

What's next? The MiG-21 story



It is easy to vilify, but hard to criticise, and agonising to witness unfortunate demise of sky warriors—the warrior, the legend, the MiG-21 which is unnecessarily maligned.

After having a charismatic career of more than 60 years, some of the last of the remaining MiG-21 fleet were relocated in 2023 to the Nal Air Force Base in Bikaner of Rajasthan. These are scheduled to be replaced by India's indigenous Tejas Mk.1A. Unfortunately, everything is not green on its side. Once a mainstay of the IAF and a proud witness of an astonishing combat record in services, it has now plunged into dwindling reputation, earning the misnomer “Flying Coffin,” plagued by an alarmingly high crash rate in the past several decades.

The MiG-21 was envisioned as a delta wing light fighter aircraft in the early fifties, mainly to intercept long range American bombers as the Cold War just started to erect its fangs. Initially mired in limitations, it gradually proved itself as one of the most successful designs of its time. It bears the legacy of being the most produced supersonic jet fighter and the longest serving fighter jet with a history of more than sixty years! Out of a total production of around 12,000, 1200 have seen services with IAF, of which 840 subjects were license produced by HAL.

In India it entered into service in 1963, just four years after induction by the Soviets when F-13 (Type74) equipped



the newly raised No. 28 Squadron, “First Supersonics.” It was quickly followed by Type-75, which, however, had little contribution in the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965. Post-war saw the induction of newer models on a war footing, paving the way for HAL to start manufacturing