Section 99s at the India Air Force Museum on 7th March.





15) Cycling for fitness. At the President's House---Rashtrapati Bhawan on 9th March.

16) After the exhilarating cycle ride to the President's House. Standing L---R: Nivedita Bhasin, Flt Lt Sonal Akkara (IAF), Reetika Dwivedi, Sugandha Jain (future 99) and Niharika Bhasin.





17) Capt. RK Wason our affable Balloon Pilot patiently took more than 125 children for the Hot Air Balloon ride on 10th March, at Balloon Port near Delhi.

18) Future 99s with Niharika Bhasin (4th from L). Extreme R: Anila Bhatia, Nivedita Bhasin and Reetika Dwivedi with the girls from Aravindam Fundacja Foundation, as the Balloon makes for a beautiful back drop of the Closing Ceremony of the WOAW, 10th March.





19) Sugandha, Prachi and Ananya (future 99s) with Niharika Bhasin and Anila Bhatia, Standing. Reetika Dwivedi and Nivedita Bhasin sitting with Capt. RK Wason, truly the man of the Day.

20) And into the sunset, we flew. A grand Closing Ceremony for the Women of Aviation Worldwide Week, 10th March, at Balloon Port, near Delhi.

