

Indian immigrant living American dream, shooting for stars in Air Force Reserve

By Master Sgt. Chance Babin, Air Force Recruiting Service Public Affairs

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Airman 1st Class Sorav Basu Roy (left), an air transportation specialist assigned to the 482nd Fighter Wing, Homestead Air Reserve Base, and a commercial pilot with United Express, pictured here in the cockpit of a Bombardier Canadair Regional Jet with co-pilot Nicholas Emery who is also a warrant officer in the Army National Guard.

Airman 1st Class Sorav Basu Roy, an air transportation specialist assigned to the 482nd Fighter Wing here and a commercial airline pilot with United Express, is living the American dream.

Born and raised in the small, mountainous and underdeveloped city of Agartala, India, Basu Roy had big dreams as a little boy. Thankfully, he also had parents who encouraged him to shoot for the stars.

“My childhood dream was to be an astronaut someday,” he said. “But, in my society there was so much prejudice that not many people supported me, except my parents.”

He recalled writing an essay on his life goals when he was just 6 years old and receiving an unusual reaction from his teacher about his future aspirations.

“I wrote an essay saying I would like to be an astronaut and how I would start by being a pilot,” he said. “But my teacher got mad at me. She thought I was being a daydreamer even though I was a good student at the time. She spanked my hands with a bamboo stick until my palms got red. She even made fun of me with a few other teachers. But I believe those kinds of experiences made me a strong and successful person today.”

Unlike his teacher, Basu Roy’s parents supported his dreams.

When he was 18, his parents decided it was time to send Basu Roy to the United States.

Within 19 days of arriving in the U.S., Basu Roy began flight training. Having spent endless hours on a computer-based flight simulator growing up in India, he was well prepared for the actual training.

“My instructor was so happy that I already knew so much about the aircraft,” he said. “On top of that, I was able to do all the maneuvers by myself without his intervention. In my first entry in my pilot logbook, he wrote ‘Excellent Job.’”

Basu Roy did his first solo flight when he was 19 and he passed his first exam for his private pilot’s license with flying colors. He received his instrument rating and his commercial pilot’s license in just six months.

With his pilot certificates in hand, he enrolled at Miami Dade College to work on his associate’s degree and began working toward his certified flight instructor rating.

He earned an associate of science degree in pilot technology and a Bachelor of Science degree in information technology as a distinguished graduate while simultaneously pursuing his aviation career.

“Four years ago, when I started flying as a flight instructor, I trained many new pilots who passed with flying colors and now work for airlines worldwide,” he said.

An accomplished flight instructor, Basu Roy accepted a job with Air Wisconsin Airlines, a regional partner of United Airlines.

“I joined them as a first officer about three years ago and accumulated more than 3,000 hours in total flight time. I now have more than 1,500 hours in jet time,” he said.

He became an airline captain at age 24, then Basu Roy turned his attentions to reaching his lifelong dream of becoming an astronaut.

“I applied for the U.S. Navy in 2016, thinking that someday it will open a pathway for me to apply for Test Pilot School, which will make it easier for me to one day be a NASA astronaut,” he said.

During his application process, the Navy stopped recruiting people without a residency card due to a government directive. Undeterred, Basu Roy continued to look for a way to chase his dreams of becoming an astronaut and serve his country. Since he is not an American citizen yet, he is not eligible to be an Air Force pilot. But he talked to an Air Force recruiter who explained that he could enlist. He set his sights on joining the Air Force Reserve.

“When I first met Basu Roy, I was impressed because he was a 24-year-old airline pilot,” said Tech. Sgt. Reynaldo Rodriguez, a line recruiter with the 351st Recruiting Squadron. “He was willing to join as an enlisted member, with hopes of becoming a pilot later.”

Basu Roy was all set to join the Reserve in late 2019, when an opportunity he couldn't refuse came up. He received an offer from United Airlines to transfer from the regional carrier to the main airline.

“So I stopped the enlistment process for some time,” he said. “My plan was to start with United and then eventually enlist in the Reserve.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit and the commercial aviation industry suffered a major slowdown, Basu Roy's position at United was put on hold and he thought it would be the perfect time to begin his military career.

While he is excited about serving as an Airman, he still has some loftier goals in mind.

"My job for now will be air transportation," he said. "My immediate next goal is to get selected by any pilot board within the Air Force Reserve, anywhere in the continental United States for an undergraduate pilot training slot and eventually make it to the Test Pilot School."

With his sight set on still becoming an astronaut one day, he has already been accepted for a doctoral degree in unmanned aerial systems once he completes his master's degree.

"I chose Unmanned Systems because I believe that is the future as everything will go pilotless with Artificial Intelligence," he said. "Having my Ph.D. in Unmanned Systems, I will be future ready."

As he continues to build his resume Basu Roy set his sights on his ultimate dream.

"This year, for the first time, I applied for NASA's astronaut program as a civilian," he said. "I know nobody gets selected as an astronaut on the first attempt, so I will keep on trying until I fulfill this life goal from my childhood. I will be an Air Force Reserve pilot and then, soon enough, a NASA astronaut. That day will be my dream come true."

Alot of credit goes to those who came into my life and left a positive impact on me. I can succeed in my life because of the help I got from so many kind people. I would like to thank the United States of America for giving me so many enormous opportunities. This is and will forever be a land of opportunity. Dreams do come true here. God bless America!"