

ROAD SAFETY: EVERYONE'S PRIORITY



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The Road...! Can we imagine our lives without the road? The use of roads has become an increasingly important part of our daily lives. Road use is an everyday activity. Roads come with road transport, and road transport comes with road accidents. In order to prevent these traffic accidents, the concept of "Road Safety" is important. Road travel is the main means of transportation in India and is crucial to the country's economic development. It supports balanced socioeconomic growth across the nation's diverse regions and eases the transportation of passengers and commodities. Additionally, it is critical to the nation's development and socioeconomic integration. In comparison to other modes of transportation, road transportation accounts for the largest proportion of both passenger and freight transportation due to the ease of access, dependability, and possibility of service expansion to the most remote regions of the nation.



The construction of road infrastructure is what turns the wheels of economic expansion. The total length of roads and highways in India is approximately 60 lakh kilometers, which is second only to the United States of America. The new roads are connecting all the corners of the country. The roads were built at a record speed of about 30 km per day. But there is one black side to this development. A social evil called 'road accidents'.



Road accidents have a bad reputation in India. According to MoRTH, 17 people die every hour on Indian roads. In India, there are about 1.5 million fatal traffic accidents every year. As a result, India is responsible for over 11% of all accident-related fatalities worldwide. India, thus, leads the world in road accidents. The country has about 1% of the global vehicle population but accounts for 6% of the world's road accidents.



According to MoRTH, road crashes contributed to an economic loss of approximately 3% of GDP. The picture is horrible and shameful, too. Road accidents are a human tragedy, and the remedy is road safety.

Road safety, in simple terms, is to secure people while traveling on the roads. All road users, including pedestrians, two-wheelers, four-wheelers, and other users of transport vehicles, have to be made safe. Road safety is to ensure safer drivers, the safety of vulnerable road users, safer road infrastructure, and safer vehicles.

Everyone should respect others while driving or walking on the road and take care of their safety. Not only road users, but road safety also concerns various aspects like the maintenance of your vehicle, defensive driving, the condition of the road, preventive measures, related emergency care, and many more.

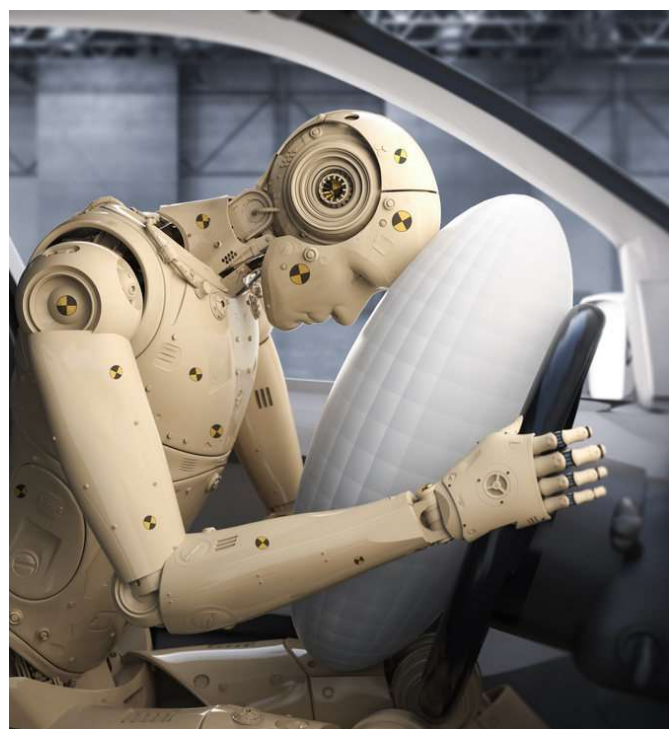
But is everyone concerned about road safety? Is everyone aware of road safety? Unfortunately, the answer is no.

Road safety is a worldwide concern. Stockholm, Sweden, hosted the third Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in February 2020. All of the participants in this conference, including India, reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to reaching the targets of decreasing traffic-related fatalities by at least 50% by 2030. Road traffic is still a significant development problem, a public health hazard, and a major source of death and injury worldwide.



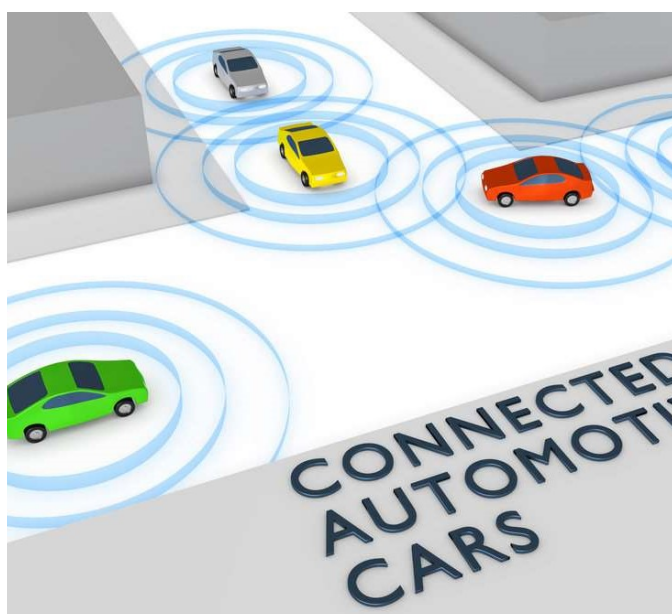
Children must be taught the basics of road safety right from a young age. Parents must remember that action speaks louder than words. Setting an example of good behavior on the road may save your child's life one day. Children are great imitators; if you break the rules, so will they. Driving habits are based on human behavior. Such human behavior can be mentored, especially at the school and college level, by teacher and colleague interactions. It can only be achieved if educational institutes take the initiative to conduct a program of training regarding traffic education, defensive driving, and road safety regulations.

So, to curb this social evil, we must teach road safety as a duty as well as a habit in our lives. The main thrust of road safety across the world has been on the 5 E's, viz. Education, Enforcement, Engineering, Environment, and Emergency care of accident victims. The most important requirement is education about road safety. It is a foundation. It includes road users as well as drivers' education. The driver's negligence or fault is to blame for about 80% of road accidents. Improving drivers' skills and behavior is vital for reducing road-related accidents and fatalities. The human aspect of 'driver behind the wheel' is one key area that needs to be addressed. A driver with knowledge of driving rules and regulations and acting according to them will help in achieving the expected target by 2030. It is not the driving skills of drivers but their attitude and bad driving culture on the road that need to be set right.



The Ministry of Company Affairs has clarified the inclusion of driver training, mass road safety education and awareness, etc., which can be included in CSR.

Engineering is also important for road safety. We have better vehicles and better roads these days. The government is consistently taking measures by developing national highways and urban and rural roads in accordance with international best practices, keeping in view Indian traffic conditions. The Samrudhi Expressway in Maharashtra is the best example. Safer vehicles are also encouraging road safety in their design and functions. ABS technology, mandatory airbags, a speed governor, the introduction of the OBD II system, and artificial intelligence in vehicles make it safer to drive on the road.





For enforcement, we are consciously amending the Motor Vehicles Act to impose stricter punishments. The amendment has increased the penalties for the offenses committed under it. These penalties are expected to act as deterrents. These fines are not taxes, and you are not supposed to pay them if you follow the rules. All these rules are there for the safety of people. If you are someone who trusts statistics, helmets and seat belts save lives. Wearing a good-quality (IS: 4151) helmet can reduce the risk of death from a road crash by almost 45% and the risk of severe injury by over 70%. Wearing a proper seat belt reduces the risk of death by 55 to 65%. There is a misconception among Indians that if it is your day, you are going to die. Still, you must remember that there is a difference between an accident and a suicide.

Recently, the Bharat New Car Assessment Program, usually known as the Bharat NCAP, was introduced in India. The program will award a star rating between 1 and 5 for the cars tested, with 1 being the lowest.

Emergency care is also essential for road safety. It includes both preventive and curative measures. To reduce the trauma and probability of death and disability associated with road accidents, curative measures such as providing relief and evacuation to the accident victims are vital. As per the reports, nearly 50 percent of road fatalities would not have happened if medical attention had been given within the first hour. This first hour is called the Golden Hour. Everyone should get training in first aid, become a good Samaritan, and help reduce this number. A good Samaritan is a person who, in good faith, without expectation of payment or reward, voluntarily comes forward to administer immediate assistance or emergency care to a person injured in an accident or crash.



Road safety is an issue that can only be addressed together with all stakeholders. i.e., government, corporate houses, the auto industry and its associations, universities, educational and other institutions, non-governmental organizations, and society. Schools and colleges can play a vital role in this. Students are prime movers. Educational institutes should engage more students to create awareness about road safety among themselves and carry out road safety advocacy. Every student must know and follow the motor driving regulations, defensive driving, and associated things while using the road. Avoiding overspeeding, drinking and driving, following signals, lane discipline, and using a helmet and seat belt while on the road can be game changers.



Whenever any foreign investors plan their entry into another country, they invariably consider congestion, transportation, road safety, and the environment before venturing. Even tourists do not want to visit cities, however, if they have apprehensions about road conditions, safety, and pollution. Someone has said, "Raste aur drivers desh ki pehchan banate hai."



Road safety should become a mass movement to curb this social menace of road accidents. If we can eradicate Polio unitedly, then definitely we can achieve 'Vision Zero for Road Accidents.' What is needed is that everyone must contribute in their way to curb this social evil 'Road accidents' in India. Road safety must be everyone's first and foremost priority.



Road accidents in India have reached alarming levels, causing immense loss of life and property. It is crucial for individuals, communities, and government bodies to come together and prioritize road safety. By raising awareness, enforcing stricter traffic regulations, and promoting responsible driving habits, we can work towards achieving the goal of 'Vision Zero for Road Accidents' in our country.

**"Be the change you wish to see in the world."
Mahatma Gandhi**

Let us take inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi's words and actively contribute to making our roads safer for everyone.

The author is a proactive supporter of road safety. He is instrumental in increasing awareness about road safety through his talks and workshops on road safety in colleges, schools, and corporations.

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