

AUTORICKSHAW BUSINESS IN POONA *

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THIS paper embodies some of the findings of an enquiry conducted by me into the passenger and goods transport business in Poona as in 1956-57. As a component of the urban transport system in Poona, autorickshaws were introduced only in 1948. Prior to the introduction of these three-wheelers, rickshaws pulled by human beings were operating in the city as public service vehicles, but the tenure of this particular mode of transport proved to be short as they were banned as public carriers in 1949, chiefly on humanitarian grounds. This synchronized with the novel addition of the three-wheeled power-driven rickshaws to the prevalent transport system.

In India, these vehicles made their first appearance only after the war. Initially as an experimental measure, the three-wheelers were used for the movement of goods in urban areas. They were found greatly useful under the Indian conditions in a variety of ways. The compact urban areas had their major economic activities clustered around the central districts. With roads uneven in width and acutely winding and narrow, the means of transport had to be slow-moving vehicles. For such towns and cities, the advent of autorickshaws was a welcome change. The vehicle was an Italian product and was chiefly designed to ensure greater manoeuvrability, economy of size, low consumption and high mileage performance. This light weight carrier which could be handled with comparatively little skill was ideally suited as the means of movement of goods and passengers especially in smaller cities and towns. While in metropolitan cities like Bombay and Calcutta they could not prove popular for obvious reasons, they were of immense use to smaller urban centres where the total volume of movement being moderate could be more effectively tackled by a smaller complement of more economical means of transport.

In Poona, during 1948-49, 20 permits for rickshaws as authorized public service vehicles were issued by the Regional Transport Authority which functioned as the regulating and controlling authority for the business of rickshaws as well as other power-driven vehicles within its statutorily defined jurisdiction. The new trade could establish itself within a short period partly because of its novelty and partly because of its immense utility for the urbanites. During a span of eight years, the number of rickshaws multiplied by almost ten times as could be seen from the table below.

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