

AIR MARSHAL SUBROTO MUKERJEE MEMORIAL ORATION



AIR MARSHAL SUBROTO MUKERJEE OBE

Air Marshal Subroto Mukerjee OBE (05 Mar 1911 - 08 Nov 1960) lived a life of determination, dedication and total commitment to the cause of the service that he guided from its inception until its transformation into the Air Arm of independent India. In the early 1930's, when the British government in India could no longer ignore the growing demands of the Indian people for greater representation in the higher ranks of the defence services, it grudgingly began the process of 'Indianisation' of the services. As a result, the Indian Air Force (IAF) came into its existence on 08 October 1932.

While the older services were marked for partial 'Indianisation', the IAF became the first truly Indian service, as only Indians could be granted commission or enrolled in its ranks. In those early days, a career in the Air Force was an uncharted territory for Indians, made all the more difficult by the prevailing discriminatory and obstructive mindset of the majority of the British in India who were extremely skeptical of the ability of the 'natives' to fly military aircrafts. Air Marshal Subroto Mukerjee was one of the six Indians selected for training as pilots at the RAF College, Cranwell. The date of commission of this small pioneering band coincided with the date of formation of the Indian Air Force. In July 1938, he was put in command of 'B' Flight of the No.1 IAF Squadron in the rank of Flying Officer. He became the first Indian Officer to command a Squadron when he took over the

squadron on 16 March 1939. After converting to the Hawker Hart, the squadron moved to Miranshah in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). He led the squadron into action against the tribals of the NWFP during this tenure. When World War - II broke out in the East, Mukerjee was at the Air HQ as a Wing Commander. He served in various staff assignments during the war. He was awarded with the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1944 for his distinguished service during the war. At the time of Independence, he was the senior most Air Commodore serving in the IAF. On 15 August 1947, the Armed Forces became independent forces with the formation of an independent nation. Although the Armed Forces were no longer under the British Army, there was a lack of senior officers. It was decided to depute serving British officers as commanders. Air Marshal Sir Thomas Elmhist became the Air Force Chief. Air Commodore Mukerjee was promoted to Air Vice Marshal and posted as the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff at Air HQ. He served as the Vice Chief for over 6½ years. Working under three different British Chiefs helped him groom himself for the top post. On 01 April 1954, he took over from Air Marshal Gerald Gibbs as the Chief of the Air Staff of the Indian Air Force. At that time, he was just about 43 years old. The task and responsibility of re-equipping and restructuring the Air Force with newer aircrafts & equipment fell upon him. During his tenure, IAF inducted a variety of state-of-the-art aircrafts. Dassault Mystere, Hawker Hunter, BAe Canberra and Folland Gnat were inducted during his tenure. Over the next few years, he had to lead the fledgling service through its trials and tribulations, taking it from strength to strength, till it was ready to take its place amongst the leading Air Forces of the world. He took care of the serving personnel and human resources planning too. His task was commendable for the fact that he had to deal with the post-independence non-violence driven defence policy.

Tragically, his brilliant career was cut short in its prime in 1960 at the age of 49. Nevertheless, his legacy lives on, and forms the cornerstone of the hallowed traditions of the service whose very foundations he laid, and whose edifice he built in the early years of its history.

The iconic personality not only laid the foundation of our Air Force but also the Medical Services of IAF. Predominantly due to his unfailing interest and foresight, a well-established medical service, to cater for the needs of the Armed Forces, was formed. The prestigious Institute of Aerospace Medicine, which is the first of its kind in Asia, owes its existence mainly due to his patronage and support.

The Aeromedical Society of India (now Indian Society of Aerospace Medicine) was formed in 1952. Air Marshal Subroto Mukerjee was its first patron and remained so till his untimely demise in 1960. He took keen personal interest in the affairs of the society and was the main pillar of support in its formative years.

In 1971, the Aeromedical Society of India instituted an 'oration' to commemorate his name, to be delivered during the inaugural function of the annual meeting of the society as a gesture of the society's gratitude and appreciation for him. A medal is also presented to the eminent personality who delivers the oration.

LIST OF AIR MARSHAL SUBROTO MUKERJEE ORATIONS IN THE PAST

Year	Topic	Orator
1972	Rehabilitation of Cases of Ischemic Heart Disease in the Armed Forces.	Maj Gen Inder Singh
1973	Electrocardiographic abnormalities in normal and apparently normal individuals	Dr. Rustom Jal Vakil
1974	Current Research in Aviation Medicine in the Royal Air Force.	Gp Capt Peter Howard
1975	The values of Aviation Medicine in the Changing World.	AVM MM Srinagesh
1976	Alcohol – The First Drug of Addiction.	Dr. PN Chuttani
1977	Incidence of Cardiovascular Problems among Flying Personnel and their Evaluation.	Lt Gen RS Hoon (Retd)
1978	Aviation and Radiation Hazards.	Dr Raja Ramanna
1979	Utilizing the Full Capacity of the Human Brain	Prof B Ramamurti
1980	Nutrition & Health	Dr C Gopalan
1981	The Art and Science of Adaptation	Dr. MMS Ahuja
1986	Recent Advances in Ophthalmology and the Developing World.	Dr. Madan Mohan
1988	Recent Trends in Diagnosis and Management of Ischemic Heart Disease	Dr MK Khalilullah
1989	Role of Coronary Bypass in the Treatment of Ischemic Heart Disease.	Dr. MR Girinath
1990	Vertigo: Recent Advances.	Padmshri Dr. S Kameswaran
1992	Peripheral Organization of Movements of the Hand	Dr. MS Devanandan
1995	Perspectives of Aeromedical Research	Dr. CA Varghese
1996	Horizons of Visual Performance and Aviation	Air Mshl MS Boparai AVSM (Retd)
1997	Ultimate Air Combat Protection of Pilot	Dr. Kenneth N Ackles
1998	On Indian Explosions May 11-13, 1998	Dr. SK Sikka
1999	New Frontiers in the Management of Cardiac and Cardiovascular disorders	Padmashri Dr Naresh Trehan
2000	Space Medicine and Exobiology: Emerging Scenario	Dr. K Kasturirangan
2001	Aeronautical Technologies - Present & Future	Padma Bhushan Dr VK Aatre

Year	Topic	Orator
2002	Human Factors: Accident Analysis and Prevention	Prof Douglas A Weigmann
2003	How important is Scientific Research and Testing of Life Support Equipment for High Performance Aircraft?	Dr Ulf L Balldin
2004	Ergonomic Design of Cockpit of an Advanced Combat Aircraft	Mr MB Verma, ADA
2005	Converting Atom into Bytes	Dr Devi Shetty
2006	Indian Space Programme	Shri G Madhavan Nair
2007	Integrating Civil Aviation and India's Economic Growth: A vision and Perspective	Capt GR Gopinath
2008	Human presence in solar system.	Dr K Radhakrishnan
2009	Challenges & Opportunities in Civil aviation sector	Dr SNA Zaidi
2010	Space Exploration: Where do we go from here?	Wg Cdr Rakesh Sharma AC (Retd)
2011	Modern Imaging Modalities and Aerospace Medicine	Dr AK Gupta
2012	Aerospace Systems: A possible Profile	Dr APJ Abdul Kalam
2013	Aerospace Toxicology: An Emerging Multi-Disciplinary Field of Medical Science	Dr AK Chaturvedi
2014	Civil Aviation in India	Dr Prabhat Kumar
2015	Beyond Glass Ceilings- Opportunities and Challenges for Women in the 21 st Century	Ms Shikha Sharma
2016	The Relevance of Making Data Relevant - Translational Research in Medicine	Dr Soumya Swaminathan
2017	Civil Aerospace in India	Air Cmde Harish Malik (Retd)
2018	The Pilot Physician - What has been & what can be!	Air Mshl NB Amaresh VSM (Retd)
2019	The Role of Science & Technology - From India - For the Future of Our Planet	Prof K Vijay Raghavan
2020	Developing Novel Intervention Strategies Using Human Factors Intervention Matrix (HFIX)	Dr Scott A Shappell
2021	Pilot Physician's Evolution to Human Intervention Motivational Study (HIMS)	Dr Snyder
2022	Analysis and Evaluation of the Cognitive Demands of flying	Dr Gray G.Kay Ph.D.
2023	Playing International Sports for Two Decades – What it takes!	Padmashri Dr Syed Mujtaba Hussain Kirmani