

**Rajnish Sharma says...**

## I learnt more than flying from them: Air Marshal (R) Harish Masand

**W**ith 28 Squadron, The First Supersonics, celebrating their Diamond Jubilee in March 2023, I thought this was an appropriate time to pay tribute to a living legend who not only converted the Squadron

on MiG-29s but also set a new bar on aerobatics and air combat. I have known Air Marshal Harish Masand since 18 March 1989, then a Wing Commander. In fact, it was an enrapturing experience as I watched him flying with graceful

dexterity his MiG-29 over Tilpat Firing Range during Air Power Demonstration (APD). It was a solo aerobatic display. The way he flew enthralled me and all the spectators. I could see the excitement among the onlookers as they watched him flying over the range. The whole sequence of his aerobatic display is still vivid in my mind. 9 G turn and Hammer Stall were particularly breathtaking. The next day's Hindustan Times newspaper carried an article about APD and described Wing Commander Masand's aerobatic display that stole the show from Thunderbolts aerobatic Team (the erstwhile aerobatic team of IAF). A similar write-up is in the VAYU issue in 1989. These bear testimony to Air Marshal Masand's flying skills. Even a layman like me could understand that his aerobatic display was extraordinary. From that day onwards I started taking even a keener interest in military aviation and Air Marshal Masand.

I had a strong desire to meet Wing Commander Masand and the desire to meet him grew stronger with each passing day. Since I didn't know where he was posted at that time, I sent a New Year Greeting card addressed to Air Chief Marshal NC Suri in December 1992 and requested him to redirect an enclosed envelope addressed to Wing Commander Masand to wherever he was posted then. Thankfully, the Air Chief redirected that envelope to Wing Commander Masand. I express my gratitude to Air Chief Suri Sir if he is reading this article. Sometime in the middle of January 1993 I received a letter from Group Captain Masand (he was promoted to Group Captain soon after the APD). He was in the USA then, deputed by IAF for a course in Air War College, Montgomery, Alabama. Group Captain Masand had topped in that course, thereby adding another feather in his cap.

Soon after his return from the USA sometime in 1993 he was appointed as Director of MiG upgrade. The redoubtable MiG-21s (I would rather prefer to call

