



WAI's founding members pose with the NGO's president, Radha Bhatia (centre).

CLEARED FOR TAKE-OFF!

Delhi-based Women in Aviation India (WAI), a non-profit organisation, is reshaping the dreams of girls nationwide to foster equity and equal opportunity in the traditionally male-centric industry that dominates the skies.

By SAKSHI NAHAR DHARIWAL

IN THE YEAR 1971, SEASONED entrepreneur Mrs Radha Bhatia founded the Bird Group—an organisation that spans hospitality, travel, tourism, aviation, education, and luxury retail verticals. And a transformative encounter in 2015 resulted in her meeting representatives from the Women in Aviation International group, whose global chapters were championing the cause of women in different sections of the aviation industry. Such was the impact of this interaction that it fuelled her commitment to spearhead the creation of an India chapter to empower ladies to soar in the male-dominated airline sector. Subsequently, the now-almost-nine-year-old WAI was birthed by accomplished professionals in the airline industry. Driven by a goal to create meaningful contributions for the next generation, these stalwarts, representing diverse fields within the aviation sector, share a singular



Launch of the Women in Aviation India slogan by the then-Union Minister Shri Puspapathi Ashok Gajapathi Raju.

purpose—to mentor and educate girls from various societal segments across the nation and increase opportunities available to them over a spectrum of aviation verticals.

STARTING BIG

The inaugural meeting of WAI convened on 7 December 2015, to coincide with International Civil Aviation Day. The far-sighted initiative, led by 15 founding members, with Bhatia as President, gained momentum

with crucial support, which included recognition from the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India. The announcement of WAI's establishment at the U.S. Embassy New Delhi, endorsed by the USA's Ambassador to India and the then-Secretary of Civil Aviation, further solidified its significance. The NGO's impactful slogan, 'Beti ki Udaan, Desh ka Swabhimaan' (A Daughter's Flight, A Nation's Pride) was coined on 8 March 2017, at the Airport Authority of India,

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creating further news about its presence. Since then, WAI has evolved into a diverse coalition of women, including astronauts, pilots, entrepreneurs, academics, journalists, and more, each contributing unique skills and perspectives to the varied tapestry of aviation. Let's delve into the intricacies of the organisation's robust growth.

WINGS OF INCLUSIVITY

As part of its core initiatives, WAI collaborates with NGOs, schools, colleges, and universities to mentor middle-school students during their pivotal career-planning phase. The NGO also assesses students' aptitudes and offers free education to girls from underprivileged communities, giving access to expert learning for those facing financial constraints. Its 'WAI Round Tables' is a key annual programme that features panel discussions and, this year, is emphasising the advancement of women to board-level positions in the aviation industry.

The annual celebration of 'Girls in Aviation Day' in September stands out as a very successful initiative, involving extensive outreach across India's urban and remote locations. Partner members of WIA connect with hundreds of girls, and students are taken on visits to airports, cargo terminals, and beyond to engage with women pilots, cabin crew, engineers, security personnel, and aero sports experts, among others. Through this immersive experience, professionals encourage and nurture these students to pursue and fulfil their dreams within the dynamic realm of aviation.

Every October, the highly anticipated 'Women in Aviation India Awards: Giving Wings to Dreams' takes the spotlight. This cherished initiative celebrates successes and also serves as a guiding light for aspiring female aviators. Beyond individual honours, the awards foster a harmonious collaboration among airlines, airports, authorities, and



Radha Bhatia, President, WAI, addresses the audience at an event.



Local school students attend an aviation-familiarisation trip organised by Vistara in collaboration with WAI at Bagdogra airport.



Dreams take flight at the 'Girls in Aviation Day' celebrations in Jhajjar, Haryana.

Soaring with Vistara

A long-standing partner of WAI, Vistara hosts aviation-familiarisation trips and interactive sessions to inspire young girls to pursue careers in aviation.

corporations, all united by a common mission—empowering the Indian aviation sector through the strength of women. Through the unwavering support of the Ministry of Civil Aviation, these awards exemplify a shared commitment to excellence.

SKYWARD AMBITIONS

Over the past eight years, the impact of WAI's initiatives has been truly encouraging. Having impacted thousands of girls, these programmes offer a unique opportunity for personal interaction with luminaries from the Indian aviation industry. With India currently leading globally with the highest ratio of women pilots at 15 per cent, WAI aims for an impressive 50 per cent benchmark in the years to come.

Beyond breaking glass ceilings, WAI envisions a future where women secure seats at the table and carve an influential presence in boardrooms and corridors of power. The NGO's commitment is not merely aspirational—it is grounded in the transformative impact on lives today, with an eye on shaping the future for women in the industry. The focus is on building unshakable foundations and creating awareness among young girls on the verge of crucial career decisions. WAI's goal is to empower these future leaders not only to become strong and independent individuals but also to contribute to the fortification of the nation by raising resilient families.

Aligned with India's vision for the future, WAI is steadfast in promoting innovation, technology, and automation as tools to build a promising and equitable tomorrow. With the right strategic team and support from various sectors, the future looks bright and beautiful for young talent. The commitment echoes through training, education, and empowerment, ensuring that the sky is truly the limit for our nation's women. ✨

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