

## Road Safety: A Critical Issue Requiring Government Attention

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### ABSTRACT.

Traffic problems aren't something to take lightly anymore, not when we have been proclaimed as the nation with the most traffic accidents. In India, it matters little if the Union government 'recognizes' a problem, the record on implementing anything is poor. A lot of this is because the suggested measures are so outlandish and ambitious that implementing them is almost impossibility. The arms of the Indian States end up becoming impotent due to neglect or decayed due to corruption. This study will succinctly examine the problem of road traffic accidents.

**Keywords;** Critical issues, Road accidents, etc

### INTRODUCTION

India has the highest road traffic accident rate worldwide with over 140,000 deaths annually, beating even China. Every hour, nearly 14 lives are lost due to road accidents in India. More than 40 % of the deaths are caused by trucks and two-wheelers. Most accidents occur in the afternoons and during peak hours (especially in the evening) considered an 'unsafe' or dangerous time to be on the road. In 67% of these accidents there is head injury. Most people do not wear seat belts or those on two wheelers do not wear a helmet -though it is compulsory in many states of the country. Our traffic conditions are chaotic, the rules are broken all the time and we have no traffic sense. All this reflects in the number of fatal accidents that occur in India. Road traffic accidents have come down in most western countries due to strict adherence to traffic rules and stringent penalties. Out of the estimated 1.4 million serious road accidents/ collisions occurring annually in India, hardly 0.4 million are recorded. Many road traffic deaths in rural areas are not recorded. Accidents which result in late deaths after the discharge from hospital, due to the effects of morbidity also are not recorded.

### HERE ARE SOME HORRIFYING STATISTICS ABOUT INDIA:

- Road accidents last year – more than 130,000 dead set to increase, to jump to 150,000 (per annum) by 2015.
- 10 percent of the (million-plus) fatal accidents in the world happen in India.
- India has just 1 percent of the world's vehicles, but accounts for 10 percent of the world's road accidents.
- We lose 3 percent of our GDP per annum due to road accidents.
- 70 percent of road accidents take away the main wage earner.
- Mortality rate per 10,000 vehicles is 14 (less than two for developed countries).

In 1989, India established its "Rules of the Road Regulation" to set standards for drivers of vehicles, including three- and four-wheelers. The country has 15 different classifications of vehicles that include the omnibus, which is built to carry more than six passengers, and motor cars, which are vehicles other than transport vehicles, omnibuses, tractors, road-rollers, motorcycles or invalid carriages. India also has many traffic laws. 'Although basic laws for road safety exists in India, their enforcement is extremely weak. Enforcement of wearing of seat belts for passengers of cars scored 2 out of a scale of 10.



- India still hasn't implemented the advanced technological methods of law enforcement when it comes to traffic regulation. But here there is a ray of light in the fact that the situation is improving rapidly, in this respect.
- The tendency to disobey rules is dependent on opportunity. The large population and paucity of space on Indian roads and at traffic junctions, etc. only aggravates the situation.
- Indian administration has limited resources and larger targets to meet in comparison with other countries. It poses a relatively much heavier burden on the shoulders of the law enforcement agencies. Poor road quality and road maintenance.
- Lack of adequate roadways is thought of as a major reason. Besides, the worst accidents happen on highways. Lack of discipline gets magnified at high speed on a fast moving road. Although it must be mentioned here that evidence from the countries with better highways and roads suggests that building more roads does not ease traffic congestion; it just brings more cars/ vehicles on the road.
- Two wheelers leave the body exposed to much injury in case of an accident. Approximately '44% of deaths are of those on two-wheelers' – The Nano could probably help in these cases.
- Low conviction rates could be one of the major problems
- Most countries have a multi-disciplinary approach to traffic planning and road design. It is done by psychologists, engineers, doctors, sociologists and vehicle experts. In India, traffic is still a civil engineering issue.
- Infrastructural loop holes as well as vehicle manufacturers are to blame to some extent. Proper safety measures (like safety equipment including air bags, etc.) are not implemented in vehicles designed for Indian roads, although present in vehicles abroad.
- Actions like dangerous overtaking, lane cutting, jumping of signals, erratic parking, not using dim headlights are major causes.

### **HOW IS OUR GOVERNMENT TACKLING THE ROAD ACCIDENT PROBLEM?**

The government is planning to make safety features on cars and speed governors compulsory on heavy vehicles, besides other measures. The Government must enforce stricter road rules in India and also provide adequate infrastructure to safeguard its citizens.

### **TRAFFIC RULES AND FINES**

India's law against driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs carries a maximum penalty of Rs. 2,000 and a maximum imprisonment of six months. India has a law against playing music while driving that carries a fine of Rs. 1,000. The fine for using a cell phone while driving is Rs. 1,000, and the laws against using colored lights and outfitting windows with tinted shading carry fines of Rs. 100.

### **LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS CONCERNING THE PROBLEM.**

• Motorcycle helmet law enforcement also scored 2 out of 10. Enforcement of DUI (Driving Under the influence of Intoxication) law (0.03g/dL) scored 3 out of 10. Speed limit laws are existent; however data regarding their enforcement was not available. Child restraint laws are not existent in India. This can be possible only by strict enforcement of laws by the Government.

• In India, the number of RTA( Road Traffic Accident) fatalities has been growing at nearly 8% per year and shows no signs of falling. The results suggest that, in India, road safety laws need to be made more comprehensive while enforcement should be strengthened.' 85 % of the victims of these fatalities are men in the age group 20-50 years. Majority of these men are the bread- winners for their families.

Perhaps one of the prime reasons for poor driving sense is the ease with which a person may obtain a license in India. This is an easily remediable cause of traffic problems and in turn the high number of traffic accidents. A report of a person trying to obtain a licence in Singapore in 2008, which is contained in brief below, will act as a great eye-opener.

In Singapore, it takes



