CHAPTER VIII

CHARACTER OF RURAL TRANSPORT

Rural transport signifies the movement of man and materials of the rural areas or the exchange between the villages and the markets. It is primarily concerned with the disposal of the surplus products and bringing in the materials of their need from outside. This establishes an interaction between the markets usually located at the junction point of local and inter-regional routes, and numerous villages scattered around them. The rural transportation involves the outflow of the surplus from the villages, and inflow of the finished goods from markets. It plays an important role in bringing villages and markets closer to each other.

The nature and distributional pattern of markets bring out a distinct nature, pattern and degree of rural transportation in any region. In Manipur, there are about 32 towns, which act as markets and service centres for their rural hinter-

230
land, besides a number of weekly, and biweekly markets in the rural areas especially in the hill areas. Small number of daily markets in the rural areas and hills are influenced by the facilities of rural transport which in turn is influenced by the physical factors of terrain, nature of slope and vegetal cover.

**Village Roads and Cart Tracks**

In Manipur, the advantages of rural-urban and inter-town transport arteries are limited to a small area. Hence, the Inter-Village Roads and cart tracks provide the main routes of transportation in the rural areas. These inter village roads and cart tracks are mostly unmetalled, which carry traffic of varied volume, nature and character. These unpaved roads are totally useless during the rainy season especially in the hills and not suitable for the most part of the year for vehicular traffic. These roads are almost non-existent in many rural areas. Sometimes they are laid out, only nominally, in the midst of the fields, and by the sides of the hills, where these tracks are too narrow and steep to allow the carts to move. Only the mule track and foot paths, therefore, exist in the hill areas as transport routes linking tribal villages.
## TABLE 8.1
**DISTRIBUTION AND DENSITY OF INTER-VILLAGE ROADS, 1985**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
<th>Population (1981)</th>
<th>Total Road Length (km)</th>
<th>Inter-village Roads Density</th>
<th>Density of Inter-village Roads (Per km)</th>
<th>Density of Inter-village Roads (Per 10,000 km²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imphal</td>
<td>1,303</td>
<td>5,56,196</td>
<td>942.46</td>
<td>566.00</td>
<td>43.44</td>
<td>10.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>2,31,981</td>
<td>494.86</td>
<td>373.00</td>
<td>92.10</td>
<td>16.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>1,41,150</td>
<td>242.90</td>
<td>173.00</td>
<td>32.64</td>
<td>14.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukhrul</td>
<td>4,544</td>
<td>82,946</td>
<td>664.60</td>
<td>255.00</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>30.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamenglong</td>
<td>4,391</td>
<td>62,289</td>
<td>632.30</td>
<td>178.00</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>28.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senapati</td>
<td>3,271</td>
<td>1,55,421</td>
<td>446.53</td>
<td>185.00</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>11.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churachandpur</td>
<td>4,570</td>
<td>1,34,716</td>
<td>307.60</td>
<td>192.00</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>14.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandel</td>
<td>3,313</td>
<td>56,444</td>
<td>399.35</td>
<td>283.00</td>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>50.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MANIPUR:** 22,327 14,20,953 4130.60 22205.00 9.88 15.52

*Source: Statistical Handbook of Manipur 1985, pp.136-40.*
Table 8.1 shows the varied density of Inter-Village Roads per 100 km$^2$ of area as well as per 10,000 population. Among the eight districts, Thoubal district has the highest density of about 92.10 kms per 100 km$^2$ of area as against state's average of 9.88 kms. It is followed by Imphal district with 43.44 kms of Inter-Village Roads and Bishnupur district with about 32.64 kms per 100 km$^2$. The remaining five hill districts have an Inter-Village Road density of less than the state's average.\(\text{Map 4}\) The density of rural roads differ to much extent in different hill districts, e.g. Chandel (8.54 km), Senapati (5.64 km), Ukhrul (5.61 km), Churachandpur (4.20 km), and Tamenglong (4.05 km$^2$).\(^3\)

The density per 10,000 population is the highest in Chandel district with 50.14 km., followed by Ukhrul with 30.74 km. and Tamenglong 28.58 km. The districts of Thoubal, Churachandpur, Bishnupur, Senapati, and Imphal have the Inter-Village Road density per 10,000 population of 16.07 km, 14.25 km, 14.11 km, 11.90 km, and 10.18 km respectively.

The low density of Inter-Village Roads per 100 km$^2$ area in the hill districts is influenced by the nature of topography as well as the climatic conditions.
The hill districts enjoy the moist or rainy tropical monsoon climate. These climatic characteristics combined with the high and steep slope obstruct the construction and development of roads, especially the IVRS and cart-tracks. The frequent landslides and solifluction in these hills lead to slow progress in construction of Inter-Village Roads. The bridle paths are commonly found in the hills.

Conveyances

In the rural areas, the main conveyances are the bullock cart and power trailers in the plain districts, and headloads in the hill districts. Even in rural markets of the plain districts, the agricultural produces are mostly brought by the women folk on their heads, which is more common characteristic feature of the markets in the hill districts. In the plain districts, the bullock-carts are very common in the rural areas to transport the agricultural produces from the fields to their respective homes and markets. The number of bullock carts in the state is over 15,0005.

Traffic

Rural Traffic in Manipur generally consists of agricultural commodities such as rice, straw, vegetables
and forest produces such as fuel wood and others. However, forest products are the main traffic in the hills. The cattle too form an important traffic on the village roads for their movement to the grazing lands and agricultural fields. In some parts of plains districts, passenger buses are also plying on the unmetalled roads during the dry seasons, forming part of rural traffic. These buses also carry passengers along with the agricultural commodities for sale in the nearby markets.

Thus, the pattern or rural traffic is the same everywhere in the state. The traffic converges on one centre where it is considered to be the most suitable place or point for disposal of local products. These converging points serve as local markets.

Rural markets are of various types. However, two types of rural markets are prevalent in the state: (1) Permanent or daily markets, and (2) Temporary markets. The permanent markets are those markets where trade of commodities is done daily. Most of small towns and markets in the rural areas are daily or permanent markets. In the hills, the district
headquarters serve as daily markets. Temporary markets are those markets which are held once, twice or thrice a week. These markets are generally located at the adjoining areas or transitional zone of plains and hills, and in the hill districts. In these markets, the villagers bring agricultural, industrial, and forest products for sale. The seller of one particular commodity may also be the buyer of another commodity. These markets are mostly located in the hill districts and foothill villages. Important agricultural produces are rice, and pulses, potato, arum, pumpkin, cane and bamboo products, handloom cloths etc. These commodities are transported through various transport routes such as footpaths, cart-tracks, and Inter-Village Roads.

The nature of commodities marketed also differ according to the character of the respective catchment areas and availability of surplus products. It some markets, rice and other food-grains predominate, while in others vegetables predominate. The density of such markets is also influenced by
the density and distribution of population in each district.

**Regional Characteristics**

Regional variation in the nature and intensity of traffic is found in different districts of the state, which depend upon the nature and degree of economic development. Based on physiographic considerations, the eight districts of Manipur fall under two groups: (i) the plain districts and (ii) the hill districts.

**The Plain Districts**: The density of markets is related to the density of the inter-village roads in the rural areas. Higher the density of rural roads higher will be the density of markets. The three plain districts are having higher number of small towns. These market town are mostly permanent trading centres. Their density is the highest in Thoubal district, followed by Imphal and Bishnupur districts. Out of 32 towns of the state 12 towns are located in this district, nine in Imphal district and six in Bishnupur district. Besides, there are a number of smaller daily and weekly markets. The traffic consist of rice, vegetables, people and animals. These markets are
linked with the larger towns with better means of transportation.

The Hill Districts: In the hill districts of Senapati, Tamenglong, Ukhrul, Churachandpur and Chandel, markets are weekly and biweekly, except the administrative headquarters of the districts where markets are daily due to their administrative and other functions. In general, the density of such markets is sparse in the hill areas due to the sparse population and lack of transport facilities. The main traffic in these markets are generally agricultural in character. Forest and handloom raw materials and products also form part of the traffic in these local markets. Except a main road connecting the market centre with other towns outside, other converging routes are mostly hill tracks, foot paths, the unmetalled inter-village roads.

Conclusion

It is however, true that the rural transport in Manipur is far from satisfactory. The main goods traffic consist of agricultural commodities and its flow pattern is quite variable. The volume of traffic
in the rural areas is low throughout the year, which is influenced mostly by the prevailing physical conditions as well as road conditions. Bullock carts are the only means of movement for the agricultural products to the village markets. If the link roads are better off and good enough for other passenger and goods vehicles, the agricultural commodities may reach the markets at a quicker speed. On considering these facts, there is a greater need of better link roads with improved surface conditions to gear the rural economy for socio-economic transformation of the countryside. Efforts have to be made to link all the villages by inter-village roads to the neighbouring market and service centres. With help of good rural transport system, the village economy can be diversified to provide alternate opportunities of employment to the villagers, who to much extent suffer from unemployment and hidden underemployment.
REFERENCES


4. Ibid.