



UPSC & STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Squadron Leader Saanya — IAF's First Woman Cat-A Flying Instructor

19 May 2026

SECURITY & DEFENCE

PERSONS & AWARDS

GS3

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)**ALSO FROM THE CREATOR****BharatNotes**Free UPSC notes, MCQs, PYQ analysis. **100% Free.**bharatnotes.com →**ADVERTISE****Advertise with Ujiyari**

Reach thousands of UPSC aspirants daily.

epicbharat@gmail.com

Squadron Leader Saanya — IAF's First Woman Cat-A Flying Instructor

19 May 2026 · 6 min read ·

2 tags ▾

WHY IN NEWS:

Squadron Leader Saanya of the **Indian Air Force (IAF)** has become the **first woman to qualify as a Cat-A (Category-A) Flying Instructor** in IAF history. She completed the rigorous Flying Instructors' Course (FIC) at the **Air Force Academy (AFA), Dundigal, Hyderabad**, earning the highest instructor qualification in IAF's flying training framework. The achievement was confirmed by IAF on May 19, 2026.

WHAT IS A CAT-A FLYING INSTRUCTOR?

The IAF classifies flying instructors into **four categories (A, B, C, and D)**, with Category A being the most prestigious and demanding.

CATEGORY	DESIGNATION	CRITERIA
Cat-A	Master Instructor	Highest grade; can train other instructors; awarded only after completing FIC with top performance and demonstrated advanced air skills
Cat-B	Senior Instructor	Experienced instructor; can supervise training sorties
Cat-C	Instructor	Qualified to independently instruct student pilots
Cat-D	Under Training	New instructor under supervision

A **Cat-A instructor** has the authority to evaluate and certify other instructors — making it the apex of the IAF's flying instructor pyramid. The qualification requires exceptional airmanship, pedagogical skill, and the ability to handle emergencies in dual-control training aircraft.

SQUADRON LEADER SAANYA — PROFILE

ATTRIBUTE	DETAIL
Name	Squadron Leader Saanya (surname withheld per IAF convention for serving officers)
Branch	Indian Air Force — Fighter/Trainer stream
Achievement	First woman Cat-A flying instructor in IAF history
Course completed	Flying Instructors' Course (FIC), Air Force Academy, Dundigal
Significance	Sets precedent for women officers advancing into highest-tier training roles

WOMEN IN IAF — A HISTORICAL ARC

Squadron Leader Saanya's achievement is the latest milestone in a decades-long expansion of women's roles in the IAF:

YEAR	MILESTONE
1992	IAF inducted its first women officers in non-flying branches (administrative, meteorology, education)
1994	Women admitted to Short Service Commission (SSC) in non-combatant roles
2015	IAF announced women would be inducted as fighter pilots for the first time
2016	Flight Lieutenant Avani Chaturvedi, Bhawana Kanth, and Mohana Singh — India's first three women fighter pilots inducted into IAF combat stream
2018	Avani Chaturvedi becomes the first Indian woman to fly a fighter jet solo (MiG-21 Bison)
2022	Squadron Leader Avani Chaturvedi becomes the first Indian woman to fly the Su-30 MKI solo
2021–22	IAF grants Permanent Commission to women officers in flying and ground duty branches following Babita Puniya (2020) SC direction; women in flying branch become eligible for PC
2026	Squadron Leader Saanya becomes first woman Cat-A flying instructor

This progression shows the IAF's systematic expansion of women's roles — from non-combatant support to front-line fighters to now the highest tier of instructor qualification.

FLYING INSTRUCTORS' COURSE (FIC) — OVERVIEW

The **Flying Instructors' Course (FIC)** at AFA Dundigal is one of the most demanding courses in the IAF:

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Location	Air Force Academy (AFA), Dundigal, near Hyderabad, Telangana
Duration	Approximately 26 weeks
Aircraft used	Kiran Mk-II (HAL-built jet trainer), Pilatus PC-7 Mk-II (Swiss-built turbo-prop trainer)
Assessment	Flying performance, instructional ability, academic tests, emergency procedure evaluations
Output	Graduates are certified flying instructors; top performers earn Cat-A
Significance	AFA Dundigal is where all IAF officers receive their basic flying training; FIC graduates return as instructors here

HAL's **Kiran Mk-II** (HJT-16) is an indigenously designed jet trainer — a landmark aircraft in India's aerospace self-reliance journey, still in service as a primary instructor-qualification platform.

AIR FORCE ACADEMY, DUNDIGAL

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Location	Dundigal, ~35 km from Hyderabad, Telangana
Established	1971 (as Flying Training Establishment; renamed AFA)
Role	Primary training institution for IAF officers; all flying branches train here
Passing-out parade	Held termly; President/CAS takes salute at major POP
Affiliated institution	Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTU) for academic degrees

SIGNIFICANCE FOR GENDER INTEGRATION IN DEFENCE

Squadron Leader Saanya's achievement is not merely symbolic — it has operational and institutional implications:

- 1 **Institutional credibility:** A Cat-A instructor shapes dozens of future pilots. Women in these roles directly influence the culture and training ethos of the IAF.

- 2 **Permanent Commission impact:** Since 2021–22, women in IAF can hold Permanent Commission (following the Babita Puniya SC direction, extended to flying branch). A Cat-A qualification makes them eligible for senior instructor postings, squadron command, and training command assignments.
- 3 **Tri-service context:** The Indian Navy inducted women as fighter pilots in 2023 (Sub Lieutenant Shivangi Swaroop had been a maritime reconnaissance pilot since 2019). The Army is the last service without women in combat roles — a debate that the Supreme Court has pushed on.
- 4 **UPSC angle:** Gender integration in defence forces is a recurring GS2/GS4 topic — constitutional equality, national security, operational effectiveness.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 — Internal Security / Defence

- IAF's flying instructor qualification framework: Cat-A to D
- Role of AFA Dundigal in IAF's training ecosystem
- Indigenous aircraft in training: HAL Kiran Mk-II, Pilatus PC-7 Mk-II

GS Paper 2 — Governance / Social Issues

- Women's integration in combat and combatant roles in the Indian Armed Forces
- Supreme Court judgments on Permanent Commission for women officers (2020 — Army; followed by IAF and Navy)
- Constitutional framework: Article 14 (equality), Article 15(3) (special provisions for women), Article 33 (fundamental rights in armed forces)

GS Paper 4 — Ethics

- Role models and institutional change: How individual achievement reshapes institutional culture
- Leadership, courage, and perseverance as ethical values demonstrated by trailblazers

Keywords: Squadron Leader Saanya, Cat-A flying instructor, IAF, Air Force Academy Dundigal, Flying Instructors' Course, women in IAF, Avani Chaturvedi, Permanent Commission, HAL Kiran Mk-II, gender integration.

Sources: GKToday, PIB, Indian Air Force

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

SQUADRON LEADER SAANYA — KEY FACTS:

IAF's first woman Cat-A (Category-A) flying instructor

Qualified at Air Force Academy (AFA), Dundigal, Hyderabad

Course: Flying Instructors' Course (FIC)

Announced: May 19, 2026

IAF FLYING INSTRUCTOR CATEGORIES:

Cat-A: Master Instructor — highest grade; can train other instructors

Cat-B: Senior Instructor

Cat-C: Basic Instructor

Cat-D: Under Training Instructor

AIR FORCE ACADEMY (AFA), DUNDIGAL:

Location: Dundigal, ~35 km from Hyderabad, Telangana

Established: 1971

Primary IAF officer training institution; all flying branches train here

WOMEN IN IAF — MILESTONES:

1992: First women officers in non-flying branches

2016: First three women fighter pilots (Avani Chaturvedi, Bhawana Kanth, Mohana Singh)

2018: Avani Chaturvedi — first woman to fly fighter jet solo (MiG-21 Bison)

2021–22: IAF grants Permanent Commission to women (including flying branch), following Babita Puniya SC direction (2020)

2026: Sqn Ldr Saanya — first woman Cat-A flying instructor

HAL KIRAN MK-II (HJT-16):

Indigenously designed jet trainer by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)

Used in FIC at AFA Dundigal

India's first indigenously designed and produced jet aircraft

SUPREME COURT ON WOMEN IN ARMED FORCES:

2020: SC directed Army to grant Permanent Commission to women SSC officers (Sec 14 of Army Act)

IAF and Navy followed with similar PC policies

2021–22: IAF granted PC to women in flying and other branches (following Babita Puniya SC direction, 2020)

← **NEWER ARTICLE**

[India-Norway Green Strategic Partnership — 12 Agreements...](#)

OLDER ARTICLE →

[BCCI Exempt from RTI Act — CIC Upholds Ruling on Absence of...](#)

RELATED EDITORIALS

INDIAN EXPRESS

[India-UAE: The Energy Security Pivot and Its Diplomatic Cost](#)

16 May

THE HINDU

[India's Strategic Autonomy Under Pressure: The Iran War and Multi-Alignment Stress Test](#)

15 May

THE HINDU

[Just War, Power Balance, and Modern Conflict](#)

14 May

THE HINDU

[India-Vietnam Enhanced CSP: A New Phase in the Indo-Pacific](#)

12 May

RELATED KEY TERMS

KEY TERM

[Advanced Technology Vessel \(ATV\) Programme](#)

India's classified, decades-long programme to indigenously design and...

KEY TERM

[AFSPA \(Armed Forces Special Powers Act\)](#)

A central legislation granting special powers to armed forces...

KEY TERM

[Article 355](#)

Constitutional provision making it the duty of the Union to protect...

KEY TERM

[Asymmetry](#)

A lack of equality or equivalence between corresponding parts or roles...



CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/daily/2026/05/19/iaf-saanya-first-woman-cat-a-flying-instructor-2026/>

ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

BharatNotes

Free UPSC study platform — subject-wise notes across all 4 GS papers, Prelims MCQs, Mains answer frameworks, PYQ analysis & progress tracking. **100% Free • No Login Required.**

[Start Preparing → bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com)

📌 OPPORTUNITY

Advertise with Ujiyari

Reach **thousands of serious UPSC & State PCS aspirants** daily through our PDFs, website, and social channels.

Ideal for: Coaching institutes • EdTech platforms • Book publishers • Exam prep apps

[✉ epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)

Write to us for rates & media kit

Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs · ujiyari.com · bharatnotes.com