



DHEERA CHALIHA HAZARIKA

Sky is the limit for her

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Born in Jorhat in 1940, Dheera Chaliha's primary education started in the Gitarthi School, Jorhat. Thereafter, when she was eight, the family shifted to Guwahati, due to her father's transferable job. She then took admission for Class 3 in T.C. High School, Guwahati and studied there till Class 10. After passing her matriculation exams, Dheera took admission in Handique Girls' College in 1956 to study the intermediate course.

While she was studying in Handique, fate took a slight twist. Even as a young girl, Dheera was fascinated by aeroplanes and had always wanted to fly. In 1958, a group of enterprising people had started the Assam Flying club and were offering ten scholarships to young people to encourage them to learn flying. Getting a chance to realise her dream, Dheera applied and was called for interview. A panel of three officers from the Director General of Aviation office in Delhi came along to Guwahati to interview her. Dheera was fortunate to have passed the interview and for being selected for a flying scholarship.

So began a new lifestyle for Dheera. Early morning, she would be taken to the Assam Flying club to clock up flying hours and then she would come back home, change her uniform and attend classes in Handique college. After 17 hours of dual flight, she was finally allowed to fly solo and try for her PPL (Private Pilots Licence). That day will always be etched in her memory because for the first time, Dheera was alone in the sky, the open space giving her a sense of tremendous freedom. She felt like being on the top of the world. On finally acquiring her PPL, Dheera Chaliha Hazarika had in the process created history, for she was Assam's first lady pilot.

Again, fate had other things in store. She continued to fly alone to acquire more solo hours to her credit. After 40 hours of solo flight, she used to carry passengers in her two-seater Hindustan Pushpak. But while she was preparing to obtain the B Licence (Commercial Licence) her wedding was arranged with London-based singer and lyricist Kamal Hazarika and she had to take the decision to settle down and start a new life. So Dheera moved to London and concentrated on family life. In time, she had two children and brought them up to be independent and successful, with a gutsy attitude - just like her! Now at 70, Dheera still holds a hope that one day she will sit behind the controls on an aeroplane and feel the exhilaration of flying alone once more. Though Dheera Hazarika still continues to live in the U.K, she has strong ties to her motherland and comes to Assam every year. She is also a columnist for *Asom Bani* with a regular column on her life in London. □□