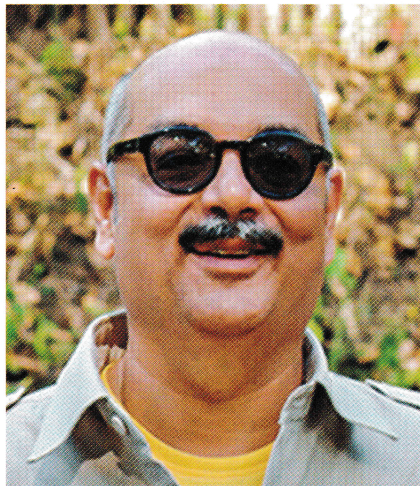A recently released report shows that Mumbai's traffic police has registered 1.1 lakh cases of signal jumping in the first quarter of this year. Another report says that a total of 18.55 lakh traffic offences were registered in Mumbai in 2015 and the total fine collected was ₹21.22 crores. Parking in a no-parking spot was the highest traffic violation followed by riding without a helmet. In third place are miscellaneous cases (I have no clue what this means) followed by signal jumping in fourth.

Strangely, no cases of rash driving or going into a one-way street are mentioned. I have lived in Mumbai for over 50 years now and have seen the traffic and road discipline go from bad to worse, to the disastrous nightmare it now is. People flout every possible traffic rule. They jump traffic lights, drive rashly, cut lanes without looking, over speed in crowded lanes, make U-turns where it's not permitted, ride and even drive on pavements, turn without indicating, stop in the middle of the road, talk on mobiles, drive without seatbelts, ride without helmets, and drink and drive—the list is endless.

Honestly, I am pleasantly surprised that the police have registered 1.1 lakh cases of signal jumping. Because rarely do you see anyone getting caught these days and you also see fewer traffic cops. The Mumbai traffic police says it's understaffed. Which I am sure it is. Despite this, if they have registered 1.1 lakh cases, they need to be congratulated.

I spoke to some policemen and some of the things they told me off the record were shocking. They said, "There is no longer any fear of the law. People have become arrogant. They argue and abuse us if we catch them. Sometimes they even get physical. In the past five years, many traffic cops have been assaulted and beaten up. That's why we now don't stand alone on the road. Some policemen have even been run over by people who want to evade the law. Motorcyclists, especially those who come out at night are the worst. Now we are always in groups to ensure we have the strength to enforce the law. Because we have to be in groups; the number of places we cover has reduced. And since our presence has reduced, so has our effectiveness. Also we have to stay away from some areas due to communal or political reasons. If we start enforcing the law in these sensitive places, it can lead to riots."

I find this to be a shocking state of affairs. Policemen are now hesitant in standing alone on the road and carrying out their job! One

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Mayhem rules on our roads, and the fear of law is sadly non-existent

traffic constable I spoke to said, "The traffic fines are as low as ₹100; some people just throw money in our face and drive off. Others threaten us with their political or underworld connections." On hearing this I began doing some research. In February 2016, a member of the Shiv Sena brutally beat up a lady traffic constable in Thane, because she stopped him for talking on a mobile while driving. In 2013, sub-inspector Sachin Suryavanshi stopped and fined Bahujan Vikas Aghadi MLA Kshitij Thakur for speeding on the sea link in Mumbai. Soon after, Suryavanshi was beaten up by some MLAs in the Maharashtra Assembly. He was subsequently suspended following a breach of privilege motion against him in the state legislature. After he was reinstated, he was transferred. All because he did his duty. If this is not 'Goonda Raj', I don't know what is.

I also came across many reports of regular citizens beating up traffic cops. This is truly shameful. Just a little over a decade back, if a traffic cop blew his whistle and pointed at you while you were driving, you immediately pulled over. Even if he was on the other side of the road, you stopped. Running away or running him over was the last thing on anybody's mind. He was the law, and if you broke it you apologized and paid up the fine.

You might argue your case, but even this you did politely.

So what has changed? For one it's the number of vehicles on the roads. There are way too many, so number of traffic offenders has multiplied. And since they are rarely caught, they get into the habit of breaking laws. If they get caught, they pay the measly fine amount. But what about the aggression—why beat up a policeman? The truth is people are more affluent now. I feel this money has gone to the heads of people, and they feel they can do anything and get away. The media also reinforces this impression. And when MLAs beat up cops and punish them for doing their duty, the people lose whatever little faith in the law they may have had.

So what is the solution? I think we should recruit more cops. Traffic fines should be raised with the minimum penalty being ₹5,000. Cops should get a percentage of the fines they collect as an incentive and reward. Those who do their duty well should get medals and promotions. Poor or rich, common man or powerful person, law should be enforced equally. It's high time the 'danda' is used to reintroduce the fear of law. If traffic laws are strictly enforced, it will reduce accidents and deaths, and good revenue can be generated from fines too. **OD**