



By ALBERTINA ALMEIDA

Of Accidents, Masculinities and (absence of) Rule of Law

The spate of accidents in the last few days has triggered a discussion on both the causes and the solutions. Coming in the aftermath of the ban on bars and the vending of liquor within 220 or 500 metres from the national and state highways (as the case may be), it is perhaps a poignant reminder that we need to dig deeper into this malaise of accidents, rather than come up with knee jerk responses or solutions that provide the justification for surveillance while not addressing the core problems.

No doubt drunken driving is a major cause of accidents. But we cannot live under the illusion that drunken driving is not possible anymore in the wake of the ban. So what is really the killer? The absence of rule of law that makes exercising road rage, road stunts and macho driving possible.

We have today a society where some people zoom past others at breakneck speed beyond the prescribed limits, whether having consumed alcohol or not, because they consider themselves as being a law unto themselves, and unquestionable. The police looking the other way when these drivers drive or ride in this fashion, lends credence to this assumption about them being a law unto themselves. A closer look reveals that these drivers performing stunts and driving with speed, often have associations with power that enable them to get away; to drive in that manner in the first place.

Take the case of one of the bikers involved in one of the recent accidents, that is, the accident at Neura. I have myself seen how terrified people would just give way or move aside, as this person's car or super-bike sped past the National Highway, as though it were an ambulance or a minister's car, for fear of facing consequences – physical (by way of injuries or death due to accident) or political (for not toeing in to these lords, sometimes nouveau lords), if they did not. We also make assumptions that the people who drive in this rash and negligent manner are students. Not always. The biker I was referring to, for instance, was a 35 year old. Hence profiling is dangerous, as it masks the solution. There are, therefore, two issues here. One, that there is a tendency to profile certain people, such as youngsters, as rash and negligent drivers, thereby removing the gaze from the not so young. Two, that

some people wield clout by virtue of their money-power to ride rough shod over the rule of



Of Accidents, Masculinities and (absence of) Rule of Law

What provides the base for these macho attitudes among people? One major factor is the advertisements on hoardings and print and electronic media for these super-cars and super-bikes which add in no small measure to a consolidation of macho attitudes of 'speed-driving-is-power-and-supermanhood'. The bikes are projected to be bikes which people can speed-ride without a care in the world and which can fetch the rider some 'pretty girls' as acquisitions. Manhood is associated with stunts, aggressive and risky driving, along with six packs and flexing of muscles, and so such speed driving then becomes an assertion of this 'manhood'.

Add to this is the *dadagiri* (a sense of false power and manhood) that comes with the ability to finance elections and be a law unto oneself, which is seen as another assertion of masculinity.

The solutions that have been devised to redress the concerns about accidents, by way of purchase of equipment such as radars, speedometers, alcometers, vehicles, and installation of CCTVs and interceptors, do not take into account as to what use such equipment that is already existing has been put to or not put to. Again, the CCTVs as well as the robot police parked outside on highways, would have definitely captured regularly zooming vehicles such as the ones of the aforementioned biker involved in the Neura accident.

In the ultimate analysis, the problem lies hugely on the one hand, with the absence of the rule of law - of absence of enforcement of the law, and absence of accountability for non-enforcement of law by the police, and on the other hand, with a society that valorizes macho attitudes and sanctions traffic violations.

Those who do not comply with their obligations under the law, those authorities who oversee or are in collusion with traffic violators, must be held accountable. As someone has said, the salaries of defaulting officers should be reclaimed for dereliction of duty.

More important are the preventive measures. Can we begin to address the formation of understandings of manhood that are defined by speed driving, road rage, vehicle stunts – all of which ultimately claim the lives of people? Which means addressing the ideological apparatus that perceives speed drivers and stunt men as ‘real men’ or ‘smart men’? A conditioning that is propped up by the vehicle industry, particularly the super-vehicle industry, by an entire advertisement industry, and by the politics industry. This ideological apparatus needs to be interrogated to see how men are socialized into believing that their manhood is determined by speedy driving, and also to see what makes men warm up to these notions of manhood. Eventually, this sort of conditioning and orientation needs to be dismantled.

(First published in *O Heraldo*, dt: 20 April, 2017)



Share this...



Facebook



Whatsapp



Print



Email



Twitter



Reddit