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PHENOMENAL WOMAN

Making history, with every step

Chennaiite Capt. Divya Ajith Kumar led the widely-celebrated first all-woman Army contingent in the Republic Day parade

K. Manikandan

On a chilly winter Monday, amidst a light drizzle, history was made as an all-woman Army contingent marched on the stretch in Rajpath, New Delhi, during the Republic Day parade.

Seated in the audience, in gallery no. 14, was Binah Ajith Kumar. A resident of Madipakkam, her heart overflowed with pride as the women officers marched by. After all, the contingent was led by her daughter Capt. Divya Ajith Kumar.

"Her contingent was the first to march after the display of military firepower, machines and vehicles. When it was announced that the first ever all-woman Army contingent was marching by, everyone in the audience rose and applauded. When my daughter's name was announced as contingent commander, I was overjoyed; it was the most memorable moment in my life," Ms. Binah recalls.

Belonging to the Corps of Army Air Defence, Capt. Divya marched past the dignitaries and audience, flanked by two woman officers. They were followed by 144 serving woman officers from the Army and trainee lady cadets from OTA.

This is not the first time Capt. Divya is marching on the Rajpath stretch. She had also led the all-India contingent of National Cadet Corps's senior division girls wing for the Republic Day parade in 2008, when she won the All India Best Girl Cadet and best parade commander awards. Capt. Divya was a student of Good Shepherd Convent and a B. Com graduate from Stella Maris College.

Her NCC officer from college, Dolly Thomas, remembers her as very focussed



ROLE MODEL: This was the second time Capt. Divya participated in the Republic Day parade after marching as an NCC cadet in 2008 — PHOTO: K.V. SRINIVASAN

and hardworking. "She was very responsible and used to single-handedly take care of Cadostar, our annual inter-college NCC festival," Prof. Thomas says.

Capt. Divya graduated from college in 2009, cleared the Combined Defence Services Examination and joined OTA the same year. She passed out in 2010, bagging the sword of honour – the first woman to receive it in the history of the academy, where she is now an instructor. She had earlier served in Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir.

"It was a terrific feeling and I got a lot of calls of appreciation. I want more young women, especially from Tamil Nadu, to join the army," adds the 25-year-old, who, like any true Chennaiite, is a fan of the Marina Beach.