

# THE WAR WITHIN

The Tale Of Aviator Gunjan Saxena, The Woman Who Bleeds Blue Through And Through

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It was a perfect winter morning. 17-year-old Gunjan, the eldest daughter in Saxena family, was preparing and serving the daily breakfast, but she seemed far away mentally. “Where are you?” asked her younger sister. “I always see you lost in your thoughts every morning.” “No, no. I was just thinking of a new recipe of cheese bread rolls that I saw on YouTube and want to try out,” Gunjan quickly changed the subject.

## The dreams

Everything would have been normal, but for Gunjan, these dreams were becoming both frequent and vivid. The dreams revolved around a tree, gunshots, and shouts of Vande Mataram. She would often wake up shouting ‘Inquilab Zindabad!’

So it was decided that the following Sunday, Gunjan’s parents would take her to a doctor. In a hushed tone, Gunjan’s father narrated the repeated sleep episodes to the doctor. After carefully examining Gunjan and asking a barrage of questions, the doctor concluded that Gunjan had no physical ailment and that they should meet renowned psychiatrist, Dr Gopal Krishan.

## The realisation

Dr Krishan made Gunjan sit on a nicely-cushioned sofa and asked her to relax. He took out a pendulum and asked her to con-

centrate on it and watch it closely. Slowly but surely Gunjan fell into a deep sleep. Dr Krishan started his questions. He asked, “Who are you?” “Gunjan,” came the reply. “Which school do you go to?” “Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Gomti Nagar.” “Who are your parents?” “Govind Saxena and Angoori Devi”, promptly came the response. Now that Gunjan was comfortable, Dr Krishan started his questions on a different thread. “Which tree do you see in your dreams?” After a pause came the reply, “a peepal tree.” “What year is it?” “1857.” “Where are you when you see the tree?” “On top of it, hiding,” she replied. “Why are you hiding?” “I’m hiding from the British soldiers who are searching for me.” “What did you do that the British soldiers are looking for you?” “I am a revolutionary and head of a women’s battalion under the command of Begum Hazrat Mahal.” “What is the girl’s name who is sitting on top of the tree?” “Uda Devi.” “Tell me about Uda Devi.” “I was born in Lucknow into a Dalit family and was brought up with a patriotic streak. My husband and I decided to enlist in the revolt against the oppressive forces of the British. We reached out to the queen of the district, Begum Hazrat Mahal, to enlist for the impending war. The begum made me in-charge of the women’s battalion and my husband was a soldier in her army.” “Tell me about the events that led to the day you were atop the tree.” Gunjan replied, “I took

part in the battle in Sikandar Bagh in November 1857. After I issued instructions to my battalion, I climbed up a peepal tree and began shooting at the advancing British soldiers. Suspecting the sniper was atop a tree, a British officer ordered his soldiers to fire at the trees. One of the bullets hit me and I fell to the ground. Even in such acute pain, I thanked God that I was dying in the service of my nation.”

It was by now clear that Gunjan was a reincarnation of Uda Devi, the Dalit freedom fighter who had played a crucial role in the Indian rebellion of 1857. The doctor decided to take Gunjan out of the hypnosis and ended the session. When Gunjan resumed normalcy, the doctor asked her again, “What is it that you desire the most?” Gunjan answered, “I have an innate and compelling desire to join the Indian Armed Forces.”

## The redemption

The family returned home quietly, thinking about what had transpired in Dr Krishan’s clinic. Gunjan’s desire to join the Armed Forces was now playing on the minds of the worried parents and sister. Her father checked the eligibility and was disappointed to find out that girls were not allowed to join the NDA. So, he decided that Gunjan should appear for the AFCAT (Air Force Common Admission Test), a test conducted by Indian Air Force to select Class-I Gazetted Officers in Flying and

Ground Duties. Being an intelligent girl, Gunjan passed the exam with flying colours. Through hard work and dedication, Gunjan grew in stature and ranks, and soon became a flight lieutenant. She was considered one of the finest fighter chopper pilots of the land.

It was now May 1999. Newspapers were abuzz with the news of Pakistani incursion into Kargil. Multiple action plans were being devised at a feverish pace in the army control rooms. Two women combat aviators, Gunjan Saxena and Vidya Rajan, were entrusted with the dangerous yet very strategic task of flying sorties into the combat zones and gaining vital intelligence that had to be passed on to the Indian artillery gunners and fighter pilots. These outstanding women not only brought back the intelligence, but also carried back injured Indian soldiers amidst the never-ending exchange of bullets and missiles. It was as if she was born for this day. The only thought that consumed her was to rid her motherland of the infiltrators. Through the precise intelligence provided to the brave artillery gunners and fighter pilots, India finally won the war.

The news of India’s victory was music to Gunjan’s ears. She felt lighter and the long-standing weight had been lifted from her shoulders. She instinctively started shouting “Inquilab Zindabad. Bharat Mata Ki Jai.” Finally, Gunjan was feeling a sense of redemption that her soul had sought.

