Wings to words

Bhartesh Singh Thakur

A to X of Aviation chronicles the journey of man's ambitious idea to fly and follows it up to the drawing board of the sixth generation aircrafts.

This book by Wing Commander D.P. Sabharwal (retd) has over 600 photographs with chapters in alphabetic order. The book has details about almost all the aircrafts, and there are accounts of various attempts to fly before the Wright brothers' landmark flight. There is a hint of mythological *vimanas* too.

The author, who has served in the Indian Air Force for 25 years, has to his credit 20 books. Eleven are on the topics related to aircraft maintenance and engineering and six on aviation and space. He has also written a book on manners and etiquette — *A Finer You* — and another one on the Bharat Ratnas.

Here's a Q and A with the author...

Q: Why did you name it *A to X of Aviation*, and not A to Z?

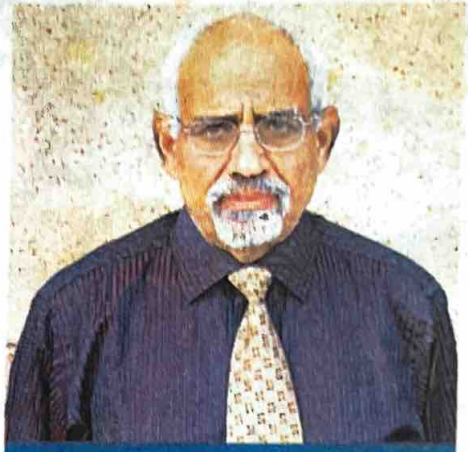
A: This is not the end of aviation. Y and Z chapters are still to come. The nuclear-powered aircrafts, solar-powered planes and hypersonic jets have reached the drawing board. A lot is yet to come.

Q: What made you write this book?

A: I started air clubs in schools and I used to give presentations to school children. But they always asked for more. While one would request for information on CD, the other would ask for notes. So, I decided to write a book for children.

Q: Where did you gather the information?

A: I had my own scrapbook. Since magazines were limited about 15 years ago, whatever picture I laid my hand on, I saved it. I also have all the encyclopaedias on aviation. Plus, now there is the Internet. There are more than 600 pictures in the book but it still costs Rs 250. To earn money isn't the point.



Wing Commander D.P. Sabharwal (retd) has 20 books to his credit

Q: You have mentioned about *vimana* in Vedic texts and that it is similar to the design of current space shuttles.

A: I believe technology at that time was quite advanced. The design of three-tier Boeing aircraft is similar to what is available in Vedic texts. The Ramayana also has a mention of *Pushpak Vimana*. In Greek mythology too, there is an account of Daedalus — the 'first man to fly'.

Q: What's the most important achievement in the development of aircrafts?

A: The first breakthrough came with Wright brothers. During that time other people were also trying. But they carried out experiments in a more systematic way and carried over 100 flights. Later, the development of the jet engine in 1940 was a major achievement. Before that the piston-engine aircrafts were slow and couldn't achieve height.

Q: How do you see the development of aeronautical engineering in India?

A: We had developed Marut aircraft some 40 years ago but it didn't have an indigenous engine. That project had to be wound up. For the next 20 years, we didn't do anything. Then the government sanctioned Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), which also has engine-related problems. It was left for Hindustan Aeronautical Limited (HAL), which is not a research establishment, but a profit-making company. We suffered from poor planning. But I still rate LCA as quite an accomplished aircraft in terms of technology. We have made long strides in space science. The ISRO develops and manufactures its own things unlike DRDO.

Q: Do you think the role of the pilot and his manoeuvring skills will decrease in future, and aircrafts would be more dependent on technology?

A: I don't see that coming in the next 50 years. Though the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles are being used for reconnaissance purposes, but for destroying enemy targets you need pilots. In future their number may decrease but their role cannot be undermined.