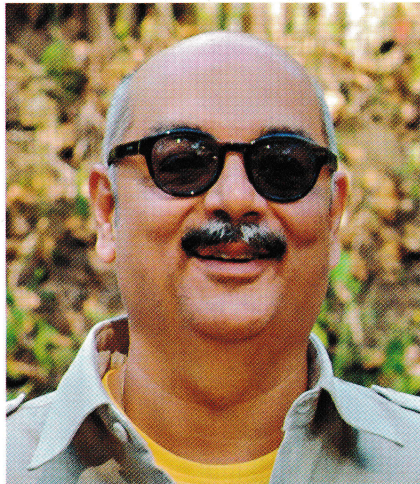


Amongst all the extensive news reports of the recent terror attacks in Paris, a few things caught my eye. A friendly international football match was being played between France and Germany and the French President Francois Hollande was there to watch it. A couple of loud explosions took place close by and the French President was evacuated by the Special Forces. Some 80,000 fans at the stadium were asked to gather on the field and were moved out in batches by a handful of security personnel and organisers. While walking out, the football fans sang *La Marseillaise*, the French National Anthem. Our nation has also suffered many terror attacks, but what I found striking about this incident is that nobody panicked. They all followed instructions. Though there were 80,000 of them and only a few officials, they exited the stadium in a most orderly manner while holding their heads high and singing the French National Anthem. I am sure in India there would have been total chaos. Nobody would have waited or followed any instructions given over a public address system. They would have simply rushed out and caused a stampede, resulting in even more deaths. Why this big difference? Is it a cultural thing? Or is it about education and upbringing? Or are we 'like that only'.

Another thing that I could not help but notice was that the cab drivers went out of their way to help people on the streets. They transported them to their homes free of charge. Yes, the cab drivers in Paris gave free rides home and one Parisian, like most on that day, noted, "The cab drivers were very concerned about seeing us home safely and went beyond their call of duty in ensuring our safety. And they refused to take any money". I find this simply amazing and a big tribute to not just the cab drivers, but also the people of Paris and, by extension, France.

On July 11, 2006, I faced a completely different situation when seven blasts took place over a period of 11 minutes in Mumbai. The bombs were set off in pressure cookers on trains plying the Western Line of the Suburban Railway network and 209 people were killed and over 700 injured! I too was on a Suburban Railway train at exactly that time in the evening. When the series of blasts happened, the police gave the railway authorities orders to shut down the rail network. My train stopped short of Sion station and along with the other passengers, I walked out to the nearby taxi



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While the cab drivers in Paris did not charge after the terror attacks, the ones in Mumbai always loot passengers on the day of a calamity

stand. There were many cabs there and also several auto rickshaws. But none was ready to take me to my friend's place at Bandra, some six kilometres away. They wanted to be paid extra. There were other commuters who wanted to go towards Bandra and the cab drivers said they would take us only if each one of us paid them ₹1000! Well over 20 times the normal fare. We requested and pleaded but failed to make any impression. I walked for a bit and had cabs slowing down and asking me where I wanted to go. But all wanted absurd sums of money to drop me to my destination. Finally, along with a couple of other commuters, I blocked the path of one cab and shoved the driver to the side and got behind the wheel and started driving. When questioned why they were not helping fellow citizens on a day of such a big calamity, the cab driver coolly told me, "These calamities are opportunities for people like us to make more money. Be it a natural calamity like floods or a manmade one like terror attacks, we demand a much higher fare and make more money. When people are in trouble, they will pay more to reach the safety of their homes. So why should we taxi driver's not charge more."

Nothing more needs to be said about the

difference in attitude of Mumbai cabbies and the ones in Paris. But again, I fail to understand why? Why such mean and mercenary behaviour on part of our cabbies? And it happens each and every time there is an adversity.

Another thing I have noticed about Mumbai cabbies is that they hate wearing seatbelts. When the law to make them mandatory was brought in, they went on strike and agitated to prevent the introduction of this law. So the government at that time exempted the older Fiat taxis from having seatbelts and said they would be mandatory only in new cabs. Now most of the old Fiat cabs have been phased out and we have newer ones like Hyundai Santros, Maruti Altos etc, plying on our roads and all come with factory fitted seat belts. And as per the law, the taxi driver has to wear them. But they don't wear them, they just slip them on. Yes, they simply tie or clip up the belt at the starting point on the B-Pillar. You now even get a clip as an accessory that stops the retractable movement of the seatbelt. And the driver then simply slips it across his front and most don't even bother buckling it. That is a Mumbai cab driver for you. Selfish and scheming, but completely stupid too. **OD**