

# ROAD TRANSPORT IN 19TH CENTURY COLONIAL ODISHA



Transport is an important means through which civilization progresses. Since the dawn of civilization, men have consistently tried for the development of transportation to expedite their movement. The invention of wheel in the Stone Age was one of the powerful boosters of the pace of civilization. It made man faster and compelled him to invent vehicles. Road also has been one of the important means of communication. They are the arteries of the body of any nation. No scheme for improving the lot of common man has any chance of success, unless roads are properly developed. Modern wide and all-weather roads are the indicators of the worth of any powerful and rich nation. Before the advent of the British rule, roadways in the modern sense were practically unknown in India. Even long after its establishment, there were few quality roads which indicate the utter backwardness of India under British rule.

## The Beginning

It was Lord Dalhousie who first initiated a vigorous road policy and setup a Central Public Works Department (PWD) supplemented by similar provincial departments in place of the military boards which were abolished in 1855. From now onwards, progress in road-making became much more methodical and their up-keep more satisfactory. A further stimulus was given by the extension of the Local Self Government. Just as the financial decentralization carried out by Lord Mayo and Lord Lytton, it enabled the Government of India to transfer most of the responsibility for road work to the provincial governments. In each case, the extension of local control was accompanied by considerable improvement in local communications.

## Odisha Chapter

Odisha remained under-civilized and under-developed for a fair long period owing to lack of improvement in transport and communication. Odisha was geographically isolated from the outside world. Most part of Odisha regions remained remote and inaccessible and people lived in ignorance, superstition, caste prejudices, irrational customs and traditions. There were no other roads in the real sense and their absence made the province inaccessible. Francis Buchman wrote, "There was no good roads in most parts and built earlier by earth works, were unsatisfactory and impassable during rainy season."<sup>1</sup> When the British took over the province in 1803 A.D., there was not a road in the modern sense

of the word. What were then called roads were mere fair-weather cart-tracts without prosper ferry arrangements for crossing numerous water courses. The traffic from South to Cuttack passed along the eastern shore of the Chilika Lake, between it and the sea, to Puri and then followed exactly the line of the present great Jagannath Road. It now all passes through Khurda along the Ganjam Road, the old route being abandoned to Nuliya fishermen. The ruins of the old rest-house for pilgrims still remain the only visible record of its former existence. Another line from Puri passed through Khurda and the Barimul pass into the central Provinces via Sambalpur proceeding northwards, the line from Puri passed through Cuttack, Padampur, Arakpur and Barambardah to Jajpur and then to Bhadrak through Dhamanagar.<sup>2</sup> Then the line followed as nearly as possible that of the present road. Another road being connected Cuttack, situated in strategic point served the purpose of a connecting link between Bengal, Madras and Nagpur. It was the only town between the Bengal and Northern Sarkars.

### **Other Important Roads**

The familiar road that connected Bengal with Cuttack ran through Medinapur, Jaleswar, Basta, Ramchandrapur, Balasore, Soro, Bhadrak, Dhamanagar, Arakpur, Padampur etc. This was the only route generally used by the pilgrims of northern India when they came to visit Puri, popular as Jagannath Sadak. The same route was used by Motte in his march to Sambalpur in 1766. Lackie used this road when he was deputed by Lord Cornwallis to Nagpur Court in 1790 along with George Forster.

There was a regular road from Cuttack to Nagpur which ran through Banki, Baideswar, Padmabati, Kantilo, Barmul, Boud, Sonpur, Ratanpur, Lanji and Tharse to Nagpur. There were two other roads from Cuttack to Nagpur which were not frequently used by the people or by the Government as these roads passed through dense forests.

Bengal-Cuttack road passed to Madras through Puri and Ganjam. Travellers coming from northern India on Badsahi road from Central India through Barmul pass crossed the Kathajodi River to go to Puri through Baliana and Pipli. The road from Cuttack to Puri was the continuation of Bengal-Cuttack road that passed through Baliana, Balakati and Pipli.

Khurda, the seat of the Hindu raja of Odisha was not connected with Cuttack with Ganjam directly during the period of Maratha administration. Dense forest regions between Khurda and Ganjam did not permit the Maratha ruler to construct direct roads between Khurda and Ganjam. Khurda had a regular land connection to Puri. The road that connected Khurda with Puri passed through Sahajpur and Kalupada crossing Daya River and joined with the Cuttack-Puri road at Pipli.

### **Purpose of the Roads**

By the time the British rulers came to Odisha these important roads were used by the people for mercantile traffics. British rulers became interested in the development of these roads for the purpose of

commercial prosperity of the company. Three vital functions thus ascribed to the road-

- (a) As a means of military communication
- (b) As a means of commercialization and
- (c) As an improved pilgrimage route.
- (d) As a means to maintaining internal law and order situation with administration and justice.

Many new roads were added to the existing roads. Roads were constructed and maintained by different agencies.

#### Types of Roads

There were three types of roads-

- (a) Provincial Road
- (b) District Board Road &
- (c) Local Board Road.

The first category of road that was provincial road paid for out of the provincial funds and was kept under the charge of the public works Department of the provincial Government. The second category of roads was paid for out of the District Road fund and was under the immediate charge of the District Engineer. Local Board roads were maintained by the Local Boards purely for local utility. The cost of the maintenance of such roads was paid out of the Local Board funds. The District, Boards maintained the Districted Board roads within the boundary of the district, roads passing through the killas of permanently settled estates were also maintained by the District Board, But the Rajas or Zamindars were required to pay the cost of the maintenance of such roads to the District Board under which killa came.

#### **Grand Trunk Road**

The first among the provincial roads was Grand Trunk Road which ran from Medinapur in Bengal Presidency to Ganjam in Madras Presidency. It entered the Cuttack district at Akhayapada, 46 miles from Cuttack town. It was raised and metalled and crossed the rivers Baitarani, Kharsuan, Brahmani and Mahanadi by ferries. Passing through western hills reached to Puri road and Cuttack to Ganjam road. Cuttack to Puri was generally known as Jagannath Road which was constructed between 1811 and 1812 in place of the old pilgrim road. There were two other provincial roads, the first from Cuttack to Sonepur, mostly unmetalled and the second from Cuttack to Sambalpur through Athagarh.

#### Provincial Roads after the Great Famine 1866

After the Great Famine in 1866, Government began to give an attention for the construction of

new roads and maintenance of the old ones. The Grand Trunk Road from Madras to Calcutta via Odisha was completed by Public Works Department in 1857 A.D. That road was one of the important Highways that passing through Odisha. It was metalled road people were crossing the rivers Mahanadi, Baitarani, Brahmani, Kharsuan by ferries. From Cuttack city a branch line was connected with main Calcutta Highroad which was running from the south to the town of Puri. The total length of roads constructed in Odisha up to 1877 A.D., was 531 miles.<sup>3</sup>

There was a Provincial road; first Cuttack–Sambalpur road was stretched up to the bank of the river Mahanadi. The principle District Road and roads which are leading to Cuttack town were-

- i. Cuttack to Taladana-44 miles length out of which 14 miles were un-metalled.
- ii. Cuttack to Machagaon-32 miles leaving Taladanda road 11 miles metalled up to 14 miles from Cuttack.
- iii. Cuttack to Chandbali road passed through Patamundai having a length of 63 miles.
- iv. Phulnakhara to Madhaba road joined with the Cuttack-Puri road at 15 miles from Cuttack.
- v. Tangi to Hariपुर road connected the Garhjats with Grand Trunk Road at 10 miles from Cuttack.

Local roads were many, but all these roads were only fair-weather roads in Cuttack district. Puri district possessed many roads maintained by Provincial Boards, District Boards, and Local Boards. They were-

- i. Pipil to Khurda 15 miles long joined Ganjam and Jagannath road at Mukundaprasad near Khurda.
- ii. From Khurda to Kalapathar through Jilla Kuspala and Manikgora 17 miles long join the provincial road, Cuttack Sonepur road near Kantilo.
- iii. A district branch road left the Khurda-Sambalpur road at Baghamari was extended up to Itamati, a commercial centre of Nayagarh Raja.
- iv. Sunakhala, a village in the district road between Baghamari and Bolgarh was connected with a road made by the Raja of Ranpur that further was linked with Ganjam road near Tangi.
- v. A district road was stretched from Balugaon Chilika Lake to Banpur.
- vi. A good road was made by the estate improvement fund from Khurdha to Pattanaikia on the Jagannath road having a length of 22 miles.
- vi. A district road was constructed road between Sunakhala and Aitpur with a length of 34 miles.

### Consequences

The opening of roads facilitated the merchants coming from Calcutta and Madras to trade in forest produce and rice respective.<sup>4</sup> They also penetrated into Garhjat tracts when the Government connected Sambalpur and Cuttack by a road in 1879 which passed through Angul. In 1879-80 the British Raj had also collected voluntary taxes from the tribal people to construct roads in Kandhamals.<sup>5</sup> In the Sambalpur district huge sums had been spent to improve Sambalpur-Binka road and to repair Sambalpur-Raipur road. This resulted in the increase of volume of import and export from Sambalpur.<sup>6</sup> After 1885, Bargarh road and Sonapur road were repaired and metalled to open the area to the traders. Internal security against anti-social elements, sabotage, arson and violent activities can never be assured in a country without efficient and prompt service of transport and communication. The timely police and military aid, service of fire brigade etc all require good transport system in a country.

At the turn of the Century, Odisha was no longer an isolated province. It processed the following metal roads to enable the people to process the benefit of the modern civilizations.

#### **Metal Roads of Odisha were as follows:-**

1. Grand Trunk Road
2. Sambalpur-Cuttack Road
3. Keonjhar Road
4. Machgaon Road
5. Taladanda Road
6. Chandabali Road
7. Jajpur Road
8. Sambalpur-Bolangir Road
9. Sambalpur-Raipur Road.<sup>7</sup>

The Calcutta-Puri Road was also maintained by the Public Work Department. It was an excellent road throughout. But the river crossings were problem some until December as there were no bridges. Other important roads maintained by the Public Work Department were the Khurda-Pipli road (13 3/4miles), Khurda- Patanaikia road (12 1/2 miles), Vyas sarover-Jajpur road (15 miles) and the Cuttack-Chandbali road (63 1/4 miles).<sup>8</sup>

Balasore District Board constructed 38 roads having the total length of 309 miles. Only 40 miles were un-metalled and 269 miles were metalled it was impossible during rains. In North Balasore, the Kamrad- Baliapala, Baliapala-Basta road, Kamrada-Jaleswara and single Nangeswar roads were unsafe for traffic due to high floods during rainy season. In south Balasore, the Panchapara-Haldipada road, Balasore-Nilagiri Road, Gopinathpur-Nilgiri Road were in good condition for the passengers and

commercial traffic. The traffic was heavy in both Chandbali and Basudevpur-Chandbali road, rice was exported in large quantities and many consumption articles were imported from Chandbali port. In addition to the District Board Roads, there were 67 village roads with a total length of 200 km.

The construction of railways also gave considerable encouragement to road building. The formation of District Boards in 1885 acted as a catalyst to construct District Roads. But the policy of collecting roads to cess was a source of hardship to the people. There was very meager development of roads to meet the needs of people especially internal communication was, on the whole, far from satisfactory.

### Conclusion

After 70 years of independence, we have not taken any drastic measures to connect the interior locations to the nearby main cities. For several decades, we had embarked in wrong directions with wrong policies. We should have changed the work culture for making world class transportation system. The Government of Odisha has also proposed to build an over bridge from Bhubaneswar to Cuttack through Trisulia. It will minimize the time limit and maximize the business spirit of this region. More roads are required to escalate the concept of development in Odisha.

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