

Flight over Kerala

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Flying on a direct route from Coimbatore to Trivandrum on a partly cloudy day (cloudless sky was too much to expect in that part of the country) was something I had always looked forward to during my 30 years in the IAF. Enjoying the unparalleled scenic beauty below was as attractive as the prospect of meeting dear ones at Trivandrum, my home town. Fortunately, I had ample opportunities starting with my first posting at Transport Training Wing, Yelahanka near Bangalore (1977 to '82).

With a map in hand I would gaze below at the landmarks that became fondly familiar over time. After Pollachi south of Coimbatore, the Western Ghats suddenly rose near Amaravatinagar (location of Sainik school Tamilnadu) from 1400 feet to around 6000 ft, as if someone had erected a huge wall. After a while, the 8800 feet Anamudi peak, the highest in India excluding The Himalayas, would appear a bit to the left of the route.

Close behind in elevation was the Kodaikanal peak that would be in sight to the far left. That was soon followed by the high ranges of Munnar coming directly below the aircraft. A few minutes later the beautiful arch dam at Idukki would appear. One would wonder how the dam, short in length but tall, was able to block the huge quantum of water in the catchment area represented by a narrow but deep, 'V' shaped valley blue in colour. The bird's eye view was a treat to the eyes. But the spectacular scenery of the dam and the surroundings from ground is something I am yet to experience.

On crossing the Idukki dam identifiable by its unique shape, I would ready myself to locate to the left, the famous Sabarimala temple that was simply elusive during the first few flights because of its solitude in the vast expanse of

greenery. Finally, when I identified the narrow forest track stretching northward from Pamba river to the temple and the temple as such, my joy knew no bounds. In the late seventies there was hardly a structure barring the temple in that area. The last time I saw the temple complex from a commercial aircraft recently, the 'ugly' brown patch with concrete structures in the midst of green pristine forest stood out like a sore thumb.....

During the entire 45 minutes flight by Avro, I would try to identify small towns, dams and rivers until I finally located my **Alma mater, (Sainik school, Kazhakootam)** before landing at Trivandrum airport. The whole route has formed a sort of mosaic in my mind. A map is not really required these days. Needless to say much has changed from Yelahanka days. The temptation to look out for the familiar landmarks of Mallu land will remain evergreen even from the faster and higher flying commercial airplanes.....

In fact, I had always wished I was on board a helicopter while flying this particular stretch over 'God's own country' Kerala, my native province. Then you could hover at length to look at 'the things of beauty which are a joy for ever'.