PREFACE
Air transport can be termed as the youngest of all means of transport and is one of the largest and fastest growing industries of the world. The advent of Civil aviation has led to a whole new concept in the world of transportation. The rapid development of air transport has made the whole world practically one neighbourhood and has made travel an easy affair. In the sheer joy of seeing the whole world, today millions of people seem to move from one continent to another in a matter of hours. No history of human being has witnessed such a spurt in people travelling at home and abroad as today. A record number of three million people travelled within their country and abroad in 1983 and the number is rapidly increasing every year.

Today, the advantages of air transport are not to be assessed from economic angle alone. Air transport has wider implications encompassing not only economic gains but social and cultural benefits too. In terms of social and cultural advantages, there are abundance of evidences to prove that civil aviation unquestionably creates the atmosphere of an interaction between the cultural customs of different countries. From the economic point of view air transport tends to act as the prime mover of the development process and bears a close and complex relationship with all other sectors of the economy. It is an important source of maximising scarce foreign earnings for not only the developing countries but of many developed countries of the world as well.
Civil aviation can be termed as a highly complex phenomenon and encompasses economic, social, cultural, educational and political importance. The present study does not claim to be a novelty but surely a modest effort has been made to examine the air transport with its various manifestations. Tracing the history of air transport and focussing on its socio-economic significance, an attempt has been made to piece together various figures and facts relevant to the early history and development of air transport through the years. Endeavour has also been made towards carrying a comparative study of the performance of Air India and Indian Airlines.

A well planned aviation sector can bring prosperity and also can contribute significantly in International cooperation. Its impact on socio-cultural pattern of life of the community is obvious and far reaching. It is a key industry and its neglect is not only self defeating but immensely disastrous in a competitive world of today where the globe seems to be shrinking everyday and where we have already entered the jumbojet age. Nonetheless, air transport has always been treated as a second line of defence. Likewise, in other emergencies such as floods, earthquakes, civil commotion, disruption of surface, etc. civil aviation would be of inestimable value to the country. It is from this angel that the present study has relevance and feasibility and it is hoped that it may prove a link of the chain of studies in this area and may profitably add to the existing literature on this important field of human and
social activity beaming with promise for a tremendous future.

In the last four decades of their existence, both Air India and Indian Airlines have achieved rapid increase in traffic as well as capacity and a long term view offers a picture of broadly sustained and steady growth. Though there have been experiences of unusual variation in terms of both positive and negative traffic growth rates, in some individual years, but the overall market has shown inherent resilience, giving rise to compensatory uprise, in traffic at different points of time. The recent trend in liberalisation of Indian economy and the resultant emerging market conditions are expected to provide consistent impetus to the growth of air transport in the country.

This calls for a review of long term growth patterns in the civil aviation in order to face the future challenge.