

An Incite Into Auto-rickshaw Services in Dharwad: Poor Drivers & Rusted Three Wheelers.

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Introduction

Hubli-Dharwad, the history of which dates back to eleventh century AD, has a population of about 10 lacs and covers all area of about 202.28 sq. kms out of which constructed area is 72.78 sq. kms including 45 villages and a number of extensions spread in all directions of the main city. Like Secunderabad-Hyderabad of Andhra Pradesh, Hubli-Dharwad are the twin cities of Karnataka. Dharwad has a scenic beauty and has inspired many poets, writers, musicians, artists of national and international repute. Geologists from different parts of the world, after long study have proved that the Dharwad rock is the oldest rock in the world. Dharwad, with two universities, a number of schools and colleges is recognized as one of the well-known Educational Centers. The city is provided with necessary communication and infrastructure facilities like rail, road, telecommunication, radio and television stations, internet etc.

According to 1991 census, in Hubli-Dharwad, 28.59 percent of the total population comes under the category of working population (i.e. 1,85,110 of 6,47,640 persons). Out of this total working population 28.07 percent (1,81,723) are main workers and 0.52 percent (3387) are marginal workers. Table 1, gives the functional classification of the main working population of Hubli-Dharwad.

Table 1

Functional Classification	Number of Workers	Percentage to total workers
Primary activity	23247	12.79
Industry	57747	31.14
Trade and Commerce	43865	24.14
Transport & Communication	20529	11.3
Other Services	36335	19.99
Total	181723	100

Source: 1991 census data

Table 1 shows that; 20,529 persons in Hubli-Dharwad (MC) are engaged in transport and communication activity. Among them nearly 10,000 persons are engaged in plying of autos. Thus three wheeled auto rickshaws play an important role as para-transit modes in the public transport of people in the twin cities. This paper attempts to analyze the problems of auto rickshaw drivers in Dharwad; mainly emphasizing on the difficulties which they have to face while obtaining permits, licenses etc. The present study was undertaken to suggest at least some effective measures, that can be brought about to improve the present situation. A simple questionnaire was designed to obtain some information about the socio-economic background of auto drivers and also about some important aspects of their operations. A total of 105 responses were collected from the auto drivers of different localities in Dharwad, although respondents from the city market and surrounding areas dominate the sample. A number of commuters and a few auto-agents were also interviewed to understand the problem from their perspective.

Auto-Rickshaws and the RTA

Autos come under the category of 'contract carriage' vehicle, which means a motor vehicle meant for the purpose of carrying passenger or passengers for hire or reward and is engaged under a contract whether expressed or implied, for the use of such vehicle as a whole for the carriage of passengers mentioned therein and entered into by a person with a holder of a permit in relation to such vehicles or any person authorized by him in this behalf on a fixed or an agreed rate or sum-

- (a) on a time basis, whether or not with reference to any route or distance; or
- (b) from one point to another, and in either case, without stopping to pick up or set down passengers not included in the contract anywhere during the journey.(K.M.V. Act, 1988 Definition). If any person intends to run an auto-rickshaw he has to follow the following procedures and he must not be under the age of twenty years(K.M.V.Act, 1998 section 4(2)).

Learner's license: 'Learner's license' is the license issued by a competent authority, authorizing the person specified therein to drive as a learner. To obtain the LLR the applicant has to submit Form 2 along with CMV1,1A; three passport size photos, documents regarding residence and date of birth; medical fitness certificate (Form 1) and driving school certificate from any authorized driving school, (Form 4). Driving schools charge Rs. 1000/- from those persons who intend to obtain the certificate after attending driving classes and Rs.100/- from those who intend to get the certificate only. Whereas the government fee for the driving school certificate is only Rs.32/-. Similarly government fee for the medical fitness certificate is Rs.30/-, but many times auto drivers have to spend much more than the prescribed amount, depending on the doctors. Thus to get the LLR from the RTO; through auto agents, one has to spend Rs.350-400/-.

Permanent License: Learner's License has the validity for six months. Before the expiry of this period, drivers have to apply for "Permanent Driving License". (Form 4), along with three passport size photos, R.C. Book, Insurance papers, Tax card, Emission certificate, Original LLR and training completion certificate issued by the registered driving schools (Form 5). Government fee for Fresh Driving License (FDL) is Rs.40/-; test fee is Rs.50/- and the fee of public service vehicle badge is Rs.20/- i.e. total of Rs.110/-. As per KMV 6, for the issue of public service vehicle badge auto drivers have to give an application on the white paper to the RTA. But actually it costs auto drivers Rs.1000-1500/- if the agents are involved and Rs.300-500/- if it is obtained through auto-rickshaw union. One of the active members of the union told that, many drivers prefer, 'auto agents' to the 'union' as they can get licenses much earlier through agents. He told that as the authorities of union, does not bribe, the concerned people in the RTO, there is much delay in the movement and clearance of their files regarding issue of licenses. But the files of agents are cleared within a day or two as, they satisfy the demands of the break inspectors and others.

Registration of a new vehicle: For the registration of new vehicles, registration form (Form 20) has to be submitted along with income tax declaration from (Form 60), tax card (Form 14), fare meter certificate, vehicle fitness certificate from, ration card, documents regarding residential proof and three passport size photos (Please give the procedure for acquiring each of these documents). For the temporary registration of vehicles forms 21,22 should be produced, which are issued by the dealer of the vehicle. The government fee of registration is Rs.200/-, hypothecation is Rs.100/-, and fitness certification is Rs. 200/-. Auto drivers also have to pay five percent cess (i.e. Rs. 125/-) and Rs.2500/- as life tax of autos.

Permit: 'Permit' means a permit issued by a State or Regional Transport Authority (RTA) or an authority prescribed in this behalf under this Act authorizing the use of a motor Vehicle as a transport vehicle (The Karnataka Motor vehicle Act, 1988). For obtaining the permit auto drivers have to submit Form 36, along with ration card, all documents regarding vehicles, Insurance clearance, tax card, three photos and National Saving Certificate (NSC) of Rs.100/-. The permit fee is Rs.500/-. In this procedure of issuing permits, District Commissioner (DC) acts as a chairman; Superintendent of Police (SP) as a member and RTO act as Secretary. This authority (according to KMV Act, Section 74[2]) may attach some of the following conditions namely:

- (i) that the vehicles shall be used only in a specified area or on a specified route or routes;
- (ii) that except in accordance with specified condition, no contract of hiring, other than all extension or modification of a substituting contract, may be entered into outside the specified area;
- (iii) the maximum number of passengers and the maximum weight of luggage that may be carried on the vehicle, either generally or on specified occasions or at specified times and seasons;
- (iv) that specified fares or rates of fares shall be charged and a copy of the fare table shall be exhibited on the vehicle;
- (v) that, a specified weight of passengers luggage shall be carried free of charge and that the charge, if any, for any luggage in excess thereof shall be at a specified rate;
- (vi) that, fare meters shall be fitted and maintained in proper working order, if prescribed;

The permit has to be renewed once in five years. For this purpose Form 36(B) has to be submitted along with old permit card and other essential documents. The renewal fee is Rs.500/-. If the auto drivers fail to renew their permits within the expiry date, then they have to purchase the National Savings Certificate (NSC) of Rs. 1000/-

Emission Certificate: All vehicles are required to be maintained in good condition, so as to reduce the pollution. Thus every vehicle needs to get through the 'emission test' once in six months. The 'emission certificate' is issued by the service centers, which are authorized for this purpose from the State Transport Authority, Bangalore. But even the vehicles certified by these authorities emit more pollutants to the air than the prescribed limits, leading to air pollution and health hazards. The emission test fee is Rs.30/-. Many autos are being run by 'seconds petrol' as it is cheaper than the standardized petrol sold in the petrol bunks. But the police have not taken action against the persons who sell seconds petrol; as these people are the source of extra earnings to them.

Fitness certificate: This certificate is issued by the RTA. Unfortunately many times this is issued after checking only chassis number and engine number of the vehicle, rather than by the proper inspection of the vehicle condition. To obtain, the 'fitness certificate', every year, auto owners have to submit Form 20 (Part II) enclosed with essential documents and fitness fee of Rs.200/-. But actually it costs Rs.450-500 for the auto drivers, whenever agents are engaged. Every year, 'fare meters' of autos have to be certified by the Department of Weight and Measurement. Though the government fee for this purpose is only Rs.15/- auto drivers have to spend Rs.150-200/-. For the autos, which are above seven years, every year auto drivers have to pay Rs.200/- as Green Tax.

Insurance: Along with comprehensive insurance (full claim) which is based on the vehicle valuation (every year vehicle is depreciated by 10 percent), auto drivers also have to pay Rs.1400 for 'third party insurance' (passengers claim only).

Transfer of ownership: If somebody purchases the old auto, he has to submit Form 29 (in duplicate) and Form 30 having seller's signature and Form 30 (part II) having the purchasers signature. Three photos of the purchaser, RC book, tax card, emission certificate and income tax declaration (Form 60) are also need to be enclosed with the above-mentioned forms. The government fee of old vehicle registration is Rs.155/-. Suppose the owner of the vehicle does not appear at the time of transfer of ownership, 'letter of authority' has to be furnished and the fee for this is Rs.20/-.

If the (old) auto purchased, does not belongs to the home state Form 28(in triplicate) has to be submitted along with the stencil impression of vehicle chassis number. Form 28 is concerned with the No Objection Certificate (NOC). NOC is issued by the concerned authorities of the state from which, the vehicle is purchased. For the registration of transferred vehicles Form 27 and Form 27 (part II) shall be submitted with the following enclosures namely: Form 29 (in duplicate) and Form 30 [the forms

regarding transfer of ownership]; Form (28) [NOC form]; life tax [depends on the model of the vehicle] and the registration fee of Rs.200/-. Then, the authority assigns new chassis number to the vehicle and also issues 'fitness certificate' after thorough inspection of the vehicle and its documents.

Agents: Whenever we visit the RTO, we can see a number of agents belonging to all age groups waiting at the entrance itself, to capture the clients, who are intending to get the licenses. A fifteen-year-old boy, who has a 'pan shop' outside the RTO also acts a licensing agent, but I could not get sufficient information from him as he specializes in licensing of two wheelers! I have also met agents who specialize in licensing of autos. During the office hours, these people are busy in, taking care of movement of files in the RTO and in the evening hours in collecting essential documents from their clients. In this way, agents play an important role in the licensing procedure.

The Corrupt System: It is widely believed that black money has become an important operational component of the Indian economy with many diverse links with the political system (Samuel Paul (1997)). Rothen Roy's research, indicates that almost every sector (economic activity) generates black income with different significance rating (in %), for example professionals (77.9), construction (77.6), film industry (91.1), large scale manufacturing (89.5) and road transport (50). Regional Transport Office, Dharwad, is also not an exception, as we can see a lot of black operations taking place here. The functioning, of the political parties and system of election laws had been identified as a significant factor in black income generation by various expert committees (Iswar Dingra (1998). Mr. K one of the agents, whom I interviewed told that, many times the officials in the RTO have to send huge sums of money to the persons in power (this amount raises when the elections are on due). So they take bribes from the vehicle owners while issuing permits, licenses, fitness certificate etc.

Unlicensed auto drivers: From the above mentioned information it has become clear that the cost of obtaining driving license; permit and its renewal; passing of vehicles etc cost much higher than the official fees, because of the involvement of middlemen (agents) and also due to the corrupt system. Therefore in Dharwad, some auto drivers are running auto-rickshaws illegally i.e. without obtaining licenses and permits from the RTA. But we cannot get the accurate data from any official sources. Because often traffic police and other checking authorities take bribe from the offenders and let them free without lodging any cases against them. Mr. A, a graduate who runs auto since last twenty years and also takes part in union activities told that, nearly 25-40 percent of auto drivers are unlicensed. This can also be proved by another factor also. When I made a trip to the RTO, I came across a notice regarding the auction of the seized motor vehicles. These vehicles were seized by the RTA, for the violation of rules, mentioned in the KMV Act 1988, by their owners. The note worthy point here is that among the total number of seized vehicles, auto-rickshaws occupied the prominent position! One of the auto drivers told that it would be much easier and cheaper to pay bribe to the authorities whenever they are challaned for the violation of rules, than from making repeated trips to the RTO Dharwad situated at Navnagar, at the cost of their daily earnings. Engaging agents, to obtain the permit and licenses also cost them very much. An auto driver Mr. X who runs an auto without permit and license told that, he and many other auto drivers like him stop running autos and keep them at home during the checking period. After the completion of this checking period, again they start their business as usual. Their socio-economic background is mainly responsible for this illegality. Most of them are struggling hard to support their families.

Socio-Economic Background of auto drivers

In Dharwad, there are 3000 auto drivers. Driver age, educational status, and family details are given in Figures 1,2 and 3 respectively. Figure 1 shows that, a vast majority of drivers (92.24 percent) are below the age of 50 years and only 7.62 are above 50 years old. From the data shown in figure 2, we can say that 47.62 percent of auto drivers, have to support families of 4-6 persons, 40 percent of them have to support families of 7-9 persons and 9.52 percent of them have to support families of 10-15 persons. Figure

3 shows that, the matriculates and also higher secondary passed constitute around 75 percent of auto drivers in Dharwad. As most of the matriculates have little or no vocational training and are not suitable for any skilled job, they are being attracted towards these kind of occupations.

Figure 4 shows the amount a driver covers per day in km (which includes both with and without passengers). The data shows that, 59.05 percent of auto drivers cover 40-80 km per day and only 19.05 percent of auto drivers cover 81-100 km per day. Most of the auto drivers opined that nearly 30-40 percent of the total distance covered is without passengers, whenever they go to extension areas. From the survey we came to know that, almost every auto driver works for twelve to fifteen hours per day. But the standard of living of most of them is very low, as they have to support big families, with their meager earnings. Figure 5 shows that, 28.57 percent of the auto drivers earn less than Rs 120; 49.49 percent of them between Rs. 121-180 and only 9.52 percent of them earn more than Rs 180 per day. Almost every auto driver told that, plying of autos is a seasonal business in Dharwad, as they get more commuters only in the summer (marriage) season and for the rest of the seasons, their business is very dull.

Rusted Autos

In Dharwad, nearly 39 percent of the drivers do not own their own vehicles. They have to pay Rs 50-60 per day to vehicle owners, whether they earn that much of money or not. They also have to bear the expenses of fuel. Thus after all these expenses and payments very little amount of money remains for the auto drivers and their families. The remaining 69 percent of the drivers who own their vehicles, have the responsibility of paying for the vehicle and associated loans and interest; for obtaining licenses, permits, passing of vehicles, maintenance charges etc. In Dharwad, a number of auto drivers obtained loan from Malaprabha Grameena Bank (a Regional Rural Bank), Karnataka State Finance Corporation (KSFC), State Bank of India; and the remaining from other banks, financiers and agents at the prime lending rates of 14-20 percent, to purchase the new autos. As the cost of new auto is Rs. 80,000, for the first 3-4 years, auto driver has to set apart Rs 2000 per month of his earnings for the payment of installment. Therefore many poor unemployed youth are buying autos for Rs. 20,000, from the scrap market. Figure 6 shows that, 7.62 percent of the autos are less than year old, which implies that the number of autos is increasing continuously, as new autos are being added to the pool of existing autos. In many parts of India more than 15 years old autos are scrapped. But there is no such provision here. So even twenty-year-old autos are also plying on the road. Figure 6 gives details about this.

Figure 1

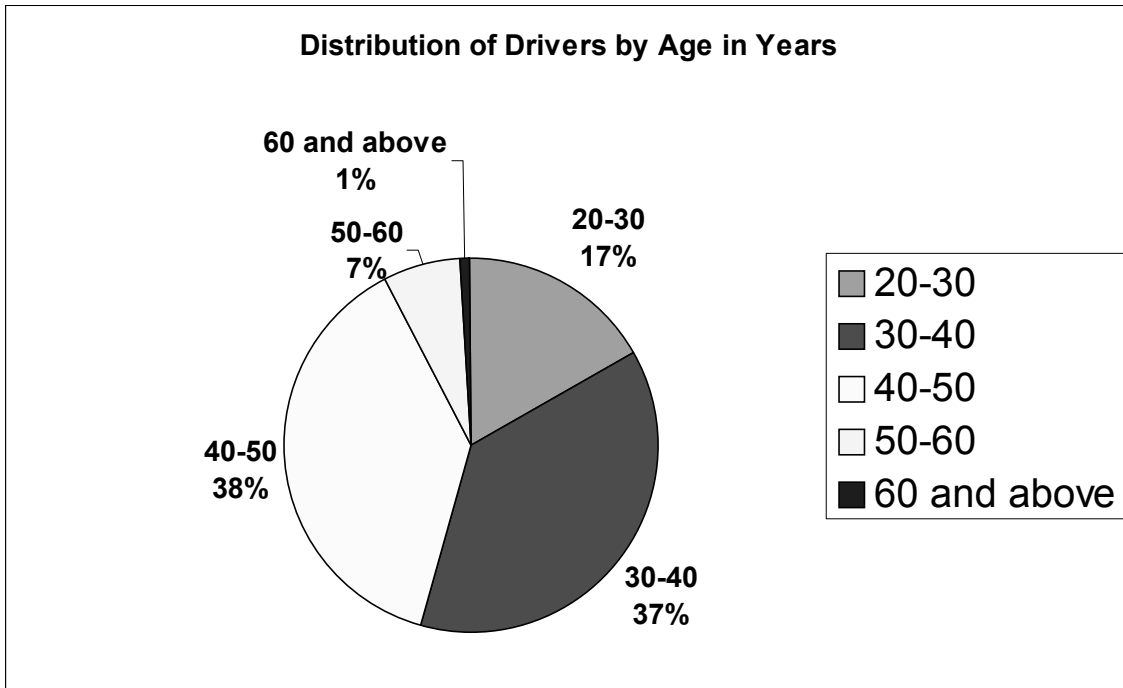


Figure 2

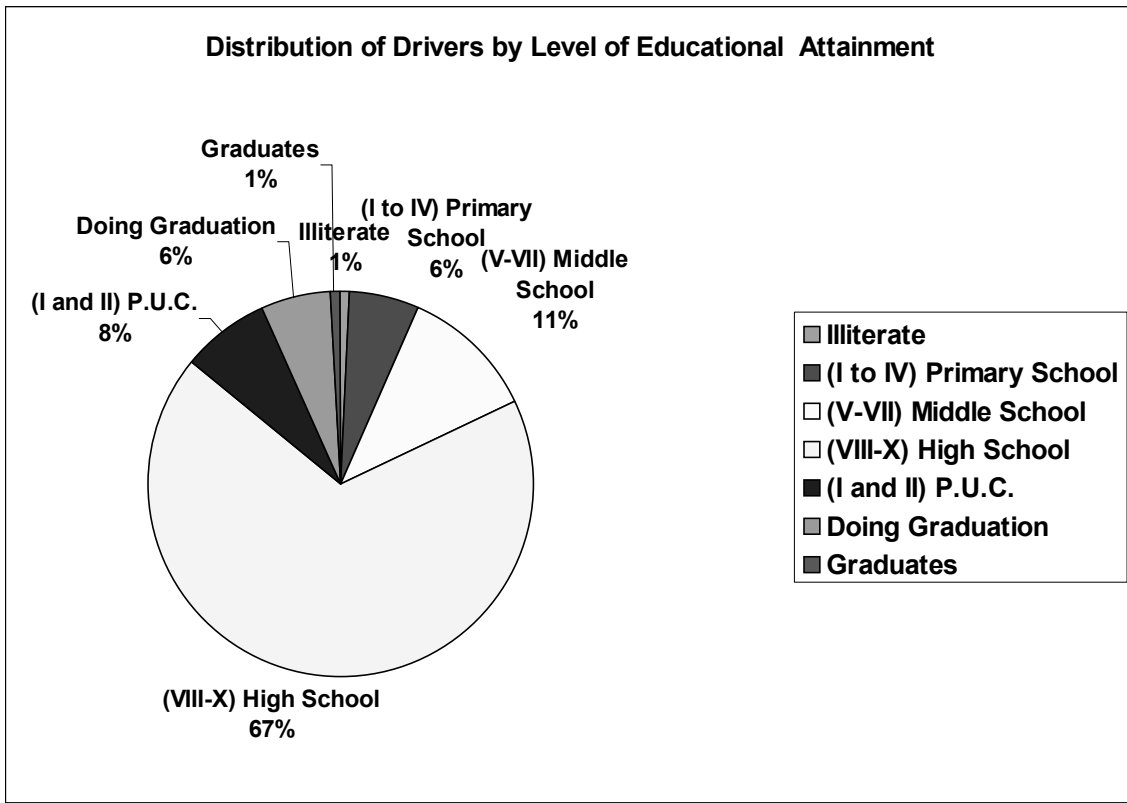


Figure 3

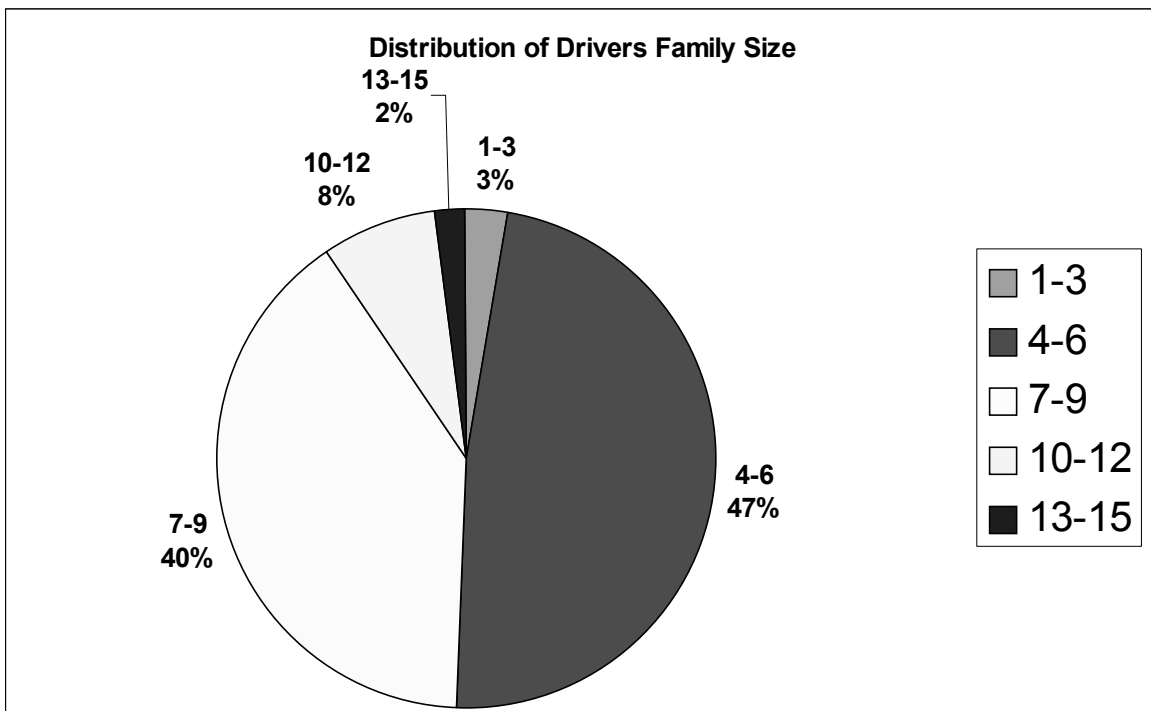


Figure 4

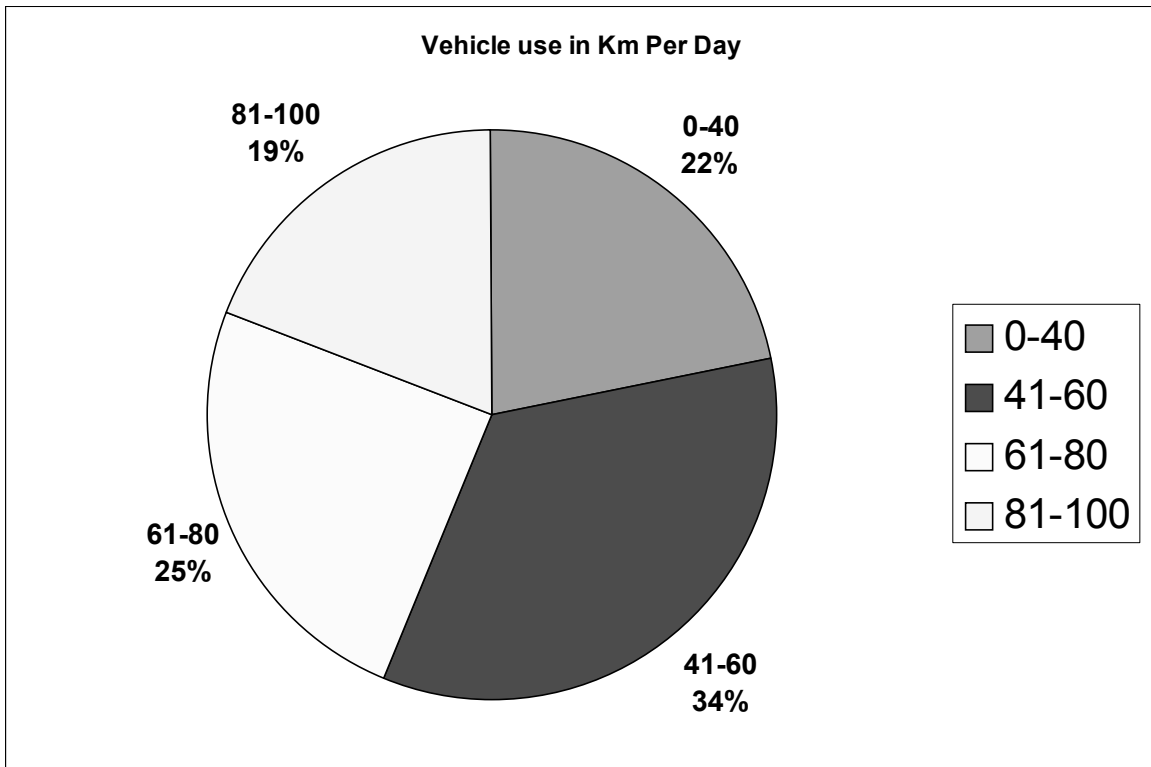


Figure 5

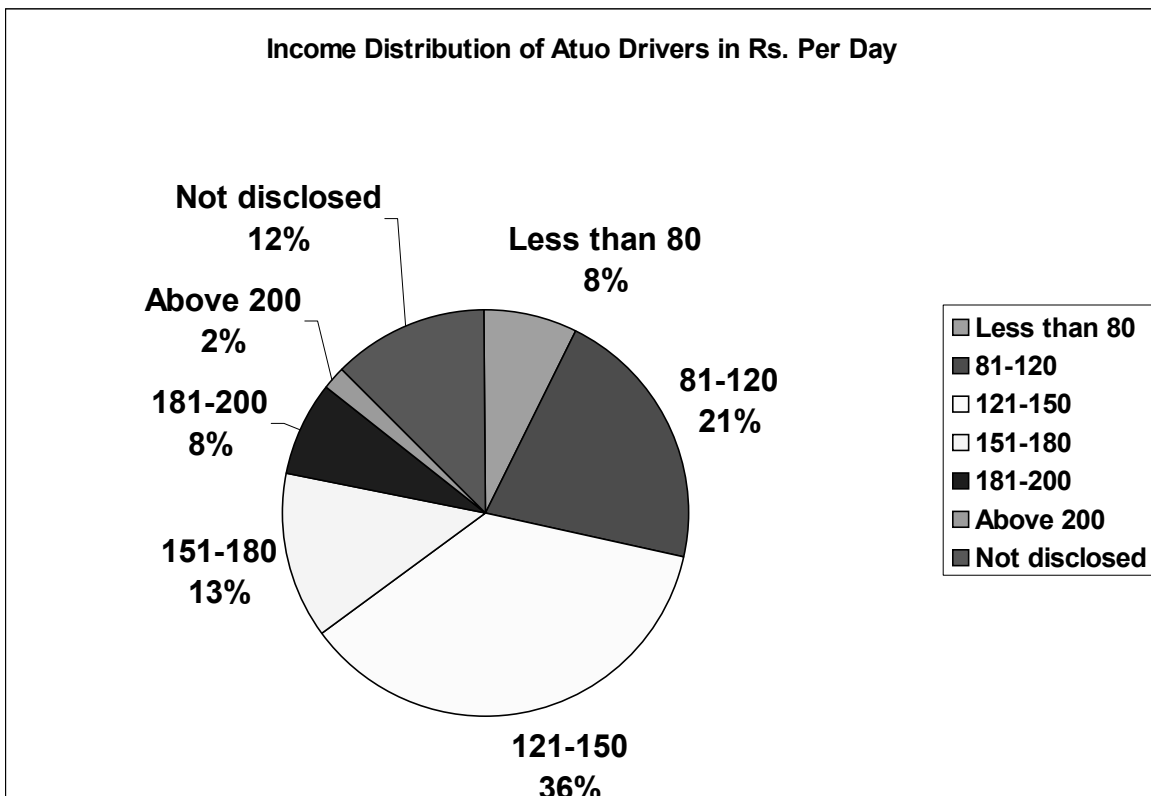
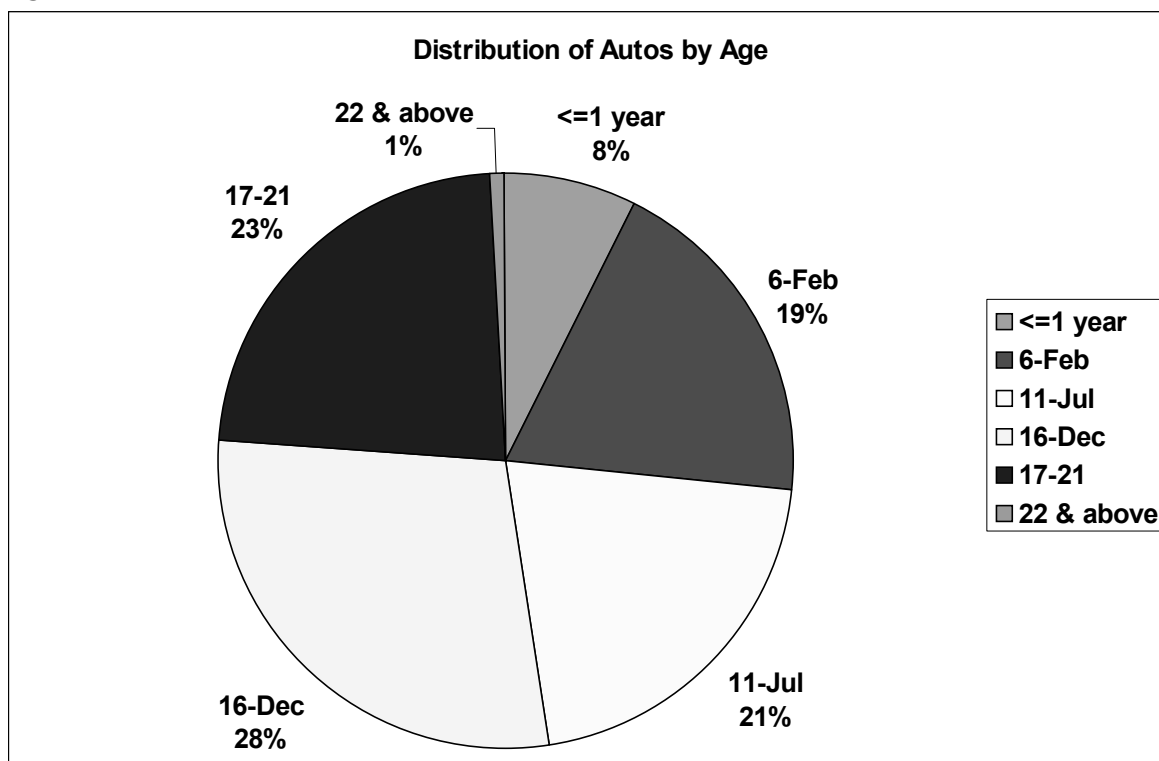


Figure 6



Meter Fare Structure

Recently, the Regional Transport Authority (RTA) Dharwad has announced a new fare for auto rickshaws, that ply in twin cities of Hubli-Dharwad and Dharwad district, in the wake of hike in the prices of petroleum and spare parts. The fare for a minimum 2-km will be Rs 10 for auto. Waiting charges for the first fifteen minutes will be free but it is Rs. 2 for every 15 minutes thereafter. The luggage charges (except suitcase and handbags of commuters) will be Rs 2 for 20 kg. The fare from 10p.m. to 6 am should not be more than one and a half. The authority also instructed the owners and drivers of all the auto ricks haws to recalibrate their fare meters before August 31.

But, in Dharwad, every auto driver charges more than the meter-down fares from the commuters, many times nearly double the meter-down fare. The authorities have tried to implement fare meters many times but failed in their effort every time as the members of in Auto-Rickshaw Union agitated strongly and succeeded in convincing the authorities by giving concrete reasons for the no implementation of fare meter. Some of the reasons are listed below: The roads in old Dharwad are very narrow and in many new extension areas we can find mud roads. The condition of the rest of the roads, are also very bad. More than that, private mobile operators including BSNL had spoiled these roads still more by digging them for laying cables and Municipal Corporation digging for laying and repairing water pipe lines and for some other sanitary works. But, most of the developmental works, including repair of roads had come to a stand still, because the Hubli-Dharwad Municipal Corporation (HDMC) authorities have not released Rs10 crore to the contractors who had taken up developmental works in the twin cities. Recently HDMC has decided to sell its property to raise funds to asphalt and repair the roads. The authorities concerned taken measures to set Rs.4.16 crore loan from HUDCO to repair the roads. They have planned to repair 2,14,038 sq.m. of the main and link roads in Dharwad. But the work is not yet started. As roads are in very bad condition auto-drivers have to spend Rs. 400-800 per month for the maintenance of autos. In Dharwad, many localities like Malamaddi, Saraswathpur, Rajatgiri, Vidyagiri,

Tejswinagar, Sri Ramnagar and Pavatenagar (Karnataka University area) are situated in hilly areas. Auto drivers say that, as the roads are bad and also as many localities have hilly areas the consumption fuel is very high. So it has become inevitable for them charge more than meter down fares. Thus in this endless tug of war between the RTA and auto drivers, poor commuters are being exploited as they have to pay more than the meter-down fares.

No New Permits Please!

Auto rickshaw drivers and owners association has observed auto rickshaw bandh on July 21, to urge the RTA, to stop issuing of fresh permits for the next two years as the numbers of auto rickshaws had already crossed its limits. They also urged to issue permits to only those who have driving licenses for more than five years. Several industries in and around Hubli- Dharwad had been closed due to lack of infrastructure facilities, slump in the market, changing industrial environment, failure to cope up with modernization, funds crunch and for many other reasons. Those who lost jobs, due to the closure of factories and other unemployed youth are buying autos eke out a livelihood. In neighboring states like Maharashtra, autos more than fifteen years old are being scrapped. Some persons buy these scrapped autos at a cheaper rate, to ply them in the city. Already of the total autos on the road in Dharwad, nearly 8.57 percent are bought from the scrap market of Maharashtra. This factor is also contributing to the increasing in the number of autos and deterioration in the standard of living of auto drivers in the city.

Many auto drivers also opined that, there is a great need to bring some modifications in the present permit system. At present a common permit is given to the auto drivers, to ply autos in and around Hubli-Dharwad (i.e. surrounding 20km). They say that, Hubli has a floating population, as it is the commercial capital of North Karnataka; it is a railway junction and also has the headquarters of Southwestern Railway Zone. Therefore the plight of auto drivers in Hubli is better than that of auto drivers in Dharwad. According to them, Hubli can accommodate at least few more autos but Dharwad cannot, as it has a stagnant population. Dharwad is the paradise of peace loving poets, intellectuals, educationalist musicians and senior citizens. Students also compose a major part of city's total population, studying in two universities and many colleges often who cannot afford to hire autos. Here the frequency of city buses is quite sufficient, i.e. 38 city buses make 588 trips per day to various localities from 6 AM to 10 PM. So people prefer city buses to autos, unless there is some urgency or emergency. Though the capacity of city buses is 40 + 10, every bus is overcrowded and many times people travel even by standing on the footboards. Auto drivers complain that the authorities penalize them if they carry more than prescribed limit of passengers but they do not take any action against the city buses. Nearly 105 maxi cabs ply over between Hubli-Dharwad and nearby places. The movement of unauthorized maxi cabs, mini dors have adverse impact on the auto business, as they take local seats also at city bus fare. Therefore the number of commuters for autos is declining day by day. Thus there is a great need for some concrete measures to be taken by the RTA, to control increasing the number of autos.

Epilogue: Restructure Everything

In the present situation, neither the auto drivers nor the commuters are happy and they are facing plenty of problems. To over come from this unhealthy atmosphere, the steps that can be under taken are summarized below:

- a) The present licensing and inspection procedures of the vehicles (autos) should be reviewed by the transport authorities, so as to make them more efficient, more transparent and less troublesome. Proper information on these procedures should be accomplished to the auto drivers through media and other feasible sources.
- b) Corrupt authorities must be punished, to clean the system.
- c) Strict action must be taken against the driving schools which issues certificates without conducting any classes and test.

- d) While issuing fitness certificates and emission certificates proper inspection of vehicles should be made by the concerned authorities.
- e) Permits should not be issued to the autos brought from the scrap market of neighboring states.
- f) In the permit card it should be clearly mentioned whether they have to ply autos in Hubli or Dharwad, to control the over crowding of autos.
- g) The plying of unauthorized Maxi cabs and mini doors must be stopped.
- h) The authorities of RTO, Dharwad and HDMC must work jointly, to asphalt and repair the roads. This may be considered as the initial step towards the recalibration of fare meters by the auto drivers. It is also a step towards reducing the burden of the commuters.

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