

# Kalpana Chawla

by ReadWorks

From a very young age, Kalpana Chawla knew she wanted to fly. She would ask her father to take her on plane rides at the flying club near her home in Karnal, India. Her interest in flying led her to pursue a career in engineering.

After graduating with a degree in aeronautical engineering from a college in India, she moved to the United States. She became a U.S. citizen in the 1980s.

Kalpana began working for NASA in 1988. Six years later, she was chosen to begin training in order to become an astronaut. After a year of training, she was assigned to her first space mission on board the space shuttle *Columbia*. By participating in this mission, she became the first Indian-born woman in space.

Her first mission took place from November 19 to December 5, 1997. While on the shuttle, Kalpana and her fellow astronauts made 252 orbits of the earth. They traveled 6.5 million miles in about 15 days! During this time, they carried out a number of experiments and used a satellite to study the outer layer of the sun.

After her first shuttle launch, Kalpana said, "When you look at the stars and the galaxy, you feel that you are not just from any particular piece of land, but from the solar system."

In 2000, Kalpana was selected for her second space mission. Like her first mission, she would be flying on the space shuttle *Columbia*. Technical problems delayed the mission until 2003. When the mission finally began, Kalpana and the



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*This is a photo of Kalpana Chawla taken in March 2002.*



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*This is a photo of Kalpana Chawla in the space shuttle Columbia on January 27, 2003.*

other astronauts conducted experiments on Earth and space science. Between her two missions, Kalpana spent a total of 30 days, 14 hours, and 54 minutes in space.

Tragically, the *Columbia* broke up as it returned to Earth on February 1, 2003. Kalpana and the rest of the astronauts on board did not survive the return.

After her death, Kalpana was honored in several ways. Some buildings were named for her. She even had a street and an asteroid named after her. And she was awarded the Congressional Space Medal of Honor.