



TRUCK OPERATIONS IN NAMAKKAL DISTRICT OF TAMILNADU – AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The Road transport Industry is vital and basic to the overall progress and prosperity of a country. The lorry transport system contributes to accelerate the Socio-economic development of any developing country, particularly India. Without the help of lorry transport, many industries and factories cannot be constructed especially in those places not connected by rail transport. Lorry transport not only entails lower overhead expenditure but also lower maintenance expenditure than the railways, involving huge expenditure on maintenance, stations, rolling stock and equipment. This article highlights the Truck Operations in Namakkal District of Tamilnadu – An Overview.

INTRODUCTION

The pioneers who first started lorry body building industry at Namakkal in 1940 were Messrs. Mariappa Asari, Raju Asari and Ponnusami Asari. In fact, the goodwill has slowly and steadily improved over the years such that Namakkal, Sankari and Tiruchengode became famous for lorry body building industry in the whole of South India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular. The hectic growth and rapid development of the industry with special reference to Namakkal District in Tamil Nadu is mainly due to the enterprising skills and ability of the pioneers. First Lorry Body Building Unit was started at Namakkal in 1940, at Tiruchengode in 1965 at Sankari 1968, at Vellore in 1970, at Kolathur in 1972, at Mettupalayam in 1975, at Madurai in 1982, at Karur in 1983 and at Tirunelveli in 1984.

A lorry body building workshop is selected by the chassis owner for various reasons. It may be due to the good will, experience, efficiency and promptness of delivery of the lorry body builders. It may even depend on the personal relationship between the chassis owner and the body builder. Usually the front cabin of the lorry will be 7 feet and 2 inches. Wood, mica sheets, plywood, iron and alloy sheets and angles are used to fabricate this unit.

TRUCKING INDUSTRY STRUCTURE

As trucking serves many different markets, it has become highly segmented in order to respond efficiently to these markets. Broadly, the industry may be divided into either private or for-hire carriers. In the for-hire sector, two types of services are provided: truckload (TL) and less-than-truckload (LTL). Additionally, TL and LTL services can be segmented into either short haul or long haul.

TRUCK CHARACTERISTICS

The majority of trucking across the Canadian border is conducted with 5-axle tractor-semitrailer combinations, although a few single-unit trucks are used. Commonly used tractor-semitrailer combinations in the cross-border operations on the Canadian border include: (1) 7- and 8-axle combinations moving containers between British Columbia and Washington; (2) 7- and 8-axle A-train and B-train doubles, RMD, and triple-trailer combinations between the Western provinces and Northern Plains States; and (4) various heavy multi-axle combinations operating under Michigan and Ontario bridge formulas.

Differing TS&W limits between Canada and the United States result in unique situations. For example, an 8-axle tractor-semitrailer crossing into British Columbia from Washington converts to a 6-axle by lifting axles on the tractor and semitrailer, which is required; a wide variety of combinations have as many as 11-axles for operations between Michigan and Ontario. A large portion of truck traffic between Mexico and the United States is dominated by the 2- and 3-axle single-unit truck and tractor-semitrailer combinations limited to 80,000 pounds. Very few double-trailer combinations are used.

TRUCK OPERATIONS

Single-Unit Trucks

The most common single-unit trucks in the commercial fleet with three or more axles are dump trucks, transit mixers, tank trucks, and trash trucks. Single-unit trucks account for approximately 42 percent of total truck VMT (Volume of Truck). The 2- and 3-axle trucks account for the majority of the single-unit truck VMT, approximately 85 percent and 12 percent, III-14 respectively. Although the number of 4 or more axle single-unit trucks has more than doubled since 1982, their share of the annual VMT, 3 percent, is an indication that their use is primarily short haul.

Single-Trailer Combinations

Tractor-semitrailer combinations are the most common combination operating in the country, accounting for over 25 percent of all registered trucks and 82 percent of all truck combinations. They include combinations of a 2-, 3-, or 4-axle tractor with a semitrailer having 1 or more axles (up to 8 in Michigan). In 1994, tractor-semitrailers accounted for approximately 53 percent of total truck VMT, or 89.6 billion VMT. Truck-trailer combinations are the second most common combination in the country, accounting for approximately 14 percent of the truck combination fleet. Their use increased significantly since 1982, primarily in the North Central region. With 3.1 billion VMT, however, truck-trailer combinations account for less than 2 percent of total truck VMT. Over 50 percent of this VMT is attributed to the 5-axle combination.

Multi-Trailer Combinations

STAA Doubles

The VMT for the STAA double (twin 28-foot) in 1994 was approximately 4.5 billion miles per year, or 2.6 per cent of all truck VMT. It accounted for 4.5 per cent of all truck combinations VMT and 71 per cent of all VMT by double-trailers.

PROFILE OF NAMAKKAL DISTRICT

Namakkal finds a place of importance in the map of India because of its Lorry body building industry, a unique feature of the town. More than 150 Lorry body building workshops and with a number of subsidiary industries of auto body works are operating since 1960's. There are Lorries, Trailers and L.P.G. Tanker Lorries in Namakkal district. Therefore it is called as "Transport City". Namakkal is the major producer of Egg in Southern Region. Hence, called as 'Egg City'.

There are about 560 sheds in Namakkal, Tiruchengode and Sankari which includes Tinkering and painting sheds. Transport has made tremendous strides in the recent years regarding goods transport especially at the cost of railways has been estimated that 75% of the lorry body building is done in Namakkal District and the remaining 25% at Madurai, Tirunelveli and Vellore, Karur and Nagercoil in Tamil Nadu.

However perceptions have changed since then. In 1997, Namakkal Transport Carriers decided that they would focus only on the ODC segment. This focus reaped rich dividends. By 2003, Namakkal Transport Carriers have earned an excellent reputation in moving a variety of ODC goods and are today the largest movers of such consignments in the region. Their clients include NEG-Micon, Enmass Process Technologies, Enmass Andritz among others. The ODC segment is a tough one, but it also demands thorough knowledge of load handling, routes and the ability to attract the best drivers. Namakkal Transport Carriers further built on their position by offering to build a variety of trailers in-house for their customers' needs. They have handled many big jobs till date. Recently they moved a 154 foot long windmill to Kongalnagaram from Chennai.

FINDINGS

- The Road transport Industry is vital and basic to the overall progress and prosperity of a country. The lorry transport system contributes to accelerate the Socio-economic development of any developing country, particularly India. Without the help of lorry transport, many industries and factories cannot be constructed especially in those places not connected by rail transport. Lorry transport not only entails lower overhead expenditure but also lower maintenance expenditure than the railways, involving huge expenditure on maintenance, stations, rolling stock and equipment.
- Lorry Transport broadens the market, fosters optimum factor utilisation and promotes greater division of labour and facilities labour movement towards better and more gainful employment. It breaks geographical barriers and opens up new vistas and reserve potentialities of production. Lorry Transport reduces the burden of maintenance of godown, because finished goods in desirable lots can be immediately moved from the factory to the marketing centres.
- On the basis of the factual information and data collected from the various respondents drawn from Tamil Nadu through schedules and interviews, the following important findings relating to L B B industry in Tamil Nadu are detailed below. They need not be extended to cover the whole of the industry as prevalent elsewhere in India due to differences in the localised factors; since the problems faced by the industry located at Tamil Nadu alone are investigated in this study.
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- Lorry Transport reduces the burden of maintenance of godown, because finished goods in desirable lots can be immediately moved from the factory to the marketing centres. Big undertakings may have their own Lorries for movement of goods and for getting raw materials and other requirements of the industry. Lorry transport helps in maintaining inter-related prices of commodities for the benefit of primary producers as well as ultimate consumers. Lorry Transport breaks the monopolies of areas and saves people from exploitation. Lorry Transport system encourages competition and lowers the prices of consumables. Lorry Transport establishes the concept of 'Unity' among diversity. It has given two cardinal political advantages namely 'National Unity' and 'National defense'. Lorry
- It has been estimated that more than 80% of the wood materials required for the construction of Lorry Body Building is purchased from Kerala and the remaining 20% is procured from Yercaud and other places in the State. The moisture content is so low that it does not affect the painting' on the lorry body in any serious way. When a comparison is made between Tumkur in Karnataka, the lower moisture content in the air in Namakkal District is very conducive for rapid drying of the painted surface.
- Many villages in and around these areas have the communal composition of large number of people belonging to Viswakarma community. Lorry Body Building Industry mainly requires, steel, timber, paint and electrical goods. The rapid development of the industry in Namakkal District has facilitated the emergence of various kinds of ancillary units too. The lorry body builders are invariably found to be experienced drivers and motor mechanics. Most of them have started their careers as cleaners and labourers, so that they are familiar with all the aspects of lorry transport.
- The lorries built in Namakkal District are having higher resale value than the lorries built elsewhere. This is because, the lorries built in these places are sleek and attractive, with a fine finish and greater durability and hence, capable of carrying more cargo. Some of the important notable highlights of lorries built at these places are a weight of 5 1/2 to 6 tons as against 6 to 7 tons of weight of lorries built in other states of India like Kerala and Karnataka. With the result, there is a reduction in depreciation as well as fuel cost of lorries built at Namakkal District can boast of comprehensive workshop facility compared with other places in Tamil Nadu and also other states in India in the lorry body building industry.
- A lorry body building workshop is selected by the chassis owner for various reasons. It may be due to the good will, experience, efficiency and promptness of delivery of the lorry body builders. It may even depend on the personal relationship between the chassis owner and the body builder. Usually the front cabin of the lorry will be 7 feet and 2 inches. Wood, mica sheets, plywood, iron and alloy sheets and angles are used to fabricate this unit. The cabin's back wall is fitted with cupboard to keep the R C Book, the trip sheet, driver's license and other documents. Most of the lorry owners desire to have a bigger diesel tank with the capacity preserving 200 to 250 litres. This provision for a bigger tank is not in the chassis. The use of this particular wood viz., silver oak, in Namakkal District confers many advantages.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Competition

To curtail unhealthy competition, there are two possible channels. The Government itself can introduce a stiff licensing procedure by which it can take into account the financial capacity, technical feasibility, labour potentiality, availability of tools and materials. But such a licensing procedure is likely to hamper the free growth of lorry body building units. Any such growth must be viewed as a healthy sign of a growing industry since the openness of an industry is assured whenever there is a possibility of free entry and exit. Moreover, the licensing might in the course of time help developing oligopolistic trends rather than

perfect competitive conditions. However, in order to check unhealthy mushrooming of lorry body building units, which is likely to cause wastage of scarce raw materials and thereby inflate the cost, the function of licensing may very well be handed over to a well organised lorry body building Association.

2. Industrial Estate:

In as much as the lorry body building industry is more or less localised for the reasons already indicated, the direction should be in the form of starting an 'Industrial Estate', with units specialising in different functions. There may be one unit specialising in trading, while another unit may be specialising on running a service station for the repair and maintenance of tools. In the supply of raw materials, there may be one or two branches each specialising in the stocking and supplying of specific raw materials such as timber, iron, metal sheets and electrical goods. To prevent labour from exploitation, a trade union may be organised. Such a trade union can perform many functions as outlined below. Trade unions can have well formulated welfare schemes for the labourers employed in the lorry body building industry in the form of insurance, medical facilities, and trading facilities. The union can also strengthen the collective bargaining whereby wages, working conditions, and bonus can be resolved.

3. Training facilities:

Now, that the Lorry Body Building Industry has become an important small scale industry, it would be well for the ITT (Industrial Training Institute) and other Trade Schools to start a separate course on Lorry Body Building. In the course of time, labourers may be hired on the basis of certificate issued by this institute. This will not only develop skilled and knowledgeable personnel for the industry but will also prevent uneducated and illiterate workers from entering this industry. Shortage of timber One of the most serious problems faced by the lorry body building industry is the ever - growing shortage of timber. This problem is likely to become more acute in the course of time, on account of the environmental policy pursued by the Government. For example, Aluminium of moulded plastic sheets or corrugated sheets can be used. Lorry bodies built with aluminium will be durable and lend a beautiful look. Even in the case of accidents, the aluminium is not wasted like timber and the same aluminium can be used again for the construction of lorry body building. But the cost of lorry body building would go up by Rs. 15000 thus, pushing up the total cost to Rs.75000. But the lorry body built by Aluminium is not suitable for the transport of matches and crackers since it is highly inflammable. In the case of state owned transport corporations, aluminium sheets are supplied at fair price by the Government. Private lorry body builders can approach the Government for getting aluminium sheets at fair price.

4. Co-operative organization

In general, co-operative organization of the Lorry Body Building Industry may go a long way in preventing the abuse of raw materials. The whole industry may be brought under a co-operative organisation - composed of lorry body builders, labourers, the actual suppliers and the users. Finance can be arranged through the co-operative unit. Similarly, materials can be procured through a co-operative agency. This may reduce tax burden on the industry and the labourers will be much benefitted by such a system. Many unfair and unethical practices may be curtailed by such co-operative endeavour. Co-operatives can interact and negotiate with the government for the inventories, thereby introduce an element of regularity and fair price. Nagar) all these suggestions will lead to the founding of an Autonagar, where all the individual units may function harmoniously. This will bring all the different requirements at one place and the necessary information will be made freely available. A Housing Society for the workers and others who are involved in this Lorry Body Building Industry may be thought of to alleviate the poor conditions of workers. Land assignment policy should be given due importance in this regard.

5. Sales Tax

Since all the Lorry Body Builders uniformly oppose the existing sales-tax of 896, the government should carefully examine the possibility of reducing the rate of sales tax from 86 to 596 or removing the

sales tax altogether. As all the materials are brought within the purview of the Sales Tax provision, the lorry bodies may be treated as second sales to avoid double taxation.

7. CA mini power plant presently, there is an erratic supply causing much chagrin and loss suffered by lorry body builders. This becomes more acute during summer which will adversely affect this industry. Along with Industrial Estate, it will be possible for such units to have Separate transformers for providing continuous supply of electricity to the Lorry Body Building Units. It is also possible to think in terms of a captive power plant for these units, either they can go in for a Mini thermal power plant or other electric power supply sources such as solar and wind. With the result, it will assure the uninterrupted supply of power and thereby minimise the waiting cost. Moreover, such a captive power supply would inspire and enthuse the enterprising entrepreneurs to come forward to buy or hire the developed industrial plots. Fruitful research is required in this direction.

CONCLUSION

The present study concluded that, truck transportation is facing many challenges and it is mainly due to the disorganized nature of the industry. The trucking companies are facing a lot of requirements to survive in a market where competition is very strong, that forcing them to reduce the direct and indirect costs and to increase quality in order to better meet customer needs. Lorry transport helps in maintaining inter-related prices of commodities for the benefit of primary producers as well as ultimate consumers. Lorry Transport breaks the monopolies of areas and saves people from exploitation.

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