

# **BICYCLE**

**Selected Articles and Stories**

**T. Vijayendra**



**ECOLOGISE HYDERABAD**

## **BICYCLE**

### **Selected Articles and Stories**

Author: T. Vijayendra

Year: 2022

Price: Priceless

O Copy Left: All Rights Reversed

Publishers: Ecologise Hyderabad

Email: t.vijayendra@gmail.com

Mobile: +91 94907 05634/+91 95916 05634

For Copies:

Write to the author for mailing an e-copy. Or you can download it from the net.

If you want to pay for it let him know. He will send account details.

## PREFACE

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 in a big way. We had a film show, bicycle rally and meetings. We also ran a face book page and published four books. The bicycle again got a boost during the pandemic and I wrote a series of articles for Countercurrents and Frontier Magazine.

The foci of our writings were: 1. Environment 2. Women 3. Children 4. Ordinary people, including the working class. They reflected 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 ten essays and two short stories. The essays are divided in two groups –Shorter essays and longer ones. The shorter ones mainly promote the bicycle and praise them whereas the longer ones take up the politics involved in the bicycle debate. Among the short stories first one is about a woman’s solo ride from West Bengal to Pondicherry. The other one is about children and bicycle maintenance.

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.

Hyderabad

November 24, 2022

## CONTENTS

<b>Preface</b>	3
<b>Smaller Articles</b>	
1. Bicycle: A Beginner's Guide	5
2. Best Bicycle for Common Woman/Man in India	9
3. Singing the Song of the Roadster	11
4. Shed a Tear for the Puncture Waala	13
5. Neo Liberalism and the Decline of the Roadster in India	15
6. Bicycle in Jamshedpur	19
<b>Longer Articles</b>	
7. Bicycle And Women's Liberation	21
8. The Bicycle: Beyond The India V. Bharat Debate	25
9. The Politics of the Bicycle Lane	32
10. Bicycle is the Future! Cycling In Indian Cities and Its Future	35
<b>Stories</b>	
11. And She Never Looked Back	40
12. Dr. Sadiq's Bicycle Health Check Up Camp	46

# BICYCLE: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

T. Vijayendra



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 is 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

6. Heavy duty bicycles are purchased by the working class 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, but you will not get all models unless you order online from the company. Best is to go to internet and look at the site. I find Hero a bit expensive and not very useful for our purpose.

S. No.	Brand	Heavy Duty	Light Commuting Cycles	Ladies Cycle
1	Hercules	Phillips/Popular DTS(Ladies)	Tashan DX	Lady Bird (BSA)
2	Atlas	Gold Line Super Strong	Gold Line Super	Venus/Beauty/Dove
3	Hero	-	-	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 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. 300/-

8. If you follow this routine, the cycle will give you a smooth ride and a lot of pleasure.



## **BEST BICYCLE FOR COMMON WOMAN/MAN IN INDIA**

**T. Vijayendra**



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 kilometres and rarely exceeding 20 kilometres.
- 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 on.
- 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 tyres 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

**Hero:** Ladies: Aiyana 26 T Rs. 8030 **Hero:**

Hero Ladies Aiyana 26 T

#### **3. Avon:**

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

#### **4. 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 tires, 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 kilometres to several pilgrimage places in India on such a bicycle. You can also do it!

Happy riding!

August 7, 2021

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

## SINGING THE SONG OF THE ROADSTER

T. Vijayendra



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-gear 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 a little less than 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.

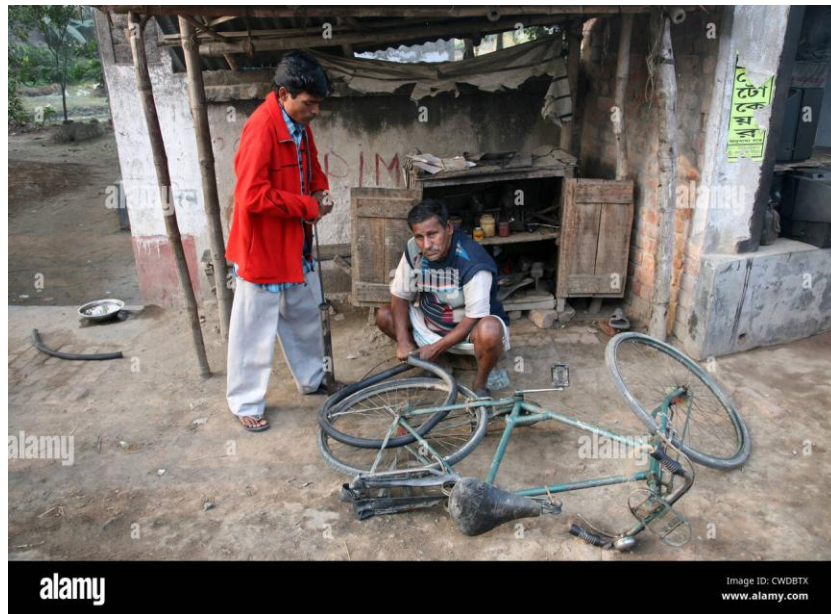
The basic problem is created by fossil fuel-based transport, which have occupied our road space, created urban traffic jams and raised air pollution to dangerous levels. This is what we must work to reduce. Creating special bicycle lanes will not solve the problem, and it will

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

T. Vijayendra



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 high end asking for bus corridors and 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 and Satanjib Gupta! Also, if possible please post a good photograph of the 'puncture waala' along this post.

April 29, 2020

# NEO LIBERALISM AND THE DECLINE OF THE ROADSTER IN INDIA

T. Vijayendra

## 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 need 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 tow 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!

October 6, 2021

Email: [t.vijayendra@gmail.com](mailto:t.vijayendra@gmail.com)

Mobile: 95916 05634/94907 05634

### **Neo Liberalism and the Decline of the Roadster in India**

Published in Countercurrents on October 6, 2021

<https://countercurrents.org/2021/10/neo-liberalism-and-the-decline-of-the-roadster-in-india/>

## Bicycle in Jamshedpur

T. Vijayendra



*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 them 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/>

## **BICYCLE AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION**

**T. Vijayendra**



### ***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 to 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 Woman'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

Email: [t.vijayendra@gmail.com](mailto:t.vijayendra@gmail.com)

Mobile: +91 94907 05634

<https://journalworker.wordpress.com/2017/03/06/bicycle-bicentenary-year-2017-bicycle-and-womens-liberation/>

Bicycle Bicentenary Year 2017: [Bicycle and Women's Liberation](#) - T Vijayendra

Frontier, Vol. 49, No. 35, Mar 5 - 11, 2017

# **THE BICYCLE: BEYOND THE INDIA V. BHARAT DEBATE**

**T. Vijayendra**

## **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-gear, 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 kilometre 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 instil 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 Facebook 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.

1. Sanjay Srivastav, 'Why the sports bicycle should not be a symbol of urban renewal'.

<https://scroll.in/topic/899/urban-inequality>

2. Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria, 'The Cyclist and the Marxist: Why everything should not be reduced to class conflict.'

<https://scroll.in/article/766391/the-cyclist-and-the-marxist-why-everything-should-not-be-reduced-to-class-conflict>

3. Mikael Colville-Andersen writes the definitive guide to global bicycle urbanism:

<https://www.treehugger.com/urban-design/mikael-colville-andersen-writes-definitive-guide-global-bicycle-urbanism.html>

4. Rakesh Anand Bakshi, 'The Most Beautiful Bicycles'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOMR2GezeAE>

Edited July 16, 2018

Email: [t.vijayendra@gmail.com](mailto:t.vijayendra@gmail.com)

Mobile: +91 94907 05634

## THE POLITICS OF THE BICYCLE LANE

T. Vijayendra

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

July 12, 2021

Email: [t.vijayendra@gmail.com](mailto:t.vijayendra@gmail.com)

Mobile: 95916 05634

Published in Countercurrents on July 21, 2021

<https://countercurrents.org/2021/07/the-politics-of-the-bicycle-lane/>

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

# **BICYCLE IS THE FUTURE!**

## **Cycling In Indian Cities and Its Future**

**T. Vijayendra**

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>3</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>**

## References

1. <https://mohua.gov.in/cms/number-of-cities--towns-by-city-size-class.php>
2. <https://www.crisil.com/en/home/newsroom/press-releases/2021/05/bicycle-demand-growth-pedalling-to-a-decadal-high-of-20-percent.html#>
3. <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg25233652-800-2021-in-review-weather-records-arent-just-broken-theyre-smashed/#ixzz7G40obrYT>
4. T. Vijayendra, Peak Oil, Dying Cities and Cities of Tomorrow, *Frontier*, July 8, 2012
5. Roadsters in Contemporary Society, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roadster\\_\(bicycle\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roadster_(bicycle))
6. T. Vijayendra, Best Bicycle for Common Woman/Man in India, 2021, FB page of Kolkata Cycle Samaj
7. T. Vijayendra, Shed a Tear for the Puncture Waala <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1940052012878756/permalink/2533437410206877>
8. Dhiraj Kaveri, Founder Director STAY ACTIVE, Hyderabad

January 2, 2022

Email: [t.vijayendra@gmail.com](mailto:t.vijayendra@gmail.com)

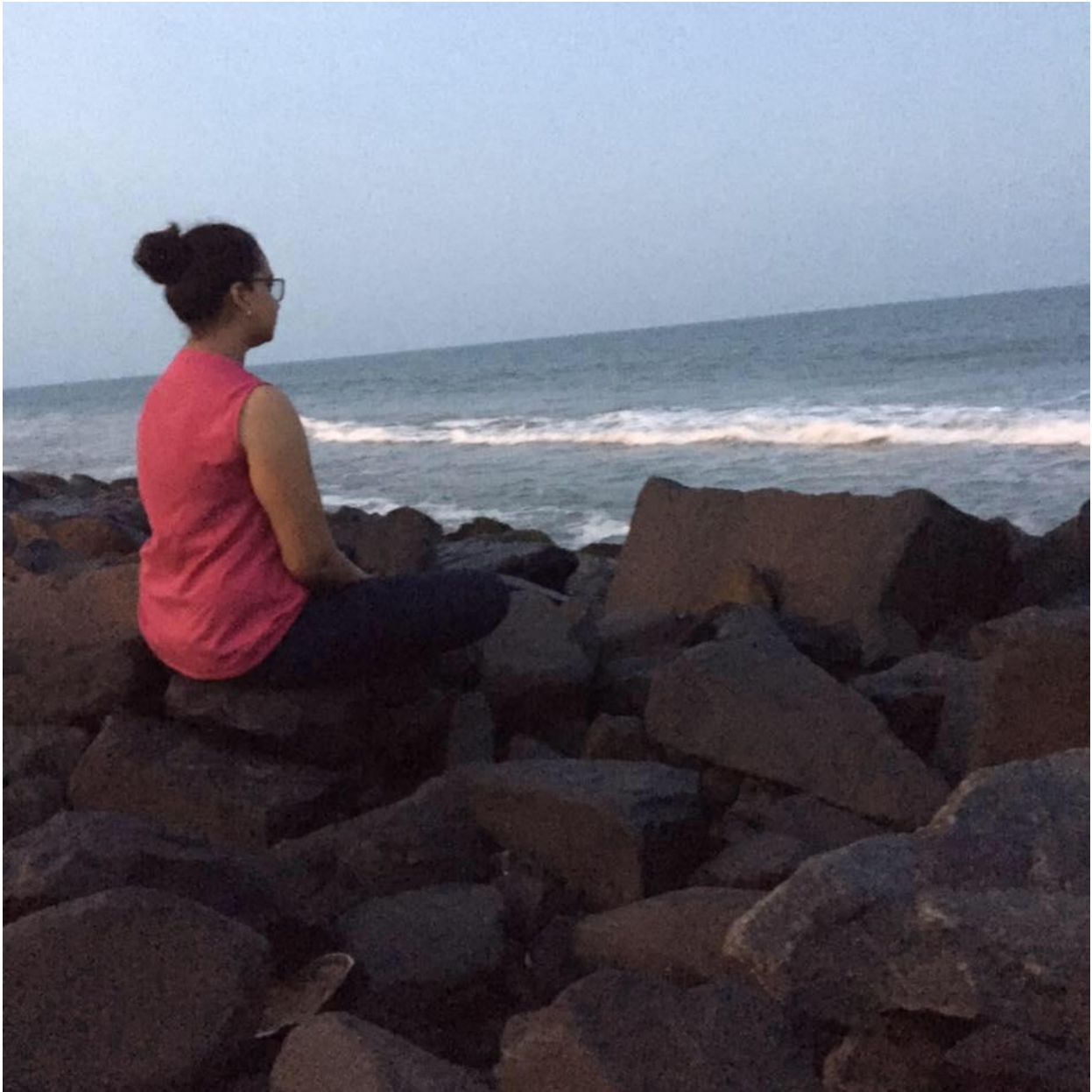
Mobile: +91 95916 05634

Published in 'Cycle O Samaj' Journal of Kolkata Cycle Samaj, Volume 2, Bookfair, 2022

*Bicycle Bicentenary Year 2017*

**AND SHE NEVER LOOKED BACK**

**T. Vijayendra**



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, 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.

\*\*\*\*\*

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 group 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.

\*\*\*\*\*

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.

... 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 packer 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 gape 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 Bhubaneshwar, resting and learning a lot more about cycling and cycle clubs.

\*\*\*\*\*

After Bhubaneshwar 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.

\*\*\*\*\*

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.

\*\*\*\*\*

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

\*\*\*\*\*

Chamrabad, Chandankiyari, Jharkhand.

February 21, 2017

Email: [t.vijayendra@gmail.com](mailto:t.vijayendra@gmail.com)

Mobile: +91 94907 05634

## DR. SADIQ'S BICYCLE HEALTH CHECK UP CAMP

T. Vijayendra



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.

\*\*\*\*\*

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.

\*\*\*\*\*

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!

\*\*\*\*\*

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 Mala'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.

\*\*\*\*\*

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 which 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.

\*\*\*\*\*

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 was 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

Email: [t.vijayendra@gmail.com](mailto:t.vijayendra@gmail.com)

Mobile: +91 95916 05634

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

T. Vijayendra (1943- ) was born in Mysore, grew 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 and so he almost exclusively publishes in the Left wing journal *Frontier*, published from Kolkata. For the last nine 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, he neither took a driving licence nor did he ever drive a fossil fuel based vehicle. So in 2017, Ecologise decided to celebrate the Bicentenary Year of the bicycle. That year they did several events –film show, cycle rallies, meetings and workshops, brought out a Face Book Page and published several books. Since then he has been writing regularly about bicycle in several journals and posting on bicycle Face Book pages. This picked more during the Covid Pandemic when the importance of the bicycle was realised with a big force!

Today he divides his time between an organic farm at the foothills of Western Ghats, watching birds, writing fiction and Hyderabad. He has published a book dealing with resource depletions, three books of essays, two collections of short stories, a novella and an autobiography.

## 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. On his first reported ride from Mannheim on June 12, 1817, he covered 13 km in less than an hour.

These essays and stories about the bicycle have been written since 2017. It was the Bicentenary year of the Bicycle and our group – Ecologise Hyderabad decided to celebrate in a big way. We had a film show, bicycle rally and meetings. We also ran a face book page and published four books. The bicycle again got a boost during the pandemic and I wrote a series of articles for Countercurrents and Frontier Magazine.

The foci of our writings are: 1. Environment 2. Women 3. Children 4. Ordinary people including the working class. They reflected the political and ecological concerns of the group.

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 ten essays and two short stories. The essays are divided in two groups –Shorter essays and longer ones. The shorter ones mainly promote the bicycle and praise them whereas the longer ones take up the politics involved in the bicycle debate. Among the short stories first one is about a woman's solo ride from West Bengal to Pondicherry. The other one is about children and bicycle maintenance.

**NO GYM, NO YOGA, NO DIET**

**JUST CYCLE**

