

# THE BICYCLE IN INDIA

*Selected Articles and Stories*

T. Vijayendra



Ecologise Hyderabad

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## *Dedication*

*This book is dedicated to the resilience shown by the Indian working people and Indian Roadster Bicycle in facing the Covid Lock Down during 2020. Here are two examples.*

*Front Cover: Ashok Behera, the 36-year-old mason from Odisha cycled 1100 kilometres in seven days, all the way home to Ganjam district from Chennai, and his wife Namita riding pillion.*

*Back Cover: Jyoti Kumari, the girl from Bihar carried her father, Mohan Paswan, pillion riding 1200 Kilometres from Gurugram to Darbhanga.*



## Preface

I am 80 years old now. Out of these 80 years, I could use a bicycle for some 55 years. Also, I have never gotten a driving license to ride a fossil fuel-based vehicle. So I am a ‘dedicated’ cyclist, though I was not aware of this! Only in the 21st century there was a lot of talk of global warming and the ill effects of fossil fuels causing this global warming. Then, suddenly a lot of people started talking about the bicycle, its health benefits and how it does not cause any pollution! So I became a bicycle enthusiast!

I have been writing about the bicycle since 2017. It was the Bicentenary year of the Bicycle and our group – Ecologise Hyderabad – decided to celebrate it in a big way. We had a film show, a bicycle rally and some meetings. We also ran a Face book page and published four books. The bicycle got a boost again during the pandemic, and I wrote a series of articles for *Countercurrents* and *Frontier Magazine*. I also wrote for the Face book page of Kolkata Cycle Samaj and more recently for the *Mainstream* magazine.

This is a collection of my writings on the bicycle for the last 7 years. Since these articles were standalone, there is inevitable repetition in the book. I beg indulgence from the readers. However,

there is also an advantage in this situation. You need not read it from the beginning. You can check the ‘Table of Contents’ and dip anywhere you like!

I offer another perspective. I treat it as music. You start with the basic notes of the raga or theme. Then elaborate it in various aspects of it. But keep on coming back to the basic notes! So I view the bicycle in terms of the foci of our writings: 1. Environment 2. Women 3. Children 4. Ordinary people, including the working class and 5. Transition Town. They reflect the political and ecological concerns of the group.

These essays also participate in the debate between the ordinary roadster bicycle and the fancy high-tech bicycles like MTB, Hybrid and race bicycles.

There are twelve essays and four short stories. The essays are divided in two groups – six shorter essays on the Promotion of the Bicycle and six longer essays on the Politics of the Bicycle. The short stories essentially follow the main theme of the book. They are also utopian. They deal with practical projects around the bicycle. They are about real people, and explore the possibilities of what they could become in green politics.

Many members of the group helped in organising the events, running the Face book page, publishing and distributing the books. The foremost among them was Ms. Hema Vaishnavi.

Madhulica Kallatt has edited the book and made it readable. A big ‘Thank You’ to her!

Hyderabad  
August 4, 2024

Vijayendra

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# Bicycle: a Beginner's Guide



This article has four sections. They are: 1. Introduction. 2. Learning how to ride. 3. Purchasing your first bicycle and 4. Maintaining your bicycle.

## 1. Introduction

A bicycle is a machine most compatible with human beings-its rider. The human being is not only its rider; s/he is also its engine and its fuel. It is run by human power and the power comes from burning your fat! It is also the only transport lighter than its rider. A horse, motor cycle, car etc. are all heavier than the rider. The reason is already given above – the rider provides the engine and

the fuel and the fuel tank. So in a way it is a most intimate machine and you will learn to treat it as an extension of your body. When you reach that stage you will automatically be a good rider and will maintain it properly. It will be like taking care of yourself!

Since it is going to be part of you, treat it with care and respect. Learn about it carefully and patiently. The fastest way of doing anything is to do it slowly. So the very first thing you do is to observe the bicycles around and their riders. Make friends with some of them and discuss with them about their cycling experience – how they learnt to ride it, how and where they purchased it and how they are maintaining it.

The next thing to do is to locate the nearest bicycle repair shop. In a small town often it is close to a bicycle shop which sells the bicycle. Make friends with the repair man or the bicycle mechanic because you will be meeting him often once you own a bicycle. Sometimes he may also be lending bicycles for hire or will know where you can hire it.

## 2. Learning How to Ride

Before you purchase your own bicycle it may be a good idea to learn it on a friend's bicycle or on a hired bicycle. The reason is that while learning it is good to have a one size smaller frame size so that your feet touch the ground when you are seated. This way you can avoid falling. When you buy your own cycle you should have proper size. Then try to use a standard or roadster bicycle because that is the kind you will purchase.

Learning to ride is not difficult. Children learn on their own all the time, often on their elder brother's or on a friend's cycle or on a hired cycle. However adult learning has its own problems. The main problem is shyness or fear of looking ridiculous. The solution is simple as they teach in spoken English classes –be shameless!

Once you do the steps are simple. If you put in an hour a day,

in seven days you will learn. The steps are:

1. Get a roadster cycle of the size so that your feet can touch the ground. A ladies cycle is preferable.
2. Find an open place or an empty road where there is no speed traffic – like inside a locality/gated community. But best is open ground.
3. Start walking with the cycle like you would walk a horse. Cycle has been called an iron horse! You will find it is not easy. Keep both hands up on the handle and keep your waist close to the seat. Initially it will be awkward. By the end of the hour you will find it comfortable.
4. Next day move a bit faster and slowly increase the speed of your walk with the bicycle. You may even run with it. That will give you a lot of confidence.
5. Next day while moving fast put your left foot on the pedal and keep on riding standing. Practise it for the whole hour.
6. Today you are ready to ride sitting on the seat. Choose a slope. Sit on the seat with both feet on the ground. Turn the pedal with the right foot so that the pedal is at about 2 o' clock position. Then gently put the right foot on the pedal and press down and at the same time lift the left foot and put it on the left pedal. In most cases you will succeed in the first trial and you have learnt to ride the cycle. Otherwise give it a few more tries and you will succeed. Do it several times and rest in between.
7. Then on you will make progress every day. One day you will scratch your nose or ear unconsciously leaving one hand from the handle. Now you have arrived. Happy riding!

### 3. Purchasing Your Bicycle

1. Now that you are riding comfortably you can think of purchasing your first bicycle. Have a budget of about Rs. 6000/- for the bicycle and another Rs. 1000/- for buying a pump (Rs. 300/-) oil can and few other tools.
2. However before you go to the shop I strongly suggest you read this small book.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/359724660/You-and-Your-Bicycle-A-Guide-to-Maintaining-Your-You-and-Your-Bicycle-A-Guide-to-Maintaining-Your-Cycle-by-Lavanya-K-and-Shamala-Kittane>

You can download it for free or I can send it for Rs. 50/- which is just 1% of the cost of your bicycle. The authors, both engineers are experienced cyclists. In addition, Lavanya's father was a bicycle mechanic and Shamala has worked as a bicycle mechanic in high end bicycle shop in Bangalore.

3. Just now you need to read only the first half of the book, which gives a good introduction to the bicycle and how to go about purchasing it.
4. Basically you should purchase a roadster bicycle from any of the 4 well established bicycle manufacturers in India. They are BSA/Hercules, Atlas, Hero and Avon. Choose from whichever is available. In a small town every shop will not stock all brands.
5. Roadsters can be classified in three categories:
  - a. Heavy duty
  - b. Light commuting cycles
  - c. Ladies bicycle

Heavy duty bicycles are purchased by the working class members who have to carry loads and travel rough roads. Students and city dwellers will purchase the light bicycle. Many old people also prefer ladies bicycle as it is easy to get on and get off. Below I am just

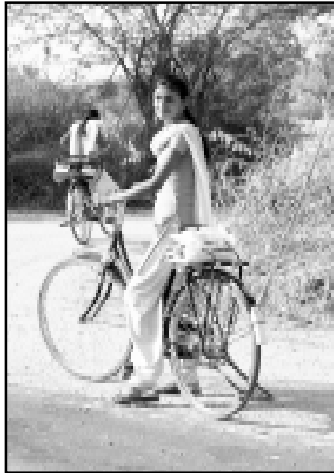
giving a few brand names. However, you will not get all models unless you order online from the company. Best is to go to internet and look at the site.

S. No.	Brand	Heavy Duty	Light Commuting Cycles	Ladies Cycle
1	Hercules	Phillips	Tashan DX	Lady Bird (BSA)
2	Atlas	Gold Line Super Strong	Gold Line Super	Venus/Beauty/Dove
3	Hero	Shaenshah	Jet Gold	Miss India
4	Avon	Pilot Ex 26 T	Action 28 T	Zinnia

#### 4. Maintaining your Bicycle

1. Here you should first read the second part of the booklet mentioned above. It will give a clear idea of what you can do yourself and when you have to take the bicycle to a mechanic.
2. Maintenance is very much like health care. Prevention is better than going to the doctor after you fall ill.
3. In preventive maintenance there is daily, weekly, monthly and annual maintenance.
4. In daily maintenance do basic cleaning and check air pressure and brakes.
5. In weekly maintenance oil the cycle at the chain, axle, hubs, pedals and brakes.
6. Take it to the cycle mechanic shop and ask him to check everything and oiling and cleaning. It will cost about Rs. 20/-
7. In annual maintenance take it the mechanic and get an 'overhauling' done. It may cost you about Rs. 1000/-
8. If you follow this routine, the cycle will give you a smooth ride and a lot of pleasure.

# Best Bicycle for the Common Woman/Man in India



First let us be clear what we mean by common woman/man. I will be using only the word woman hereinafter to save the bother and also I will be recommending the ladies bicycle for both women and men for reasons given below.

## Common Woman

By common woman in this context is someone:

- i. Who will be using the bicycle regularly for journeys normally up to 5 kilometers and rarely exceeding 20 kilometers.
- ii. Who wants no nonsense, reliable, durable, bicycle at reasonable cost and which can be maintained easily by her and the normal repairs can be done by a local mechanic close by.
- iii. The cost of such a bicycle will be above 5000 and below 8000 including all the 'add ons'.

- iv. Obviously the bicycle recommended will be a roadster/standard/Bangla bicycle.

### Ladies or Gents Bicycle?

Normally we recommend a ladies bicycle for the following reasons:

- i. It can be used by both men and women in the family.
- ii. The seat is lower so you can sit upright comfortably. It will be like sitting on a chair. It gives a very comfortable ride.
- iii. You can wear any kind of dress – saree, skirt, lungi, dhoti, pajama kurta etc. You can go to office without your dress appearing rumpled.
- iv. If you have some load on the carrier or someone sitting, you can get on the bicycle from the front easily.
- v. Buy a cycle stand which goes below the tyre and not that is on the side. This gives a more stable stand.
- vi. It may be a bit inefficient compared to men's cycle but the difference is marginal. But who cares? The purpose of the bicycle is to take you from one point to another comfortably at a reasonable speed.

### Some Bicycles in the Indian Market

I have chosen these based on the above criteria. The prices may vary a little. There are other similar models with most manufacturers. I have chosen the simple looking and sturdy models. Many colourful models are available for ladies.

#### 1. Hercules

Ladies models: a. Popular DTS (Ladies), 26 T Rs. 5585, Captain Ex (Ladies) 26T Rs. 6210. Men's cycle: Tashan DX Rs 6065, New Hercules Rs. 6080

#### 2. Atlas

Ladies: Gold line Super P/BAR 50 cm. Rs. 3927. Men's Gold



line Super DLX 50 cm Rs. 6299

### **3. Hero:**

Ladies: Aiyana 26 T Rs. 8030

### **4. Avon:**

Ladies: Pilot 26 T Rs. 5263 Men's Pilot Ex, 26 T Rs. 6135

### **5. Raleigh**

Raleigh bicycles are produced in By Suncross in India. Bengalis have a special affection for it because of the Sen Raleigh Company in Asansol. It is still a good cycle. I used a ladies Sen Raleigh bicycle from 1957 to 1975.

Ladies: CINDRELLA 26 S/S Rs. 12,725, Men's: Classic Man Rs. 7425

There is a modified CINDRELLA model which is like a roadster and is below Rs. 8000/-.

In fact you may have difficulty in getting the simple models as the colourful models appear more in demand. For example Lady Bird (BSA/Hercules – several models) has been around for many years. In the last few years many such colourful ladies bicycles have appeared. Some of them are Atlas Beauty, Hero Fashion etc. But they are also good. Just make sure that they are like the standard/roadster model – low seat, handles are parallel with the body, stand below the tyre, cloth guard, chain cover, back carriage and front basket! I have added graphics of the bicycles I have chosen.

A senior citizen woman from Pune, wearing a saree, travelled thousands of kilometers to several pilgrimage places in India on such a bicycle. You can also do it!

Happy riding!

Posted in Kolkata Cycle Samaj Face Book Page on August 7, 2021

## Singing the Song of the Roadster



Ashok Behera, the 36-year-old mason from Odisha cycled 1100 kilometres in seven days, all the way home to Ganjam district from Chennai, and his wife Namita riding pillion. Once again the roadster, a cycle design perfected more than 100 years ago proved to be reliable. During this lock out period this kind of performance was repeated by several workers all over the country.

The bicycle was invented more than 200 years ago by a prolific German inventor, Baron Karl Von Drais. His first reported ride was on June 12, 1817, in Mannheim in Germany. His bicycle had neither a chain nor any pedals! Yet, from this simple start, by 1890 the standard cycle or ‘roadster’ has come into being. This type of bicycle is still used by millions of commuters and workers all over the world.

The standard roadster cycle ruled the world till the Second World War. Thereafter the world got split into two camps – on one hand,

the developed nations of the world, mainly in the West, including Japan and Australia; and, on the other, the developing nations or the third world. The bicycle in the West became mainly a sport-and-hobby bicycle and the roadster became a relic of the past. Most people changed over to cars or public transport. In the last few decades, though, because of awareness of global warming and pollution, the bicycle is once again becoming popular in the West, though still mainly for recreational purposes. Such usage, though, so far, has not reduced the car mileage per capita in the West.

Within the developing world, of course, there has been a class divide with the rich aping the West and the poor sticking to relatively older technologies. This is often seen through the prism of the debate about 'India (rich) and Bharat (poor)', which became popular in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the context of the bicycle, of course, the standard roadster represents 'Bharat' and the multi-geared fancy bicycle represents 'India'. As a rule, those who have fancy bicycles also own cars, motorcycles or scooters, and they use the bicycle, like in the West, mainly for recreational purposes.

However, the standard roadster cycle still rules the Indian market. Out of some 150 million bicycles in India more than 130 million are the old type or Roadsters. They are manufactured by four well established brands – Hercules, Atlas, Hero and Avon. Today they would cost around Rs. 5000/- less than half the price of a decent smart phone. They are easy to maintain at home and all the repairs and overhauling can be done by a local cycle repair shop. If one budgeted about 5 % of the cost per year for maintenance, then the roadster can last up to 50 years easily.

This is because the majority of bicycle users in India are either those who commute over small distances or people who use their bicycles to run small businesses. The latter kind of bicycles are slightly modified – larger back carriers, old-fashioned stand, extra

springs and stronger tyres to carry the extra load and survive the wear and tear. Workers from a wide variety of professions use them to earn their livelihoods. For an investment of about five thousand rupees, they can earn a net profit of fifteen thousand rupees per month in a city like Hyderabad. This is probably the most successful model of micro-entrepreneurship in India. In addition such workers provide a wide variety of goods and services at affordable prices. And yet these people do not get the respect due to them from the government, police and even ordinary people, although all of us benefit from their work.

### The Immediate Future

It is obvious that in India the roadster is not going away. Even today 70 percent of the bicycles manufactured in India are roadsters. The roadster, with its various modifications, remains the backbone of India's urban transport system. Populist programmes like free bicycle schemes for school children will also continue to support the roadster cycle industry. We should also remember that the tricycle in its various designs –rickshaw, ice cream vendors shop, cargo vehicle for municipalities' waste disposal programmes, variety of vendors – all have design based on the roadster and are maintained by the same repair shops.

The basic problem is created by fossil fuel-based transport, which have occupied our road space, created urban traffic jams and raised air pollution to dangerous levels. This is what we must work to reduce. Creating special bicycle lanes will not solve the problem, and it will

anyway take up further urban space. This approach mainly serves the construction industry. The money wasted on such programmes can be better utilised in improving public transport and discouraging private cars.

April 28, 2020

## Shed a Tear for the Puncture Waala



All of us cyclists have seen the ‘puncture waala’. He is someone who may resemble a rag picker (the lowest of the low in our urban human scape) is sitting on the foot path with a beaten down metal tin trunk and a cycle pump and a shallow old iron wok (kadhai) filled with water. And like the rag picker he (I have never seen a woman puncture waali, though sometimes a small playful daughter has been hanging around) is performing an essential service for us and like him he is also looked down upon. Before going further, let me assure the gentle reader that these are not just crocodile tears, but I have some concrete and in my opinion doable solutions to offer.

So, our puncture waala, come rain or sun shine, is sitting patiently, waiting for some trade. He can do most basic repairs, that is, oiling and cleaning, repairing faulty brakes, rattling mud guards, repairing a puncture (including finding a faulty valve tube and replacing it) and filling the air in our tubes. And if you choose to, he is quite friendly and can help you in various small ways including acting as a temporary cycle parking facility for your bicycle.

## Improving the Bicycle Infrastructure in the City

Improving the bicycle infrastructure has been on the agenda of many cyclists and bicycle promoting organisations like the bicycle clubs and bicycle mayors. The normal suggestions are:

1. Demanding for bicycle lanes
2. Bicycle share programmes
3. Improving public transport

I would like to concentrate on the third as it would indirectly reduce car use and thus reduce air pollution and traffic on roads.

In improving public transport again there are two suggestions

– one, asking for bus corridors and the other - high end buses.

While the demand for improved buses is justifiable because until recently our buses have just been truck chassis with some ‘body building’ on it, bus corridors are expensive ‘smart city’ projects basically helping the construction industry. Also there is not much space for them in most cities.

## A simpler Suggestion Involving our Puncture Waala

Let us improve our bus shelters along with improving our buses in the following ways:

1. Convert them into bus shelters cum paid bicycle parking stations and basic bicycle repair station.
2. Put up a board giving bus time table for that bus stand.

3. Provide garbage collecting bins – red and green for wet and dry waste.
4. Build a kiosk for a care taker for bicycle parking stand cum basic bicycle repair shop that is for our present puncture waala.
5. The care takers can work in two shifts – 6 am to 2 pm and 2 pm to 10 pm to cover all the buses.
6. Give them a basic daily wage which can be supplemented by parking fees and repair charges.
7. Give them a basic orientation course explaining their job description and uniform. The job includes: i. Keeping the shelter clean and emptying the bins, ii. Issuing parking tickets and collecting parking fees (it should be one single rate, irrespective of time), iii. Bicycle maintenance and basic repair. There should be a rate card displayed so that user knows what to expect.

## How to Implement

I think Kolkata Cycle Samaj and our bicycle mayor can take it up as a pilot project for one prominent bus stand and funded by an MP or MLA funds. Since it will give a lot of publicity I think some of them will agree. It should be popular because it meets the need for the ‘last mile’ coverage for the public transport user.

However, before approaching them we should do our home work meticulously, because as they say the devil is in the details. We must ensure success in our efforts, because nothing

succeeds like success. So let us form a small subcommittee of volunteers who are committed and will ensure success. Over to Raghu Jana (Secretary, Kolkata Cycle Samaj) and Satanjib Gupta (Bicycle Mayor of Kolkata)!

April 29, 2020

# Neo Liberalism and the Decline of the Roadster in India



## Roadster

Roadster is the standard or as in Bengal we call it the ‘Bangla’ cycle. Its design was perfected around 1890 and it has not changed significantly since then. Many people think it is old fashioned and they want to go for ‘fancy’ cycles. However the roadster has a great resilience and remains the choice for millions all over the world. What is more in some parts of the Western world, where its popularity had declined after the Second World War, it is making a comeback.

In much of the world, the roadster is still the standard bicycle used for daily transportation. Mass-produced in Asia, they are



exported in huge numbers (mainly from India, China, and Taiwan) to developing nations as far afield as Africa and Latin America. India's Hero Cycles and Eastman Industries are still two of the world's leading roadster manufacturers, while China's Flying Pigeon was the single most popular vehicle in worldwide use. Due to their relative affordability, the strength and durability of steel frames and forks and their ability to be repaired by welding, and the ability of these bicycles to carry heavy payloads, the roadster is generally by far the most common bicycle in use in developing nations, with a particular importance for those in rural areas.

Traditional roadster models became largely obsolete in the English-speaking world and other parts of the Western world after the 1950s with the noticeable exceptions of the Netherlands and to a much lesser extent Belgium along with other parts of North-Western Europe. However, they are now becoming popular once more in many of those countries that they had largely disappeared from, due to the resurgence in the bicycle as local city transport where the roadster is ideally suited due to its upright riding position, ability to carry shopping loads, simplicity and low maintenance.

## Neo Liberalism

Neo Liberalism appeared in 1979, with capitalism wanting more freedom for itself and less control by the state. So the Reagan - Thatcher consensus or privatization (what is now referred to as the neo-liberalism) gained currency in the West. In England, Thatcherism represented a systematic and decisive rejection and reversal of the post-war consensus, whereby the major political parties largely agreed on the central themes of Keynesianism, the welfare state, nationalised industry and close regulation of the British economy. In its place, Thatcherism attempted to promote low inflation, a smaller state and free markets through tight control of the money supply, privatisation and constraints on the labour

movement. Neo - liberalism came to India in 1991, where it was presented as a package of ‘economic reforms’ for ‘Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation.’ It ended the ‘permit quota raj,’ allowed foreign companies to import, invest and set up their enterprises in India, and ushered in an era of new wealth for the rich and the middle classes at a tremendous cost to ecology.

## Indian Bicycle Industry

India is the second largest manufacturer of bicycles in the world. The industry is classified into four segments — standard, premium, kids and exports. Demand for standard/roadster bicycles, which is the largest segment (accounting for half of all bicycles sold in 2020) is driven by government purchases. Government departments procure these bicycles through a tender process and distribute under various welfare schemes. Demand for premium and kids bicycles (nearly 40 per cent) is driven by fitness and leisure needs. Exports and sales of other kinds of bicycles constitute the remaining 10 per cent demand.

## Decline of the Roadster

In 1990, 90 percent bicycles produced in India were roadsters. By 2020 it has been reduced to 50 percent. What has happened?

After independence the import of bicycle was banned and India started manufacturing its own bicycles. Several important bicycle companies came up - Sen Raleigh in Asansol, Hercules/BSA in Chennai, Atlas, Hero and Avon in Punjab (In those days Haryana was not formed).

However in 1991 imports again began. Neo liberalism also brought new wealth and an affluent middle class was born. At the same time concern about climate, global warming and health consciousness increased. This gave rise to a new demand for bicycles from this class and the market for Premium/Fancy cycle

was born. And in a few years along with the new generation of kids, the market for kids also came into being. Since then the market share of fancy and kid's bicycles has continuously increased.

### The Problems of Fancy Bicycles in India

The fancy bicycle is transitory in nature – both in history and in the life of the owner of the bicycle. In the world it appeared in the West with MTB after the Second World War and the prestige of the roadster declined. Now the roadster is coming back because it is a more comfortable and reliable machine.

As the word suggests the fancy bicycle is neither utilitarian like the standard/roadster nor professional. It is just fancy used for recreational purposes. Most of the owners use it for

weekends only. They normally have a fossil fuel based vehicle – a motor cycle/scooter/car for daily use. Today many of them are environmentally conscious and promote bicycle for environment and health reasons. Many of them are members of the cycle clubs, Rotary clubs, Lions clubs etc. Obviously they belong to relatively affluent middle class.

However in most cases this fancy lasts a few years only. A few of them graduate to professional levels. Most give up after a few years. There are many reasons. As they grow, other pressures – job, family, relatives, and friends grow and they increasingly don't find time during the weekends. The very jobs that gave them high salaries to indulge in buying these bicycles, do not allow them, within a few years, the time to ride these bicycles! Then they are not able to maintain it. In India the infrastructure for maintenance for bicycle with gears is not very good. Upper class/caste Indians have very poor culture of maintenance – they don't dirty their hands. Soon the cycle gathers dust. Most gated communities in big cities are full of these abandoned fancy bicycles. The second hand market for them is not good either. So they are offered at

half the cost within a few years. It is another example of wasteful nature of the capitalist society.

## Role of the Bicycle Clubs

The bicycle clubs have played a big role in promoting these fancy bicycles. In most cities in India the owner of these fancy bicycles is also a good cyclist and is often a prominent member of the local cycle club. In some cases a prominent member of these clubs graduated in starting a shop sensing that in the city there is no good shop or maintenance facilities for these bicycles.

## Kolkata Cycle Samaj

However among these clubs the Kolkata Cycle Samaj is an exception. The main reason is its history. In Kolkata about a decade ago, under the pressure of car owners, the Kolkata police banned bicycle on more than hundred roads. They also started making cyclist pay a fine of hundred rupees for violating the ban. Naturally there was uproar. The greatest sufferers were the working class members for whom the bicycle was a necessity and their jobs involved in travelling on these roads. Kolkata Cycle Samaj was born with the objective of removing this ban. While they have not fully succeeded in it they have created a great awareness about the bicycle and urban transport issues all over the country and even abroad. Its face book page has 5800 members!

## What can the Bicycle Clubs do?

1. In my opinion bicycle clubs should promote bicycle among common people and help them to acquire one. Most poor people aspire to own a bicycle. Our general aim should be every Indian family should own at least one ladies roadster bicycle. I say ladies because a ladies bicycle can be used by both men and women in the family. Also it has been shown

that for normal commuting a ladies bicycle gives a more comfortable ride.

2. Every bicycle club should run a bicycle gift programme for the needy person in their locality/town/city. On an average for every fancy bicycle you can purchase two roadsters. So if someone buying a new bicycle and has a budget of more than ten thousand it will be a good idea to purchase two roadster – one for herself and one to gift.
3. Every bicycle club should have a good relation with a good bicycle maintenance mechanic. They should support him; help him to acquire a good location, a good shop/kiosk. In a small town it can even be a cycle assembly shop or used for restoring old cycles.

## The Future

The world is going through a global emergency and we have a window of just about a decade to act to survive! If we do survive than much of the present wasteful society will have to go and with that the fancy bicycles will also go along with all the fossil fuel based transport. Cities will shrink in size. Urban transport will mainly depend on roadster and roadster based cycle rickshaws, cargo cycles and so on.

We live on hope. To keep the hope alive, in the bicycle sector let us promote the roadsters and get rid of our fossil fuel based vehicles!

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## Bicycle in Jamshedpur



*In the twentieth century nothing represented the working class culture more than the bicycle did. That is why the film 'Bicycle Thief' (1948, Italy, Director: Vittorio De Sica) remained the best film ever made for many years and still is one of the ten best films ever made.*

Jamshedpur with a population of 1.34 million is the largest and most populous city in Jharkhand. Founded in 1919 by Jamsetji Tata, the founder of the Tata Group, It is also the oldest planned city in India.

Jamshedpur is an industrial city and the working class is the majority here and so is the bicycle. Till the end of the last century the city could be called a bicycle city. Apart from the bicycle there were also cycle rickshaws.

The visibility of both has decreased in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the glitter of the neo-liberal economy with its neo rich middle class, bikes, scooters, scooties, cars, SUVs and so on. Still if you look for it, the bicycle and the working class is everywhere.

Again if you visit only down town Bishtupur area or the Jubilee Park or the surrounding officers' colonies you might see fewer bicycles and many of those will be fancy colourful bicycles. It is in the morning that you see thousands of roadsters coming to town from nearby villages or non town areas. Similarly in Adityapur and other industrial areas, the roads are full of roadster bicycles. My estimate is that there are more than five lakh bicycles in the city.

The bicycles here are well maintained. The reason is that most of the owners are workers and have knowledge and tools at home and they take care of them. For a similar reason the repair shops are also good.

There are a significant number of ladies bicycles – used by both men and women. Most workers carry some thing with them – lunch box, a bag etc. Many ride double – often with a lady on the carrier.

Traffic is fairly smooth. Except in Sakchi market area and railway station area there is no traffic congestion. Although there is enough space for them, there are no bicycle lanes.

I have had similar impressions about Bokaro, Bhilai, Durgapur, Kanchrapara and IIT Kharagpur campus. The conclusion is that if the city is planned, if the majority of people are manual workers and if there are no extremely poor people then it is a good place for the cyclist.

November 3, 2021 <https://countercurrents.org/2021/11/bicycle-in-jamshedpur/>

# The Bicycle: beyond the India v. Bharat debate



## Introduction

The bicycle was invented 200 years ago by a prolific German inventor, Baron Karl Von Drais. His first reported ride was on June 12, 1817, in Mannheim in Germany. His bicycle had neither a chain nor any pedals! Yet, from this simple start, by 1890 the standard cycle or ‘roadster’ that we see nowadays had come into being. This type of bicycle is still used by millions of commuters and workers all over the world.

The standard roadster cycle ruled the world till the Second World War. Thereafter the world got split into two camps – on one hand, the developed nations of the world, mainly in the West, including



Japan and Australia; and, on the other, the developing nations or the third world. The bicycle in the West became mainly a sport-and-hobby bicycle and the roadster became a relic of the past. Most people changed over to cars or public transport. In the last few decades, though, because of awareness of global warming and pollution, the bicycle is once again becoming popular in the West, though still mainly for recreational purposes. Such usage, though, has not reduced the car mileage per capita.

Within the developing world, of course, there has been a class divide with the rich aping the West and the poor sticking to relatively older technologies. This is often seen through the prism of the debate about ‘India (rich) and Bharat (poor)’, which became popular in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the context of the bicycle, of course, the standard roadster represents ‘Bharat’ and the fancy, multi-geared fancy bicycle represents ‘India’. As a rule, those who have fancy bicycles also own cars, motorcycles or scooters, and they use the bicycle, like in the West, mainly for recreational purposes.

However, the standard roadster cycle still rules the Indian market. This is because the majority of bicycle users in India are either those who commute over small distances or people who use their bicycles to run small businesses. The latter kind of bicycles are slightly modified – larger back carriers, old-fashioned stand, extra springs and stronger tyres to carry the extra load and survive the wear and tear. Workers from a wide variety of professions use them to earn their livelihoods. For an investment of about five thousand rupees, they can earn a net profit of fifteen thousand rupees per month in a city like Hyderabad. This is probably the most successful model of micro-entrepreneurship in India. In addition such workers provide a wide variety of goods and services at affordable prices. And yet these people do not get the respect due to them from the government, police and even ordinary people, although all of us benefit from their work.

## The Critique of 'India': Not a Simple Issue

Sanjay Srivastav wrote an article about three years ago with the title, 'Why the sports bicycle should not be a symbol of urban renewal'<sup>1</sup>. According to him, "Over the past few years, the sports bicycle with bells and whistles, and its rider, whose riding gear might cost more than a month's salary paid to a professional car driver, have become icons of an urban renewal movement. We so perfectly walk in the footsteps of meanings borrowed from elsewhere that we erase our own imprints. Does the fancy bicycle hold the key to an improved urban environment, characterised by reduced pollution levels and more importantly, ease of access for the city's most disadvantaged populations? Far from it. ... it is extremely unlikely that riding bicycles among the middle-classes is ever likely to be anything more than a leisure and lifestyle activity. It is not the bicycle that ought to be the symbol of urban renewal but, rather, various means of public transport. To think otherwise is nothing more than a cruel joke upon the nature of inequality and aspirations ... This is not to say that the bicycle as an instrument of leisure ought to be discouraged. Rather, we should recognise it for what it is."

On November 6, 2015, Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria wrote a reply in the same journal.<sup>2</sup> He says, "For the past few months I've been talking, cycling and hanging out with recreational cyclists in Mumbai. ... What does the bicycle mean to them? It means pleasure, fitness and well-being. It means not polluting, even if just for a day. It means making friends outside of your immediate social circle. It means giving back to the city rather than taking from it. And to many, it means freedom. It means freedom from the office cubicle, the long commutes and the shackles of the auto-mobile. For many women, the bicycle means that and more. It also means freedom from the ceaseless cycle of housework and childrearing, freedom to be out in public, to wander, and to

explore the city and all the challenges it offers.”

He concludes with an idea of the ‘Politics of possibility’. “The clearest possibility is an alliance between the two groups of people Srivastav portrays as fundamentally at odds – the livelihood and the recreational cyclists. Why preclude this from the outset? Right now there is no mass movement connecting the two groups of riders ... But more often, everyday recreational and livelihood cyclists interact silently – a head nod here, a smile there or simply sharing the road for a kilometer or two in silent companionship. And so, bit by bit, the stigma of the bicycle as the ‘poor man’s vehicle’, slowly crumbles.” He adds, “These cyclists are not only doing it for fun, they are normalising cycling as a way of life.”

## The Entry of Capital

Srivastav and Anjaria both have interesting points to make. What they miss, however, is the role of neo-liberal capitalism in this transformation of the Indian scene. ‘India’ is essentially a section of middle-and upper-class people who have benefited from the neo-liberal policies that were implemented since the early nineties. In terms of government policies ‘India’ is represented by the LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) approach of Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh, the ‘India Shining’ of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and even Narendra Modi’s ‘Make in India’. In the realm of bicycles, neoliberal capital has entered through cycle tracks, cycle lanes and bike-share programmes. These programmes are demanded and supported by recreational bicycle enthusiasts, and Sanjay Srivastav is quite right in saying that “the sports bicycle represents a form of forgetting: lack of thought about urban inequalities, unequal distribution of resources.”

International capital has also entered through ‘docked and dockless bike share’ programmes and the ‘last mile’ programmes for the Metro in Hyderabad. Many big national and international

players have arrived and announced programmes: Ola Pedal, Yulu, Chinese Ofo and InMobi. Almost all of them use imported bicycles which cost at least twice as much as the Indian roadster bicycle. Most of them have not got off the ground and many will fail – but that is how capitalism works. Meanwhile they have secured the support of the Indian government, ministers and local municipalities and corporations.

Mumbai operates two schemes, and the Ministry of Urban Development is preparing to launch a 10-city public bike scheme as part of its ‘Mission for Sustainable Habitat’. In Ahmedabad, MyByk cycle-sharing program started with eight stations within the city in 2013. Subscribers can use the bicycles as long as required without having to return them to the stations. Mysore is the first Indian city to initiate cycle sharing in 2009 with 28 locations and 52 further planned. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) launched the first software-based ‘Public Bicycle Sharing scheme (PBS)’, whereby commuters can rent cycles from a residential area and travel to the nearest Metro station where they leave the bicycle and then again rent another bicycle from another Metro station. In Pune, many IT companies have been promoting cycling to work. There is lot of bicycle- sharing schemes in the city. The trend is catching on in smaller cities including Rajkot, Bhubaneswar and Vadodara.

The industrial activity that most attracts capital in India is the construction industry. In the context of bicycles, it is about bicycle lanes, dedicated tracks, sports facilities and so on. Many municipalities, corporations and even state and central government have announced these programmes. For example, Chennai is building a cycle track in KK Nagar for Rs. 36 lakhs. Trichy is spending Rs. 70 lakhs on a bicycle corridor. Chandigarh wants to build 180 km. of bicycle track for Rs. 25 crores. Other cities are announcing similar programmes. In Uttar Pradesh the erstwhile

chief minister himself rode the first few kilometres of one of the longest dedicated bicycle roads in the world, connecting a wild life sanctuary and Agra.

### Bharat Reasserts Itself!

Populist policies cannot vanish in a country where elections matter. They first came in the form of 'Free Bicycles for Schoolchildren' schemes. Starting with Bihar several state governments have announced and successfully implemented free bicycle schemes for high-school girls in government schools. Over the years the programme has extended to all children, irrespective of caste, class, religion or gender. The recent *Sabuj Saathi* programme in West Bengal is one such programme. By most accounts these programmes are very popular, successful, efficient and are low on corruption!

There are other populist possibilities. The government can lower GST for roadsters, cycle-rickshaws and cargo bikes. Government can help finance improved cycle-rickshaws and cargo bikes for small entrepreneurs like rickshaw drivers and hawkers. The industry will welcome such schemes. Unions, cooperatives, self-help groups, micro-finance and loan schemes can be floated. Many political parties already have union leaders among them. Unions can become stronger, particularly bicycle-based-hawkers' unions. International Hawkers' Day (May 26) can be declared a public holiday along with May Day!

### A Synthesis: Bicycle Urbanism

In this context, urban planner Mikael Colville-Andersen of Copenhagen, Denmark, offers a refreshingly sane plan. He says that bikes are not primarily for racing or recreation or even commuting, or any of the many other subsets; they are just a great way to get around in cities.

The bicycle is ideal for cities. It is transport; it is a shopping cart, a family adhesive, and even an analog ‘dating app’. With the rise of the cargo bike, it can be a SUV. It is everything you can imagine, anything you wish, and whatever you want it to be – and it’s been that for all of 130 years. This most human form of transport represents the perfect synergy between technology and the human desire for mobility. It is the most perfect vehicle for urban living ever invented.<sup>3</sup>

The bicycle urbanism that Mikael wants to reinvent for European and American cities has never entirely vanished from India, although it has become largely invisible due to the invasion of fossil fuel-based cars, buses, motorcycles and scooters. The roadster has made its place in the Indian economy in the form of cargo bikes. A huge ‘cycle-parts’ manufacturing industry, exists in the Ludhiana region of Punjab. They supply for parts for all kinds of bicycle and tricycle cargo bikes. To begin with, the standard two-wheeler roadster can carry four people with a tiny baby - seat on the horizontal bar. The roadster is also modified to carry loads up to 500 kg, by providing a stronger and wider carrier behind the seat. The waste paper industry in cities depends on these bikes. In rural areas animal feed is carried on them. Small businesses selling tea, food, plastic buckets, coconuts and scores of other items are conducted using bicycles. A link to a short film about these myriad uses is given below.<sup>4</sup>

Then there is a large variety of three-wheeler cargo bikes. To begin with we have the cycle- rickshaw, normally designed to carry two passengers apart from the driver. Improved designs have come in many parts of the country. In Delhi, the ‘last mile’ of the Metro is served by this improved cycle-rickshaw, typically charging Rs. 10 per passenger. The most ubiquitous cargo bike is the urban-waste-disposal tricycle employed by municipalities in India. With ‘separation at source’ becoming a requirement for urban waste,

better-designed vehicles have appeared – as also better-paid and better-dressed municipal workers. The ordinary cycle-rickshaw is also modified to carry loads for small distances in the market. Almost all the ice cream vendors on Indian roads use specially designed tricycles with a battery-operated refrigerator. Bangalore has come up with a well-designed tricycle for vegetable vending. Finally the old four-wheeler push car also exists and accounts for significant amount of hawkers' business.

### The Immediate Future

It is obvious that in India the roadster is not going away. Even today 70 percent of the bicycles manufactured in India are roadsters. The roadster, with its various modifications, remains the backbone of India's urban transport system. Populist programmes like free bicycle schemes for school children will also continue to support the roadster cycle industry. However, recreational cycles have also come to stay, and they represent about 30 percent of the market. What will not survive are the bike-share programmes with their electronic gadgets. They are failing in many places in the world and they are not needed. Ordinary bicycles rental programmes have existed in the past, and even in tourist places a few fancy cycle-renting programmes will survive.

The basic problem is created by fossil fuel-based transport, which have occupied our road space, created urban traffic jams and raised air pollution to dangerous levels. This is what we must work to reduce. Creating special bicycle lanes will not solve the problem, and it will anyway take up further urban space. As we have shown above, this approach mainly serves the construction industry. The money wasted on such programmes can be better utilised in improving public transport and discouraging private cars.

The other big problem is the prestige associated with cars. In this area the recreational bicycle enthusiasts can help to create an

alternative aspiration model as well as instill concern for the environment. Thus there are specific areas in which India and Bharat can meet or as Anjaria says, the 'Politics of possibility' exists!

## Transition Town and the Cycle City

There is good reason to hope. The world is going through a resource crunch, particularly a petrol crunch. Cities will shrink in size. We are going through a phase of transition from a fossil fuel-based economy to a society free from fossil fuels.

Transition Towns is a grassroots network of communities that are working to build resilience in response to peak oil, climate destruction, and economic instability. A key concept within transition is the idea of a community-visioned, community-designed and community-implemented plan to proactively transition the community away from fossil fuels. The term 'community' in this context includes all the key players: local people, local institutions, local agencies and the local council.

In the field of transport, the number of cars will come down, making way for bicycles, tricycles (our familiar cycle-rickshaw) and other cargo bicycles and tricycles. The transition plan involves an approach to town planning in the field of transport based on bicycle and cargo bicycles. We have to plan for bicycle parking and bicycle maintenance services. With reduced and eventually zero private cars, there will be space and safety for all kinds of bicycles and cargo bicycles. It is better to invest in improving our cycle-rickshaws and cargo bicycles and tricycles. Good design and efficient designs exist in India and all over the world, and within a decade the cycles will take over!



## Notes and References

I have immensely benefited from discussions with Hema Vaishnavi on several earlier drafts of this article. Vidyadhar Gadgil has edited the article and made it readable.

All the reference material can be found in one place on the Face book page <https://www.facebook.com/BicentenaryBicycle> which Ms. Hema Vaishnavi has been running for more than a year. It is a great source of news and articles about the bicycle.

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## The Politics of the Bicycle Lane



In recent years there is demand for bicycle lanes by a section of the bicycle community in India. It comes mainly from Metro cities and people who demand are also younger people who use fancy/professional bicycles and are members of various bicycle clubs. Ordinary people who use the standard/roadster/Bangla cycles do not appear to be part of this group and nor is there such a demand from smaller cities and towns. The ostensible reason given is the safety of the cyclist.

However in our opinion this demand stems from the car owner community who wants the road clear of pedestrians and cyclists so that they can drive 'safely' and fast. As a matter of fact few cyclists are injured due to accidents and most of the injuries and deaths occur to car drivers and car passengers. They are unsafe. A car driver is scared that in case of an accident he may be lynched by the people. For this reason they want pedestrians and cyclists off the road and they want footpath and bicycle lanes. In fact banning bicycles on 174 roads in Kolkata is part of the same pressure of the car community. Demanding bicycle lanes amounts to agreeing that cars have right of the way.

Empirically also the bicycle lanes appear impractical in India. I

have seen many photographs of bicycle lanes in India which are not used as bicycle lanes. They are not continuous; they have pot holes, are used by motor cycles and scooters, and are being used for parking of cars and motor cycles, used by hawkers and so on. In a city like Kolkata, there is no space on major arterial roads. They are already being occupied by hawkers with permanent and semi permanent structures.

A car driver is a scared person and most of the time in bad humour. Everyone on the road is his enemy including other car drivers. Often he mutters constantly foul language cursing other drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. The people of car community are also irritated by footpaths being occupied by hawkers and they demand the demolition of their stalls.

However for the hawkers it is a question of livelihood. So in Kolkata they have been organising since 1950. Today the National Hawker Federation is spread over 28 states comprising of 1188 unions and supported by 11 central trade unions. While occasional demolitions do take place, by and large no government can touch them. Many hawkers are bicycle based. Some are tricycle based like ice cream vendors. In Bangalore there is a beautiful design of tricycle based vegetable vending transport. The bicycle ban in Kolkata primarily affects the working class who used the standard or roadster bicycles and it is their demand that the bicycle ban should be removed. In my opinion the cycle community should work with hawkers union sharing the demand for the abolition of the bicycle ban.

Today we are standing at the crossroads of history. Capitalism is going through a huge crisis and trying to restructure itself through going the path of the fourth industrial revolution of artificial intelligence, 3D printers for manufacturing, e-cars, cars without drivers, and so on. This path leads to ecological destruction, extreme climate events, human misery, chaos and collapse. The car is symbolic of this path.

On the other hand some people are trying for a world of equality and sustainability by simpler living, organic farming, smaller cities and bicycles. The bicycle is a symbol of this path.

The section of the cycling community who wants bicycle lanes also owns cars and scooters and wants the two to coexist. I am afraid this cannot succeed. You have to choose between car and bicycle – between collapse and survival!

Instead of demanding bicycle lanes we should occupy the roads!

In the light of this what should be the demand of the bicycle community? Here is a model charter of demands.

### Charter of Demands

1. Reduce or eliminate GST taxes on Standard Cycle costing below Rs. 5000/-. At present it is 12%.
2. Facilitate loans for cycles.
3. Provide Kiosks for bicycle repair shops on convenient spots as they are provided for leather workers.
4. Provide cycle parking places in convenient spots. E.g. like railway stations, major bus stations and bus stops, cinema halls, shopping centres etc.
5. Provide cycle tracks in all community sports areas.
6. Promote cycles by providing cycles to school children, police men, post men, telephone and electricity departments. Also to any other services that need a lot of travelling in the city.

### Our Slogans

Pedal More. Pollute Less Cycle to Work

Occupy all Streets Republic on Roads

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<https://workersbushtelegraph.com.au/2021/07/22/the-politics-of-bicycle-lanes/>

# Bicycle is the Future!

## Cycling in Indian Cities and its Future



The bicycle, invented two hundred years ago in 1817, was called an iron horse because like a horse it is an individual transport. However on occasions it can carry two persons and sometimes two adults and two children too. And like a horse it can also carry loads up to 250 Kg. easily. And it is cheaper too both as its initial cost and maintenance cost. So its popularity spread quickly and today, in spite of cars, motor bikes, scooters etc. it still leads in the number of vehicles in the world. Bicycles and sewing machines are said to be the only products of the industrial revolution that will outlive it.

### Urban India

About a third of the Indian population is urban. There are 7935 urban conglomerates of all classes. There are about 53 cities with a population of million, three of which – Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata have more than 10 million (one crore) people and a total

of nine have more than 5 million. These nine can be called Metro cities. There are 465 cities with population more than one lakh.<sup>1</sup>

## Bicycle in India

India's bicycle industry is pedaling to a decadal-high demand growth of 20%. In 2020, sales touched 1.45 crore units compared with 1.2 crore units in 2019. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has spurred demand for bicycles owing to improving fitness consciousness and leisure requirements.

India is the second-largest manufacturer of bicycles in the world. The industry is classified into four segments – standard, premium, kids and exports. Demand for standard bicycles, which is the largest segment (accounting for half of all bicycles sold in 2020) is driven by government purchases. Government departments procure these bicycles through a tender process and distribute them under various welfare schemes. Demand for premium and kids bicycles (nearly 40%) is driven by fitness and leisure needs. Exports and sales of other kinds of bicycles constitute the remaining 10% demand.<sup>2</sup>

## Urban Cycling

There are different patterns of use of these bicycles in urban India depending upon size of the city and class of the population.

In big metros the standard or the roadster (or Bangla) is invisible as they are dominated by cars and motorised two wheelers. Also the premium or fancy cycles with their colours and users wearing fancy gears are more visible. But if you look for them the working class is using the roadsters all the time even in metros. They are the milk men, watchmen, petty traders and nowadays even some delivery boys (and hopefully some girls too!). As we all know in our 'City of Joy' - Kolkata - they are harassed by our police. Fortunately in other metro cities, while the visibility is similar,

there is no harassment.

The situation changes as the size of the city becomes smaller and also it varies from region to region in India. In all cases the proportion of roadsters increases. In Eastern India, which is relatively less 'developed' there are more roadsters. Also the use of cycles varies. In smaller cities the cycle is more functional for almost every one and not for 'fitness and leisure needs'. They often carry more people and bags and sometimes heavier loads. There are variations within the roadster design too. Load carrying roadsters are made sturdier with additional reinforcements. It is much more pronounced in small towns and rural areas.

Working class towns - industrial townships, railway colonies are special cases. Here the scene is dominated by the bicycle and they are also well maintained because the working class knows how to maintain the machines. Similarly bicycles owned by tribals are also extremely well maintained and are decorated beautifully because the owner has a lot of pride in this acquisition.

## Rickshaws and Four Wheel Push Carts

While talking of bicycles, we should always include cycle rickshaws (even hand pulled rickshaws of Kolkata) and the four wheel push carts that is the commonest shop of street hawkers. Technically they belong to the same family of urban mobility. They are also part of the working class which uses the roadster. In a future scenario they will be the mainstay of urban mobility.

## The Future

So what is the future scenario which we have been referring to? The planet earth is going through a global emergency. This has four aspects: climate change, resource depletion, ecological degradation and political upheaval. Each of these can reinforce the other and we can see an end of the present industrial/capitalist

society before 2030! Take climate: *'2021 in review: Weather records aren't just broken; they're smashed.'*<sup>8</sup> Resource depletion: Essentially the industrial society is dependent on mineral resources. Now they are finite in quantity and the more we use, less of them are available. What is more, when we take out the easy to get, the remaining minerals become more difficult and more expensive to get. So, much before the last ounce/litre is taken out, they become unavailable or a 'peak occurs'. While the depletion of petrol and diesel is already well established, according to scientists peak will occur for most of the minerals before 2030. Ecological destruction: loss of water resources and loss of fertility of the soil have occurred at a huge scale. Many of the flora and fauna are endangered and some have become extinct. Political upheaval: newspapers are daily reporting both the war mongering by powerful countries and people's movement all over the world. The conclusion is that by 2030 collapse of the present social system will occur or the society will be well on its way to collapse.

### Shrink Globally, Act Locally

As a result of the collapse and non availability of fossil fuel energy, long distance travel will become near zero. The economy will have to be local and nearly self-sufficient. Now this need not be a bad thing. The complete lock down of our country for 3 months during the first phase of the pandemic showed both the resilience of nature and the resilience of people of our country. So I am confident that the people will rise to the occasion and build a much more peaceful and happy society based on sustainability and equity.

### Cities of Tomorrow

The cities in today's world, particularly in the developed world and in metro and mega cities of developing nations are becoming



unsustainable. In the last hundred years they restructured themselves to suit fossil fuel transport and economy - wider streets, suburbs and fossil fuel based energy. With the oil crisis they are falling apart and dying. They will not disappear overnight, but will perforce shrink. Their population will not exceed 500,000. The existing metros and million cities will split into smaller units with green areas between them. It has already happened in Detroit after the 2008 financial meltdown.<sup>4</sup>

### Urban Transport of Future

With the end of fossil fuels cars, bikes etc. will not be there. The entire urban transport will be carried out through bicycles and cargo bicycles and tricycles and push carts. In some places drought animals will also be used depending upon the availability of fodder.

### Return of the Roadster

In 1990, ninety percent of the bicycles manufactured in India were roadsters. Today they have shrunk to only fifty percent. The rest are taken by kids and premium or fancy bicycles. However bicycles are also made from metals and these metals will become scarcer in future. Therefore we will have to choose the cycle which is economical in use of resources.

Due to their relative affordability, the strength and durability of steel frames and forks and their ability to be repaired by welding, and the ability of these bicycles to carry heavy payloads, the roadster will become by far the most common bicycle. So the share of roadsters will again increase and the share of fancy cycles will decrease.

This is not wishful thinking. It is already happening in the West. Traditional roadster models became largely obsolete in the English-speaking world and other parts of the Western world after the 1950s with the noticeable exceptions of the Netherlands and to a

much lesser extent Belgium. However, they are now becoming popular once more in many of those countries that they had largely disappeared from, due to the resurgence in the bicycle as local city transport where the roadster is ideally suited due to its upright riding position, ability to carry shopping loads, simplicity and low maintenance.<sup>5</sup>

## Ladies Bicycle

Among the roadsters, the ladies bicycle is better for the following reasons:

1. It can be used by both men and women in the family.
2. The seat is lower so you can sit upright comfortably. It will be like sitting on a chair. It gives a very comfortable ride.
3. You can wear any kind of dress – saree, skirt, lungi, dhoti, pajama kurta etc. You can go to the office without your dress appearing rumpled.
4. If you have some load on the carrier or someone sitting, you can get on the bicycle from the front easily.
5. Buy a cycle stand which goes below the tyres and not that is on the side. This gives a more stable stand.
6. It may be a bit inefficient compared to men's cycle but the difference is marginal. But who cares? The purpose of the bicycle is to take you from one point to another comfortably at a reasonable speed.<sup>6</sup>

Tomorrow is ours! Let us Claim it today!

This is addressed primarily to our friends in Kolkata Cycle Samaj.

Some of us have both bicycles and motorised fossil fuel based vehicles. I urge them to use the bicycle more often and slowly dispose of their fossil fuel based vehicles. Remember tomorrow you may have to sell it as scrap! Secondly, since we can afford it, please gift a roadster ladies bicycle to a needy person.

Some are dedicated cyclists, that is, they don't own any fossil fuel based vehicles. They should learn to maintain their bicycle in 'tip top' conditions all the time. Make friends with the local cycle repair person and help him to have more dignity and a have a better shop.<sup>7</sup>

*Pedal More!*  
*Pollute Less!*  
*Occupy All Streets!*  
*Republic on Road!*<sup>8</sup>

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## An Honest Bicycle



*“The market is too race-centric; carbon fiber, electric shifting, full suspension, 11 speed, doesn’t really enhance the enjoyment of cycling. In the 1970’s and 80’s we cycled to be closer to nature, for the environment, for our health, for the simple beauty of cycling.”*

*Junzo Kawai, the founder of Suntour.*

We use the word ‘honest’ in the sense we mean nutritious food as opposed to junk food. Here by an honest bicycle we mean as against the ‘junk’, ‘fancy’ bicycle market. By honest bicycle we mean a roadster or a bicycle which the ordinary people use for

daily use in commuting. So what makes a roadster an ‘honest’ bicycle? Well it is a ‘no nonsense’ bicycle meant for daily use of rides of a few kilometers at a time and at speeds of around 10 kmph. It is made of steel and if well maintained can easily last up to 50 years. And in fact it is easy to maintain and most of the maintenance can be done and ought to be done by the owner herself including simple punctures! An overhauling done once in two years will ensure a long life. And it can be done by a local bicycle repair shop. Even in case of serious breakdown, which may require welding, it can be done in a local workshop. Its spare parts are easily available in the market. A new roadster costs, today, between 5000/- to 10,000/-rupees.

We are not against special cycles or ‘pro’ cycles like race cycles or cycles used for long tours lasting several days or even months. They can occupy about one percent of the cycle market. And a decent race cycle will cost tens of thousands of rupees. The fancy cycle market imitates the race cycle model and offers it between ten to twenty thousand rupees. Obviously it is a fake or imitation model with all the well known ‘qualities’, that is, it is attractive to look at when new, difficult to maintain, built in ‘obsolescence’ (the process of becoming antiquated, out of date, old-fashioned, no longer in general use, or no longer useful) and waste of scarce resources. Essentially it is a use and throw model. It attracts the younger generation of neo rich people, a class that has come into being after liberalization starting from 1990. The fancy cycle market in India is thus essentially a 21st century market.

Within the roadster cycles there are a few choices. The chief among them is of course the ladies versus gents cycle. We recommend the ladies cycle for the following reasons: 1. It gives an upright sitting position and the most comfortable ride for short distances at moderate speeds up to 15 kmph. 2. It allows getting on without raising your legs round the bicycle; you can wear any

dress – saree, skirt, hijab, dhoti, lungi, shorts and even a formal suit or dress. It will not rumple them. You can carry something on your back carrier, including your child or a friend or spouse and still can get on the cycle with comfort.

Within the ladies cycle there are a couple of options. The important ones are the shape of the handle and the kind of the cycle stand. We recommend the handles whose grips are bent at right angles, parallel to the cycle. This allows the upright riding position. If the handle is spread out then you have to bend while cycling. About the cycle stand - there are two types – one which has the bicycle leaning on one side, the other one which goes below the back wheel and allows an upright more stable position. We recommend the latter. This stand can be ‘locked’ also so that the cycle does not move or fall down. It also allows the cycle to be turned into a mobile shop!

### A Few Choices Available in the Market

We are giving a few examples of the models in the Indian market. Not all are covered nor the ones we are showing need be the preferred ones. Quite often the choice depends on your location.

1. Neelam Avia Lady Bicycle Rs, 5130/-
2. Hercules – Popular DTS Ladies – Rs. 5585/-
3. Atlas – Celia – Rs. 6555/-
4. Hero cycles- Miss India – LYRA – Rs. 7165/- – 7270/-
5. Avon Cycles – ROHINI IBC 26 T – Rs. 7191/-
6. Suncross – Raleigh – Classic Lady Rs. 9595/-

The information is from the internet. The actual prices may be less.

### Honest Owners of the Honest Bicycles

The owners of these honest bicycles need to be honest also! What do we mean? Majority of the owners depend on these cycles for

their daily commute to their jobs. In fact if they lose their bicycle it is a major disaster as has been shown so dramatically by the famous Italian film, 'The Bicycle Thief' or more recently by the Hindi film 'Mattu ki bicycle'. So they have to take care of their cycles and keep them in good running condition. For this, not only should they themselves do regular daily and weekly maintenance, but also get them repaired immediately in case of wear and tear and accidents. For this they also should have good relationships with the bicycle repair people. In short they are working people and have to respect other workers. Even the middle class owners – like school teachers, clerks etc. have to respect the dignity of labour. Contrast this with the owners of fancy bicycles – who are generally children of the relatively affluent classes or spoiled children of the middle class or better off workers. As a rule their cycles are not maintained properly and look bad within a few months. They need to be replaced soon! They do not know the cycle repair person and have little respect for the dignity of labour. In short, they are not 'honest' people. Let me hasten to say that there are exceptions to what I have said above. It is just a general qualitative picture.

To illustrate, let me quote from a recent communication I had from a reader:

*The cycles took me back to my childhood. We had 'Jeevan Khan Cycle Taxi' near our house in Raichur, Karnataka. Jeevan Khan was called Jeevan bhai and he had cycle rickshaws and bicycles which he would give on hire. Cycles were rented on hourly basis. He had small ones too for children which we used to ride for 25 paise an hour.*

*He did not have ladies bicycles though. Some bold girls in our town would rent the men's Hero cycles and we would look at them in awe. Later my niece who is 4 years younger to me*

*and I got our own BSASLR- a girls' bike but before that we also rode the gents cycle...first kainchi and then seat.*

*Now Jeevan bhai, who was also my father's friend, is long gone, his cycle shop was run by his sons. Now it has been upgraded and they have auto rickshams and motorcycle repairs. Actually the whole town is unrecognisable now. The mountains/rocky terrain that were behind our lane where we used to slide and fly kites in summer holidays have also diminished to a great extent.*

- Nikhat Fatima, Hyderabad

## An Honest Community for Honest People and Honest Bicycles!

This nicely shows that the fancy cycles are not the principal villains. They are just a part of an overall change of our society since liberalization. The cycle repair man is no longer a Bhai who was your father's friend. Today the urban space in Metros is so expensive that the 'puncture walla' has been brought down to the footpath!

Fossil fuel based auto rickshaw and motorcycles are everywhere. Of course the major occupiers of the street are the car wallas who don't want anyone else on the road, including other cars. They want the whole road clear for them so that they can go fast. They want hawkers removed from the road, pedestrians restricted to the footpath, bicycles to bicycle lanes. I am not sure where they want the motor cycles and auto rickshaws to go! They cause accidents and injure and kill people, sometimes themselves also. Road accidents are the biggest killer in society.

The fossil fuel based transport has expanded the city and colonies have come up. They have depleted the water table by deeper and deeper tube wells. On the other hand by paving roads and partially paving gardens and the car drive-ins, they have



stopped the rain water going underground and the slightest heavy rain causes floods in the city.

All this has resulted in a deep crisis – social and environmental. Inequality has risen and the environment has been degraded to an unprecedented level. Any visitor to Bangalore, Bombay or Hyderabad will quickly conclude that these cities are not viable any more. They are like a drowning ship and the sooner you leave it, it is better for you. But where will you go?

### Cities of Tomorrow

India has an urban population of 300 million, greater than the population of the USA, or for that matter, greater than any country except China. This urban Indian population lives in a total of 400 urban agglomerates. Of this urban population, more than half (180 million) lives in 35 cities that have a population greater than a million. The three metros/mega cities, Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi have more than 10 million residents. Hyderabad and Bengaluru, have more than 5 million. All these 35 cities have become totally unviable. They are facing big problems in terms of water, waste management and transport. We will mainly discuss the transport problems.

These cities suffer from traffic congestion and jams. The bicycle has emerged as the fastest transport in these cities. Sometimes even walking is faster. The air pollution level in most cities crosses danger marks often due to fumes from fossil fuel based transport. The main culprit is the private cars. They are parked 18 hours per day occupying valuable urban space. The slow traffic, idling motors at traffic junctions cause huge air pollution. Banning them will be one of the first steps required. However the real solution lies in breaking up these cities into smaller units of population of 5 lakhs each. In these cities bicycles will be the main transport though many people may even prefer walking!

## The Bicycle and the Cities of Tomorrow

First we define the cycle as a human powered wheel based transport. This will include cycle rickshaws, and other three wheelers like ice cream vendors, municipal waste tricycles and 3 and 4 wheeled push carts where a lot of hawker trade goes on. We propose that the entire city's transport be based on bicycles only. It is entirely possible if the cities are small.

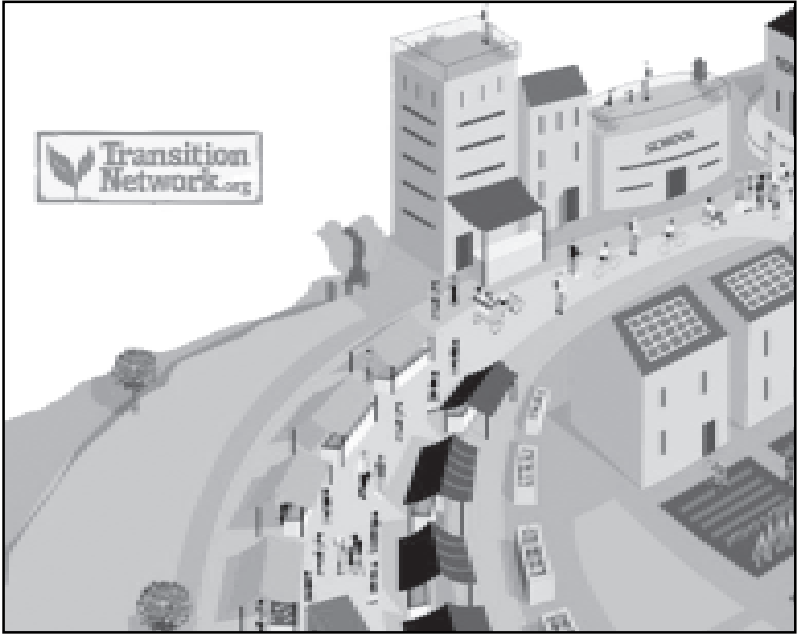
In such a city the bicycle - human powered wheel based transport - can take care of all the transport issues. In some cases animal power can also be used. These machines will not be fancy bicycles, but sturdy roadsters and local fabrication of cycle rickshaw and other 3 and 4 wheelers.

Let honesty prevail!  
Happy riding!

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## Bicycle and Transition Town



“Bicycle is one of the simplest solutions to some of the world’s most complex urban challenges.”

So what are the World’s most Complex Urban Challenges?

There are several areas where we are facing big challenges in the big cities in India. I suppose similar challenges are faced in other countries too. I am using Hyderabad as a reference point.

1. The cities are expanding very fast. In India they are called ‘colonies’. In the U. S. They are called suburbia.
2. There is a huge increase in traffic and roads are congested and air pollution is getting way above danger levels.
3. The cities are facing a huge water shortage. The new building

craze and the deep tube wells have killed a significant number of lakes and the water table has fallen to very dangerous levels. Hyderabad is pumping water from three rivers which are far away – Manjira, Krishna and Godavari.

4. The waste management problem has reached a very dangerous level. We are dumping the waste on to the surrounding village in 'land fills'. The human excreta waste is polluting lakes and rivers.
5. The urban flora and fauna has been significantly killed creating the famous 'Silent Spring' of Rachael Carson.
6. The health and the quality of human life have deteriorated significantly. We are breathing, drinking and eating poison. Both physical and mental health of urban people has suffered. Recreation has been reduced to consumption from electronic media and junk food.

### The Main Cause of this Crisis

The principal cause is the availability of a cheap energy source to capitalism. First it was coal and then in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became petroleum. This source of heat and the invention of converting heat into motion - 'the heat engine' – changed the entire level of exploitation of earth's resources and exploitation of labour. Today we are facing a poly crisis of global warming, ecological degradation, Extreme climate events and social unrest. We have reached a tipping point where all life on earth is endangered. Several species have already become extinct.

### What is the Solution?

All the concerned scientists and environmental groups are demanding an immediate cessation of use of fossil fuels. It may appear difficult but we must remember: 1. the crisis is too deep and 2. These fuels being non renewable are available in limited

quantities and their availability will keep on decreasing. So why not stop using it in most normal cases and reserve the remaining quantities for emergencies?

### What will Replace the End of the Fossil Fuel Era?

People of the world are working on it both in theory and practice. It will have to be based on consumption of a much lower level of energy. A commonly cited figure is the level of 1921, when all agriculture was organic and the world population was 2 billion. A criterion of sustainability is being evolved so that future generations will have adequate resources. Renewable, basically agriculture, will be the main source of sustenance. There will have to be ecological restoration of the degraded Earth and society will have to be more equitable. Finally, society cannot be anthropocentric. It should have a deep respect and connection with Nature.

### The Phenomenon of Transition Town

Meanwhile people all over the world are trying out several experiments based on the above principles so that working models of alternatives are ready. Transition Town is one such important movement.

Transition is a state that denotes the movement from one situation to another. Here we use it to the movement from the present capitalist/industrial stage of society to an alternative stage. The terms **Transition Town**, **Transition Initiative** and **Transition Model** form elements of an initiative or model that have evolved as grassroots community projects. Their aim is to bolster self-sufficiency and reduce the impact of peak oil (end of the petroleum resources), climate destruction, and economic instability. This is done through re-localization strategies, especially around food production and energy usage.

These towns will have a population of not more than 5 lakhs. Most of them will be below one lakh. The cities are planned for local self sufficiency around several topics: The plan will have following subject areas: 1. Air 2. Water 3. Waste Management 4. Food Production 5. Energy 6. Health 7. Education 8. Housing 9. Commons and Heritage 10. Employment Generation and Entrepreneurship.

*The main aim would be to make the area fossil fuel free in 10 years gradually and every one will earn his/her livelihood through green jobs.*

## Role of Bicycle in Transition Town

*“Bicycle is one of the simplest solutions to some of the world’s most complex urban challenges.”*

Nothing illustrates this sentence more than the Transition Towns where bicycles are the main source of transport.

First we define the cycle as a human powered wheel based transport. This will include cycle rickshaws, and other three wheelers like ice cream vendors, municipal waste tricycles and 3 and 4 wheeled push carts where a lot of hawker trade goes on. We propose that the entire city’s transport be based on bicycles only. It is entirely possible if the cities are small. As an aside we note that several machines are based on human powered wheels; by running the wheel by feet. The most famous example is of course the pedal sewing machine!

In such a city the bicycle - human powered wheel based transport - can take care of all the transport issues. In some cases animal power can also be used. These machines will not be fancy bicycles, but sturdy roadsters and local fabrication of cycle rickshaw and other 3 and 4 wheelers.

## Role of Bicycle in the 10 Subject Areas

## **1. Air**

We cannot live without air even for 3 minutes! And air pollution is the biggest threat that has to be met on war footing. The biggest polluters of air in urban areas are fossil fuel driven vehicles - scooters, cars, buses and trucks. Of these cars have the highest per capita emissions. So we should immediately aim at reducing car miles and expanding the scope of public transport. We must create car free zones and observe weekly car free days in congested localities. On the positive side promote bicycles and cycle rickshaws and other human powered wheel based transport, such as tricycles and 4 wheeled push carts. The goal is to remove the use of fossil fuel completely, as soon as possible.

## **2. Water**

Next to air, water is the most important thing for most life. All human settlements are based near water sources - lakes, rivers and wells. In fact the size of a human settlement until recently was based on the availability of water in the vicinity. Only availability of cheap energy allowed cities to pump water from distant rivers. Today in most cities every drop of water consumed involves some coal (due to electricity in pumping) and/or petrol for tanker transport. Our plan should ensure that all lakes get clean/rain water to make lakes potable, fishable, swimmable and we have to stop the froth and foam in the lakes. We must ensure that houses and roads do not get flooded during rains; to capture all rain water and ensure that all public and private buildings have rain water harvesting structures. And finally to ensure that the water table in the area rises year by year to reach 20 feet. This will allow having wells near the house where one can pull buckets of water by ropes and pulleys.

Here the main role of the bicycle would be transport: to eliminate piped water completely as it uses so much energy unless

it is done through gravity only. Bicycles and tricycles can help to transport small quantities of water – 50 to 100 litres over short distances – from lakes, rivers or public wells to residences. Even today many tricycles carry 20 litre bottles of Bisleri bottles or gas cylinders. I have seen in my childhood bullock carts carrying 18 litre tins of Narmada water to homes in Mandleshwar – a small town on the banks of Narmada.

### **3. Waste Management**

Plastic is currently the biggest source of solid waste and we must ban single use plastic to begin with. Then segregation at source between green (Biodegradable) and red (non-biodegradable) waste, recycling of non-biodegradable waste and composting the biodegradable waste is the next step. Further we need to ensure zero-waste management and also ensure that industrial and sewage waste does not go to the river or water bodies. Gradually we can introduce composting latrines to save water and keep the water bodies clean. Industrial polluting water should be treated before it is released. Harmful industries should be closed. Ensure that no pollutants enter the area and its lakes, from upstream or from outside the area.

Specially designed tricycle to transport waste to waste treatment areas has been extensively used. In Vellore, there is a wonderful project on zero waste management. It uses a specially designed tricycle managed by two women who collect pre-segregated waste from house to house to the recycling waste centre. There the biodegradable waste is composted and non biodegradable waste is further segregated, washed and cleaned, packed and sold to the recycling industry. After the initial investment, the project is self-supporting and saves the municipality a lot of money.

### **Garbage to Gold**



(UNICEF, India/18.02 minutes/English audio without subtitles)

[https://youtu.be/yFBw\\_qxbOLo](https://youtu.be/yFBw_qxbOLo)

Vellore's Christian Medical College sparked a change in the city of Vellore that would develop into a stellar model for sustainable waste management. The college began an initiative on a small scale to manage waste by segregating and making use of every last "waste" product: a "zero waste movement". Due to the success of this initiative, several other municipalities in Vellore joined in. This film takes us through Vellore's entire waste management process, whose success was ensured by the support and participation of all the people of Vellore and their remarkable workforce.

#### **4. Food**

To reduce food miles, all food should be locally procured, except salt which may have to be imported from outside. Perishables like fruits and vegetables should be produced within the local area. Grains can be procured within the district. Promote home and rooftop vegetable gardening. Promote tree planting and fruit tree planting wherever possible. Ensure that no one goes hungry. Run free kitchens wherever needed.

Bicycles and tricycles can play a big role in transporting soil, compost, plants to local home gardens. Four wheel push carts already dominate the hawker vegetable and fruit market in most cities. In Telangana there is someone called 'Chetlu (tree) Ramaiah who using his bicycle planted millions of trees and got a national award also. (12 Jul 2020 — *Padmashri Daripalli Ramaiah* Planted Over 1 Crore Trees To Make India Greener. Born in the village of Reddypally in Khammam district of Telangana ...)

#### **5. Energy**

The main aim of the transition town movement being *'Make the area fossil fuel free in 10 years gradually and every one will earn his/ her livelihood through green jobs'*; stopping the use of fossil fuels will be the biggest energy saver. As we have said, the bicycle can replace most of the cities' transport.

For other uses of energy, do energy audits of all energy users and reduce energy (based on coal, large hydroelectric dams, nuclear and gas) use by 10 % every year. That is, aim to be off grid by the end of 10 years. In any case the grid may collapse by that time. In some places, solar thermal, wind or micro-hydel may be possible. Promote roof top solar energy both for heating water and for electricity.

## **6. Health**

Urban health has deteriorated to an unprecedented level. We are breathing poison, drinking poison and eating poison. The last is mainly due to the junk food sold in packets and served in restaurants. They all are characterised by HFSS - high fat, salt and sugar. We must begin with a campaign against them and save our children. Clean air, water and healthy food are the first aims in health care. Then ensure that existing government hospitals in the area are equipped with infrastructure and staff, as well as, take up massive preventive care so that the residents are healthy. Introduce palliative care for the old and terminally ill patients. Establish hospitals ward-wise; restore the main hospital with an alternative medicine wing. Root out mosquito menace.

Every promoter of bicycles has talked about the health benefits of the cycle. Thus: 'June 3 has been declared World Bicycle Day by the United Nations General Assembly in April 2018. The year 2017 was the bicentenary year of the bicycle. They said that, 'Cycling is an affordable and equitable mode of transportation, leading to a longer and healthier life. Cycling has not only proven

to improve physical health, but also has a positive impact on mental health and subjective well-being.’

## **7. Education**

Education should aim to impart skills and values to ‘restore ecology through rebuilding communities based on equity and sustainability’. Rigorously promote local language, Hindi/Urdu, English and vernacular tongues. Combine teaching of manual skills along with mental skills. Give bicycles to all school going students. Ensure that all schools have libraries. Also reading rooms with newspapers in local language, Urdu, Hindi (or other relevant languages) and English should be provided in localities/mohallas. Make neighbourhood schooling mandatory and save time, energy and money that travels to distant schools require.

India produces about 18 million cycles per year. Sixty per cent of them are the old ‘Roadster’ type cycles suitable for Indian villages and small towns. Some twenty five percent are bought by the government under various schemes. One of the schemes that have caught the attention of the public is the free cycle for poor government school girls. It was first started by Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh (their election symbol is cycle) around 2003 and while it is still remembered, it did not last long. The most successful programme to date appears to be from Bihar. Today many states have followed this programme: Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chandigarh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka programmes have been reported to have had a big success and have contributed significantly to girls’ education all over the country.

## **8. Housing**

The future of buildings higher than 2 stories is uncertain as there may not be power for lifts and for pumping water. Ensure that every resident has a basic housing facility through low-cost environment friendly and dignified housing. New houses should be so designed that they do not require air conditioning or fans and do not require lighting during day time.

As we have said above, fossil fuels have expanded the cities and people are living away from their workplaces. Hence there is the urban problem of pollution etc. By making the cities small, people will mainly use bicycles, cycle rickshaws, cargo tricycles etc.

## **9. Commons and Heritage**

Ensure that parks and playgrounds are well maintained and all citizens and children have free access to them. Improve all Heritage Monuments by managing them locally and using them for public activity and recreation.

The town Bidar, in Karnataka, is often cited as one of the best examples of preserving monuments. I lived in Bidar for 5 years during the early 90s. I found many Sufi Majars being maintained on a daily basis by individuals. Many old monuments are used by young people for recreation and study. All these places are surrounded by parked cycles. Young people go on bicycle almost every day to visit monuments and structures which are outside the town. I would say that the bicycle culture of Bidar plays an important role in these public heritage places being used and hence preserved.

## **10. Employment Generation and Entrepreneurship**

Promote green entrepreneurship such as rain water harvesting, waste processing and composting, home gardening resources, bicycle stands and bicycle repair and maintenance shops, markets

for organic and green local products, sale, maintenance and repairs of solar cookers, water heaters and solar panels, etc. As we said above, the main aim is that at the end of 10 years everyone will be earning their livelihood through green jobs.

Bicycles probably represent one of the most significant employment generators. This year (2018), the United Nations General Assembly had written, 'In many countries, owning a bicycle has an even more significant impact for families, lifting them out of poverty, while providing them with improved access to quality education, jobs, markets, and community activities when public transportation is unavailable.'

To begin with the demand for the bicycles will increase because there will be no fossil fuel based transport available. Starting from sales and maintenance shops, local fabrication and manufacture of components offers a big scope. Then there is the scope of creating infrastructure for bicycles. Chief among them would be paid parking cycle stands. The reason is that unlike other fossil fuel based heavy vehicles, the cycle is light and can easily be 'lifted' (stolen)! Schools and colleges, cinema halls, railway and bus stand all need parking facilities. These stands can also have a small bicycle maintenance shop next to it to take care of basic needs such as pumping the air, checking breaks and chain cover and oiling.

### **Some Response to Critics of Transition Town**

Many critics say that you are suggesting going back. You are suggesting humans pull other human beings on hand pulled or cycle rickshaws, carry shit manually etc. Progressives have fought for liberation on these issues in the past.

Well the main objection was that these tasks were considered menial and were assigned to the poorest people. In the society we propose there will not be such segregation. There will be dignity of labour and educated people will also do the menial tasks as

indeed they do in many communes today. Secondly, because they were assigned to the poor there was no attempt made to improve the technology or make them safe for them. All this has been taken care of by composting latrines and humanure projects. Cycle rickshaws have been improved considerably and many educated people all over the world are pulling them! If we put our mind to it any problem can be tackled keeping the interests of ecology safe.

## **Epilogue**

Q: What is the future of the bicycle?

A: Bicycle is the future!

July 15, 2024

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<https://countercurrents.org/2024/07/bicycle-and-transition-town/>

## Bicycle and Women's Liberation



### Bicycling and Feminism

One hundred years ago, Alice Hawkins, a suffragette, cycled around Leicester (UK) promoting the women's rights movement, causing outrage by being one of the first ladies to wear pantaloons in the city. During the fight to win the vote the bicycle became not only a tool but also a symbol for the emancipation of women.

The American civil rights leader, Susan B Anthony, wrote in 1896:

“Let me tell you what I think of bicycling. I think [the bicycle] has done more to emancipate women than any one thing in the world. I rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a bike. It

gives her a feeling of self-reliance and independence the moment she takes her seat; and away she goes, the picture of untrammelled womanhood.”

Beatrice Grimshaw, who went on to a life of travel and adventure, describes a girlhood of Victorian propriety, in which she was: “the Revolting Daughter—as they called them then. I bought a bicycle, with difficulty. I rode it unchaperoned, miles and miles beyond the limits possible to the soberly trotting horses. The world opened before me. And as soon as my twenty- first birthday dawned, I went away from home, to see what the world might give to daughters who revolted.”

Women gained a significant amount of independence with the invention of the bicycle. This

device gave them the freedom to travel outside the home of their own power. Bicycle riding also necessitated more practical clothing for women and led to significant changes to female attire in society. One individual from the time period watching female cyclists remarked, “It is hard to believe, that they were the same women who went out in the afternoon for the formal carriage parade.”

## Women on Wheels: History

Although the bicycle was invented in 1817, it did not become popular because it had no pedals or chain. One had to drive it by kicking the ground. But around 1865, somebody in France dared to take both feet off the ground and onto cranks for pedalling the front wheel, proving that it was possible to balance on a bike and crank at the same time, and thus spawning a new boom. This was called the cranked two-wheeled velocipede. Now in this bicycle, designers increased bicycle speed by increasing the size of the front wheel to which the pedals were attached. The typical Ordinary, as these high-wheelers were known, had front wheels



as large as five feet in diameter so the machine would cover more ground with each pedal revolution. It required extraordinary athleticism just to mount an Ordinary, let alone ride one, and accidents were common. Steering was difficult and even a small obstacle, a rut in the road or a large stone, could send the Ordinary rider, mounted many feet above the ground, head first over the front handlebars. Indeed, learning how to “take a header” safely was an essential skill.

In the late 1870s, the first so-called “Safety” bicycles appeared. Safety bicycles had wheels of equal size and a chain drive that transferred power from the pedals to the rear wheel. The Safety quickly proved the superior design, both faster and more stable than the Ordinary, and remains the basis for bicycle design today.

The Safety, not the Ordinary was, ironically, a bicycle ordinary people, including women, could ride. The Ordinary quickly became obsolete and the Safety bicycle helped usher in the cycling craze of the 1890s. “The safety bicycle fills a much-needed want for women in any station of life,” said *The Bearings*, a cycling periodical, in October, 1894, “It knows no class distinction, is within reach of all, and rich and poor alike have the opportunity of enjoying this popular and healthful exercise.”

### The New Woman

As cycling’s popularity exploded, a new breed of woman was making her mark in the 1890s. “The New Woman” was the term used to describe the modern woman who broke with convention by working outside the home, or eschewed the traditional role of wife and mother, or became politically active in the woman’s suffrage movement or other social issues. The New Woman saw herself as the equal of men and the bicycle helped her assert herself as such.

The 1890s was the peak of the American bicycle craze and

consumers were buying bicycles in large numbers. In 1897 alone, more than two million bicycles were sold in the United States, about one for every 30 inhabitants.

Cycling in the 1890s was nothing less than “a general intoxication, an eruption of exuberance like a seismic tremor that shook the economic and social foundations of society and rattled the windows of its moral outlook.” Nowhere was this more evident than in the role of the bicycle in the changing lives of American women. Indeed, the women’s movement of the 1890s and the cycling craze became inextricably intertwined.

In 1895, 800,000 bikes were built in Britain alone. A lot of those bikes were purchased by or for women. And like the invention of the postbox (women being able to send letters without the prying eyes of their father looking over the content first? Madness!), the bicycle proved to be another leap in women not having to request permission to do normal, boring stuff.

Suddenly, a whole world full of handsome gentlemen opened up for women across the UK. “The bicycle played a critical role in both the emancipation of women, and the subsequent expansion of the national gene pool. Young women could now travel to neighbouring villages and meet a wider circle of young men.”

## Challenges

It’s therefore no wonder, with all this sexual autonomy on offer, that there was reaction against women riding bicycles. In 1891, a journalist at the American paper *Sunday Herald* wrote the following: “I think the most vicious thing I ever saw in all my life is a woman on a bicycle—and Washington is full of them. I had thought that cigarette smoking was the worst thing a woman could do, but I have changed my mind.”

So why did people have such a problem with women cycling?

Well, these ladies were cheeky enough to cycle outside, in public. Shock horror! And even if they didn't see themselves as symbols of emancipation, their very public display of their freedoms was perceived as a challenge to the ingrained and patriarchal social order.

Traditional aspects of society pushed against these advances. The 'New Woman', who wore less restrictive clothing and rode a bicycle, became a satirical figure that was ridiculed in the media, particularly in the US. These women were seen to be abandoning their husbands, children, and a more traditional way of life. The relaxed clothes they wore were obviously indicative of their status as prostitutes. Obviously!

## Bloomers and Bicycles

In 1893, the Women's Congress of the World's Columbian Exposition revived interest in the bloomer (Bloomers are divided women's garments for the lower body like pants) as an aid in improving women's health through physical exercise. Their session on women's dress opened

with Lucy Stone reminiscing about the bloomer movement of the 1850s; her extolling the bloomer as the "cleanest, neatest, most comfortable and most sensible garment" she had ever worn; and young women modelling different versions of the dress. The following year Annie "Londonderry" Cohen Kopchovsky donned the bloomer during her famous bicycle trip around the world, and an updated version of the bloomer soon became the standard "bicycle dress" for women during the bicycle craze of the 1890s.

## Fighting Back

But here's the thing: no one could stop them. Women weren't set to give up these new freedoms after finally ridding themselves of the dreaded chaperone.

Annie Londonderry was an American mother of three who decided to cycle around the world in fifteen months, setting off from Boston in 1894 carrying only a change of clothes and a pearl-handled revolver. Not only did she make full use of a woman's new found freedom of movement, she also did a lot to change public perception by becoming a bit of a celebrity.

Since then, there's been no stopping ladies from pedalling. In fact, the act of cycling is still rather revolutionary. Cycling attracts women of all different shapes, sizes, backgrounds, passions and interests. You can enjoy being on your bike in a myriad of ways.

Cycling encourages women to step outside the traditional gender roles that still exist in our 'enlightened' world: it's not quite the move from skirts to bloomers, but women who cycle are challenging the idea of femininity by partaking in a form of exercise that's male-dominated.

February 8, 2017

Bicycle Bicentenary Year 2017: Bicycle and Women's Liberation -  
T Vijayendra Frontier, Vol. 49, No. 35, Mar 5 - 11, 2017  
<https://journalworker.wordpress.com/2017/03/06/bicycle-bicentenary-year-2017-bicycle-and-womens-liberation/>

## And She Never Looked Back



Aloka was actually looking back. Sitting on the rock, watching the rough sea dashing on the rock below her in Pondicherry, she was wondering how she lived 25 long years in Calcutta after her marriage. At first everything was fine (surprise! surprise!!). She was young, enjoyed playing ‘house house’, enjoyed cooking and feeding her husband and his friends, who were all in love with her, with her singing Rabindra Sangeet and all that.

Then the daughter came and years just passed. Her husband got busy with his work, Aloka drifted in to animal care and dogs. She volunteered for Blue Cross where she met Parimal, a refugee from Bangladesh (her own grand-parents were from Jessore,

Bangladesh) and they ‘clicked’ and got together like a house on fire. Parimal knew everything about dogs – breeds, habits, training, rescue, diseases, everything! He could even do minor surgeries. And Aloka simply adored dogs and she could never tire of taking care of them.

Things slowly changed. Her husband, at first, made fun of her. Then he got jealous of Parimal. And finally he began to abuse her and was even violent when he got drunk. Yes, as Aloka drifted in to her dog love, Nihar drifted into alcohol. The daughter, Shreya, who was a teenager by now, also sided with father because she also felt neglected. Then she also accused her and suddenly Aloka found that all her friends began to avoid her. Even her parents told her that her first duty was towards her family. And Parimal? He had his dogs and he did not need anything or anybody else!

Guilt, guilt, guilt! Aloka did not know anything else but guilt in her last years in Calcutta which had become Kolkata now. She was friendless, lonely and miserable. Only the dogs gave her love and reassurance. Surrounded with all this guilt feeling, Aloka could not understand what wrong did she do? Then she met Viju.

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Viju had come to Kolkata on his annual visit and was giving an informal talk to a group of naturalists on sustainability and equality. He also focussed on the bicycle, as 2017 was the bicentenary year of the bicycle. He said, ‘from an ecological perspective the bicycle is one of the most sustainable and affordable mode of transport. Almost anyone can afford it. It is cheaper than a smart phone! It is the transport of the future particularly when oil resources are depleting.’ He also talked about the forthcoming book by his groups entitled, ‘Women and the Bicycle: Mobility, Freedom, Empowerment and Joy.’

After the talk Aloka shared a taxi ride with him. She told him a

little about herself and said that she did not know how to get out of her situation.

Viju: 'What do you want to do?'

Aloka: 'I want to see the world and finish my French course in Kolkata, the examination for which is due in April.'

Viju: 'Well, you can buy a bicycle, go to Chandannagar, stay with an old French lady, take care of her, do your French studies, appear in the examination and then go round the world on your bicycle. Ann Londonderry, a mother of three, did it in 1894!'

Aloka thought he was mad. It is so easy to talk. But she had to admit that his suggestion about moving to Chandannagar was reasonable. Chandannagar, like Pondicherry near Tamilnadu, is a former French colony and is located only 35 kilometres north of Kolkata. It is a small town with a population of just 166,867 (2014) and it would be easy to locate a French speaking Old lady if she did exist!

Next day she told Parimal about the talk.

Parimal, said, 'Well you can buy the cycle to start with'.

Aloka: 'But I don't know how to ride! And I am fifty year old!'

Parimal: (in an exasperated tone) 'Oh that! You can learn it in a day! And the age of fifty is fine (laughing) - free from pimples, post menopause freedom and frolicsome! Go to it!'

These men, Aloka, thought, they talk so easily. But they went and bought the 'Lady Bird' and kept it at Blue Cross. A new thing got added in Aloka's life. Aloka would be up early morning (she had left her husband and was living with her parents), go to the school to teach the primary classes, come home, have a lunch and after a brief rest, rush to Blue Cross and took her bicycle lessons. Yes she did learn it in a day and was actually enjoying the wind on her face and the utter freedom she felt. Yes, she would ride to Chandannagar soon.

At the end of the month, she collected her salary, bought a

track suit, a helmet, a pair of good shoes and was ready for the road. She just took one extra pair of night clothes, her toilet bag, a tube of ‘Odomos’, a water bottle and she was off to Chandannagar.

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She found Mademoiselle Simone, a spinster, daughter of a theosophist, in love with India and Bengali food and lived by giving French lessons. How the hell did Viju know? She readily agreed to have Aloka as a cook in lieu of lodge and board. She chatted and made Aloka talk in French, correcting her pronunciation and teaching new words all the time. It was a dream ‘total immersion’ programme of foreign language learning. Of course Aloka passed her examination with flying colours.

Aloka was ready for a cycle trip to Pondicherry. Chandannagar is a small town and she cycled everywhere. She also met some cyclists, was an informal tour guide to some visiting French students who loved the idea of cycling around town with a lady who knew the town and the French language. She picked up a lot of cycling folklore and some real knowledge about cycle – brands, prices, how to choose and so on. She was ready to replace her beloved ‘Lady Bird’ with the next generation of cycle.

Aloka was in touch with Viju on email. Viju was pleasantly surprised that she actually followed his advice. So few people did! Viju sent her drafts of the book, ‘Women and the Bicycle: Mobility, Freedom, Empowerment and Joy.’ The chapter ‘Bicycle and Woman’s Liberation’ and chapters on experiences of Indian women on bicycle were very inspiring.

She called up Parimal and asked him to buy a ‘Montra’ bicycle for her. On the next Sunday he came cycling the new ‘Montra’ and took the ‘Lady Bird’ back to Kolkata. Parimal also had brought a lot of road gear. It contained a double saddle bag, which



contained a good water bottle, a tiny sleeping bag and a small mosquito net. He would not take any money from her and said, 'I have been a refugee and know how it feels to leave one's home. Any little help is always welcome in such situations.' Aloka cried and cried because she knew that this was the final 'good bye' to Calcutta, to Kolkata and to her past.

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*You shall leave everything you love most:  
This is the arrow that the bow of exile shoots first.  
You are to know the bitter taste of other's bread,  
How salty it is,  
And know how hard a path it is for one  
who goes Ascending and descending others' stairs...*

*Paradiso XVII (55-60)*

Durante degli Alighieri or simply Dante (1265-1321)

Aloka cycled back towards Calcutta up to Bali and stopped for a cup of tea and her small packet of 4 Parle G biscuits. She called them the Indian National Biscuit and carried dozens of packets with her to feed any and every dog that she met. She knew that on the road this was the safest food and dogs were her most reliable friends!

Her heart was heavy and eyes misty when she turned right towards Dankuni to reach the Bombay road. This was the final goodbye to Calcutta. She stopped again at Bagnan on the banks of Rupanarayan which would take her away from the Gangetic plains and bring her to Midnapur district, another break from the past.

But by now Calcutta was dimming and new experiences were occupying her mind and her heart. At the tea shop dogs came barking because of her strange gear and her helmet. The moment

she removed the helmet and started talking to the dogs they were all wagging their tails. Then out came the Indian National Biscuits and they were all happy and sitting down near her. Children stood gaping and then she started talking to them! The adults were also gaping but soon gave it up. The tea shop refused to take money for the tea. It was getting dark and the shop owner's wife asked her to stay overnight, which she gratefully accepted. After food she fell off to sleep immediately. Strange dreams came but she got up early morning, well rested and ready to start. And as she cycled away, women came out of their houses to gaze at this woman who was cycling alone on the highway.

This set up a pattern of her travels. She aimed at 50 kilometres a day with small breaks at 10 kilometres. At some places she even met local bicycle clubs who asked her to give talks. Viju had given her lot of material and so she talked about the bicentenary of the bicycle, the history of the cycle, women and bicycle, government programmes of free bicycles to high school children, China and India and so on. She had no dearth of topics and for the audience everything was new. With time she improved on her skills of giving talks. By the time she reached Bhubaneshwar, an important stop for cyclists, she was a seasoned cyclist.

In Bhubaneshwar she met Ajay Nanda of '22 Bikes'. 22 Bikes is an unusual cycle organisation. It takes care of all the necessities of cyclists under one roof, such as selling bicycles of all brands, accessories, repairing, servicing, bicycle-rentals, training sessions and the organising of regular bicycle tours and events. Ajay believes that forming a community and bringing together all cycle enthusiasts in the city through interesting activities and events will help in driving the concept of cycling into public life. 22 Bikes is more than just a place for bicycles; it promotes, encourages and aims to educate people on the benefits of being a cyclist. It also boasts of a library, which has around 50 percent of its books

dedicated to bicycles. Aloka stayed for a week in Bhubaneswar, resting and learning a lot more about cycling and cycle clubs.

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After Bhubaneswar she was on the cycle club map and cycle clubs on the way were expecting her, felicitating her and checking her cycle for wear and tear and repairs. By the time she reached Pondicherry, there was a posse of cyclists few kilometres outside the town who accompanied her to the reception that was waiting for her. It was a big meeting in the grounds and looked like a political meeting. In fact it was more like a carnival. Stalls were set up for idly, fruits, tea, coffee, coconuts, and handicrafts and so on. Only all the business was done on cycles. People had come on their cycles and there was a nice cycle stand for parking. There was a photo exhibition about cycles and livelihood, about benefits of cycling and of course about the Pondicherry Cycle Club.

Aloka gave a short talk. She said: 'I am a Bengali and in love with French language, literature and people. That is, I am a Francophile and Chandannagar and Pondicherry are Mecca and Medina for me. I am coming from Chandannagar and I hope to make Pondicherry my home.'

This she repeated in Bengali and in French amid loud cheers. Then she gave a short description of her journey. She said, 'I first learned cycling only 3 months ago at the age of 50!' There was a first a gasp and then loud cheering from the audience. Continuing, she said, 'I thank Viju for the idea, Parimal for helping me buy my first cycle and finally I thank my cycle Lady Bird and then the present Montra. The cycle has become, after the dogs, a real friend of all seasons.'

The secretary of Pondicherry Cycling Club welcomed her and gave her Honorary Life Membership of the Club. An old gentleman asked permission to speak. He said that 'My name is

Ashutosh Bandopadhyay and I am a third generation citizen of Pondicherry. Like Aloka I am also a Francophile, more so since I am married to a French woman.' He called his wife Claudine on the stage and continuing, he said, 'our children are all abroad and are not going to come back. I offer our home and Aloka can stay in our daughter's room as long as she wishes with complete freedom!' His wife Claudine added in French, 'We will treat her as our own daughter. We have a big French library of books, music and videos and Aloka can use all of it and move further in her French studies.' There were loud cheers for minutes.

Tears were flowing down Aloka's cheeks. Everyone wanted her to speak again. The secretary offered her a huge handkerchief and Aloka wiped her face and blew her nose right into the mike! There was laughter in the audience and Aloka also smiled sheepishly. Claudine offered her moisturised paper napkins. Still when Aloka rose to speak her feet were unsteady and her voice was heavy. She finally managed to say, 'When I left Calcutta I was homeless, lonely, friendless and miserable. I had only one friend left in Calcutta – a poor Bangladeshi refugee who was a dog lover. And in the last three months I got so much love and friendship that I am overwhelmed. But what happened today here is so much beyond my wildest dreams that it has left me speechless. I will be able to thank all of Pondicherry in coming years by my deeds and not by words today.' Then she broke down crying and there was loud cheers and clapping for a long time.

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Aloka settled down in Pondicherry. She helped at home, cooking Bengali dishes and learning French cooking. She had learned some in Chandannagar also. Then she was active with Pondicherry cycle club, particularly in getting new women members and its programme of renting cycles to the tourists. She also prepared

for her next level French examination. But Ann Londonderry's solo trip round the world in 15 months in 1894 kept on ringing in her head. She was aware that the times had changed and that for an Indian woman to get all the visas was a tough proposition. So she decided to do it step by step.

First she decided to get all her documents under control. She got her certificates, Passport, Voter Identity Card, Adhaar Card and so on. Her hosts in Pondicherry and her friends in the cycling club helped her in a big way. They knew everyone in the bureaucracy. Then she would plan to go France and Europe. First she would do her own Tour de France and then take the next trip of doing Europe. She also applied for a fellowship for further study in French in France.

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Dear Reader, Aloka is still in Pondicherry, dreaming and planning. Wish her all the luck!

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Chamrabad, Chandankiyari, Jharkhand.  
February 21, 2017

## Dr. Sadiq's Bicycle Health Check up Camp



It was April 30. The examinations were over and summer vacations were starting the next day. But that was not the main excitement. Yajat was going to class 6 and the school permitted to bring cycle to school from class 6 onwards. Yajat has been after his mom to get a new cycle for him and mom promised him that he will get it once the summer vacation begins.

Yajat was tired of borrowing his elder brother Harsh's cycle and being refused half the time. Also he was tired of the quarrels that ensued when he stole it when Harsh was not around. Life is tough for an eleven year old. But now happy days are here. Yippee!

The whole family trooped to the cycle shop on M. G. Road.

They chose a BSA Hercules cycle. Then there was the issue of accessories. Yajat insisted on an old fashioned stand and an extra strong and big carrier on the back, a lamp and of course a bell! He had a secret ambition of earning some extra money by delivering newspapers in the morning.

Yajat wanted to ride home on his new cycle but his mom put her foot down and they packed the cycle on an auto rickshaw and Yajat and his mom sat behind it holding it firmly. His brother and uncle Mohit came in another rickshaw.

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In the Apartment complex there were several children. In Yajat's own class there was Malini on the floor below and Rohit on his floor. So they often got together and chatted about school and friends and a thousand other things. Yajat's cycle of course was a hit and next morning all of them came down to see the inauguration ride. Yajat had learned to ride using his brother's cycle. Rohit and Malini did not know. So they were very envious watching him ride round the block. Yajat was ready to run any errand and he plagued his mom asking if she needed eggs or bread or butter. Soon he learned about every shop in the area and learned what one can buy and where.

He also discovered Sadiq's Cycle Hospital in which Dr. Sadiq, in all his 15 year old confidence, pimples and an infectious smile, presided. Yajat loved to watch him deftly looking at brake shoes, adjusting them, hammering the chain cover in place so that it does not clatter. He loved the special ring spanner that was used to tighten the spokes. But best of all was to watch the puncture repair in which the tube was inserted in a tub of water and the air bubbles would spot the puncture hole. Over a few days Yajat was allowed to use the pump for filling air, holding the tube under water and look for the puncture. In return he got free air, cleaned

his bicycle and oiled it. Yajat's mom came to know about it and asked Yajat always to carry his tiffin box and carry some biscuits or sweets or chakli - whatever was available. Sadiq and Yajat became good friends.

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It was the school opening day. The 'assembly' started at 9 but Yajat was ready by 8 in the morning and was hurrying his mom. The school was only 10 minutes away on his bicycle but he created so much turmoil that he left at 8:30 and reached school 20 minutes before!

Rohit was dropped by his mother on her scooter. Rohit could not hurry her. She had so much to do. Finally they could start only at 8:55 and they got stuck at the traffic lights and by the time they reached the school the assembly was already on and Rohit had to stand near the front facing all the children for coming late.

Something similar happened to Malini whose father dropped her in his car. He was very punctual but he got an important call at 8:45. He took the call; gestured Malini to go down, he himself followed slowly listening to the call, opened the car, opened the other door, Malini got in and still the call was going on. Finally her father said to the other party that he will call back. It was 9:05 by now and what with taking the car out, traffic jams, they reached the school only by 9:20 and children had already gone to the class. Malini started crying. Her father took her to her class, apologised to the teacher and Malini had to go to the back bench!

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School started in earnest with home work, tests and fights among children. One day the teacher asked them to bring a drawing sheet to the class. In the evening Yajat reached home, changed, had his evening tiffin and took out 10 rupees from his drawer. His mother



always kept 5 ten rupee notes in his drawer for emergencies. He took out his cycle and bought his drawing sheet.

In both Malini's and Rohit's home the parents reached home fairly late. Both the children waited for them and when it was 8 in the evening they came to Yajat's house and told him how they can't get the drawing sheet for tomorrow. Yajat asked them to get 10 rupees to the class and he will go out in the ten minute break and get them the sheets.

Next day Yajat took care that his cycle was parked right in the front. In the ten minute break he took the cycle out and raced out of the gate before the gate keeper saw him. Within minutes he came back with the two sheets. He also had saved 4 rupees in the bargain.

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One evening Soujanya came to Yajat's house. She told Yajat's mother that she was going to do a cycle maintenance workshop in Yajat's school on the World Environment Day on June 5. They will also combine it with the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of the cycle on June 12. She was looking for a cycle mechanic near the school. Yajat immediately told her about Dr. Sadiq. They designed the workshop calling it Dr. Sadiq's Bicycle Health Check up Camp. Yajat, Rohit and Malini were selected as assistants to Dr. Sadiq. They trooped to Sadiq's shop, sorry Hospital, and talked with him. Soujanya said that he will be paid 500 rupees for the day and the assistants will be paid 200 rupees each. Everyone was happy with the prospect of earning. They will check a maximum of 20 cycles and each check up will cost rupees 20. The check up will involve cleaning and oiling and an assessment. If further repairs are needed, they would be done at the Hospital.

The programme went off very well. It began with Soujanya first telling them about the history of the bicycle and its birth on

June 12, 1817. She had beautiful slides. She also explained the beauties of the bicycle design and its benefits in terms of fun, health and its pollution free nature. Then she explained the meaning of maintenance, preventive maintenance, break down and repairs. She said it was a joy to ride a well maintained bicycle and very frustrating to ride a cycle which went rattling. Then she introduced the mechanics and his assistants. There was loud cheer when the children recognised the assistances in blue overalls.

Then each child who had registered for check up brought his cycle one by one. The child and Rohit and Malini checked it up, cleaned it, oiled it and sent it to Yajat. Yajat after examining the brakes and running the cycle either said it was alright or sent it to Sadiq who further examined it. Quite often it was either the brake or chain cover. Sometimes a loose chain was also taken care of. In a few cases Sadiq asked them to bring it to his shop. Yajat gave them an estimate of expenses involved on a piece of paper.

The Principal of the school was very happy with the programme and said that there would be one period of cycle repair each day and different classes will attend it on different days. Sadiq was appointed a teacher for the class and was promised 100 rupees for a class of 40 minutes.

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After the camp, both Rohit and Malini wanted a bicycle. They pestered their parents. Since they were in the same building, on a Sunday the parents met and decided that they will have to buy the bicycles. It so happened that both Rohit and Malini had their birthdays in the same week. So it was agreed that they will have a joint party and that the children will get new bicycles. Rohit chose the same cycle as Yajat's except that he chose a maroon colour instead of Yajat's blue. Malini got a pink Lady Bird bicycle. In the party a tall, dark and handsome young man walked in a light blue

shirt and denims. Only when he grinned they realised it was Sadiq! Malini ran to him and gave a warm hug. Sadiq was abashed. There were loud cheers when he brought out his presents. They were bicycle decorations – colour full brushes for the hubs. He quickly fitted them on the new bicycle and they really looked pretty. Uncle Mohit who ran the ‘Ecologise Bookshop’, brought copies of, ‘You and your bicycle: a guide to maintenance’ by Lavanya and Shamala and gifted a copy to every child. It was a beautiful book full of photographs. Viju Uncle also came as a special guest and he urged the parents also to buy bicycles and that all the three families can have a joint cycle picnic. Every one cheered at the idea.

February 22, 2017  
Chamrabad, Chandankiyari, Jharkhand

## Priyanka Buys a Bicycle



Priyanka Jain is a nutritionist and a Marwari. This is important to know to follow this story.

Priyanka read Viju's World Bicycle Day Resolution:

*World Bicycle Day*

*June 3, 2022*

*Resolution: To Refurbish At Least One Bicycle*

“This is my personal resolution. I am making it public so that if anyone else gets attracted to the idea, s/he can follow it up.

1. Make friends with the local/neighbourhood bicycle mechanic.
2. Find rates for overhauling and repainting. Depending on the

size of the city the rates may vary between Rs. 300 to Rs. 500 each for overhauling and repainting.

3. Locate an old bicycle or a poor person whom you know and whose bicycle needs overhauling/refurbishing.
4. Get it done.
5. The whole project may cost you as little as Rs. 1000 or up to Rs. 2000. Recently I paid Rs. 1300 in a village in Odisha.'

Priyanka said to Viju: 'Help me get a second-hand bicycle.'

Viju: 'I think Suresh at Manchi Pustakam has a Ladies bicycle which is not in use.'

So, they went to Manchi Pustakam to ask Suresh.

Suresh said, 'Yes, it is lying downstairs. It is in working condition but you may want to put in air and get it oiled and cleaned.'

Priyanka: 'How much will it cost?'

Suresh: 'It is free.'

Priyanka: 'Thank you.' (Thoughtfully) 'Do you have another free bicycle?'

Suresh looked a bit amazed and Viju started to laugh.

Suresh: 'Actually yes. There is Bhagya's old bicycle at home. It will need overhauling. If you want it, I will send it across to your address.'

Priyanka: 'How much will it cost to send?'

Suresh: 'Nothing. It is on the house.'

Priyanka: 'But why? You will be paying actual cash!'

Suresh: 'I am paying fees to you for learning. I learnt an important lesson in trade enquiry from you: 'Always look for extra opportunities that may be there.'

Viju again laughs.

Priyanka: (turning to Viju) 'and why are you laughing?'

Viju: 'Sorry. I just remembered the old Marwari joke. You know it of course, but I will repeat it for Suresh's benefit. It goes like this: A Marwari goes to a shop in Kolkata and asks the price of a certain

item. The Bengali shopkeeper quotes, let us say Rs.10. The Marwari naturally asks if the shopkeeper will sell it for Rs. 5. At this, the shopkeeper gets irritated and offers it for free! The Marwari coolly asks if he will give two items for free!‘ But of course, Priyanka must have some logic for asking for the second bicycle.’

Priyanka: ‘Yes, it is like this! If I get one bicycle, I spend about Rs.1000 on its maintenance and get a bicycle in working condition. So, it is not free. However, if I get two, I spend Rs.2000 and get two bicycles in working condition. I can sell one of the bicycles for Rs.2000 and get one bicycle for free. Even if I donate it to a poor person, I am donating Rs. 2000 and still getting a bicycle free for myself!’

Suresh: ‘I see.’

Priyanka: ‘By the way, the other day Viju brought a nice diary and a few pads from you for us. ‘Thanks.’ Then mischievously she added, ‘I asked him if there was only one diary?’

Suresh: ‘As the Marwaris say, ‘the whole shop is yours!’ He then added, ‘but I have only one shop!’

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Priyanka had heard from Viju about Dr. Sadiq’s Cycle Hospital. She went to him to discuss about restoring the cycles. He readily agreed. He said he will charge reasonable rates as it will enhance his business. Since the bicycles would have to be repainted, each restored bicycle would cost anything between Rs. 1000 and 1500, depending upon what old parts are replaced with new ones. Then, he said a bit diffidently that he would like to purchase a paint sprayer and that it would cost around Rs. 2000 and that he wants to raise a loan for it. Priyanka offered a no-interest loan with an EMI of Rs. 200 so that the loan gets paid within a year. She then took both the bicycles to his shop.

Now the problem was to find a buyer who would buy the cycles and donate them to the needy. Viju told her about Dhiraj Kaveri.

## The Bicycle Bandhu Programme of Hyderabad

This is a programme to donate bicycles to needy persons in the neighbourhood. The programme was initiated in 2016 in a gated community by Dhiraj Kaveri. He is a physiotherapist, a cyclist and a health promoter. He is a very active bicycle promoter and has slogans like:

#Cycling Connects

#Celebrate Cycling

#Pedal More Pollute Less

#Occupy All Streets

The Bicycle Bandhu Programme also has catchy slogans like:

#Connect Collaborate Contribute

Promoting Active Transport in #Urban Settings...

With No Public Transport due to Covid19 Lock Down: The Humble Bicycle has been 'A Safer & Cheaper Mode of Transport'.

The following 'Question and Answer' with Dhiraj will enable like-minded people elsewhere to initiate similar programmes.

Question: 'Your Bicycle Bandhu programme is great. How many cycles have you gifted so far and in how many months?'

I notice that you gift Roadster models to workers and 'fancy' models to children. What is your assessment of these fancy models? My gut feeling is, and I may be wrong, that they belong to the 'use and throw' culture that is, their life may be only a few years whereas the roadster can last decades.'

Dhiraj: 'So far, we have distributed 51 bicycles since 2018, though the program started in 2016.'

The bicycles are given under various options like donation, no-Interest EMI, second-hand and similar.

Your observation about the type of bicycle given is right. Adults prefer the Roadster as it is cheaper, stronger, and durable. The younger students prefer the Ranger models that definitely are a bit

costlier, less strong with lesser durability as compared to a Roadster.

If they are taking up cycling to their workplace, it does not matter which type of bicycle they are using. Plus, we also have a budget cut-off range where we don't gift bicycles worth Rs.7000 or more.'

### Concluding Remark

It is a humble unpretentious local programme. It is something many of us in the cycle movement can do and should do. A similar programme is done by Karuna Jeeva Kalyan Trust in Davangere in Karnataka. So far they have donated 205 bicycle to needy people.

So, Viju arranged a meeting between Priyanka, Dhiraj and Sadiq. Each had a clear responsibility - Priyanka to get old bicycles, Sadiq to restore them and Dhiraj to distribute them. Both Priyanka and Dhiraj would raise money. Priyanka called her outfit 'Kayakalp' (meaning rejuvenation), since she was a health professional and this was a common term in Indian health practice.

The person who is gifted the bicycle, must go to Sadiq's shop with a letter from Dhiraj or Priyanka and pick up the cycle. After that, Sadiq and the bicycle recipient would individually confirm the bicycle transaction and Rs. 2000 would be transferred to Sadiq's account immediately by phone. Sadiq would pay Rs.500 to Priyanka for every old bicycle he gets. The Bicycle Bandhu Programme raises a minimum of Rs. 3000 per gift. This way, everybody's overhead costs are covered.

Priyanka worked out a small notice about Kayakalp which she printed and kept copies in her office.

**KAYAKALP** This is a programme to restore old bicycles and gift them to needy members of the working class. Kindly donate your old bicycle (Ladies or Gents) if you are not using it. Our cost of restoring is about Rs.2000. You can donate



whatever amount you can afford to this cause. It is an informal small programme, so please do not expect invoice and tax deductions. Please send the money to Priyanka@(phone number).

The programme has been working well. Sadiq has been restoring two bicycles per week. If his stock increases more than two, he is free to sell them as second-hand bicycles to his own customers. He sells them for Rs. 2500.

Sadiq also plans to set up his own assembly unit for new bicycles. He plans to call it 'Saathi' and sell the bicycles for Rs. 4000.

June 6, 2022

# Cyclewali

The No. 1 Ladies' Bicycle Club of Kabir Nagar



Somewhere in North Karnataka, there is a taluk town called Bilgram. The town grew around an army cantonment during British times, more than a hundred years ago, so it has tree-lined streets, and bungalows with gardens that have old trees. There is an 'Institute' area where there was once a club and a theatre which showed foreign movies and even had a bar. Near it, there is a market where you can buy anything. There are many old churches, mosques and temples. The people here speak Kannada, Marathi, Dakhni, Konkani and English.

The town has an environmental group called Prakruti. Nora Carvalho is the secretary, and the heart and soul of the group.

Apart from her, there is a naturalist, an animal lover, a photographer, a doctor, a trade unionist and a journalist in the group.

Prakruti does several things. They run environment education programmes and eco clubs in schools. In the town, they have an anti-plastic bag campaign and a rooftop rain water harvesting programme too.

The Prakruti group found it very difficult to implement any project with the affluent people of the town. So they chose Kabir Nagar, the power loom weavers' colony where they had been demanding latrines from the municipality. They contacted the municipality and got permission to build latrines in the city garden next to the colony. Here, they successfully built composting toilets in a public garden, after some initial problems. They found that children were the most progressive people and came forward for any project. So they built Makkal Mane (Children's Home) in the garden, and it became the centre of all their activities. When the composted product became too much, they converted it into a humanure gas project, and to use the excess gas they ran a community kitchen and so on. All this has been documented elsewhere, (VIJUTOPIAS/ *Transition in a Small Town/ Humanure at Bilgram: How to Get Started in Local Action* /Kashtachi Bhakar: *Community Kitchen at Kabir Nagar*). Here, we tell you the story of a bicycle project started by the Prakruti group.

June 3, 2020

Ever since the coronavirus pandemic started, the activities at Makkal Mane (Children's Home) had slowed down. People had to wear masks and did not step out or meet others often. The humanure project was of course going on and the gas was being produced. But the Kashtachi Bhakar (Community Kitchen) project acquired a different shape.

Many workers went to their villages since the factories were closed. But the community kitchen was useful for the poor as they got food at an affordable price. Many of the poor were fed free of charge. The weekly Sunday meeting of the group also became a bit irregular as some members could not come.

June 3 was not a Sunday. It was a Wednesday. But all of them – Nora, Raju and Eva (Prakruti Members) and some of their friends came on bicycles. Also, their bicycles were shining clean and decorated with colourful guards and feathers on the handles and wheels. Seetha (daughter of a local milkman, abandoned by her husband because she did not produce a baby) and Maruti (union worker from the power loom factory union), who were already there, were surprised.

Nora explained that June 3 had been declared World Bicycle Day by the United Nations General Assembly in April 2018. They said, ‘Cycling is an affordable and equitable mode of transportation, leading to a longer and healthier life. Cycling has not only proven to improve physical health, but also has a positive impact on mental health and subjective well-being.’ Plus, 2017 was the bicentenary year of the bicycle. ‘So,’ Nora said, ‘Today, we are celebrating it’.

Seetha came near Eva’s ladies’ cycle to touch it. Eva asked, ‘Do you want to ride it?’

Seetha said, ‘Yes, but I don’t know how to’. So Eva said, ‘Let us celebrate this day by teaching Seetha how to ride it!’

So, they spent one hour teaching Seetha her first lesson in cycling. Seetha was quite thrilled. Then Eva said, ‘I will leave my cycle behind in Maruti’s care, and he can help her to learn. We will come on Sunday.’

For a change, they had brought packed lunches of fish curry and rice from Jhunka Bhakar. So they all had a good picnic lunch.

## Ladies Cycle Club

On Sunday, everyone gathered again. Seetha had learned cycling well enough to take rounds inside the park and a little bit outside, but lacked the confidence to venture further. But the news had spread, and many girls in Kabir Nagar wanted to learn how to ride a cycle. So, the Prakruti group had a meeting.

Nora said, ‘The cycle is an important means of women’s liberation. This year, the United Nations General Assembly had written, that in many countries, owning a bicycle has an even more significant impact for families, lifting them out of poverty, while providing them with improved access to quality education, jobs, markets, and community activities when public transportation is unavailable. So, we must encourage cycling among girls when they themselves want it.’

Eva said, ‘Let us start a Ladies Cycle Club’.

‘Since this is the first Ladies’ Cycle Club in Bilgram, we will call it the ‘No.1, Ladies’ Cycle Club!’ agreed Nora.

But none of the girls had the money to buy a cycle. Nora had a friend who was a retired banker. Nora talked to her and asked if bank would donate six bicycles to the club. The lady contacted her old bank as well as a local dealer of a reputed cycle company, and worked out a comprehensive scheme of bank loans for the ladies’ cycles. She also got a good price for a standard ladies’ roadster bicycle with double stand and a basket in front. Then, she contacted the ‘Inner Wheel’, the ladies’ section of the Rotary Club and got a donation for six cycles.

So, the cycles came. They decorated and painted ‘LCC’ on each of them, along with the numbers one to six in red paint on the back mudguard. It was decided that the cycles would be given on rent only to those girls who had learned how to ride the cycle on the old cycle first. The rent was fixed at one rupee per hour.

## The No. 1. Ladies Cycle Clinic

Then, there was the question of maintaining the cycles. Kabir Nagar had only one old cycle repair shop. The owner, Rahim Chacha, was very old and kept a pump readily available. In fact, he was very poor and Seetha often carried food for him. Fatima and Deepthi were close friends and very active in Makkal Mane right from the beginning. Fatima was Rahim Chacha's grandniece.

Deepthi's father was an auto driver. He kept his auto spotlessly clean and Deepthi often helped him do it. Both Fatima and Deepthi readily came forward to look after the bicycles. Nora had brought a copy of a small book for children on bicycle maintenance called 'You and Your Bicycle'. Deepthi could read English, so she used the book quite a bit.

After a few days, Seetha brought Rahim Chacha to Makkal Mane to show him the cycles. He offered to come every morning to be around and help. Everyone was happy. He was given tea and lunch every day. After lunch, he slept a little in the hall and later had tea. Deepthi or Fatima would take him pillion on their cycles and drop him home.

Over the next few weeks, Rahim Chacha taught the girls how to do basic cycle repair. Then one day, he decided to overhaul Eva's old cycle. He told the girls to go to town and buy grease, spokes and a range of ball bearings. He brought out his old tin box of tools and for the next two days the girls eagerly learned to overhaul a cycle under his supervision.

The next Sunday, the group heard about it. Eva suggested that they start a ladies cycle repair shop and call it 'The No.1 Ladies Cycle Clinic'! Everyone clapped. 'I'll collect old ladies cycles as gifts and we can overhaul and paint them and sell them to the girls in Kabir Nagar', Eva suggested. Nora said she that she would get a bank loan for the initial investment.

## Sarala Bicycles

The cycle clinic was getting a lot of school bicycles to repair. They found that they were all from the ‘free cycle for school girls’ programme offered by the government. So they asked why the cycles needed repairs. The girls and their parents replied that the quality was poor.

‘Even when new, we have to buy a few ancillaries and after that almost every month we have to spend as much as Rs. 100 for repairs! By the time the children reached class 10 it was becoming scrap,’ one parent said.

So, they decided to buy the scrapped bicycles from the owners. They paid Rs. 300/- per bicycle for them. Then, they refurbished them and gave them a fresh black coat of black paint. They had to spend about Rs. 1000/- per bicycle but the cycles looked good as new! Then, someone suggested giving these cycles a name. Several names came up – Kayakalp, Bilgram ladies bicycle etc. Then, Eva said it should be simple and asked to suggest a girl’s name. Immediately Deepthi translated ‘simple’ to Sarala! So SARALA BICYCLE was born. They sold the refurbished bicycles for Rs. 2000/- with a guarantee of free repair for one year. They got sold almost immediately.

They were ‘producing’ one SARALA Bicycle a week. They had to buy quite a few new parts: chain cover, carrier, basket, and sometimes even a whole handle. So the idea came about to buy the spare parts in small bulks from a wholesale dealer. Rahim Chacha said that they should go to the Hubli auto and cycle dealer market. But he was too old and many of his contacts had died. Deepthi asked her father. He said he had some cousins in Hubli who knew the market well. He offered to come with them.

So the following week, Deepthi’s father, Deepthi, Fatima and Seetha took the morning train to Hubli. They all had a sense that they were on a picnic. At Hubli, Deepthi’s father’s cousin, Narayan

uncle, took out his auto and they all squeezed in it to go to the 'Auto Nagar' Market. They were shocked to see the size of the cycle market, the variety and low prices. They wanted to buy everything. After going through a whole round of the market, they went to a small hotel and had something to eat while they discussed what to and how much to buy. Deepthi took out her notebook and her ink pen. After much discussion and with the help of Narayan uncle, Deepthi finally made a list of what to buy and how much. They had brought Rs. 10, 000/- with them, so they spent a little above Rs. 9000/-. They also collected many catalogues and price lists for future reference.

### The Cycle Doctor Programme

The cycle clinic found that work was increasing and there were only a few workers – mainly Deepthi and Fatima. Seetha had other responsibilities and did not have the time. So they discussed the issue during the Sunday meeting.

Nora said, 'Viju had sent us the book on bicycle maintenance. Let us ask him if he can persuade the authors to do a training programme for us.'

Viju contacted Lavanya and Shamala and they agreed to come for a week provided there were about 7 trainees. They said they would bring 10 xerox copies of the Kannada translation of their book also and bring one set of essential tools. They would have to be paid a total of Rs. 7000/- for the course. The details were: the project would cost Rs. 5000/- + travel money for both of them, that is, a total of Rs. 7000/-. They suggested a fee of Rs. 1000/- per participant so that it will cover the basic costs.

### The Trainees

Deepthi and Fatima were of course the obvious candidates. Then there was Karuna, another abandoned young woman of 22 years



from Kabir Nagar, who had been working as an apprentice at the cycle clinic. The local Girls Degree College had a librarian, Vasudha, who was quite close to Prakruti and this training programme was the best way to help some of the people associated with the college.

You see, the college had a watchman who died of coronavirus, and although the college gave his wife a job, the earning was not enough. The couple had two daughters, 20 and 18 years respectively, named Kamala and Vimala. Both had done high school. The college had a bicycle stand and wanted to create a bicycle repair shop next to the stand, both of which the two girls could run. The students would pay Rs. 20/-per month as rent and there were at least 100 bicycles. So, the project would partly pay for itself. The maintenance and repair of bicycles will bring some more money. The rest, the college would pay. Vasudha recognised this training workshop as the perfect way for Kamala and Vimala to train themselves for their job.

In the town near Nora's house, there was an old bicycle shop called Pinto's Bicycle Shop. It sold and repaired bicycles. Like everyone in the street, he was Nora's friend. His niece, Mary Fernandez, all of 22 years and a school dropout, tinkered in the shop. Nora asked Pinto if Mary would take the course. He readily agreed, as Mary was a bit wild and would listen to no one.

Finally, there was Pranali Chitke from Maharashtra. She had solo toured on a bicycle in every district of Maharashtra and wanted to dedicate herself full-time to bicycle-related work. She also got the bicycle maintenance book translated into Marathi.

## The Training Programme

There was much excitement at Makkal Mane. Everyone was in a festive mood and they all surrounded the trainers – Lavanya and Shamala. The programme began with a song from the girls in

Kannada and in Marathi. Nora welcomed everybody on behalf of Prakruti and they got down to the training programme straight away. They mainly followed the book, 'You and Your Bicycle' and directly worked on the bicycles. On the way, they clarified some concepts and answered some doubts. After the first session, they had tea and discussed the session – mainly the importance of daily and periodic maintenance and preventative maintenance. After lunch, the visitors were tired because they had come overnight on the train. The trainees mixed with each other and got to know each other well.

They finished the basic book in two days and then got down to overhauling bicycles. They did it slowly because it was new and difficult. Apart from how to put back the parts that you remove when opening the bicycle, they taught the trainees how to examine and clean each component, and how to replace worn out ball bearings and grease them. Then, they taught them the importance of wheel alignment and 'truing'. All this they did in the first half for three days. They also learnt how to organise and maintain the tools required. They put together puncture kits that they could carry and basic tools to fix minor repairs while on the road.

During the second half of the three days, they did field visits. First, they toured Kabir Nagar on cycles. The next day, they visited the college and discussed where the stand would come and how the shop would work. Finally, Pinto invited them for high tea to his shop and proudly told them about the history of his shop.

## Plans

On the last day of the programme, each group presented their future plan. It was a Sunday and everyone – Nora, Eva, Raju, Maruti and Seetha of the Prakruti and Makkal Mane Group – came, along with the trainees: Deepthi, Fatima and Karuna. Mary Fernandez brought her uncle Pinto. Vasudha, the librarian of the

college came with her trainees – Kamala, Vimala and Pranali Chikte.

First, the Makkal Mane group presented their plan - SAPNA BICYCLES – OUR OWN BRAND. Maruti, the trade union person said that Union has recently acquired an old power loom factory premises. The owner was old and not greedy. As a parting settlement, he gave every worker a bonus of one month's present wages multiplied by the number of years they had worked. The Union got the building and the old machinery. The union planned to sell the old machinery and acquire tools and machinery required for the cycle project. The workers would also get their bicycles maintained and repaired by the shop. Everyone cheered! The girls said that they would continue their present programme – SARALA Cycles – of refurbishing old cycles and would try their hand at fabricating their own dream cycle – SAPNA Cycles! Pinto said that he would help with the project and get parts from the Hubli market. 'I will also sell the SAPNA cycles when they are ready!' he said.

Vasudha outlined the bicycle stand and the bicycle maintenance programme of the college. 'They are thinking of an annual maintenance contract with those cycle owners, who want it,' she shared. 'It will do preventive maintenance and an annual overhaul of the cycle. They are hoping to charge Rs. 1000/- per cycle annually!' she added, excited.

Mary Fernandez said that she learned for the first time how great the ladies roadster bicycle is. She said that she would promote and stock different brands of ladies roadsters. So all the city girls who wanted to buy a good bicycle would come to their shop.

Finally, Pranali said that she would start her shop in Sevagram, Wardha. 'There are a lot of like-minded people there and I will have a ready market,' she said. 'I will start with a bicycle renting programme and maintenance shop since Sevagram gets a lot of

visitors. Then I will also campaign to make Sevagram a car free town!' she finished, proudly.

Lavanya and Shamala also spoke in the end. They said that they never expected so much from a mere seven-day programme. They suggested that everyone should meet after a year again for a similar programme - Monday to Saturday!

### Epilogue: Jai Bheem, Jai Gandhi

One day, Maruti and Seetha arrived at Nora's house on their cycles. Nora was surprised by these unexpected visitors. With much hesitation, Seetha told her that they wanted to get married. 'Great!' said Nora. Maruti was shuffling his feet. He said that there was a problem; he was a Dalit and Seetha was from the Yadav caste, and they were afraid of social opposition. Nora said, 'Okay, we will tackle the problem during our Sunday meeting.'

The following Sunday, the whole group met, including the members of the union, Makkal Mane, Kashtachi Bhakar, the No. 1 Ladies Cycle Club and the Ladies Cycle Clinic. Nora explained the situation and said that as a social organisation they should support social reform and inter-caste marriage. Both Ambedkar and Gandhi had supported inter-caste marriages. According to Babasaheb Ambedkar, the real solution for social integration and the abolition of caste is inter-caste marriage. Mahatma Gandhi, too, in the later years of his life conducted only inter-caste marriages at his ashram. Many anti-caste preachers like Sree Narayana Guru, Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy and Rammanohar Lohia also felt the same.

It was decided and agreed by everyone that all the organisations would support the marriage. They also organised things in such a way that the registrar of marriages came to Makkal Mane with his Register and performed the marriage.

On the marriage day, everybody was offered non-veg food.

Maruti's parents came from the village and Seetha's father and brother also attended.

From the cycle group, Vasudha, the librarian and the two girls, Kamala and Vimala also came. Pinto and Mary came on bicycles! Pranali, Lavanya and Shamala sent messages.

And so it was, that one more little step was taken in Kabir Nagar towards the abolition of the caste system.

July 10, 2024

**Note:**

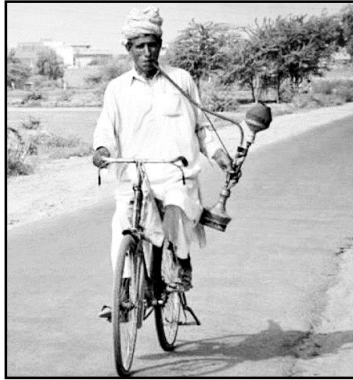
This story was partly inspired by a Marathi Short Film. We recommend all readers to watch this short film. The film has subtitles in English.

Chakori (Bicycle) – Short Film (1992)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CV9oT8kkzxE&feature=youtu.be>

This is a classic short film made by the veteran film makers Sumitra Bhave and Sunil Sukhthankar about an Indian village girl, Seeta, trying to ride a bicycle. The film is a classic interpretation of the obstacles women have to face in India. Though classic, this film with its symbolic yet realistic language and presentation is a treat for all filmmakers and film-lovers, and is still relevant today.

## Bicycle Musings



### i. Cricket And Bicycle

The empire was won on the cricket fields of Eton

While the word ‘cricket’ is used to denote fair play, the game has always been associated with war. Here is a poem from Caribbeans about Viv Richards:

*Marching in an epic line of marshals-  
Worrell, Sobers, Kanhai, Lloyd-  
You infected us with victory  
Levelling Montgomery’s England.*

The allusion to Field-Marshal Montgomery is appropriate, recalling as it does a British war hero who brought his tactician’s mind to bear on his love of cricket, opining that a ‘test match is a battle’. As an alumnus of St. Paul’s School, Monty had gone through the public school system whose playing fields were regarded as preparation to the battles of empire.

The word ‘levelling’ is mild compared to the words used by

newspapers reporting cricket – defeated, crushed, slayed, sizzled, mayhem, explosive, hammering, defensive field (all these are from one single report!). And if there is an India-Pakistan cricket match, it is virtually a war like atmosphere on the streets. However, one must say that knowing the sensitivity many newspapers play it soberly too.

## **Bicycling**

Contrast this to the sport of bicycling. Bicycling begins as pure joy for the kids and at the height of it, it is pure adventure. Iconic bicyclist of Tour de France, Lance Armstrong once said, ‘Chasing records doesn’t keep me on my bike. Happiness does’. In between, it is a very functional and economical mode of transport for billions of people and a means of livelihood for millions. It is also a source of health and fitness till almost to the end of one’s life, it is easy to maintain, pollution free...The list of virtues of the bicycle is a long one.

Bicycle events are not much reported in newspapers and when they are, there is never this war kind of language. Why? What is the difference between these two sports?

## **Two Kinds of Sports**

Cricket and bicycling represent two different kinds of sports. In fact they are called ‘Games’ and ‘Sports’ respectively. Games stand for adversarial sports, that is, where there are two teams (they can even be two individuals as in Tennis, Badminton and Table Tennis singles) each trying to assess the other team’s strategy and defeating it. Obviously, it is more like war. In the most ancient of these ‘games’, that is, in chess, the Indian terminology is explicitly militaristic - elephants, horses, camels and foot soldiers. The most famous and money-spinning adversarial sports/games are obviously cricket and football/soccer. These games are reported

in the media - newspapers and television - widely, and the revenue from them is the main source of their income. And as we have seen above, the reporting language often follows that of war.

Contrast this with the sports of bicycling, running, swimming, javelin and discus throw, high jump, long jump and gymnastics. Here there are no opponents whom you have to defeat. You are just excelling a record. The language of reporting is that of grace, beauty, poetry and even divinity.

### **The Spirit of Science**

Scientists have a faith that we can find knowledge. Now this faith is also like a faith in God - it cannot be proved that we can find knowledge in every field. Einstein expressed it in his famous sentence,

“Der herr Gott ist raffiniert, aber boshaft ist Er nicht.”

“God may be subtle, but he isn’t plain mean.”

The scientist has a faith that the laws of nature may be subtle, difficult to discover, but nature doesn’t play games, does not cheat us. If we persist we will find its laws. Nature is not an adversary like in a chess game where we have to keep on guessing the other’s move. If we systematically work, we solve problems - be it problems in school mathematics or unsolved problems. Sometimes, it takes centuries to solve them – as with Fermat’s Last Theorem.

In sports (as opposed to games) there is a similar situation. There are no adversaries. We are only trying to excel ourselves within the laws of nature. Nature is not an adversary. It is not consciously trying to defeat us. If we keep on trying scientifically we improve bit by bit. We have only to perform ourselves. We don’t have to calculate others’ moves. There is a theory that all the ‘sports’ involve jumping and flying - lifting ourselves! Maybe that is the spirit of science and sports!



It's the Money!

While the difference between these two kinds of sports is fundamental and profound, it does not come across so strongly in the case of children, school, village and small town sports. There it can be pure fun. Children play marble, spin tops, fly kites, old people have a game of rummy every evening in a small club, and carom boards are common in slums in Indian cities. These are all adversarial games but they are not played like wars! It is only when big money comes or if you like when the market comes, that all these evils show up. And when money is there, even the non-adversarial sports get affected. There are cases of use of dope to improve performances and even the iconic Lance Armstrong has been exposed as having used them. All the same, the levels of money involved in the two kinds are hugely different and hence the 'evil' in them is also hugely different.

### **A Natural Approach to Sports**

Animals play. They have fun. Pairs of vultures wheel about for their own entertainment. Hares box. Flocks of birds perform manoeuvres in the sky, squirrels wrestle. Likewise we humans also play, swim, dive, climb trees, and jump across streams. We play with dolphins and dogs and many of us enjoy watching puppies, kittens or squirrels playing. To exercise one's capacities to their fullest extent, to take pleasure in one's own existence - it is simply what life is.

In this spirit this author would encourage children to climb trees, swim and ride bicycles. They are both fun and useful skills to acquire for life.

May 21, 2017

## ii. Electronics, Quality Of Life And Bicycle

### **1. What is Electronics?**

Electronics can be defined in three words: ‘electrical processing of signals’! Signal means anything that has some meaning or has some information. Typically it can be written word, sound – speech or music, visual – still picture, video etc. That is why the subject is often referred to as ‘Information Technology’ or IT.

### **2. What do Electronics Engineers do?**

Since it is electrical processing, the signal has to be first converted to an electrical signal. This is done through using ‘transducers’. For example, the microphone converts an audio signal (sound vibration through air) into an electrical audio signal. Similarly a video camera converts a visual signal to an electrical visual signal. Conversely a loudspeaker or earphone converts an electrical audio signal to a physical sound signal. Similarly a screen converts a video signal to a picture etc. Processing implies amplifying, modulating, computing etc. The whole subject of electronics deals with this processing.

### **3. What is the Main Aim of an Electronic Engineer’s Work?**

The main aim is to minimize the distortion of the signal during processing. That is what the term Hi-Fi or High Fidelity means. Why does a signal get distorted during processing? In any electrical circuit a certain amount of ‘noise’ gets generated in the circuit and it distorts the signal. So the aim of the work is to reduce the noise to the minimum. For this there is a term: quality or Q and Q is defined as a ratio of Signal to Noise. That is  $Q=S/N$ . So the aim is to increase Q (quality) by reducing noise in processing the signal. That is the main aim of an electronic engineer’s work.

#### **4. Quality of Life**

We can apply this learning from electronics to life also. To improve the quality of our life we have to reduce the noise in our life. What is 'noise' in society or for that matter what is 'signal'? Well signal is something we want and noise is something we don't want. However, we live in a consumer society whose main aim is to sell as many things to you as possible, whether you need it or not. In fact the purpose of the advertisement industry is to create artificial needs.

We have to learn how to separate our real needs from these artificial needs or noise. For that we have to have some criteria to decide. It can vary from individual to individual. It can range from 'to live within your means' to having a sustainable lifestyle with minimal load on the environment.

#### **5. Quality of Life and the Bicycle**

Bicycling provides one such criterion in transport. It satisfies the need of better health - physical and spiritual health and minimal load on the environment. Most health practitioners will agree that better health is ensured by physical activity and direct contact with nature - soil, water and air. Anyone who has the experience of an early morning bicycle ride will testify the deep spiritual satisfaction one gets by the cold air hitting our face. Many people call it meditation! As to the load on the environment it is obvious. It is pollution free and saves a lot of polluting petrol and diesel.

May 16, 2024

### iii. Bicycle And Philosophy

One morning Mulla Naseeruddin was coming down on his bicycle. He was a bit dusty and tired after what seemed a fairly long ride.

The Court Philosopher was coming down from the other side riding on his magnificent Arab horse. His servant was running along with him.

Seeing Mulla Naseeruddin the Court Philosopher stopped and got down from his horse and went humbly towards the Mulla. Mulla also got down from his bicycle.

Court Philosopher: My salute to you O! Mulla! Where are you coming from?

Mulla Naseeruddin: I went for a morning ride to the forest and sat beside a brook. It was very pleasant and peaceful. There I meditated on some philosophical problems for a couple of hours and now I am coming back. Where are you going?

CP: I am going to the Court to see the King. O! Mulla! I know you are very learned and wise. I am not that good a philosopher because I have very little time to study and meditate.

MN: What do you do?

CP: Why, I have to attend the Court every day. If only you wrote a few poems praising the King, then you too can live in luxury like I am doing. I have this magnificent horse and feeding it alone costs a lot. Then I have to pay the servants, run a harem of four wives and their children. Isn't it wonderful?

MN: No! I don't think so. On the other hand if only you learned to ride a cycle then you don't have to praise the king and spend so much money. Then you too can become a good philosopher!

September 6, 2023

#### iv. Zen And The Art Of Bicycle Riding

A Zen teacher saw five of his students returning from the market, riding their bicycles. When they arrived at the monastery and had dismounted, the teacher asked the students, “Why are you riding your bicycles?”

The first student replied, “The bicycle is carrying this sack of potatoes. I am glad that I do not have to carry them on my back!” The teacher praised the first student. “You are a smart boy! When you grow old, you will not walk hunched over like I do.”

The second student replied, “I love to watch the trees and fields pass by as I roll down the path!” The teacher commended the second student, “Your eyes are open, and you see the world.”

The third student replied, “When I ride my bicycle, I am content to chant nam myoho rengo kyo.” The teacher gave his praise to the third student, “Your mind will roll with the ease of a newly turned wheel.”

The fourth student replied, “Riding my bicycle, I live in harmony with all sentient beings.” The teacher was pleased and said to the fourth student, “You are riding on the golden path of non-harming.”

The fifth student replied, “I ride my bicycle to ride my bicycle.” The teacher sat at the feet of the fifth student and said, “I am your student.”

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**Note:** This last story is taken from the internet. Author is not known.

## About the Author

T. Vijayendra (1943-) was born in Mysore, grew up in Indore and went to IIT Kharagpur to get a B. Tech. in Electronics (1966). After a year's stint at the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, Kolkata, he got drawn into the whirlwind times of the late 60s. Since then, he has always been some kind of political-social activist. His brief for himself is the education of Left wing cadres, so he almost exclusively publishes in the Left wing journal *Frontier*, published from Kolkata. For the last few years, he also has been publishing in online journals like, *Countercurrents* and *Mainstream*. For the last twelve years, he has been active in the field of 'Peak Oil' and is a founder member of Peak Oil India and Ecologise. Since 2015, he has been involved in Ecologise Camps.

In 2016, he initiated Ecologise Hyderabad. Vijayendra has been a 'dedicated' cyclist all his life, meaning that he has never taken a driving license, nor driven a fossil fuel-based vehicle. 2017, was the Bicentenary year of the Bicycle and Ecologise Hyderabad, decided to celebrate it in a big way. They had a film show, bicycle rallies and meetings. They also ran a Face book page and published four books. Since then, he has been writing regularly about the bicycle in several journals and posting on bicycle Face book pages. The bicycle again got a boost

during the pandemic and he wrote a series of articles for *Countercurrents*, *Frontier Magazine* and *Mainstream Magazine*.

Today, he divides his time between an organic farm at the foothills of the Western Ghats where he watches birds and writes fiction, and Hyderabad. He has published a book dealing with resource depletions, three books of essays, three collections of short stories, a novella, an autobiography and a book on the Transition Town Movement (with co-authors: Usha Rao and Shreekumar).

## About the Book

The Bicycle was invented in 1817 by a German, Baron Karl von Drais, a civil servant to the Grand Duke of Baden in Germany. These essays and stories about the bicycle have been written since 2017, the Bicentenary Year of the Bicycle.

The foci of the writings are: 1. Environment 2. Women 3. Children 4. Ordinary people, including the working class. They reflect the author's political and ecological concerns.

These essays participate in the debate between the ordinary roadster bicycle and the fancy high-tech bicycles like MTB, Hybrid and race bicycles.

There are twelve essays and four short stories. The essays are divided into two groups - six shorter essays on the Promotion of the Bicycle and six longer essays on the Politics of the Bicycle.

The short stories are utopian. They deal with practical projects around the bicycle. They are about real people and they explore the possibilities of what they could become in green politics.



# Books on Bicycles from Ecologise Hyderabad

Ecologise Hyderabad celebrated the Bicentenary of the Bicycle with several events and publications.

1. **You and Your Bicycle: A Guide to Maintaining Your Cycle** by Lavanya K and Shamala Kittane Rs. 50/-

<https://www.scribd.com/document/359724660/You-and-Your-Bicycle-A-Guide-to-Maintaining-Your-Cycle-by-Lavanya-K-and-Shamala-Kittane>

2. **Concorde Photo Stories from India: Bicycle Rs. 150/-**

‘Concorde: Photo Stories from India’ is a photography magazine from Hyderabad. It is curated and published by a young Hyderabad - Kishor Krishnamoorthi. You can know more about it at [www.concordezine.com](http://www.concordezine.com)

You can also order books online by going to their site.

3. **Kiki’s Super Duper Explorer** by T. Vijayendra Rs. 50/-

<https://www.scribd.com/document/355957890/Kiki-s-Super-Duper-Explorer>

4. **Women and Cycle in India: Joy, Mobility, Freedom and Empowerment**

**By: Bicycle and Women Collective. Price: Rs. 80/-**

<https://www.scribd.com/document/360836455/Women-and-Cycle-in-India>

You can order these books (except the Concorde Photo story) from:

**Manchi Pustakam**

12-13-439, St. No. 1

Tarnaka, Secunderabad-500017

Email: [sureshkosaraju@yahoo.co.in](mailto:sureshkosaraju@yahoo.co.in)

Mobile: +91 73822 97430

**THE BICYCLE IN INDIA**  
*Selected Articles and Stories*



Jyoti Kumari, the girl from Bihar carried her father, Mohan Paswan, pillion riding 1200 Kilometres from Gurugram to Darbhanga.