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Diversity and Power
Inequalities:
Notes of Caution in
Promoting Change

My approach to the topic considers issues of power inequality and how these affect our interactions and relations between groups and individual in a multi-cultural context. The latter point is not simply limited to a multi-ethnic context but is more far-reaching considering class gender, age, capacity and linguistic difference and other forms of diversity.

Cycle campaigning in context

- Early organisations (C19th) part of establishment
- 1930s emergence of campaigning movements - defence of rights
- Today:
- *Both* defence of rights, *And*
- Envisioning a future

Defending marginalised rights

- This is the easy bit....
- Anger, outrage, reaction
- Issues to focus on, events to highlight
- Emotions to cope with
- The familiar tasks of campaigners and protest groups whatever the issues
- We campaign for cyclists



Come out and claim the road **by Sunita Narain**

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I write this column from my bed, recovering from an accident that broke my bones. I was hit by a speeding car when cycling. The car fled the scene, leaving me bleeding on the road. This is what happens again and again, in every city of our country, on every road as we plan without care for the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. These are the invisible users. They die doing nothing more than the most ordinary thing like crossing a road. I was more fortunate. Two cars stopped, strangers helped me and took me to hospital. I got treatment. I will be back fighting fit.

And this is one battle that needs our combined attention. We cannot lose the space to walk and cycle. Since my accident, relatives and friends all have berated me for being so reckless as to cycle on Delhi's roads. They are right. We have built the city roads only for cars. They rule the road. There are no dedicated lanes for cycles and sidewalks. The little stretches that do exist are either dirty or taken over by parked cars. Roads are for cars. The rest don't matter.

But cycling and walking are difficult not just because of poor planning. It is also because of our mindset that only those who move in a car have a status and road rights. Anyone who walks or cycles is poor, wretched and destined to be marginalised, if not obliterated.

This is what must change. We have no option but to reinvent mobility, as I keep repeating. This week toxic smog in Delhi has reached a new peak. Last month the World Health Organization declared air pollutants a human carcinogen. We must realize that this pollution is not acceptable. It is killing us, and no longer softly or slowly. But if we are serious about combating air pollution then we have no option but to think of restraining the growth of cars. Learn how to move people not cars.

When Centre for Science and Environment began its campaign against air pollution in the mid-1990s, it did everything conventional. It pushed to clean up the quality of fuel; improved emission standards of vehicles; got inspectional and maintenance systems for checking tailpipe emissions in place. It also pushed a leapfrog solution transition to compressed natural gas (CNG) for gross polluting vehicles like diesel buses and two-stroke autorickshaws. All that made a difference. There is no question that the quality of air would have been even worse, even more deadly, without these steps.

But this is not good enough. We soon realised this. Pollution levels are rising again, inexorably and inevitably. All research points to one cause and one big solution: building transport systems differently. We also have the option of doing this. We have still not motorised; still not built every flyover or four-lane road. Most importantly, most of India still takes the bus, walks or cycles in many cities as much as 20 per cent population bikes. We do this because we are poor. Now the challenge is to reinvent city planning so that we can do this as we become rich.

For the past few years this is exactly what we have been working on how to bring back integrated and safe public transport options to our cities, so that even if we own a car, we don't have to drive it. But the keyword is integration. We can build a metro or get new buses, but if we do not have last mile connectivity, then it will still not work. It has to be seamless and effortless. That is why we need to think differently.

This is where we are failing. Today, there is talk of transport, even cycling and needs of pedestrians. But it is empty talk. Every time there is an attempt to take a part of the existing road and convert it into a cycle track, it is virulently opposed. The argument is it will take away space from cars and add to congestion. But that is exactly what we need to do; reduce lanes for cars and add space for buses, cycles and pedestrians. This is the only way to get out of the ever-growing car-bulge on roads.

This takes courage of conviction. In our overcrowded and chaotic roads, planning for cycle tracks and keeping sidewalks clean and clear will take lots of effort. I have absolutely no illusion that this will be easy to plan or to implement. But why should that deter us? The rest of the world has learnt successfully to rework road space so that it provides dignity and accessibility to cyclists and pedestrians. They have learnt to restrict space for cars and yet build extremely liveable cities.

Just think of the double bonus: clean air by getting rid of the most noxious source of pollution and healthy bodies by having the option of getting some exercise while commuting. This is what we have to fight for. And we will. I hope all of you will join us in making the right to cycle and walk with safety non-negotiable.

PS: Many thanks to the kind strangers who took me to hospital and the excellent doctors at the AIIMS Trauma Centre to whom I owe my life.

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The complicated part...

- Promoting significant change
- Asking others to do something that they do not currently
- Do we imply that what they currently do is not good enough?
- Does this carry over into saying that *they themselves are not good enough?*

Webs Of Power

- We are entangled in webs of power
- Caught up in pre-existing patterns of story and history
- Shaped in terms of ethnicity, class, gender, age, nationality, impairment, education, education, religion, sexuality ...
- All of which link to different capacities and states of relative privilege/ (dis)advantage



Each thread catches us, tugs at us. Pulls us towards a particular direction, a particular identity.

We are entangled and ensnare by forces outside our control.

Each of these descriptions gives us an aspect of our identity. Each has its own set of stories and histories, tells us what is important, what is acceptable or proper, what is important, where one should fit in the bigger picture.

The sociologist Peter Berger back in the 1960s used the analogy of a puppet theatre: we each act out our individual and collective parts on the stage, scripted and controlled by forces outside of ourselves.

Not a behavioural problem

- While we remain, and allow our campaigns to remain, focused on individual behaviour, we risk denigrating others
- We risk exacerbating existing inequalities
- We risk threatening and alienating those for whom we purport to care
- Need to look at the bigger context

The bigger framework

- Webs of power are institutional and structural
- Reframing power relations at these levels is a political task
 - So is avoiding the political task...
- Need for clarity over how we understand what more cycling is really for
- Be honest about our bigger pictures

Away from politics, back to people

- Is our focus on ourselves or others?
- If on others, do we just want them to be like us? – if so why?
- Is cycling a proxy for other values? e.g.
 - Social egalitarianism
 - Environmental protection
 - More efficient capitalism
- All are viable reasons