

Abstract of Doctoral Dissertation

**Rural Bus Transport Operations of the
Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport
Corporation* (A Study of their Impact on
the Socio-Economic Development of Rural
Households in Visakhapatnam District)**

KOTNANA RAMA RAO**

INDIA IS A vast country extending over an area of 3.29 million square kilometres with an astounding strength of population of 843.93 million. It is basically rural in character as nearly 74.30 per cent of its population lives in 5.92 lakh villages. It is predominantly an agrarian economy as about 60.00 per cent of its people take it up as an occupation. As such, any attempt, to develop the country or to improve the living standards of the people, must begin with the development of villages. But, as these villages are physically spread throughout the length and breadth of the country, no mode of transport other than road transport can adequately and effectively meet the demand of transport arising out of the growing economic, social, health, cultural and religious needs of the villagers.

The conventional bus is relatively more convenient, speedier and cheaper means of passenger transport in providing economical, adequate and well co-ordinated rural transport network. While this bonanza service, so named after its vital role cited above is provided by both the State Transport Undertakings (STUs) and the private operators, the objectives of these two operators are convergent on certain aspects and divergent on certain others. Accordingly, private operators in India, as everywhere else, choose to operate bus services on profitable routes, leaving out the unprofitable ones. The STUs are operating bus services to various villages subject to the availability of motorable roads, either on their own initiative or on being directed to do so by the State Governments concerned. Here it may be mentioned that the STUs are caught between two divergent corporate objectives of plying the services on commercial considerations on the one hand and social considerations on the other. There

* The thesis submitted for the award of Ph.D. degree in 1993 to Andhra University Visakhapatnam under the supervision of Dr. D. Panduranga Rao Prof. of Transport Management Studies, Dept. of Commerce and Management Studies, Andra University, Visakhapatnam.

** Lecturer Postgraduate Department of Commerce, A.M.A.L. College, Anakapalle - 531001 (A.P.).

Submitted June '94, Accepted October '95

is, however, a need for reasonably reconciling these two objectives, lest the STUs should cease to operate on uneconomical routes depriving the rural masses of access to various goods, services and facilities. This reconciliation becomes possible only if the State Governments concerned realise that the STUs, by taking up bus services in villages, are only discharging a social obligation which, strictly speaking, is one of the constitutional responsibilities of such Governments. So, studies that throw light upon the utility of Rural Bus Transport services become necessary to convince the State Governments of the need to give all possible support for the continuation of such services.

Need for the Study

The review of research and literature reveals, that the studies on the impact of the Rural Bus Transport services on socio-economic development of the people are very limited. Further, no study has so far been made on the impact of Rural Bus Transport services offered by the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) in the Visakhapatnam district. The present study entitled 'Rural Bus Transport Operations of the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (A Study of their Impact on the Socio-Economic Development of Rural Households in the Visakhapatnam District)' is a modest attempt to fill this research gap. The present study for which the Visakhapatnam district is chosen assumes special significance in view of the fact that the district has the highest number of villages in the state (3,692 out of 32,560). Further, the highest number of villages have been unconnected by any bus service both at the time of inception of the village Link Transport Service Scheme (1978) and even after a decadal operation of the scheme (1988).

Objectives

The broad objectives of the study are:

1. To analyse the rural transportation scene in India;
2. To review the working of Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation with special reference to its rural operations;
3. To make a comparative assessment of the accessibility to certain selected amenities prior to and after the introduction of the bus services to the selected villages;
4. To study and compare the select socio-economic conditions of respondents prior to and after the introduction of bus service and to trace the resultant impact; and
5. To make suggestions based on the findings of the study for improving rural transportation in general and Rural Passenger Transportation in particular.

Methodology

The present study is based on data collected from both primary and secondary sources. While the primary data are gathered by administering a structured questionnaire to the sample households of the selected villages in

the Visakhapatnam district, the secondary data are gathered from the various institutions of the State Government of Andhra Pradesh and Government of India as well as the books, reports and journals published by various agencies.

In order to achieve the objectives of this study 10 per cent of the 198 villages which have been connected with bus service by the APSRTC from 1978 to 1988 are sampled to begin with. In the selection of sample villages, due consideration was given to the economic activity, typography and population so that the villages selected would more or less represent the entire district. Similarly, in each of the villages chosen for the survey a maximum of 20 households are selected on a random basis giving adequate representation to different occupational categories commonly found in the villages such as farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans, businessmen and employees.

Tools for Analysis

The data gathered for the purpose of the present study are analysed using simple statistical tools such as averages and percentages. For presenting the data, simple and complex tables are also used.

Time Span

A time frame of 10 years i.e., 1978-79 to 1987-88 is chosen keeping in view the objectives of the study.

Presentation of the Study

The present study is divided into seven chapters. The introduction, the review of research and literature, the need for and objectives of the study, the parameters selected for the study, the data-base and the methodology, the time span and the tools for analysis and the scope and the limitations are covered in the first few pages. A brief picture of the rural transport scene in India is presented in Chapter I. A brief profile of the APSRTC covering its genesis and organisational structure, its performance both operational and financial, the quality of service and its rural operations are presented in Chapter II. A profile of the Visakhapatnam district from which the sample villages are drawn is given in Chapter III. Chapter IV presents the analysis about the accessibility to various amenities viz., medical aid, educational facilities, Government offices, banking facilities, railway station, posts and telegraph facilities and newspapers. Chapter V attempts to study the role of transport in the economic endeavour of respondents. It deals with the occupational transport requirements of the farmers, the agricultural labourers, the artisans, the businessmen and the employees; the impact on income generation, household and cloth purchases and purchases from fair price shops. The role of transport in shaping the social life of the respondents is the subject matter of chapter VI. It traces the influence of transport on the mode of living, selection of the means of recreation, establishing social contacts and matrimonial alliances, etc. Broadly these chapters attempt to analyse the problems experienced by the respondents prior to the introduction of the bus service, the means of transport used prior to and after the introduction of the bus service and the impact of the introduction of the bus service on their endeavours. A summary

of the study and the suggestions emanating from it constitutes the subject matter of chapter VII, the concluding one.

Observations

The multiplicity of agencies at different levels with different roles is not found to be conducive to the rural road transportation system, on account of lack of co-ordination and the resultant duplication of efforts leading to wastage of scarce resources.

It is observed that the revenue earnings from the operation of buses in rural areas have been encouraging but the cost of operation went up much ahead of it all along, landing the Corporation in losses year after year. Despite the Corporation's earnestness and eagerness in the village connectivity, it received a setback due to various reasons such as the government's beating the corporation hollow with only empty promises and no tangible help.

The percentage of villages in the district, the inhabitants of which have to travel beyond two kilometres is 35 in the case of primary schools, 66 in the case of post offices, 76 in the case of medical facility, either private or Government, 80 in the case of upper primary or high schools, 82 in the case of telegraph office and 93 so far as fertiliser or pesticide shops are concerned.

The villagers imputed to the introduction of the bus service, the mobility thus imparted which in turn accounted for the improvement of incomes through subsidiary occupations and also for an increase in the number of earning members in different families.

It is observed that prior to the introduction of the bus service dependence on slow and strenuous means of transport made rural lists more immobile. Among the other problems encountered on account of lack of accessibility, the exploitation by local merchants in the sale of domestic goods, the inevitable need to the total family cloth requirements once or twice in a year, the dependence on quacks or on local medicinal herbs, the helplessness of the sick or the injured in emergencies, the abandonment of education by children at the level provided by the village schools, the keeping of children with their relatives or at the hostels, the loss of time spent on slow and strenuous means of transport, which otherwise could be spent on productive purposes, the excessive reliance on the local moneylenders, the delayed receipt of letters or telegrams, etc., are worth-mentioning.

The increase in the frequency of visits for the purpose of household goods and cloth purchases, the flow of a variety of goods into their villages from other places, getting of goods at reasonable prices etc., are the benefits derived by the villagers with regard to household goods or other-wise after the introduction of bus service. A majority of the people felt happy in saving time and cost and in avoiding physical strain in reaching the various goods, services and facilities. The accessibility to better medicare, the improvement in school-going children, the decreased reliance on the local moneylenders are some of the benefits derived by the villagers from the introduction of bus service.

It is stated that after the introduction of bus service, there is a shift from street plays to movies, country liquor to branded liquors and village sports to town sports. The villagers trace it to both the improvement in accessibility to towns caused by the bus service and also to the influence of mass media like radio, television etc. The introduction of bus service in the villages played a complementary role in moulding and changing the habits of the people such as the food they eat, the vessels they use, the dress they wear and the cosmetics they apply. Though changes of this type cannot be attributed to bus service it is clear from the response of a majority of people that these changes stemmed from the interaction with others and more particularly with the people in towns. This interaction is indeed facilitated by the introduction of bus service.

It is observed that minimising the visits to the houses of friends and relatives, taxing their hospitality due to lack of immediate return transport, spending of higher amounts on transport etc., are the problems faced by the people with regard to social contracts prior to the introduction of bus service. It is observed that with the introduction of bus service problems of this type could be overcome.

The introduction of bus service helped the farmers in the purchasing of inputs, rather than the sale of output. The improvement in earnings due to higher bargaining power the decline in the number of idle days and opportunity for taking up work in some other villages are some of the benefits derived by the agricultural labourers. The beneficial effect of bus service is not appreciable as far as meeting the occupational needs of the artisans is concerned. The bus service, to a limited extent, ran counter to the interests of the village traders as it led to a decline in their profit margins, due to increase in competition and also due to their customers purchasing goods from other places directly. The convenience in going to the towns on official work by bus and keeping of their families at the places convenient for them are the major benefits derived by the employees from the bus service. The analysis tendered in the above paragraphs reveals that the benefits of bus services out-weigh the disadvantages of it if any.

Though most of the sections of the people in the villages expressed their satisfaction with the bus facility provided by the APSRTC to their villages, there are some people who are not satisfied with the quality of service offered. 38 per cent of the people are unhappy with the timings. 40 per cent with frequency, 37 per cent with the way the vehicles are driven, 62 per cent with the concessions presently available, 20 per cent with the present fare and freight and 27 per cent with the attitude of the crew.

Suggestions

In the exercise of planning for rural roads, it is felt that in addition to the population norm, a realistic assessment of the transport needs of the villagers and the various development indices, among other things, should be considered.

It is also suggested that there should be a unified 'Central Rural Roads Organisation' with decentralised powers to plan and implement the rural road programmes at the region or State level so as to facilitate macro level action for micro level results in the matter of policy formulation, monitoring and technology upgradation. Further, the concept of 'Master Plan' is also to be adopted. In preparing such a master plan care should also be taken to ensure maximum village connectivity vis-a-vis linear kilometrage of the road planned.

There is also a need for stepping up allocation for the maintenance of rural roads : The additional funds needed for the development and maintenance of roads can be mobilised by imposing— (a) mineral cess, (b) sugarcane cess, (c) passenger tax on STUs, by (d) procuring private investment through the incentive of a weighted deduction in tax assessment and by (e) floating central and state government bonds.

Political interference and bureaucratic bias should be avoided in deciding the question of adequacy or inadequacy of the rural roads and the system should be such that the adequacy or inadequacy of roads is decided on the basis of set norms. In doing so priority should be fixed on the basis of intensity of isolation. Greater priority should be assigned to the villages with high intensity of isolation.

The account presented above speaks volumes for the multiple beneficial effects derived by the villagers from the Rural Bus Transport Services offered by the APSRTC. As one of the vitally important factors accounting for the all round development of the countryside, these services have ushered in a new era of hope and prosperity. Therefore, to resolve the dichotomy in the objectives of the APSRTC and in the light of the above benefits, it is suggested that till such time of connecting all villages with all-weather roads, the Government, therefore, should extend certain concessions like exemption from motor vehicle tax in respect of buses operated in villages, reimbursement of the cost of concessions, if any, extended by the APSRTC to the rural computers, etc.

In order to improve the quality of service by the APSRTC, it is suggested that connecting a central place for several villages with a nearby or distant town or city should be thought of instead of connecting all villages to a particular city. This approach would help the Corporation to achieve higher levels of accessibility and economy. This will facilitate the Corporation to operate the required number of trips to each village by a proper scheduling of timings and routes in the light of vehicle utilisation, fleet utilisation, crew utilisation, etc.

The punctuality and regularity of services can also be improved through the timely release of buses from the garage and the strict enforcement of timings at various intermediary stages. The Corporation should try to educate the crew and inculcate in them a sense of service and responsibility.

As buses with a single wheel-base are more suitable for village operations, such vehicles should be introduced replacing those with double wheel-base presently in most of the village routes. Buses with a seating capacity of 20-25, fitted with low-power diesel-engines specially designed for driving at a maximum speed of 50-60 kilometres per hour should be introduced for village operations and their frequency can be increased to meet the travel requirements of the people. This is likely to help the corporation in the conservation of fuel and in providing the required amount of mobility to the rural masses.

A separate department exclusively for rural operations may be started at the head office as well as regional offices of the APSRTC so as to formulate new schemes, conduct route surveys, draft route-scheduling, co-ordinate the activities of the depots and to maintain all statistical information relating to the rural operations etc.