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Market Watch

# MCX, Banasthali Vidyapith sign MoU to support financial literacy among women

BY SUTANUKA GHOSAL, ET BUREAU | UPDATED: AUG 18, 2015, 02.18 PM IST

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KOLKATA: [Multi Commodity Exchange of India Limited \(MCX\)](#), and Banasthali Vidyapith of Rajasthan, have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for supporting financial literacy among women. The initiative is directed at fostering [women](#) empowerment through several efforts toward financial-skill development in managing commodity price risk using modern financial derivatives. Banasthali Vidyapith has over the past 80 years developed into a national centre for women's education and is eager to provide new skill sets to their students.

To enhance financial literacy, it is also imperative that women should be equal partner in the financial ecosystem. They will, with their newly acquired skillsets be able not only to manage price risks and increase economic security, but also add a new dimension to India's progress.

P. K. Singhal, joint managing director of MCX said, "This association with Banasthali complements our current objective to carry benefits of the commodity derivatives market to all through financial education. Women's natural skills along with their intuition and analytical prowess can create a formidable workforce, which can support future needs of [India Inc.](#), especially in the area of commodity price risk management. Our joint educational initiatives will focus on supporting financial inclusion for women and go a long way in facilitating young women in India getting into the financial ecosystem, thus enabling their empowerment."

Harsh Purohit, Dean-FMS-WISDOM, Banasthali Vidyapith said, "Under the charismatic leadership of our Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Aditya Shastri, the university has shown unprecedented progress in the last 15 years and this is because of several new initiatives. We are the first university in India to set up a Centre for [Financial Planning](#) Training & Research for Women in the campus. This MoU would further provide opportunities to the bright girls of the Vidyapith to excel in corporate roles and foster research and community service as well. We appreciate the role of MCX in the financial ecosystem and are excited to join hands."

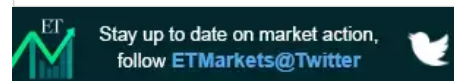
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Market Watch

# Social worker Binny Yanga passes away

BY PTI | UPDATED: SEP 03, 2015, 12.54 PM IST

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ITANAGAR: **Social worker** Binny Yanga, known for her work for the welfare of weaker sections of society, died at a **Guwahati hospital** today after prolonged illness, family members said.

A member of the **Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women and Country Women Association** of India, 57-year-old Yanga is survived by husband, two sons and two daughters.

Her body was brought from Guwahati to Naharlagun by road and her last rites would be performed here, they said.

Born on July 7, 1958, Yanga did her education at Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan.

Despite being diagnosed with cervical cancer in 2007, she continued to work for the **Oju Welfare Association** (OWA), set up by her, which hosts 338 orphans and destitute.

She formed the All-Subansiri District Girls Welfare Association and raised her voice against social evils such as child marriage, forced marriage, dowry among others.



*Social worker Binny Yanga, known for her work for the welfare of weaker sections of society, died at a Guwahati hospital today after prolonged illness.*

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She joined the first batch of women cadre under the Arunachal police in 1987 and the experience gathered there, where she closely watched the plight of girls, motivated her to set up shelter homes for such victims.

In 1979, she initiated a small **Adult Education and Nursery Centre** in Naharlagun and shelter home for girls and victims of child marriage, forced marriages and the destitute.

This humble beginning finally grew up to become the OWA which she registered in 1988.

She was also the **founder** of the Himgiri Multi-purpose Cooperative Society which catered to the needs of rural artisans and provided marketing facilities for their products.

She was conferred with Padma Shree in 2012 in recognition of her selfless service. She had also received the Durgabai Deshmukh Award in 2000.

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16 February, 2017

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THIS STORY IS FROM FEBRUARY 16, 2017

## International seminar on women's education concludes

TNN | Updated: Feb 16, 2017, 7:10 IST



JAIPUR: A three-day international seminar on 'Women's higher education for leadership and social innovation' concluded in Jaipur on Wednesday. The seminar witnessed deliberations by



(Representative image)

innovation' concluded in Jaipur on Wednesday. The seminar witnessed deliberations by famous academicians from the US, Middle East, Africa, Japan, Australia and Southeast Asia on issues related to higher education and sought possible solutions.

At a session on national development and policy initiatives in women's higher education, Tom Rudin, director of the Committee on Women in Science Engineering and Medicine, spoke about gender bias in society and how stereotypes have managed to control women. "By promoting work flexibility and conflict resolution, the lives of women can be improved," said Rudin.

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**Education**

# MCX ties up with Banasthali Vidyapith University for promoting financial literacy

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[Our Bureau](#) [Mumbai](#) | Updated on January 23, 2018 Published on August 19, 2015

Multi Commodity Exchange has tied up with Banasthali Vidyapith, the world's largest fully residential university for women in Rajasthan to support financial literacy among women. The initiative will foster women empowerment through financial-skill development in managing commodity price risk using modern financial derivatives.

Over last 80 years, Banasthali Vidyapith has developed itself into a national centre for women's education and is eager to provide new skill sets to their students.

PK Singhal, Joint Managing Director, MCX said women's natural skills along with their intuition and analytical prowess can create a formidable workforce, which can support future needs of India Inc, especially in the area of commodity price risk management.

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## **"Banasthali Vidyapith is a wonderful blend & an epitome of tradition and modernity"- M Venkaiah Naidu**

Banasthali Vidyapith is a unique institution in the world for women's education. Its ideology of five-fold education is an innovative way of holistic development as well as character building for the students.

**By JAGRAN JOSH**

JAN 18, 2018 15:38 IST



**"Banasthali Vidyapith is a unique institution in the world for women's education. Its ideology of five-fold education is an innovative way of holistic development as well as character building for the students."**

"Banasthali Vidyapith is an epitome of tradition and modernity. I am amazed to see the beautiful amalgamation of women's education, values, Indian culture and ethos, technology and advanced infrastructure in this world's largest fully residential university- Banasthali Vidyapith," said Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, Hon'ble Vice President of India, while addressing a



congregation of graduate, post-graduate and doctorate degree recipients at the 34th Convocation Ceremony of Banasthali Vidyapith held on January 7, 2018.



"This is my first visit to Banasthali Vidyapith and I thank Prof. Aditya Shastri, Vice Chancellor of the University for inviting me to this one of its kind institution. He is doing a noble task in educating the young women of India through the unique educational ideology of Panchmukhi Shiksha. Each of the missionary activity that I witnessed today beginning with the Swagat Gaan to parade, the all girls' band, horse riding and show jumping assured me that a unique institution like Banasthali Vidyapith is nurturing the future leaders who will take our nation to greater heights," the Vice President of India said. He hailed the vision and tireless efforts of Pt. Hiralal Shastri, Padma Bhushan Smt. Ratan Shastri and all those who helped them in shaping the great institution committed to the cause of women's education.

Shri Naidu added, "Panchmukhi Shiksha- the unique ideology for women's education in this institution of international repute, has played a pivotal role in helping the students to realise their innate potential and integrating the knowledge gained with its cultural and environmental context."



The Vice President hailed the students and said, "through the Panchmukhi Shiksha, you, the students of Banasthali Vidyapith will take the glorious legacy of ancient Indian women scholars like Lopamudra, Gargi and Vidyottama. Such a unique educational ideology should be replicated over the entire country. It will help us in going back to our roots which is the need of the hour. One should never forget ones mother, mother tongue, motherland and Guru. Google will never become the substitute of Guru. Instead of caste, community and cash barriers, people should focus on character, calibre, competence and conduct.

Shri Naidu added, "It is gratifying to note that in the era when literacy was low and girls remained confined to homes, Banasthali Vidyapith became the pioneer in the cause of education of girls. In the era when women were learning to use cycles, Banasthali Vidyapith ensured that women swiftly rode and raced horses, and touched the sky as gliders and pilots. Again, in the era when women were asked to settle down in mundane jobs after professional education, Banasthali Vidyapith nurtured the likes of Ft. Lt. Avani Chaturvedi, one of the first fighter pilots inducted in Indian Airforce. Today when STEM courses still remain male dominated; the students of this premiere university for women are learning the Internet of Things and gaining technological skills in the most advanced industry 4.0 laboratories of Mechatronics and Robotics".

He made an appeal to all corporate and business houses to duly support Banasthali Vidyapith in its journey of development and thus play a role both in rural reconstruction and women development. Talking about rural reconstruction he quoted Gandhiji, "Go back to villages" and added that Pt.

Hiralal Shastri, a man of character and vision, followed Gandhiji's words when others hardly paid heed.



Appreciating the one of a kind of its institution, Shri Naidu said, "Banasthali Vidyapith has over the years emerged as a dynamic educational institution preparing its students for the many roles that they may assume in life. It has carved a niche for itself among the cluster of educational institutions in the state and country and continues to spread its wings far and wide."

Expressing his wishes to the new graduates, the Vice President said that India is a land of opportunities. One can achieve anything with hard work and passion irrespective of one's background and hoped that they will make use of their knowledge and training to contribute towards nation-building and will make a positive impact on the world around them while pursuing their own dreams and fulfilling their ambitions.

His oratorical skills that were par excellence enthralled the audience. Time and again the venue was thundered with applause.

Initiating his address Prof. Aditya Shastri said, "Banasthali has never followed the westernized style of formal convocation ceremonies. We have always had the tradition of beginning the convocation with Vedic Richas. The recipients are dressed in traditional Indian attire made of Khadi and are formally initiated as graduates by the Head of the Institution who gives them a Deeksha in Indian Gurukul tradition."

While introducing the honourable chief guest Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, Vice Chancellor of Banasthali Vidyapith, Prof. Aditya Shastri said that, "Typically



biographic information and salient achievements are shared on such occasions, but everything pales in comparison to the enormous and larger than life persona of his. With humble beginning he has been one of the most prominent public figure of the country for the last several decades. We all know that he has served as the President of Bharatiya Janata Party. He had headed several important Ministries in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government as well as in the current Modi Government before taking over as the Vice President of India in August, 2017. As the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, we have all witnessed his masterly conduct of the proceedings. People attain excellence in their respective fields but it is indeed astonishing and mind blowing how anybody could play so many different roles in one life time. All in all, if I were to summarize his life I would say he has been a great son of the soil and I salute him for a lifetime of dedicated services to the nation. We are all extremely proud that you are the Vice President of this wonderful nation of ours."

In his address, Prof. Shastri said that when he visited the hon'ble Vice President to extend the invitation, he immediately gave him appointment and the Vice Chancellor was deeply touched by the humility of Shri Naidu. Both of them had a discussion over several pertinent issues and during the entire meeting the hon'ble Vice President was extremely humble. In fact, Prof. Shastri went on to say, "the redoubtable belief of the Vice President in the unity and diversity of India and the affection he has for the countrymen reflects his uncomparable faith in Indian culture and strong sense of nationalism." Prof. Aditya Shastri added, "Banasthali also believes in simplicity, humility and modesty and its comprehensive educational ideology rests on the twin pillars of Indian culture and nationalism. Banasthali, as you now know, is the creation of a father who made a promise to himself to train every other girl just the same way he would have trained his own daughter whom he lost before her hour. Banasthali embarked upon its journey way back in 1935, when the concept of education for a girl child virtually didn't exist. Our founders went door to door to recruit students. There was no question of charging any fee over the first few decades. With that humble beginning 83 years ago, Banasthali today stands as one of the world's largest fully residential women's universities having more than 15000 students on its 850-acre campus situated amidst rural setting in Rajasthan and having a distinct educational ideology and offering a variety of programmes from nursery up to doctoral level across a wide spectrum of disciplines to prepare enlightened citizens with strong value-base."

Paying his gratitude to the Vice President, Prof Shastri said that "Banasthali has earned one more well-wisher and we look forward to your enshrined blessings. Today we are extremely delighted and honoured to have you

amongst us."

The vote of thanks was delivered by Prof. Siddharth Shastri, Vice President, Banasthali Vidyapith. He expressed warm gratefulness to hon'ble Vice President of India Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu as well as all the dignitaries, administration, media, guardians, staff and students.



Earlier in the morning, the chief guest of the 34th Convocation of Banasthali Vidyapith, the hon'ble Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu reached Banasthali at 10:00 am by a chopper that landed on Marut Maidan, the airfield of Banasthali Vidyapith. He was accompanied by Shri Arun Chaturvedi, Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment GoR, and Shri Rajpal Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Industry, GoR.

The Vice President of India was received by the President of Banasthali Vidyapith, Prof. Chitra Purohit, Vice President Prof. Siddharth Shastri, Vice Chancellor Prof. Aditya Shastri, Shri Sukhbir Singh Jaunapuriah, MP, Tonk-Sawai Madhopur and the senior officials of the state and district administration. At the Swagat Dwar, the Vice President was given a ceremonial welcome amidst the presence of the Pro Vice Chancellor Prof. Ina Shastri, Prof. Sudha Shastri, Treasurer, Banasthali Vidyapith, the students and the staff members. The band of Banasthali Sewa Dal gave national salute. Shri Naidu was escorted to Shantabai Shiksha Kutir, the birth place of Banasthali and Gandhi Ghar, the residence of the founders where Prof. Aditya Shastri explained the significance of the places. The next destination was Laxmibai Maidan where the chief guest unfurled the national flag. He inspected the parade and was highly impressed by the march past. The chief

guest was all praises for the green and serene campus, activities like horse riding and show jumping that he witnessed during his drive through the university campus.

A total of 3847 graduates were awarded degrees that included 299 PhD degrees. Gold medals were awarded to 99 meritorious students. Flying, horse riding and shooting and all exhibitions as well as departments were open for visitors in the afternoon. Cultural programme representing the rich cultural diversity, both classical and folk of India was also organised for the guests and campus fraternity in the evening.

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Photo: Priyanka Parashar/Mint

## Women fly higher when in charge of their money

4 min read . Updated: 24 Jan 2018, 01:56 AM IST Monika Halan

Being in control of your financial life is a central part of the push towards gender equality

The auditorium was packed. Girls were sitting on the floor in the aisles. I was visiting Banasthali University, 75 km south of Jaipur, to speak to the postgraduate management and journalism students. About 250 curious pairs of eyes were bright with anticipation and I was hoping that I don't let them down.

For those who don't know, a quick update on this unique university. The journey of how this university came to be is quite a story. In 1927, the Jaipur state secretary in the home and foreign department, Pandit Hiralal Shastri, left his powerful job to relocate to a remote village (then) called Banthali to work on rural reconstruction. His friends said he'd gone half mad to do this. Who gives up power, prestige and money like this? But he moved himself and his family to the village. One day he found his 11-year-old daughter, Shanta, teaching the village kids under a tree. Sometime later she asked him for a room so that she could teach them without fear of storms or wild



animals. He told her—you build the bricks and I will build the room. He forgot about the story thinking that the child will move on to other things. Three months later she showed him 300 handmade bricks she and the village kids had made. I saw one of the bricks that the institution has preserved. To touch the brick made by a determined young lady almost a 100 years ago was surreal. Shastri built that room and decided to give his daughter the best education he could manage. Music and martial art classes were organized. There is a painting of young Shanta in a sari, wielding a lathi and practising in one of the preserved rooms. When you remember that this was in rural Rajasthan in the 1920s when girls were married off as soon as they could be, the image of the lathi-wielding girls just adds to the amazement.

But Shastri's dream was shattered when the child died of a fever at age 12. He was devastated and the story goes that he did not come out of his room for days. His wife, with no formal education, then counselled him and asked him why he didn't do something to educate other Shantas? He was moved by the idea and decided to start a girls' residential school in the village. People then said he'd gone fully mad. Who would send their daughters to school and that too in this remote area? Well, 90 years later Banasthali Vidyapith is the world's largest residential university for girls with over 16,000 students studying from elementary school to postgraduate courses. It was fantastic to see six small aircraft in a hangar in their fully licenced aviation school. The university boasts of a stable with 70 horses for the girls, a state-of-the-art robotics lab where the young women learn the internet of things, an incubation centre that hopes to produce women entrepreneurs and postgraduate programmes ranging from philosophy to pharmacy.

When I got the invitation from the University to speak to the girls, I chose to talk about money management for one key reason. These postgraduate girls were about to enter one of the toughest phases of their lives. The ages between 25 to 35 are particularly difficult for women who work outside the home. The career is still new and needs attention. Both marriage and kids usually come around this time for most Indian women. Trying to keep it all together is not easy and to hand over at least that one job to the man—of money management—seems like a no-brainer. But this





Flying officer Avani Chaturvedi who flew a 30-minute solo sortie in an MiG-21 at the Jamnagar airbase. She underwent six months of intensive training at the Air Force Academy in Dundigal, before she was inducted into the IAF fighter squadron. Photo: PTI

## **Avani Chaturvedi, India's first female fighter pilot, has her eyes on the sky**

*2 min read.* Updated: 09 Mar 2018, 07:13 AM IST Radhika Iyengar

On 19 February, Avani Chaturvedi scripted history by becoming the first Indian woman to fly the MiG 21 Bison, solo feat that has helped shatter gender stereotypes in a male-dominated profession

Three weeks ago, on 19 February, Avani Chaturvedi became the first Indian woman to fly the MiG 21 Bison, solo. Not only did this declare that a woman from a small town in Madhya Pradesh could become a combat pilot, but it exponentially contributed to the complex narrative surrounding gender equality in India.

Almost a year and a half ago, in June 2016, Chaturvedi, along with Bhawana Kanth and Mohana Singh, made history by becoming India's first female fighter pilots.

For decades, perennial monologues by men about pregnancy, practical ‘ineptitude’ and menopause have denied women a spot in a gamut of high-pressure professions, including the armed forces. “There is a strong belief that combat, by nature, is a male occupation; that the army is a male space and combat the most masculine of all aspects of war,” wrote senior social scientist and historian, Prem Chowdhry in her paper titled, ‘Women in the Army’, published in Economic and Political Weekly in August 2010.

Chaturvedi has worked hard in destabilising that belief. She underwent six months of intensive training at the Air Force Academy in Dundigal, Hyderabad, before she was inducted into the IAF fighter squadron. “The best part of being a pilot is that you are flying an aircraft—it is a machine. The aircraft does not know who is sitting behind it, so the machine will behave in the same way it would behave with a male pilot,” the 24-year-old told Mint over the phone.

Chaturvedi’s defence family gave her unconditional support, irrespective of her gender. The Indian Air Force, however, has traditionally been structured along immutable gendered lines. How did her male counterparts respond to her presence? “The first day, I think it was quite new to them, as it was for me,” she said. But the men soon exhibited a great sense of camaraderie. “I have a great bond with all my classmates. Every flight—every landing, every take off—is different. There are days when you’ll have a bad sortie, and you will feel bad about it. On these days, when I’d go back and speak to a classmate, I’d learn that, oh, the same thing happened to him also a few days ago. That’s when I feel that I’m not the only one, and that it’s human to make mistakes.”

While pursuing her B.Tech degree, Chaturvedi learned aviation as an additional discipline at the campus aviation school. “It was during a difficult verbal examination for Student Pilot License that our chief flight instructor, Captain S.D. Sharma and chief ground instructor Captain Gautam Bose, discovered that Avani showed a great understanding of aviation. Captain Bose said, ‘This girl has spark; she is very promising’,” recalls the dean of the aviation school, Dr Seema Verma sitting in her



office. "So, we began encouraging her immensely and pushed her to pursue her dream. Rest, as they say, is history."

Today, the number of girls wanting to become fighter pilots has increased. "Initially, this was not the case, because no one had ever dreamt of it," said Dr Verma. "Earlier, most of my students prepped for working in commercial airlines, but today, my girls look at Avani as a role model."

Chaturvedi received her Bachelors in Technology from Banasthali Vidyapith, a university in rural Rajasthan's Tonk district, that is providing the most advance programmes to its students. Banasthali Vidyapith is said to be the country's largest, women's only residential university educating over 16,000 students.



A group of students at the Banasthali Vidyapith Gliding & Flying Club. Photographs: Pradeep Gaur/Mint

## A unique university in Rajasthan is teaching women how to fly

13 min read . Updated: 10 Mar 2018, 04:09 AM IST **Radhika Iyengar**

Banasthali Vidyapith, an 83-year-old institution in Tonk district, trains women in aviation, nanotechnology and pharmacy

LINK: [mint-india-wire Banasthali VidyapithAvani ChaturvediRajasthanInternational Women's DayIndian Air ForceTonkaviation schoolMadhya PradeshSiddharth Shastriroboticsgender gapaviation](#)

Sakshi Gaur slides her palm along the smooth contours of the wing of the Cessna 152. Hair pulled back in a tight ponytail, she taps the body of the aircraft, alert to any odd sound it might make. "This ensures there are no scars on the plane's body, or any cracks on the navigation lights," she says.

The 19-year-old is an aviation student in one of the country's largest women-only residential universities, Banasthali Vidyapith, 75km from Jaipur, in Rajasthan's Tonk district. Established in 1935, the 850-acre campus is marked by 18 buildings that house 28 disciplines. Apart from offering traditional courses like science, law and design, the university also offers aviation science, robotics and nanotechnology. It has its own aviation school, Banasthali Vidyapith Gliding & Flying Club (BVGFC), with an airstrip. Each student is expected to take up at least one physical activity, such as horse-riding, cricket or badminton.

### **Taking off**

Gaur busies herself with every pilot's essential pre-flight routine: checking the propeller, the chassis, testing each tyre's shock-absorbing capacity with her foot. "This is to see whether the aircraft can handle the load when it lands," she says. It is only when she is fully satisfied that she walks away.

Gaur is the only girl in her family studying aviation. Her father wanted one of his children (he has two older sons ) to pursue aviation—but Gaur, closest to him, chose to fulfil his dream. "I would have liked to become a fighter pilot like Avani Chaturvedi," she says as she looks at the plane, referring to the 24-year-old from rural Madhya Pradesh, who, in 2016, became the first woman to be inducted as a combat pilot in the Indian Air Force (IAF). "I can't though. I am 5ft, 2 inches, and the minimum height requirement for a female fighter pilot in the Indian Air Force is 162.5cm (5ft, 3 inches). So I'm going to fly commercial airlines."

**Also read:** Avani Chaturvedi, India's first female fighter pilot, has her eyes on the sky. Chaturvedi graduated from Banasthali Vidyapith in 2014, from its on-campus aviation school, which first began training female pilots back in the 1960s. "At a time when it was considered unreal and absurd for women to drive cars in the country, we were teaching girls how to fly," says Siddharth Shastri, the grandson of the founder, Pandit Hiralal Shastri. He has more reason to be proud: On 19 February, Chaturvedi made history again, becoming the country's first woman to fly a fighter aircraft solo.



Pre-flight checks.

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Born two years after independence, Siddharth, the vice-president of Banasthali Vidyapith, meets us in a high-collared white kurta-pyjama and black Nehru jacket. We are standing in an open courtyard hemmed in by a row of matchbox mud huts painted powder blue, with lime green windows. Locally, this place is known as “old Banasthali”—“the place where it all began,” whispers Shastri, acquiring the air of a storyteller.

In 1927, his grandfather Hiralal Shastri, who served as Jaipur’s state secretary in the home and foreign department, relinquished his post to relocate his family to a remote village called Banthali (today known as Banasthali) in 1929. These one-room mud huts were the first structures he built. “He wanted to help the farmers by educating them, to make them socially and politically aware by fighting against evils like the caste system,” says Siddharth.

Hiralal’s daughter, Shantabai, was also socially driven. A child herself, she spent her days teaching children from the village. “One day, Shantabai approached my



grandfather and asked him whether he could help her build a room where she could teach the children," rather than teaching in the open, says Siddharth. Hiralal considered his daughter's request a child's whim. To distract her, he told her that if she managed to sculpt mud bricks, he would help her build a room. In three months, Shantabai had 300 handmade bricks, fashioned with the help of children from the village. Hiralal built his daughter a schoolroom.

In 1935, at the age of 12, Shantabai succumbed to an illness. Trying to stave off her husband's depression, Hiralal's wife, Ratan Shastri, told him: "You've lost a daughter, but you have the daughters of many friends. Why don't you bring them here and train them as you would have trained Shanta?"

This was the genesis of Banasthali Vidyapith.

There would be countless obstacles in the way. "At that time, many Indian families believed educating a girl had no purpose—it was a waste of time and resources. This was the monolithic mindset my grandfather had to fight," says Siddharth. Hiralal went door to door, trying to convince parents to send their daughters to Banasthali. "In 1935, Banasthali started with just seven girls," says Siddharth. "Today there are 16,000 girls studying here. The institute offers education at the school, undergraduate, postgraduate and doctorate levels."

Banasthali Vidyapith has drawn girls from all parts of the country, from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and the North-East, opening the gates for women even from rural India.



Banasthali Vidyapith vice-president Siddharth Shastri—behind him are paintings of Shantabai making the first Banasthali mud brick and learning self-defence.

### **The aviation school**

It's the first week of February when we visit. The sky is turquoise. Seema Verma, the dean of the Banasthali Vidyapith Gliding & Flying Club, runs her fingers through her cropped hair. It's 8.30 in the morning and we're standing a few metres from a 3,600ft-long unmetalled runway. "We're lucky," she says, tilting her head towards the sky.

"The sun is out and there is clear visibility. It's a great time to fly."

In the distance, a second-year aviation science student is seated inside the cockpit of the Cessna 152, performing the customary pre-flight checks. She is preparing for her first solo flight. Watching her, hawk-eyed, is Banasthali's chief flying instructor and head of training, Captain Amit Dahiya. He has been training aspiring pilots at the institution for two years and is aware of the obstacles his students could face.

"Aviation in India is particularly male-dominated," he says.

Banasthali provides 5-10 hours flying for free to students who wish to acquire a student pilot licence. While the cost of pursuing a commercial pilot licence (CPL) is

Rs20-35 lakh; at Banasthali, it costs Rs17 lakh. Each hour of flying costs about Rs10,000, and the students need at least 200 hours of flying in order to get a commercial licence. "This is still a huge investment from the parents' side," says Captain Dahiya. "A lot of Indian parents don't want to spend so much training their daughters. There are exceptions, of course, but the conventional belief is that the girls will ultimately get married."

Meghali Tyagi's parents, however, have always encouraged their 20-year-old daughter. "Flying was a lifelong dream," Tyagi says. "But when I learnt the amount my parents would have to pay, I didn't want to pursue it." A second-year student, she lives in an on-campus hostel. Tyagi wakes up well before dawn to wash and iron her clothes. She wolfs down her breakfast and then makes the 15-minute walk to the aviation school, reporting every day at 8.30am sharp.

"My mother pushed me to become a pilot," she continues. "She said: 'You don't worry about the money, you just fly. You are not flying—it is me who is flying through you.' "



The daily horse-riding drill.

## **Rooted in history**

As Siddharth walks us into a small hut in old Banasthali, the sun begins to set. A few metres away, a campus shop has begun to play a peaceful Sanskrit mantra. Inside, black and white portraits of Siddharth's grandfather and grandmother rest on a plinth that is covered by a white cloth. On the wall hangs an iconic photograph: an image of the members of the constituent assembly. Hiralal sits to the far right, smiling.

The students of Banasthali made their own contributions to the freedom struggle.

During the Quit India Movement, says Siddharth, young women from the institution took to the streets and walked shoulder to shoulder with the protesting men. It became, he adds, one of Nehru's favourite institutions.

Siddharth adds that Nehru encouraged Hiralal to apply for government grants so that Banasthali could grow, giving more girls opportunities. "Nehru would be extremely happy when he would visit Banasthali," says Siddharth. "It was here that he found the kind of India he imagined—one that thrived in unity and diversity. The girls came from everywhere—belonging to different religions, castes and classes. In fact, he once told my grandfather, 'I talk of national integration, but it is in Banasthali that I find national integration realized'."

Today, Banasthali Vidyapith is a deemed university, inaugurated in 1983 by the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi.





Aviation science students with a plane they made during aeromodelling classes.

### **School of automation**

The automation classroom is filled with unfamiliar thrums when we walk in. Within a 12x10ft glass room, a 20-year-old is standing before a powerful 5-tonne robot with a mounted arm, the KR-16. An orange wireless smart-pad rests in her palm; she is using it to “instruct” the bulky KR-16 to write on A3-size paper. Her classmates huddle behind her, watching intently as the machine glides the marker across the page, drawing a vertical line, two adjoining semi-circles and a horizontal line above them to construct a letter. The machine is writing in Devanagari.

“The girls are teaching it how to write,” says Shaily Sharma, the dean of the Bajaj School of Automation. The KR-16 was originally programmed to perform welding, lifting, and handling material, but the students have trained it to do other things. “It recently drew our institution’s logo as well,” says one of the students, Vidhushi Bisht. In 2011, Sharma and other members of the university’s engineering school decided to revisit the curriculum for the students, and identify structural inadequacies. “We were worried that the course was gradually losing impact,” she admits. The school was



providing basic theoretical knowledge, but was unable to give the girls hands-on experience. "So we decided to create an environment within the school that would be somewhat similar to the industry culture."

In 2015, the school reached out to Bajaj Auto Ltd with a blueprint of its automation project. Bajaj came on board, partially funding the project and financing a hostel for the engineering students. It has also allotted Rs1 crore per year for student scholarships. The school has procured robots and other machines from Bosch, Festo, TAL India Ltd and Siemens Ltd.

Robotics is another field in India that is dominated by men. This does not deter the girls at Banasthali though. Ankita Srivastav, chirpy and exuding confidence, sits beside her classmate Soumya Mehrotra. Both are third-year BTech (electronics and communication) students. Srivastav's interest in technology took root a few years ago, when she came across cellphones for the first time. When it became clear this was the line she wanted to follow, Srivastav's father spent weeks researching a good institute. "He found a prestigious institute in Agra, known for its technology department," Srivastav says. "But he learnt, by word of mouth, that they taught boys and girls differently. Sometimes they would teach the boys in practical labs, make a video of it and show it to the girls. This meant that the girls were not given practical lab experience. But he wanted me to have the best education possible. He eventually learnt about Banasthali, and here I am."

"The thing is, here you're allowed to make mistakes," says Mehrotra, whose focus is security and technology. She plans to become a technical security assistant in the air force. "Our teachers are not interested in the 'perfect' end result of a project; they are more concerned about what and how we learn while working on a project."



Students with the KUKA KR-16 robot.

### **The first step**

As evening sets in, the weather is reasonably pleasant. In the distance, a group of girls are playing badminton. On a stage-like platform, a handful of girls seem to be preparing for a play. We cross the horse-riding ground, where students in track pants and protective headgear trot by on their horses. Overhead, a Banasthali Vidyapith plane flies across the sky.

The confidence of this community of women is palpable. They are passionate about their areas of study, their professional ambitions. What is the future of this institution and what does it envision for the modern Indian woman?

Later, we sit down with Banasthali's vice-chancellor, Aditya Shastri (Hiralal's grandson and Siddharth's cousin), for tea. Aditya, a large bespectacled man, waves his hands occasionally as he speaks. "If you analyse the 80 years of the institution's history, the first 25 years were focused on going door to door, bringing the girl child out of her home and into school. By the 1960s, quite a few girls started coming to the school (but they would leave early, due to marriage)—so from 1960-85, our mission

was to retain them," he says, leaning back into his chair. "From 1985-2010, we focused on the emerging areas, particularly those traditionally considered male domains: management, engineering and entrepreneurship. For the next 10-15 years, our agenda is now to develop leadership qualities—to encourage our students to 'think big and think beyond'."

There have been critics who argue that Banasthali Vidyapith nurtures its girls in a sanitized world, a cocoon which does not prepare them for the harshness of a patriarchal world.

"Gender sensitization is an important part of our educational programme," says Siddharth. "While we tell our girls that men and women are complementary and must support each other, we also tell them that they should build a strong sense of self. They must keep their identity intact." This is why the institute offers accompanying programmes like business entrepreneurship and financial management.

Classroom education is only one dimension of the holistic education Banasthali offers.

It customarily invites female role models from various fields to speak. "These role models are high achievers, those who have also managed to maintain a balance between family and work life," says Siddharth. "For the girls, these role models are important. You cannot teach these things from textbooks and classroom lectures."

Over the years, Banasthali Vidyapith has produced illustrious alumna, such as Avani Chaturvedi, Meira Kumar (the country's first woman Lok Sabha speaker, and a 2017 presidential candidate), Asian marathon champion Sunita Godara (1992), Kamla Beniwal (Gujarat governor, 2009-14) and Hollywood film editor Anuradha Singh.

While there are a handful of women-only residential universities within the country, including the Mody University of Science and Technology in Laxmangarh, Rajasthan, and Assam Women's University (the state's first women-only university), Banasthali Vidyapith is one of the largest, with an array of unconventional programmes.

Although the institute offers support to its girls, the onus of carving their own identity is solely on them. "Ultimately, it depends on us," says Meghali Tyagi. "In life, we will come across many shackles that will attempt to stop us—but it is up to us to break

them. Unless we put our best foot forward and keep marching, we cannot succeed. We have to take the first step."

**My mother pushed me to become a pilot. She said, 'You don't worry about the money, you just fly. You are not flying—it is me who is flying through you.'**-

Meghali Tyagi, 2nd Year Aviation Science Student

## **Benchmarks**

### **Few illustrious graduates of Banasthali Vidyapith**

#### **Avani Chaturvedi, 24**

She made history by becoming the first Indian woman to fly the fighter jet MiG-21 Bison solo on 19 February. Chaturvedi is also one of the country's first three women fighter pilots.

#### **Anuradha Singh, 45**

A Hollywood film editor, Singh has worked on films like the Academy award-winning 'Slumdog Millionaire', 'Million Dollar Arm', 'The Hundred-Foot Journey' and 'West Is West'.

#### **Sunita Godara, 58**

An Asian marathon champion (1992) and Arjuna award winner, Godara also carried the Olympic flame at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.

#### **Binny Yanga, 1958-2015**

Yanga was a Padma Shri award-winning (2012) social activist and a member of the erstwhile National Planning Commission of India.

#### **Meira Kumar, 72**

Kumar is the country's first woman speaker of the Lok Sabha (2009-14), and was a 2017 presidential candidate.

#### **Kamla Beniwal, 91**

She served as the governor of Tripura in 2009, becoming the first female governor of a North-East state. She also served as the governor of Gujarat from 2009-14, and as governor of Mizoram in 2014.

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28 March 2018

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THIS STORY IS FROM MARCH 28, 2018

## Governor Kalyan Singh honours Banasthali Vidyapith

TNN | Updated: Mar 28, 2018, 13:06 IST



JAIPUR: Banasthali Vidyapith has been felicitated by governor Kalyan Singh at Raj Bhawan in a joint programme organized by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and Raj Bhawan, Jaipur, for its significant national and international achievements in university rankings and ratings on March 26.

The QS World University ranking is regarded as one of the three most influential and reliable university rankings in the world. This ranking was based on eight indicators to select the top 100 higher learning institutions in BRICS countries.

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"No Indian University has secured a rating of more than four stars in the QS ratings," says Prof Aditya Shastri, Vice-Chancellor, Banasthali while adding that university was given five stars in teaching, employability, facilities, arts, culture, and inclusiveness. Besides, Banasthali has been awarded Diamond rating by QS I-Gauge and is ranked among the top 350 Universities in BRICS.

Banasthali Vidyapith has given the nation governors, speakers, corporate chief executives, international sportspersons, renowned artists, musicians, leading administrators, eminent educationists and social activists.

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