

PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND THE LAW A SOCIO-LEGAL ANALYSIS OF MAHARASHTRA'S ROAD TRANSPORT CORPORATION

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ABSTRACT.

The Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) serves as a backbone of public mobility in the state. While its operational framework is grounded in socio-economic necessity, its legal foundation is often overlooked. This paper critically examines the laws governing MSRTC, analyzing their effectiveness in promoting public welfare, ensuring employee rights, and maintaining service standards. Through a socio-legal lens, the paper investigates legislative intent, administrative challenges, and judicial interventions, aiming to highlight areas of reform. The study contributes to broader discourses on public transport governance, legal accountability, and citizen-centric policy.



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AIMS OF THIS PAPER:

This paper aims to bridge the gap between statutory frameworks and social outcomes in the functioning of the MSRTC. It invites stakeholders from law, public policy, and management to reimagine transport governance through a rights-based and efficient model. The discourse encourages legal reform, administrative transparency, and citizen participation.

INTRODUCTION:

Public transport systems are vital for social and economic inclusion. In India, state-run corporations like MSRTC are not only service providers but also instruments of social justice, connecting rural and urban populations affordably. Despite their importance, these institutions face operational inefficiencies, financial crises, and legal ambiguities. Maharashtra, being a large and economically significant state, presents a valuable case for studying the intersection of law, policy, and public transport. This paper aims to analyze the legal structures that support MSRTC and evaluate their socio-legal impact.

CONCETUAL FRAMEWORK:

The term 'socio-legal study' implies an interdisciplinary approach combining legal analysis with social science methods. Here, the law is not merely seen as statutes and rules but as a dynamic tool that interacts with society. The legal structure of MSRTC is defined primarily by the Road Transport Corporations Act, 1950, and governed at the state level by administrative and transport departments. A socio-legal perspective entails examining how these laws affect, and are affected by, the societal context-public needs, employee welfare, economic constraints, and political influence.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

This paper limits its scope to:

- The legal framework governing MSRTC
- Administrative practices and challenges
- Social implications including accessibility and labor relations
- Judicial scrutiny and legislative reform
- Recommendations for future governance The study covers developments up to 2025 and primarily focuses on the state of Maharashtra.

EXPLANATION AND ANALYSIS:

1. **Legal Framework:** MSRTC is governed under the Road Transport Corporations Act, 1950, enabling states to establish transport corporations. Maharashtra adopted this in 1948, even before the Act, and later aligned it with the central legislation. The Corporation is subject to state oversight and auditing.

Relevant provisions include:

Section 3: Establishment and incorporation

Section 18: Power to acquire property

Section 34: Annual financial statement

Section 38: Power to make rules

These laws provide a structure but often lack implementation mechanisms, resulting in accountability gaps.

2. **Administrative and Financial Challenges:** MSRTC has faced persistent financial losses due to rising fuel costs, poor fare structures, and operational inefficiencies. Legal challenges arise from strikes, employee grievances, and contractual disputes. Governance often suffers from bureaucratic delay and political interference.

3. **Social Dimensions:** Public transport is a public good. For rural populations, MSRTC buses are a lifeline. However, service cutbacks and fleet reduction affect marginalized communities most.

Legal protections for equitable access are vague, with no binding service obligations.

Labor relations also form a core issue. Strikes by MSRTC employees, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted poor wage structures and job insecurity. While laws exist for grievance redressal, implementation is weak.

4. **Judicial and Policy Interventions:** Courts have occasionally intervened, particularly in labor disputes. In multiple rulings, the Bombay High Court emphasized timely payment of wages and respect for employee rights. However, judicial activism is limited by the broader inefficiency in policy execution.

Policy reforms like electrification of fleets and digital ticketing are underway, but they lack legal backing or enforcement clauses.

CONCLUSION:

The socio-legal analysis of MSRTC reveals a complex interplay between legal structures and social realities. While laws provide a necessary foundation, their implementation remains inconsistent and often inadequate. For MSRTC to fulfill its mandate as a public welfare institution, legal reforms must be paired with administrative efficiency and participatory governance. A robust grievance redressal system, clear service mandates, and enhanced judicial oversight can transform MSRTC into a more accountable and people-centric service. This study underscores the urgent need for a legal framework that not only governs but empowers public transport in Maharashtra.

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