

Artificial Intelligence is the Road to take

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The newspaper report was about how Gurgaon Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) was now planning to use Artificial Intelligence for monitoring and maintenance of roads in Gurugram. As a long time (and suffering) resident of the Millennium City, I was thrilled. After all, what better way to improve the ghastly state of roads in the city than to use the latest high tech?

The euphoric feeling that I had while reading the report with my morning tea evaporated as soon as I started driving to work. The road in front of my house has thankfully been re-laid with concrete and so is relatively pothole free. Of course, the level of the road is now a few inches above the levels of the houses and hence the houses get flooded during the monsoon since there is no egress for the water. But then, you win some and lose some.

However, as soon as the concrete road ends, the problems start. One of the main roads leading from my place to the highway is a very busy road. Potholes are of course ubiquitous and in fact hardly ever noticed, except when an unfortunate motorcyclist falls because of them. The road is wide enough but between the encroachment by the various vendors and parking by autos and e-rickshaws, the road is effectively reduced to a single lane, rural bylane like the ones made under the Pradhan Mantri Grameen Sadak Yojna.

The administration has of course taken steps to ease the commute- for instance, to decrease cross-traffic, most of the intersections have been closed. Tall concrete fencing has been put on the median to avoid pedestrians crossing and a foot over-bridge has been constructed. But what the traffic planners did not take into account is that ours is a free country.

The over-bridge is almost never used. The concrete fencing has been pulled down at various places so that one doesn't have to make the effort of climbing the few steps to the over-bridge. To cross the road wherever one wants to was, it seems, inadvertently left out by our constitutional framers from Articles 12 to 35 which list a citizen's fundamental rights.

And unlike drivers abroad, our drivers are extremely conscious of the environment. Why should one drive an extra 100 meters to make a U-turn at the intersection, when it is ecologically beneficial to drive on the wrong side of the road and cause a jam? Think of all the petrol saved and the emissions averted because of such Good Samaritans.

All this is of course not specific to the city where I live- it is common place anywhere in the country. And therefore, I was extremely pleased that finally something is being done about it. Clearly, ordinary intelligence, of the kind possessed by common citizens like me is not up to snuff to figure out that there is a problem. Taking a drive around the city to see the state of the road infrastructure, filling up the potholes and maintaining the roads, strictly enforcing the traffic rules against wrong side driving etc. are so Oh!, so old fashioned. What we need is the latest in Artificial Intelligence to tell us what the problems are and how to solve them. I am sure my commute will be far less harrowing now that we would have the power of Deep Mind to maintain the roads.

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