

Chapter 26

Defence Officer: Wahida



Have you ever seen her photograph anywhere? She is Lieutenant Commander Wahida Prism, doctor in the Indian Navy. She is one of the few women who has worked on a naval ship. She is the first woman to lead a parade. This is considered to be a very big honour in the armed forces.

We specially spoke to Wahida for this book. Let us read what we spoke.

Question – Wahida, tell us something about your childhood and school.

Wahida – I come from a very small village called Thannamandi. This is in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir. I did my schooling from a government school. Most of the girls from the village studied in my school. However, few of them ever thought of what they would do

For the teacher: Encourage children to locate Jammu and Kashmir on the map of India.

after finishing school. I always wanted to become someone special and move forward in life. I was very interested in higher studies and wanted to complete the tenth class. In my area, it was a new thing at that time. My mother and father had to face many problems because of this. We even had to move out of our village. We then went to live with my grandmother in Rajouri. I did my twelfth class from there.

Question – So you always thought differently right from the beginning?

Wahida – Even when I was very young I wanted to do something different. I was very fond of riding a motor-cycle. We are three sisters. My father wanted one of us to become a doctor and one a teacher. He wanted the third daughter to become a lawyer or join the police force. I have become a doctor in the Indian Navy and my sister is in the Jammu Police Force.

Question – How did you become a doctor?

Wahida – I worked very hard. My friends and family members helped me a lot. I got admission in Jammu Medical College. I studied for five years and did my M.B.B.S.

Question – How did you get into the Defence Forces? Didn't your family stop you?

Wahida – Oh, no! They felt that a job in the Forces would be the best thing for me. When I was very small, I would see army officers in our village. I wanted to be like them. This was really a very big dream for me! While in school, I attended camps,

For the teacher: Children can be informed about all the three forces. For this, help can be taken from children from the defence background.



climbed mountains and was a 'Girl Guide'. After I became a doctor, I appeared for an interview to join the Armed Forces. I got selected there and received a training for six months.

Question – Why did you join the Indian Navy? Do you not have to live on the naval ship?

Wahida – Well, I am very fond of travelling. I like to see different places. I wanted to go to far-off places. I was born in the hills and now I am working in sea. I really enjoy it.

Very few lady-officers have worked on a ship. I am one of them. Earlier, women were not allowed to go on Naval ships. When an opportunity was given, I myself went forward and gave my name. I even want to go in a submarine. I want to do everything which people think women cannot do. At present women are not allowed to go in submarines, but whenever it is allowed, I will certainly go.

Question – So what happened to your degree of M.B.B.S?

Wahida – I am a doctor, but in Indian Navy a naval doctor does not just give medicine to patients. She is in fact, a medical officer. The ship goes to sea for three-four months at a time. There, it is my responsibility to make sure that everybody on the ship stays fit and healthy. I carry out medical check-ups of all the officers and sailors. I also have to make sure that

cleanliness is maintained on the ship. I have to ensure that no garbage collects and there are no rats on the ship. Rats and garbage can spread diseases. I must keep everybody, ready for any medical emergency on the ship. In case there is an accident on the ship, (like a fire), everybody must be ready to deal with it.



Question – Is there a hospital on the ship?

Wahida – ‘First aid’ is given on every naval ship. Each ship has one doctor and two or three assistants. Necessary medicines and some equipment are also available. All these things are kept in a small room.

Question – You are the first woman to lead a parade. You must have worked very hard for this.

Wahida – My seniors gave this opportunity to me after seeing my performance for three years. I felt happy that they had chosen me and showed faith in me. So I practiced very sincerely.

Question – Tell us something about that parade.

Wahida – In a parade, four platoons march behind the leader. Thirty-six commands have to be given during the entire parade. These must be given in a very loud voice so that it is heard till the rear. The voice should also reach the spectators sitting on the other side of the ground.

For the teacher: Other occupations may also be discussed while teaching this lesson.



Question – Didn't you feel nervous leading four platoons?

Wahida – I was not nervous, but one has to shout thirty-six commands. If you forget even one, the entire parade can get spoiled. I practised every morning and evening for a month. But, I have been

participating in parades since school.

Question – What is the meaning of the word 'Prism' in your name?

Wahida – My father gave this name to me. A prism is a kind of glass which reflects seven colours. My father wanted me to be like a prism and that is why he started calling me by this name from my childhood itself.

❏ Do you know anyone who is in defence services? Is the person in the Navy, Army or Air Force?

❏ What work do they do in the force?

❏ Would you like to join the defence services?

❏ Which of the three would you like to join – the Army, the Navy or the Air Force?

- ö In which other jobs do people wear uniforms as in defence services?

ö Wahida works as a doctor in the Indian Navy. Can you name five other occupations in the Navy?

- ö Have you ever seen a parade? Hold a parade in your own school and try giving thirty-six-commands – for example, “Parade, Eyes Right”, “Don’t move”, “Close in”, “Open file”. Can you add some more commands to this list?

- ö Talk to a doctor and find out about her/his work.

- ö Do you know any woman who has done something unusual? Talk to her in the same way as we talked to Lt. Cdr. Wahida Prism. Think of the questions that you will ask. Find out why she has chosen that work. What were the difficulties she faced in her life?

