Right to Road Safety

Mains: *GS II – Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services*

Why in News?

Recently, The Supreme Court's judgment in a tragic road accident case from Coimbatore gives an urgent wake-up call for Indian administrators to introduce lane discipline on chaotic roads.

What is the legality of right to road safety in India?

- **Fundamental right** – The Supreme Court (SC) has held that the right to safe, well-maintained and motorable roads is an essential component of the fundamental Right to Life *under Article 21 of the Constitution*.
- **Constitutional obligation of the State** – The SC said that citizens cannot be deprived of safe public infrastructure, especially roads that are vital for mobility, dignity and economic access
- **Domain of Article 19** – The *right to access any part of the country*, with certain exceptions and restrictions under certain circumstances, is a fundamental right under Article 19(1) (g).
    - The free movement depends on well-maintained roads.
- **Government's responsibility** – It is the responsibility of the State *to develop and maintain well motorable roads under its control.*
    - This was held in Umri Pooph Pratappur (Upp) Tollways Pvt. Ltd. v. M.P. Road Development Corporation and Another case.

What is lane discipline?

- **Meaning** – It refers to the practice of *driving within designated lanes on a road* and adhering to the rules associated with those lanes.
- **Global practise** – In countries like *Germany, Japan, or Singapore, lane discipline is drilled into the psyche of motorists*.
    - This is achieved through driver education sessions and any violation of road safety rules will lead to penalties.



What are the challenges in following lane discipline?

- **Poor road infrastructure** – Many roads in India are in poor condition, with *potholes, uneven surfaces and a lack of clearly marked lanes.*
  - This can make it difficult for drivers to stay in their designated lanes.
- **Traffic congestion** – Indian roads are often congested with vehicles, making it *challenging for drivers to maintain lane* discipline and avoid collisions.
- **Insufficient driver education** – Many drivers in India may not have received *adequate training on the importance of lane discipline* and how to maintain it on the road.
- **Corruption** – Road Transport Authority conducts namesake tests before issuing driving licences and it is most often riddled with corruption.
- **Implementation issues** – Lack of enforcement of traffic laws in India, which is often negligent.
  - This can lead to a culture of disregard for traffic rules and lack of accountability towards drivers who do not maintain lane discipline.
- **Behavioural problem** – Lane discipline *may not be a priority for some drivers in India*, as there may be cultural or societal pressures that encourage reckless or aggressive driving.
  - They are *overconfident in their abilities* and may not consider the importance of lane discipline to ensure the safety of all road users.

What measures can be taken to ensure driving discipline?

- **Education** – Government needs to ensure people are well educated about traffic rules to end traffic chaos.
- **Stringent enforcement** – A strict method needs to be followed by government for the efficient enforcement of the road safety rules.
- **Insurance policies** – Government may incentivise good road behaviour by offering them discounts in health insurance and motor insurance.
- **Innovative solutions** – Artificial intelligence-driven solutions can be introduced to track people's driving to penalise them for reckless driving.
- **Civic responsibility** – People must understand that a driving licence is not a right but a luxury which comes with responsibility.

Punjab's Road Safety Force – A case study

• **SSF** – Sadak Suraksha Force (SSF) is the road safety force setup by Punjab government.
• **Structure** – SSF teams are stationed every 30 kilometres across 4,100 km of Punjab's highways.
• **Prevention of accidents** – It had prevented accidents and saved more than 35,000 live
• **Swift response** – SSF teams reach accident spots within 5 to 7 minutes of receiving an alert.
- They administer first aid on the spot, and ensure the injured are swiftly transported to hospitals.
• **Women participation** – Women form 28% of its personnel and take part in all activities from accident response, cracking down on drug trafficking, stolen vehicles, and other criminal activities
• **Zero child mortality** – No child had died in a road accident while commuting to or from school in SSF-patrolled zones during 2024, which was a first in Punjab's history.

References

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2. Money Life| State Liable for Unsafe Roads
3. The Indian Express| Road Safety Force

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