

BLOWING YOUR HORN

The Chennai airport is a mess. The number of flights per day has gone up in the recent years, and a renovation of the airport proceeds at snails pace. Pick up and drop happen in the same section of the road outside the airport building and the work in progress area.

Cars are vying for spaces to park. Other cars are fighting for a way out! I was waiting for my pick up the other day and thinking about how hard we are scrambling to catch up with the developed world, the meaning of GDP and the importance of GPI when I was awakened rudely out of my thoughts by a long and loud burst of a car horn. A Toyota Corolla was annoyed that a lowly Indica was blocking its way.

As I stated to notice the loud cacophony, I saw an interesting pattern. The loudest and most insistent horns belonged to the high end cars. Some of them had their rich owners seated in them, so did not. But the chauffeurs were certain that being violent, and assuming that their rights were greater than the more humble cars and taxis, was totally legitimate.

Being predatory and extractive seems to be the path to modernity and wealth. Once one is wealthy, being predatory and extractive is probably a habit. With every person walking this path, our GDP goes up and our environment gets depleted.

Ganapathy Sthapati often remarked about two kinds of beggars the ones he called “Panchadhit Aandi” (made poor by sudden misfortune) and “Paramparai Aandi” (poor over generations). The famine-poor beg as though they are entitled to be given, and curse you if you do not give.

The traditional-poor ask humbly and leave peacefully. “Some of them are Siddhas, who live as frugally as they can” he would say.

I wonder whether the sudden upward mobility of the average Indian is also making him behave like the famine-poor. At what price modernity and the 8% plus GDP that we are trumpeting?