

**Pawan Hans Helicopters Ltd. All India Essay/ Painting Competition**  
**Declaration of originality of the essay / painting**

1. I, Anirudh Jain, certify that the details mentioned below are true in my respect.
  
2. I declare that attached English essay is self written and not previously published elsewhere nor sent for publication. I will not use it anywhere till the results of the competition.
  
3. My mother tongue is Hindi.
  
4. I, Anirudh Jain, am a citizen of India.

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## **“Hundred years of Civil Aviation in India”**

"When once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return."

- Leonardo Da Vinci

Man has always been fascinated by flight so much so that in his literary or artistic parlance he has used the act of flying as the most beautiful of metaphors. Painters have used to depict a flying dove as a symbol of peace, divinity and beauty, novelists have associated flight with freedom of mind and thought unsurpassed. For example the novel, Jonathan Livingston Seagull, in it, the protagonist who is a bird flies higher and higher, where height is an implied metaphor for adventure, thrill, fear of the unknown and emancipation from the dogmatic and pedantic world of his fellow seagulls. Man has associated the noblest of emotions with flight. Hence when the Wright brothers invented the first aero-vehicle, mankind rejoiced not only because it was an invention which was going to change the world of transportation and commuting forever but because man's greatest dream was about to be realised. He was no longer content with seeing the eagles in the sky and writing about their grandeur and grace, he could actually join them and see for himself what flying felt like and he saw that no words, painting or sculpture could truly depict the exhilaration and contentment he felt sharing the skies.

What would have happened if the Wright brothers were from India? Could they have fuelled their imagination the same way and given the world the gift of flight? Would India have had the capacity and genius to recognize their school of thought and helped them achieve their glory and in turn be glorified itself? The answer to that is a disappointing no, because India herself was in chains. She was a slave herself, her worthy sons were trying to free her. In the midst of it all, there was a man who understood what flight meant. This entrepreneur, whose company was responsible for giving India the gift of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, was poised to give yet another gem to his mother. His name was JRD Tata. He gave his motherland the first aviation company “Tata Airlines” which in due course was to become a nationalized PSU by the name of Air India.

Today, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 a hundred years have gone by since the first flight undertaken in India from Allahabad to Naini. We live today in a world which has chaos and order alike. The India of today is a whirlwind of paradoxes. On one hand we have India a rare success of a pluralist society, a standing epitome of unity in diversity which is poised to become one of the major economic powers of the world. The land of the Mahatma which has united people of various caste creed and ethnicity and is a successful and vibrant democracy but on the other hand corruption has become deep rooted our political and administrative system and has charred the noble ideals of our constitution. Where does the aviation industry stand in all this? 30 percent of the Indian population live below the poverty line. Aviation is a service only the top 5 percent of our populace can afford. Should we worry about the state of our planes, our airports and our helicopters when 75 percent of our population live on less than 4 dollars a day and don't have access to proper sanitation, healthcare and potable water?

“No matter how injured a bird is, it must never abandon the will to fly. For flight is neither the triumph of the mind nor the body. It’s the triumph of the spirit.”

- Louis Bleriot

Today the aviation sector is a stage where there are examples of success and failures alike. Connectivity has increased throughout India with airports springing up in remotest of places and towns like Jorhat and Dibrugarh in the east and helicopter connectivity has helped in providing commutation to capitals like Shillong, and mountainous places like Tawang and Gangtok. Pawanhans has also started helicopter services, helping pilgrims to travel to shrines like Badrinath and Kedarnath. Apart from Air India, many private companies have also come up. With deregulation of aviation sector, private players like GoAir, Indigo, Spicejet and Air Deccan have also come up. Thus competition in the sector has led to competitive prices due to which the common man benefitted owing to lower fares. But on the flip side of it, deregulation has also resulted in instances where companies form a clique and simultaneously increase their fares like in September 2010 which proves disastrous to an average traveller. Also private airlines like Kingfisher and government airlines i.e. Air India have in recent times become inefficient. Owing to fares on the higher side, mismanagement and overspending on overfed and underworked staffs, both airlines have mounting debts and can’t even get the break even to pay off salaries of the people they employ.

**The Case of Air India:** Due to job security in government service, there was a bit of complacency creeping up in the Air India work staff. There was no pressure or any incentive to perform. Regardless of their performance their rise was certain in strict governmental bureaucratic machinery. There was no fast promotion for performing workers and no demotions, severance or punishment for underperformance. The atmosphere has become stagnant and the mood fatalistic. The Air India plane looked day by day more like a rustic and bovine government office rather than a proud member of the fleet of an airline which has won awards worldwide in service, security and performance. Recently a bailout of 40000 crore is agreed upon. The time has come for Air India to stand up and be counted like other PSUs like ONGC, PGCIL and Coal India which are doing well. It must recall its former days of glory and stop being a drain on the taxpayer’s wallet. Streamlining, corporate set-up and emphasis on performance should be the new mantra for the recovering Maharajah. As a service provider, Air India must strive to provide aviation service beyond the elite to the rural and urban poor alike. Today air travel is still beyond the reach of 80 % of Indian taxpayers. So if their money is being used to bailout the Maharajah, then it’s about time that the Maharajah abandons his airs and graces and serves the lesser fortunate of his countrymen.

Airports like the Indira Gandhi International Airport of Delhi have won international acclaim regarding on ground services to passengers offering world class facilities. Tourist desks have been made mandatory all over India, which provide information to passengers both domestic and international about the local sights and places, hotels, restaurants, etc and also about the places which are risky and ought to be avoided. The airports of Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmadabad and Hyderabad have undergone a huge change in the recent times with anticipation of increasing traffic in the years to come. Greenfield airports have started coming up alongside main terminals to ease the traffic on the main airport. Sadly the story of airports in other parts of the country is not the same. The Kolkata airport, until recently, has been the most clogged of all airports. Because of high traffic and low

number of runways for a city its size, delays in flights both in arrival and departure had become the norm. The recent facelift and rebuilding that has started should have been done a decade earlier, when symptoms of high traffic and overcrowding of planes was becoming all the more evident.

The landscape of the service industry in the aviation sector has also changed remarkably. Realising the need for recruitment of air hostesses, cabin attendants, ground staff and pilots, training schools and institutes have come up by the hundreds to supply the labour required by the Airline companies. A rich pool of talented young men and women are recruited by the companies which in turn help to provide one on one better customer services. Supervising travel of children who are not of age, providing wheelchairs for the aged and the physically challenged, all add a personal touch which makes the customer feel valued and cared for. But there is also a darker side to it. The service industry in aviation today is more like a glamour industry. Instead of ensuring that the staff is clean, presentable and competent, the companies want them to be good-looking, suave and fluent in the English language. I must add that fluency in the English language is not a bad trait to have, but the staff must be equally fluent in the regional languages. We must understand that India is a country where every state has a linguistic identity of its own. A very small minority of the population is comfortable with the English language, and Hindi, though being a national language, doesn't have the fluent tongue especially in South India, Bengal, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Though people inhabiting these regions understand the two languages, they prefer to communicate in their regional language. Countless number of times I have seen people of indigenous descent especially elderly people having an uncomfortable conversation at the check-in or the security check because they fail to pick up on the instructions or guidance provided by the staff. So it is best if the staff do their best to keep the customer at his ease.

“Guten Morgen, What may I do for you, Bitte??”

- An attendant of a German airlines using English and German.

The above line is an example of how the staff can use two languages simultaneously and allowing the customer choose the language of his preference to communicate without his feeling odd or uncomfortable about it. I do believe that the government needs to encourage this concept in India where the regional language is largely ignored by the staff and employees.

A more pressing issue that ought to be debated upon is the issue of airline safety. Since the hijacking of the IC814 Indian Airlines plane by terrorists, the issue of airplane safety ought to be looked at with greater scrutiny. The liberty of placing firearm in the cockpit with the pilot and a secure locking system of the cockpit door to deal with such a threat has been decided upon. The airport security has been beefed up since the unfortunate incident. Better X-ray detectors with more elaborate security checks have become the norm.

Airline crashes have also put the issue of safety in the limelight. Air India's Kanishka air crash in the eighties, deaths of personalities like Madhavrao Scindia, the prince of Gwalior and Venkata Giri, Andhra Pradesh's chief minister and the close shave a helicopter had when it was blocking a plane's path on the runway, in which the president of India herself was seated, the Tawang Helicopter crash have all reminded us that we need to intensively scrutinize our on ground safety regulations, equipment standardization, aircraft and helicopter procurement procedure and pilot licensing methods. There, recently, was a scandal of nepotism in which a daughter of an influential

officer procured a pilot's license without fulfilling the given criteria of flying hours and tests. These incidents should not be treated as freak instances but ought to be carefully looked into, for compromising one's safety is a gamble we can't expect a person to take.

“Aviation is neither a sector nor an industry. It is a miracle”

- Igor Sikorsky

It must be understood that the future for Indian aviation is uncertain. We have major companies in financial trouble and seeing a general slump in demand as a result of less tourists due to the financial recession overseas. But as every cloud has a silver lining, so too, this period must be looked upon as an opportunity by the aviators to reinvent themselves .i.e. customers, companies and government alike. Government should take this opportunity to cut off the excess fat and not let the unions bully them, customers need to be more assertive and companies ought to take lessons from the failure of Kingfisher and the success of Indigo and Spice Jet and strive to provide better and more economical service to the price- conscious Indian consumer.

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