

# An operational view of MiG-23MF with the Indian Air Force



The 1980s ushered the Indian Air Force into a whirlwind of modernisation, leaping almost two generations of combat capability with the induction of six new fighter types, namely the Jaguar (1979), the variable geometry MiG-23BN and MiG-23MF (1981-82), the much celebrated, first truly-multirole Mirage 2000 (1985), the more advanced iteration of the MiG-23BN, the MiG-27ML (1985-86) and finally the then state-of-the-art air defence interceptor, the MiG-29 (1987). During this rapid transition from the Second Generation fighter aircraft to Fourth Generation, of all the aircraft types procured, the MiG-23MF was born and left service in a largely 'silent' fashion.

Acquired in 1982 as a direct counter to the Pakistan's F-16s, the Soviet-built swing-wing interceptor arrived with ground-breaking systems — variable-geometry wings, a high-powered Beyond Visible Range (BVR) missile with Track While Scanning (TWS) radar and blistering speed. But its story in India diverged sharply from its global prominence. Limited to just 40 airframes, perhaps the smallest procurement of all the fighter

types, the MiG-23MF operated in the starkest contrasts: defending the rarified Himalayan skies to patrolling the Thar Desert's scorching expanse, and even towing banners over Gujarat's coast.

