

Indisciplined parking and a substantial increase in the numbers and sizes of cars have resulted in the choking of streets in most Goan cities. The result of which is that there is hardly any room for pedestrians. In Panjim, pedestrians have been further strained by the new plan for one-way vehicular movement, which has led to an increase in vehicular speeds, making it dangerous for pedestrians to cross roads. In ideal cities the pedestrians are supposed to rule the road, but in our cities they are forced to risk life and limb every time they step on the street.

At a public consultation held by the City Corporation of Panjim (CCP) on 27 November 2015, to receive public feedback on Smart City proposals, Commissioner Sanjith Rodrigues recounted the problems the authorities face while implementing parking rules, despite employing contractors to clamp vehicles which flaunt these rules. An example he cited was of the no-parking area in front of the Caculo Mall in Panjim; some vehicle owners would apparently park their vehicles right in front of the mall, challenge the authorities to clamp them, proceed to have a meal inside the mall and, on their return, not only pay the fine but also offer an extra amount as a tip, and then drive off with glee. This vile kind of display of entitlement seems widespread in Goa nowadays.

Financial deterrents through fines are usually not adequate to discourage people from abusing the law (since the biggest law-breakers are usually the wealthy and powerful in any case!). But the efficient clamping by the contractor did help in bringing about some limited form of traffic discipline within the city. This, however, did not last long as the Panjim Councillors decided, a few months back, to dispense with the services of the said contractor (*O Heraldo*: 13 Aug. 2015). The city representatives probably succumbed to the pressure applied by elite vehicle owners and high-end shopping patrons. As a result, unlawful parking, whether in front of Caculo mall or other parts of the city, continues unabated and engaged in by many more.

The elite car owners dislike being 'policed' by 'ordinary' clamping workers or police constables, even if they have the money for the fine. So, even when their cars were parked

illegally, many vehicle owners would abuse these workers who were simply doing their job. This desire to flaunt one's power and privilege by flouting the rules is a typical structural problem which emerges from the graded hierarchy of the caste system, where the privileged are always assumed to be right even when they are legally not.

The historic character of Goan towns is their compact built environment. Widening of streets to accommodate more cars is only going to destroy this unique character. Moreover, widening of roads to ease vehicular traffic is a vicious cycle: the wider the roads, the more the numbers of cars, leading to more traffic jams. Bangalore is an excellent example of a city which has lost its character because of rampant road widening and innumerable flyovers. Despite these technological interventions, however, the time taken to get from one place to another has not reduced; on the contrary the opposite has happened. To make matters worse Bangalore's pedestrian life has been completely compromised.

Given this situation, rather than discussing how to make more space for individually owned cars, citizens must debate how to make the city free of them. In his article *End of the car age: how cities are outgrowing the automobile* (*The Guardian*: 28 Apr. 2015), Stephen Moss argues that cities around the world are coming to the same conclusion: they'd be better off with far fewer cars. In order to achieve this, the city needs to adopt a vision in which residents no longer rely on their cars but on efficient and respectful public transport.

The citizens of Panjim, who are discussing how to make their city smart, need to make some tough decisions, without which the city will soon come to a grinding halt. There is an urgent need to expel the cars from the city and make way for efficient public transport, cyclists and pedestrians. One great example we can learn from is the case of Amsterdam. Journalist Renate van der Zee (*The Guardian*: 5May 2015) writes that although cyclists rule in the Dutch capital today, great pains had to be taken initially to accommodate them. Zee argues that it was because of the tough decisions taken in the 1970s that contemporary Amsterdam (or for that matter the whole of The Netherlands) is equipped with an elaborate network of cycle-paths and lanes, so safe and comfortable that even children and elderly people use bikes as the easiest mode of transport.

It is time for Panjimto go the Dutch way. World-over, more than the technological infrastructure installed by experts it is the actions of inspired citizens that make a city smart. Car-Free City!
It is only thanks to fierce activism, writes Renate, that Amsterdam has succeeded in becoming what it is, now: the bicycle capital of the world. The smart city, then, is really about wise citizens, who canvass for the right kind of smart systems.

(First published in *The Goan Everyday*, dt: 6 December, 2015)



Share this...



Facebook



Whatsapp



Print



Email



Twitter



Reddit