**CRUSHED: A Story of Suppressed Voices**

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On the 7th of August, 2019, Safe In India Foundation released its report called Crushed, a report on the thousands of automotive workers who suffer crush injuries in the automotive sector. A social initiative supported by the batch of ‘91of IIM Ahmedabad graduates, Safe in India has been creating a valuable impact in workers’ lives for close to its three years of operations in the Gurgaon area, garnering support from stakeholders across industry, policymaking, and the workers. Their ground-level involvement with the workers and the first-hand experience gained through helping close to 2000 workers till date has enabled them to examine the causes, the effects, and the reality that lay behind these crush injuries in the automotive sector. The involvement with the government and the legitimacy that the group carries with the industry has led to widespread appreciation as well as acceptance of the report’s contents.

The release program of the report involved voices from each stakeholder’s perspective through an eight member panel discussion which was chaired by **Prof. Errol D’ Souza, Director, IIM Ahmedabad**. The release program started with an inaugural address by Prof Errol D’ Souza, who recollected the objectives of the International Labor Organization, which works with an ambition of providing a safe working atmosphere to workers across nations throughout the world. He further emphasized on the importance of safety in the automotive sector in spite of the rough patch that the industry is going through right now, to have a sustainable organization that can work safely into the future. **“*Bad times for any industry are good times to think about sustainability issues*”,** he said, as he quoted the example of the textile industry which took initiatives to improve the work environment in Bangladesh. He also detailed on the causes for the lack of safety in these industries, by citing the trends of lean supply chains, which put further performance pressure on contractors at the level 2 and level 3 factories, causing increased fatigue and increased safety failures. Further expounding on the importance of an organization like Safe In India, he gave the example of Foxconn’s improvements, which allowed aware journalists to come in the factories to point out the several defects in the handling of worker rights, thus setting itself on a path to right its many wrongs.

This opening by the professor was followed by an address by **Sandeep Sachdeva, Co-Founder & CEO Safe in India Foundation**, who detailed on the objectives of safe-in-India and their current plans of action, which involve targeted help of workers with ESIC provisions who suffer from crush injuries, with an aim to involve stakeholders and bring about a systemic change from a regulatory and implementation perspective. A moving video, which involved the stories of several helpless workers who have suffered crush injuries either due to inadequate work experience, tightening production schedules, or the fatigue of overtime was shown to sensitize the audience further and bring about a relatable human angle to the entire initiative.

The stories shared by two of the **workers, Manmohan and Dablesh**, who had suffered crush injuries were moving in terms of the hardships that they experience as well as the pressure that they face in delivering the production targets in increasingly shorter times. With no voice that is listened to, ***these workers put their lives on the line each day in a hope to make ends meet***, coming far from the comfort of home to be able to achieve a petty livelihood in life. Overworked and undertrained, novice workers put on the job often suffer crush injuries, which make them ineligible for further work, crushing not just their hands, but also their hopes and aspirations.

This was followed by the panel discussion that represented voices from stakeholders from law making bodies such as **labour unions**, **FICCI**, the automotive sector from **Maruti Suzuki**, the workers’ front, the academia and the government. **The conflict of interest and the divergence of approaches in formulating a solution** was also seen to be different from the various stakeholders that were involved.

While **Saji Narayanan, National President, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh** pushed for a more humane face at the policy level, the industry level and legislative framework for the regulation of safety in the interest of developing an overarching safety culture, **Mr AS Raju, VP Supply Chain, Maruti Suzuki**, felt that safety was a matter of scale. He further believed that while safety is often taken care of at the OEM level and the Level 1 Supplier level, the level 2 supplier and further down had margins that were too thin to scale in matters of safety.

Others like **Mr Rajiv Khandelwal, Founder-CEO Aajeevika Bureau and Mr Ashim Roy, Founder National Trade Unions of India,** who were a part of the discussion believed in policy and technology as a panacea to the safety problem, relying upon more stringent regulations and compensation mechanisms to force industrialists of all scales to comply with safety, or to develop technological safeguards that completely prevent the possibility of unsafe acts and practices.

The importance of sensitization was also expounded upon through case studies, articles and quotes that could be transferred through social media or the press. The importance of involving stakeholders vs sensitization through the involvement of the press was also debated upon, with arguments for both sides gaining ground. While the several voices highlighted the various flaws in the current legislative structure and the implementation processes across the industry, **the common agreement that there are multiple solutions to a single problem became prevalent as the discussion ended, while the graveness and the urgency of the situation were re-emphasized.**

The event then concluded with a session of audience questions, where several members of the industry, civic society and academia, shared not just their views on the topic along with possible solutions, but also questions that were food for thought for both the organization as well as the stakeholders of the issue. Questions regarding the **economic and social class of the hurt workers** were asked, a valid concern in light of the widespread discrimination and marginalization of voices that they suffer. Sensitization through **short clips and videos**, which could be circulated through social networks, making the workers aware of their rights as well as safety precautions were also asked.

The question of scale, as raised by the industry was also answered to a certain extent, by asking them to **transfer the cost of safety to consumers**, citing the example of Germany. Further evidence for this claim was provided by the stable or declining prices of raw materials in the automotive sector, which further led to a debate concerning the importance or the lack thereof of it on safety and safe practices.

The **legal side of the accident**s was also debated upon, with an emphasis on the failure of India to ratify the ILO Convention C155 of 1981. There was also a consensus on the **strengthening of the compensation laws and imposing the cost of safety**, either in terms of preventive measures, or in terms of compensation to the industry.

The audience as a whole also **expressed a desire for the expansion of activities of Safe In India, to all parts of the Indian geography**, and an expansion of its ambit in terms of the services and policy changes that the organization is capable of bringing through the co-option of the various stakeholders in order to make the narrative of the workers the dominant narrative. The emphasis on the immense potential of the organization in its capabilities and legitimacy were well lauded by the audience.

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