

# Reinventing Cochin Cycle Rally 2009

By

Reinventing Cochin Team



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## CYCLE RALLY DOCUMENTATION

### THE CONCEPT:



**Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR)** is a research-based organization working in Cochin on a gamut of areas ranging from education and livelihood to city reforms, governance and environment. Academic institutions, youth and cultural organizations, local bodies and self-help groups take an active role in all our initiatives. CPPR partners with several national and international organizations and agencies to reach out to a larger section of society.

The Reinventing Cochin Cycle Rally '09 poster

**Reinventing Cochin**, one of the leading initiatives of CPPR working on areas of urban research, development and reforms, in pursuance of the same, sought to organize a campaign unlike any other - a **Cycle Rally**, to highlight the many problems commonly faced by cities globally such as the lack of green open spaces, the cluster and mayhem of city life, and the pollution the engulfs it all.

5<sup>th</sup> of December 2009, the date earmarked for the Rally, falling in with the United Nations Climate Change Conference Week held at Copenhagen, and the World Pollution Prevention Day was no accident; rather, such a coincidence was sought as a way to make a powerful statement in favor of the environment. The Rally aimed to revive the luster of greenery and the power of easy mobility that Kochi is slowly, but surely losing

## THE PARTICIPANTS:

Reinventing Cochin Cycle rally '09 was in collaboration with the Kochi City Police, the Corporation of Cochin, Green Dream, and Aiesec International with participation of colleges like Sacred Heart College, Thevara and Rajagiri College of Social Sciences. Naval officers, NCC cadets, members from Lawyers Environmental Action Forum, alongside health and cycling enthusiasts also made their presence known.

## THE DISAPPEARING TWO-WHEELER:



As popular a mode of transportation it may have been once, very few Kochieties patronize the cycle. One finds few cyclists on the streets; cars, bikes and buses dominate the roads. The reasons why cycles, once a sign of women emancipation and labour liberation, find few takers in God's own country are many:

### Unused cycles thrown in a heap

- **Social:** With vehicles becoming one of the main means to advertise wealth and social standing, the average Malayalee sees it unbecoming of his status to often use a transport as common and inexpensive as a bicycle. The larger the vehicle, the greater the ascension of the family in social circles, or so it is assumed.
- **Psychological:** Cycles are most commonly by school children in travelling to and fro from schools. Therefore, youth fascinated with fast bikes and cars, upon attaining maturity, find it difficult to associate with “things” they

believe essentially to belong to their childhood days, one of them being the cycle.

- ***Urban problems:*** Kerala roads, with its looming potholes and jagged curves are unplanned at best and nightmarish at worst. Traffic congestion and lack of proper pedestrian walkways add to the existing problem. Amidst this mayhem cyclists and cycles have neither voice nor way in traversing the city.
  
- ***Economical considerations:*** It might seem ludicrous to imagine a cycle to be considered a costly investment, and rightly so. But nevertheless, it is oft considered a wasteful one. For, once children outgrow it, having learned the basic skills to equip them to handle other vehicles, it is given away or sold, used to entertain tourists or merely left to rust and decay.
  
- ***Inherent limitations:*** Cycles have restrictions by nature of design – they cannot be utilized for long-distance travel. Vehicles such as cars both the luxurious and the modest, outfitted to better serve such needs. Also, where public transportation is moderately efficient and affordable, it is relied upon.
  
- ***Others:*** The arrival of gyms, health clubs and resorts, offering attractive fitness packages have slowly usurped the position of cycles as a health maintaining mechanism.

## THE GREAT CYCLE COME-BACK:

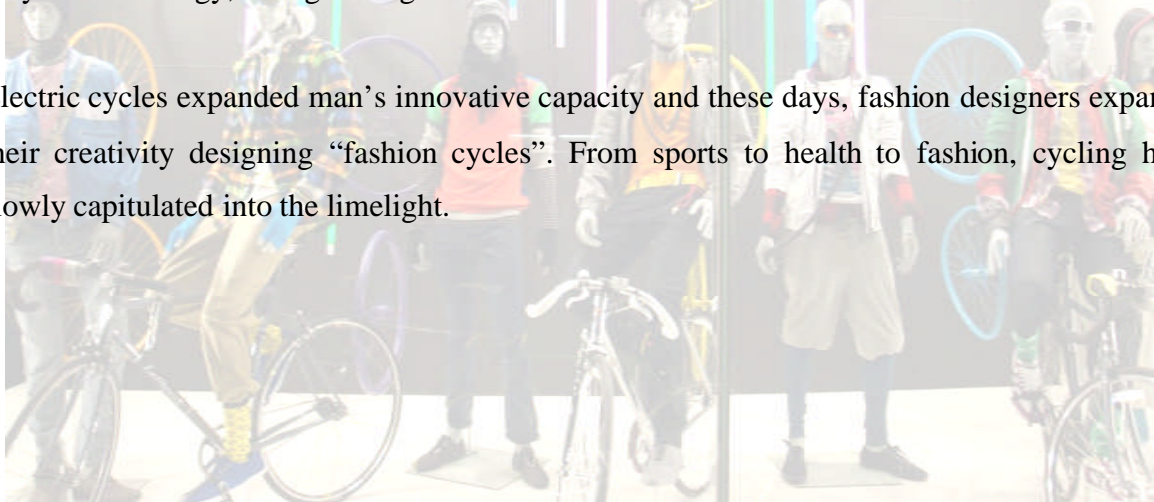


The revival of cycles and cycling as a mode of transportation can never be attributed to a single incident. Though in the fast paced era of chauffeured cars, cycles are seen to have little practical value, they are still viewed with fascination, taught to be revered and admired, though as relics of a past age.

**Cycles place in history is very big**

Being a popular sport, it never went out of public eye. Learning to ride a cycle was considered a necessary skill, next only to swimming. Tourists favoured it as it allowed them to soak in the local culture without the expenses of a hired guide or taxis. Hikers, mountaineers and children alike kept cycle manufacturers in constant business. When world leaders agonized over environmental problems, it became the transportation of choice. Where trains and tram cars and every other two-wheeler polluted the environment, cycling expended only human energy, strengthening the mind and the muscles.

Electric cycles expanded man's innovative capacity and these days, fashion designers expand their creativity designing "fashion cycles". From sports to health to fashion, cycling has slowly capitulated into the limelight.



## WHY CYCLING?

One of the most common questions we had to field was that of “why cycling?”... Why not a Marathon? Or even a Walkathon?

Cycling was our vehicle of choice namely because it is THE most efficient mode of non-motorized and eco-friendly transportation and therefore, a symbol of sustainable urban progress. As an organization promoting urban progress, even a tram-car might have gotten the point across, but only sustainable development can balance both progress and environmental protection.



Cities have realized its multi-faceted potential in being eco-friendly, affordable and healthy. Cycling also transcends barriers of class, age and physical ability. Moreover, by its popular presence in all sporting avenues, it is seen as a symbol of equality and human dignity, affordable to both the noble and the under-privileged.

### **The common man's vehicle**

By efficiently integrating cycling into main-stream transportation, it is our underlying belief that Kochi will re-brand itself from a disorganized agglomeration into a ‘people oriented’ city thereby also paving way for non-motorized transport systems.



## **PLANNING THE REINVENTING COCHIN CYCLE RALLY 2009:**

### ***Stage – 1***

Having decided to hold the Rally during the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2009, it came to be christened the Reinventing Cochin Cycle Rally 2009. Preparations began by mid-October and unfolded rapidly in the coming month. The Rally was given a basic framework by the creation of its concept note. Prospective participants were identified and areas of possible sponsorship categorized.

### ***Stage – 2***

The participation and sponsorship activation programs began. Talks progressed with similarly interested bodies such as the youth organization Aiesec and environmental movement Green Dream. The Kochi City police and the Corporation of Kochi were invited to be partners in our initiative. City Councillors, members from the District Sports Council, the NCC and the Navy were informed and their participation sought.

On the networking side, Facebook, Orkut and Twitter helped connect to the youth of the City. Regular updates on the Reinventing Cochin Blog (<http://reinventingcochin.blogspot.com>), emails and an online registration system ensured a wider coverage for the Rally. Leaflets, posters and brochures highlighting the event and calling forth participants, were also circulated. Schools and colleges were approached by volunteers, their participation sought. Cycling clubs and health resorts were also appraised about the event.

Professionals and corporate bodies were contacted with the dual purpose of being both sponsors and participants and many organizations like the Falcon cycling club for Cognizant heartily contributed towards the latter. News and Radio updates also contributed towards keeping the momentum high.



### *Stage – 3*

On the sponsorship front, BSA, the Event sponsor, agreed to provide t-shirts and caps to the participating masses, whereas K.R Bakes and Nestle made available refreshments and chocolates respectively, becoming the Hospitality partners to the event. Water, glucose and volunteer t-shirts were provided by the host organization, Centre for Public Policy Research. Radio sponsors Red FM through regular radio bites and updates ensured that the Rally remained in public eye. Flash, a mid-day publication from ‘Kerala Kaoumudi’ also contributed towards publicizing the event.

## EVENT DAY:

The Reinventing Cochin Cycle Rally 2009 commenced at 7:30 am the morn of 5<sup>th</sup> December 2009. Registration counters, numbering from 1 to 4, each catering to one or more categories of participants functioned, handed out caps, t-shirts and pamphlets to all participants, directing the registered participants to their cycles with specific token numbers. Rented cycles were numbered and tagged with separate coloured numbers to enable easy identification.



**Rally Dignitaries taking the “Green Pledge”**

On arrival of the dignitaries, namely, The Hon’ble Minister for Transport, Adv. Jose Thettayil, Hon’ble Mayor for the city of Kochi, Mercy Williams, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Traffic, Mr. Venugopal, Mr. Shamsudeen, Member, District Sports Council, and popular cine actor Vinu Mohan, the assembled participants/ audience were then addressed by them. In addition, cine actor Vinu Mohan also read out the Green Pledge, with every member of the audience vowing alongside him to do his or her bit for the environment and the progress of the country.

The event was further commemorated by the release of a 100 green hydrogen balloons, by both participants and the dignitaries, declaring the Reinventing Cochin Cycle Rally 2009 open!



**Green balloons are flown to commemorate the Rally**

After the flag off by the Mayor, all the other dignitaries and participants, with The Hon'ble Minister for Transport, Adv. Jose Thettayil leading the charge, began their carefully co-ordinated trek from the venue. The cyclists completed a full circle beginning from Durbar Hall Ground, through M.G Road, entering Banerjee road and then to Marine Drive and finally back to Durbar Hall Ground



**Cycle Rally Flag off by Kochi Mayor, Mercy Williams (2006-2011)**



**The youth should be made more accountable**

Selected points on the stretch, manned by vigilant volunteers to both advice and admonish errant cyclists also liberally provided them with glucose and water. On their return, the exhausted and exhilarated cyclists were directed to park their cycles and then greeted with refreshments. After a few photos and rounds of appreciation, the participants disbanded with the promise of inculcating the Rally's message in their daily lives.



**Cyclists preparing for the flag-off**

## REASONS FOR IMPACT:

- The success of the Rally lies in having been able to connect with the common man. While research organizations and NGO's spearheaded similar movements through lectures and presentations, they fail to attract the common man, and therefore cater to only the elite group. If a movement needs to gather momentum, awareness needs to begin at the roots. In effect this is what the Rally has managed to do.



- The cycle has been recognized as a symbol of sustainable development, offering eco-friendly, healthy and *even* fashionable means of urban transportation. Portable, efficient and inexpensive, people have begun to consider it urbane to ride branded cycles than suffer the hazards of traffic congestion.

### Unprecedented and positive responses

- Keralaites are a class of people more concerned with their rights than their duty. The upside to this is that an average Malayalee, if given a platform, is more than willing to express his views, his likes and his dislikes. This, coupled with a slowly growing civic sense make the Kochiete an informed, if slightly reluctant city activist.

## **LEARNINGS FROM THE RALLY:**

Cycling is very much in vogue; proper awareness and infrastructure will soon see it on the roads again. As with any two-wheeler transportation, they have to bear in mind the perils of cycling amidst heavier and bigger vehicles. Cycling enthusiasts and clubs, and other interested parties can urge the Transport Ministry to prepare a code for cycling in the cities, demarcate safe zones, buffer zones etc. This of course, calls for long term planning. Kochi being more of a sprawling agglomeration (as a result of commercialization) than a planned city suffers from the lack of planning. Infrastructural changes call for improvisation; it must be such that it takes into consideration the current city constraints while making the best of what is available.

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