

A rare glimpse of Aviation- Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow .

*“To most people, sky is the limit . To those who love Aviation .
Sky is home!”*

~Jerry crawford

If we look down the memory lane, 70 years or so, the aviation was a synonym to Air Force. The Indian Air Force took time in coming out of the legacy and clutches of Royal Air Force because even after independence till the year :1952 we had a *Britisher* as the Commander-in-Chief, Indian Air Force. It was indeed a matter of great honour that Indians were still pioneer as member of Royal Air Force. We may recall India's first squadron Commanded by Air Marshal S.N. Goyal, when it was named “*tigers*” in remembrance to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, initiatives towards freedom struggle.

It all started by the solo flying by *JRD Tata* when we could name *Juhu* as Airport. Those were the days when Air India was in existence as a private commercial carrier. Its' growth could have been manifold but somehow it could not remain a private affair and Air India got its wings from the Government as National Carrier. There had been developments in Air Force year-after-year as the youngest brother of Armed Forces, numbers of records were set and expansion remained in an unending process.

If I talk about the latest for the Indian Air Force, a proposal for acquiring 200 Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) in phased manner is going to be on cards. Our pilots set records year-after-year. Wing Commander *Anil Kumar* and *Rahul Monga* manoeuvred a micro light aircraft around the globe in a record time of 80 days with a brief stop over at *Karachi* on the last leg of their journey. The duo flew over 19 countries and covered 40497 kms. before landing at the air force station *Hindon* on 19th August 2007.

This column can not afford to miss the progress made in the field of Civil Aviation. The Airports in the country were managed by Civil Aviation Dept. and Central Public Works Dept. of the Government of India. We had very few Airports for civil aviation, which were catering the domestic requirements. Air Journey was confined to elite group of society. Foreign travel used to be a dream. It all came with the initiative taken by *Dr. Karan Singh* as Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism by constituting a committee headed by *JRD Tata* to examine the feasibility and give recommendation for having international Airports in the country, meeting the requirements of International Civil Aviation Organization, Montreal. *JRD Tata*, we all know him as father of Civil Aviation.

The *Tata Committee* report was accepted by the Government and it was the beginning of bright future of Civil Aviation in the country. Four International Airports, i.e. *Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras*, were born in 1972 managed by an autonomous body called *International Airports Authority of India* under the Ministry of Civil Aviation. The Civil Aviation never looked back and the rest of the domestic airports, which were managed by the Government, also came under the purview of *National Airports Authority*, which came into existence in the year 1985. It never ended there. The year 1995 witnessed another historical event in the form of merger of these two organizations by single body *Airports Authority of India*.

Coming back to the growth of Civil Aviation in the country till early 90s, it was all in the hands of National carriers i.e. Air India and Indian Airlines, we have witnessed long queues at Bombay and Delhi Airports what to say about Calcutta and Madras Airports. At that time, it was going well keeping in view of the limited passenger movement. The fares were very high and 95% air travellers were flying at the cost of others meaning thereby business travellers could move with an ease in case of emergency. The mid 90s came with fortunate movement of *Open Sky Policy*. We saw number of new private airlines on Indian horizon, East West Airlines, Intercontinental, Damiana Airways, Jet Air, Modi-Loft, Air Asiatic, Raj Air and so on, may be with two or three aircrafts

The growth of private sector in the aviation sector was unbelievable as it was not anticipated. Nobody thought such a voluminous growth of passenger traffic. It will become a lengthy column if, I go on telling the things in micro level therefore, I need to stop here. Thanks to print and media educating you about the latest happenings, which are going to witness sea change in aviation industry in years to come. The speculations are that by the year 2020 our country is going to have name in the Aviation Sector of the world, beating many developed countries.

The new civil aviation policy of government of India came as a boon, facilitating the growth of aviation sector in the country. We need to know; what is the vision of new aviation policy it's a very dynamic and pragmatic step taken by the government to create an eco-system to make flying affordable to the masses. Also, to enable 30 crore domestic ticketing by 2022 and 50 crores by 2027, and international ticketing to increase to 20 crores by 2027. Further the policy looks for cargo volumes to be increased to 10 million tonnes by 2027.

The various bottlenecks coming in the way of expansion of airlines on international routes have been removed because in October 2004, the union cabinet stipulated for Indian carriers must fly on domestic routes for 5 years and to have a fleet of 20 aircrafts to become eligible for flying abroad. This requirement for 5/20 is modified and all airlines can commence international operations provided that they deploy 20 aircrafts or 20 % of total capacity in term of average number of seats on all departures put together, whichever is higher for domestic operations.

The airports are to be developed by State Government, Private sector on Public Private Participation (PPP) Mode. The state government required new airports in their state by Airport Authority of India or with other interested Public-Sector Undertakings/Industry in order to create stake and ownership.

Airport authority of India is not having any monopoly now Bombay and Delhi airport are joint venture with revenue sharing Hyderabad and Bangalore are green field airports cochin is already having its independent status. airport authority is having 125 airports out of which 95 are operational with 71 having scheduled commercial flights. There is need to have new green field and brown field airports the financial viability with non-zero Internal Rate of Return is a must unless no-frill airports are developed under regional connectivity scheme.

The policy also looks for viability gap fund to be provided by government. The airport is strategically important but financially unviable like in the case of paying in Sikkim. The revenue needs to be earned from non- aeronautical sources like duty free shops, food and beverage outlets, vehicle parking and advertisements.

India is lagging behind in this area because hardly 30% revenue is coming from non- traffic whereas in other developed countries 60-70% revenues comes from non traffic streams 'if we talk about the potential and growth of aviation sector in India it should not be surprising to know that there are already 450 air stripes in different states of the country. The need is to develop them as no frills airport. The new aviation policy is already taking care by way of providing incentives in the form of tax holidays ,no landing parking charges and other incentives, lot of money goes on taxation and the government is willing to wave off various taxies and lavies.

Another gray area is MRO maintenance and repair .The MRO Business of indian carriers is around rupees 5,000 crore, 90% of which is currently spent out of India . these are the figure of 2016-17 budget .Now we can see how much is the potential in this area.

Aviation education and skill building is another vital aspect in the field of aviation growth. The estimated the direct additional employment requirement of civil aviation sector is about 3.3 lakh by the year 2025. There are nearly 8,000 pilots holding commercial pilot licence who have not found any regular employment. We really fell happy to see that government has already planned the revival of 50 unserved airports. The government of India approved the proposal cost of 4,500 crore rupees for revival of 15 airports and 15 air-strips during 2017-18 and 2018-19 .it is also planned that another 20 airports and air-stripes will be revived during 2019-2020. The low cost airlines have already been allotted routes for example: alliance air -15, spicejet-11, Turbo mega airways-18 and Air deccan and air odisha-15.

All these developments are praise worthy nothing moves without money that is why to reduce viability gap in funding airline operators the central and state government will be required to bear the burden in the ratio of 80:20. For north eastern states ,this will be in the ratio 90:10.

In order to have regional connectivity only in those states which reduce valueadded tax on Air turbine fuel to 1% or less. The regional connectivity will have a cap of air fares for a common man ,one hour flight to cost 2,500 rupees and 1,200 only for half-an hour flight. The revival of air stripes as airports with no frill should be done

only with a expenditure of 5,200 crores . the most interesting support for viability gap fund will come by having 2% levy on all airline tickets.

We never thought of these things that it will be possible, if we will rely on the government policies the air fares will go down further. the low cost carriers connecting small town in the region will have the air fare of rs1420 for distance from 151-175 km. and Rs.2500 from 476-525 km. finally it will only be 3500 for the distance from 776-800 km. why helicopter should be left the maximum fare for one hour helicopter ride will be 5,000.

Today, it is quite a pleasant surprise to see that a lower middle class person with his family travelling by air, it is no more a dream. Well, one can imagine Airport with no conveyor belts, buses and air conditioned building, reducing the cost. See a passenger coming out of the Aircraft carrying his own luggage and taking a public transport for going to the city with no trolleys drinking water, visitor chairs, announcement system, CCTV, etc are what you generally see at any airport. We should not get surprised because a decade ago we never thought of an air journey without food, air hostesses or proper ticket with number of leaflets.

Civil aviation is going to come a long way as public utility service, affordable to a common man. You may find regional airlines in future where the operation will be within the region. It will be a boon to the states which are not having proper road and train connectivity. The travel may be cost effective in view of small aircrafts such as ATRs and small Airports with bare minimum facilities. There is no dearth of business houses who may be inclined to enter in aviation sector. Today, if I start counting the private players showed their presence in the aviation sector during last two decades it goes on to name Jet Air, Kingfisher, Spice Jet, Deccan Air, MDLR, Go Air, Indigo Airline, Paramount, Air Sahara, and so on. Only a few could stay in the business however, the recent introduction of Vistara in the association with Singapore airlines is an introduction seeing its systematic fast growth .We never thought of this expansion a decade ago. A stage has come where the normal citizen is having a choice to travel by Air or by Train. IT sector has played an important role in reducing the passenger cost by way of e-ticketing and on-line check-in etc.

It all looks so good, the aircrafts representing different airlines of India landing across the world at different airports giving name to our country. It makes our presence on the globe, we are no more a small country. India is going to lead the world in aviation sector tomorrow . We are in number third in regards to the domestic travel concern after America and China . And we are ranked 9th if we speak about international travel if all goes well with the new aviation policy and supply of about 1,000 aircrafts ordered by different airlines there is no-doubt that we are going to lead the world.