

CHAPTER - III

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TRADE UNIONISM IN M.S.R.T.C.

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A) Historical background of M.S.R.T.C.

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A) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF M.S.R.T.C. :

Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation which is the pioneer in the nationalised passenger road transport industry has glorious history. For the purpose of study it can be divided into two periods, each of them revealing different tendencies.

1) Road transport industry before nationalisation :

Road transport industry was concentrated in the hands of private operators in the then Bombay Province. In order to get more passengers, agents were appointed by the private operators. Unhealthy competition was there in this field. Many times passengers were shifted from one bus to another and sometimes carried at considerably low rates.¹ Generally 'T' model of Ford, Dodge, Sheverlet vehicles were operated. Provided no comfort to the passengers.² There was no limit of how many passengers are to be accommodated in a bus. It was the usual experience of passengers travelling on the roofs of buses. Due to the absence of time schedule, the buses were halted at the residence of prominent persons and government officials for hours together. Even if the bus starts its journey there was no guarantee that it would reach the destination at a particular time because the mechanical condition of vehicles were precarious and break-down on its way was always a guaranteed affair.

The then Bombay province was considered as a progressive province and in order to remove the anarchy in this field of

passenger road transport industry as explained above, the Government of Bombay sponsored the scheme for setting up a number of Tripartite Zonal Companies.³ The whole Bombay province was divided into 14 zones for this purpose. These zones were to be operated on the lines of 'Road Transport Department' in Hyderabad State.⁴

Later on, in 1946, Balasaheb Kher Ministry was sworn in. Morarji Desai was home minister. Passenger transport department was under the control of home ministry. Home minister felt that the object of reorganisation of the Road Transport as a public service cannot be achieved by the tripartite zonal companies because they can not forget the profit motive. The Government of Bombay Province, therefore, decided to complete nationalisation of passenger road transport industry. According to administration of Bombay State Transport the prominent feature of the scheme was, " it would weild all transport services operating in entire state into one single operating unit, which would achieve uniformity in policy of administration and a progressively higher standard of efficiency in the true sense of the word." It was therefore, decided that the government can itself step into the business of road transport and make it public owned business in order to ensure that the services were run in the public interest and that profits accruing from the operations were ploughed back into the road transport services. Mr.Vitfield was appointed to chalk out the plan of nationalisation.

The main purpose of nationalisation was to eliminate harmful and uneconomical competition and overlapping of services and to bring about the integrated system of transport.⁵

2) Road transport industry after nationalisation :

The State Transport Department was established on 1st April, 1948 to implement the scheme of reorganisation approved by the provincial government till the public statutory board is constituted to take over the administration. The department was the first of its kind in the country and being commercial in character, it has to face number of difficulties regarding procedures, expenditure, sanction, recruitment etc. A high power committee was setup (H.P.C.) to take decisions on all matters communicating with the administration of the new undertakings. Although the working of the High Power Committee was efficient and smooth, the government felt that the nationalisation of any industry would not fully serve its purpose unless the administration is entrusted to a statutory public board with autonomous powers vesting in it. The Government of Bombay, therefore, under the Road Transport Corporation Act of 1948, established Bombay State Road Transport Corporation w.e.f. 17th November 1949.

One operator from Nasik, whose stage carriage permit was not renewed by the Regional Transport Authority, challenged the notification issued by the Government of Bombay to establish

Bombay Road Transport Corporation under the Road Transport Corporation Act 1948. The High Court, gave the decision that the Road Transport Corporation Act of 1948 was ultra vires and as a result the notification issued by the Government of Bombay was null and void and no corporation validly came into existence. Therefore, the work of the State Road Transport undertakings reverted temporarily in law to the pattern of a department under the state government. The parliament passed other Road Transport Corporation Act in the year 1950 and later on in keeping with this statute, the Government of Bombay formally constituted under Section 3 of the Corporation Act, 1950, a corporation for the various districts in the then Bombay Province.⁶

State transport undertaking started it's working with 35 vehicles in Poona Division. State transport bus was firstly started on Pune - Ahmednagar route on 1st June 1948. By March ; 1952, it had grown to 11 divisions operating 1946 vehicles.

Three divisions namely, Belgaum, Bijapur and Hubli were handed over to Mysore State on 1st November 1956, due to reorganisation of state on linguistic basis and ABU pocket was handed over to Rajasthan on 1st January 1957. The Government of Bombay however, took over the operations of the Saurashtra State Road Transport Corporation, Kutch State Road Transport Corporation, Provincial Transport Services, Nagpur, and State Transport Marathwada.

After the bifurcation of the then Bombay State on 1st May 1960, it was decided to bifurcate the Bombay State Road Transport

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Corporation, between the Maharashtra and Gujrat. After bifurcation and with the approval of the government, a notification was issued in June, 1961 merging the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation, State Transport Marathwada and Provincial State Road Transport Services, Nagpur on 1st July, 1961 and the jurisdiction of Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation covered the entire State of Maharashtra.⁷

The corporation grew from strength to strength and it had in the year 1979, 26 divisions with a fleet of 8,866 buses manned by the total staff of 64,232 employees, operating 9,342 routes with total route length of 6,05,629 kilometers. Making transport arrangements of 27.20 lakh passengers per day.⁸

M.S.R.T.C. has achieved now about 100% nationalisation with a fleet of buses numbering 12,190 running over 14,351 routes in every nook and corner of Maharashtra State and making transport arrangements of 51.36 lakh passengers per day with the help of 92,851 employees as on 31st March, 1987.⁹

It is operating 768 long distance services (250 kms and above), running 305 Nigh Queen and operating 295 inter state routes.

For the convenience of the travelling public 452 fully equipped bus stations were built, 3,045 pickup sheds' were also built even at the remote places.¹⁰

Thus, the M.S.R.T.C. today occupies the premier position in this sector of nationalised economy in India and is the largest

public sector enterprise of it's kind in Asia and in the world.

B) TRADE UNIONISM IN M.S.R.T.C. :

1) Labour conditions prior to nationalisation :

The condition of Labour, prior to nationalisation of Passenger Transport Industry in Maharashtra in the year 1948 were precarious. Motor transport services were operated under different small private operators owning one or two buses and the workers had no security of service and they could not aspire for better prospects or promotions. Service was not a career for any of them, it was merely a living for existence. The labour in this industry was dis-organised with the result that the concept of fixed and graded pay scales, weekly offs, fixed hours of duty, leave rules, medical facilities etc. were unheard. Due to the scattered position of the labour, they could not organise any union for collective bargaining.

Nationalisation caused to brought a large group of workers in the industry under central control. They were given opportunity to organise themselves in trade unions for collective bargaining and for the betterment of the service conditions and standard of living.

2) Labour condition after nationalisation :

Trade unions started functioning in Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation since 1950 and State Transport Workers union which latter named itself "The Maharashtra State Road

Transport Workers Federation" was recognised at State and Divisional levels upto the year 1967 as the only recognised union. There was also another union named State Transport Kamgar Sabha which had a majority in some of the divisions was also recognised for local issues from 1958. After merger of Road Transport from Vidharbha and Marathwada in the year 1961, the unions functioning with these units were also given recognition. In the year 1965 the various unions functioning under the name of State Transport Kamgar Sabha, Bombay, State Transport Employees Union, Aurangabad and the State Transport Mazdoor Union, Thana, amalgamated to form one statewide trade union named as, 'Maharashtra State Transport Mazdoor Sabha and started agitations for recognition, at state level, which was given to it on 1/4/1967 and at the same time, continued the recognition of Maharashtra State Road Transport Workers Federation.

From the date recognitions are given to two unions at state level, the union rivalries have started and they have continued till this date and the history of labour relations in Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation has become the history of union rivalries between these two state-wide unions, on important issues, not on the grounds of the principles or for the welfare or the betterment of the standard of living of the workers, but on the grounds of opposing the schemes sponsored by the rival unions. One such example is that the settlement

regarding linking of Dearness Allowance to the cost of living index was accepted by the Maharashtra State Workers' Federation but the Mazdoor Sabha did not accept it at that time and for sometime the Mazdoor Sabha did not participate in the joint meetings also.¹¹

Later on, The M.R.T.U. and P.U.L.P. Act (Maharashtra Recognition of Trade Unions and Prevention of Unfair Labour Practices Act) came in to force on 8/9/1975. As per the provisions of the above Act, the unions have to seek recognition in the Industry from the Industrial Court. Even after promulgation of the said Act, none of the above unions had obtained recognition from the Industrial Court. In view of the above, the M.M.K.Federation and P.R.M.K.Union approached Industrial court, Nagpur seeking similar facilities as were given to M.S.T. Workers Federation (INTUC) and M.S.T.Kamgar Sanghatana in the year 1977. The Industrial Court, Nagpur vide its decision dated 7/7/1986 and High Court vide its decision dated 21/12/1984 upheld the contentions of the M.M.K.Federation and P.R.M.K.Union, Nagpur and directed the corporation to give similar facilities to these two unions in view of the fact that none of the unions of the S.T. employees had obtained recognition from Industrial Court, as envisaged in MRTU and PULP Act. The Chalak-Wahak Sanghatana approached the Industrial Court, Pune and in pursuance of the decision of the said court dated 6/11/1984 and 28/1/1985 and 16/8/1985 is now entitled for all facilities as are given to other unions.

The Castribe S.T.Karmachari Sanghatana had approached the Industrial Court, Nagpur for similar facilities on the basis of the decision of the High Court, Nagpur Bench dated 21/2/1984. In pursuance of interim orders of the Industrial Court, Nagpur dated 12/9/1985, the Castribe Sanghatana has been allowed to participate in the negotiations held with the M.S.T. Workers Federation (INTUC), M.S.T.Kamgar Sanghatana, M.M.K.Federation, P.R.M.K.Union and M.S.T.Chalak-Wahak Sanghatana by Negotiating Committee appointed by the corporation. Other facilities similar to other unions were also granted to this union.

In addition to the above, six unions, there are five other registered unions functioning in M.S.R.T.C. viz. -

- i) The Association of Technical Supervisory Staff,
- ii) Alpasankhyank S.T. Karmachari Sanghatana,
- iii) M.S.T.Suraksha Karmachari Sanghatana,
- iv) M.S.R.T. Engineering Staff Association and
- v) Yantriki Karmchari Sanghatana.

The M.S.T.Suraksha Sanghatana and M.S.T.Engineering Staff Association are affiliated to the M.M.K.Federation.

At present, the M.S.R.T.Corporation is having 12 unions. The multiplicity of the unions have delayed the process of settling the issues and decide the policy on wages, allowances and other facilities while arriving the settlement, since for any general issue, the management has to consult 6 unions and

many a times by holding separate meetings as they do not sit together even for deciding common issues.

Though, the MRTU and PULP Act envisages recognition of one union in industry and accord of recognition within three or four months, the rival unions raise many issues like incorrect membership, illegal strike by the unions seeking recognition. The case may be dragged years together. In absence of the decision, any union with just seven members can get all facilities in M.S.R.T. Corporation from Industrial Court. This situation has created an unhealthy atmosphere in the field of industrial relations in M.S.R.T. Corporation.

It is therefore, suggested that to ascertain membership of union for the purpose of knowing majority and grant of recognition, the secret ballot be conducted in the industry as it is done in Andhra Pradesh. This would avoid the delay in litigation and decide the issue of recognition of one union in the Industry which would pave way for maintaining peace in the Industry by deciding policy decisions quickly.¹²

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