

We had carried a report on the absurd, discriminatory laws and regulations that control the working of the rickshaw sector in Delhi in Issue No. 125 of MANUSHI entitled, “Licence-Quota-Raid Raj: Economic Warfare Against Rickshaw Owners and Pullers.” To recap the findings of our study of the rickshaw sector in brief:

Municipal authorities “control” the number of rickshaws through a license-quota system. The city administration has declared that it will not allow more than 90,000 licenses for the entire city of Delhi, although there is no ceiling on the number of cars, scooters, and other motorized vehicles plying in Delhi. Municipal authorities admit that there are 500,000 to 600,000 cycle rickshaws in Delhi for carrying passengers as well as for carting goods, fruits, vegetables, and, even, for the removal of garbage. Till last year, municipal licenses were issued to about 73,000 cycle rickshaws. This restrictive policy has resulted in a flourishing extortion racket for issuing and renewing licenses, as well as monthly bribes for allowing rickshaws to continue to work without licenses.

MCD policy also laid down that the owner of a rickshaw must also be the puller of that rickshaw. If a rickshaw owner allows someone else to ply his vehicle he risks confiscation and destruction. In actuality, a majority of rickshaws are owned by operators who manage fleets, ranging from 5 to 500 vehicles. Since most rickshaw pullers are seasonal migrants from villages and have no fixed residence or place for safe parking of vehicles, most of them find it less burdensome and more convenient to rent a rickshaw at Rs. 20 a day than to own one. Even if they own a rickshaw, the risk of

Follow up



Denial of Constitutional Equality Government’s War on Cycle Rickshaw Pullers

Madhu Kishwar

confiscation on flimsy grounds –real or imagined traffic offences, or under the guise of checking whether the owner is actually the puller make it virtually impossible for the actual pullers to afford to invest in their own vehicles.

City authorities routinely and arbitrarily seize rickshaws in the name of decongesting the city, claiming

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proudly that they destroy 50,000 vehicles every year. The minimum fine for releasing a cycle rickshaw, after the owner has proved that the confiscation was malafide, is Rs. 300, plus Rs. 25 for storage charges for every day that the rickshaw stays in municipal yards.

Despite an active and growing demand for vehicles all over the city, police authorities have declared vast areas of the city as forbidden zones for cycle rickshaws. This enables the traffic police and local *thana* staff to collect bribes for letting pullers “violate” the ban on their plying. Pullers are forced to pay up because refusal to comply can lead to the impounding of vehicles by police.

These economic assaults are accompanied by beatings, abuses, and humiliations, all of which make

rickshaw plying a high risk occupation, despite the fact that cycle rickshaws provide a vital service to the population of Delhi.

In response to MANUSHI'S campaign on behalf of this sector, Prime Minister Vajpayee intervened personally and directed the Lt. Governor Delhi to reform the existing policy on the lines suggested in a Concept Note prepared by the Prime Minister's Office in August 2001. Policy guidelines issued in this Note respond with sensitivity to the genuine requirements of people working in the sector, as well as to the needs of commuters. However, instead of implementing the Prime Minister's policy, the city administration has gone about finding newer ways to make life difficult for those who work in this sector. Issue No. 126 carried a report on the ways in which the PM's policy was being sabotaged.

Since those in charge of implementing this policy were not even willing to negotiate on the issue, MANUSHI approached the Delhi High Court with an appeal that the city administration be directed to implement the Prime Minister's policy for the rickshaw sector.

The Court has so far received responses to our request only from three of the concerned authorities : Deputy Commissioner of Police, Delhi; Additional Secretary, Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi and Director, Enforcement, New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC)

The most brazen defiance of the PM's policy directive comes from the NDMC Director, who says openly that the NDMC intends to continue with a total and complete ban on rickshaw plying in the areas under its jurisdiction since the NDMC Act of 1994 does not envisage issuance of

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licences to cycle rickshaws. The NDMC spokesman overlooks the fact that cycle rickshaws have made their appearance in some of these areas and that the PM's Policy Note makes a strong case that the administration

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should use market mechanisms for regulating the number of rickshaws rather than impose a blanket ban on these vehicles anywhere in the city.

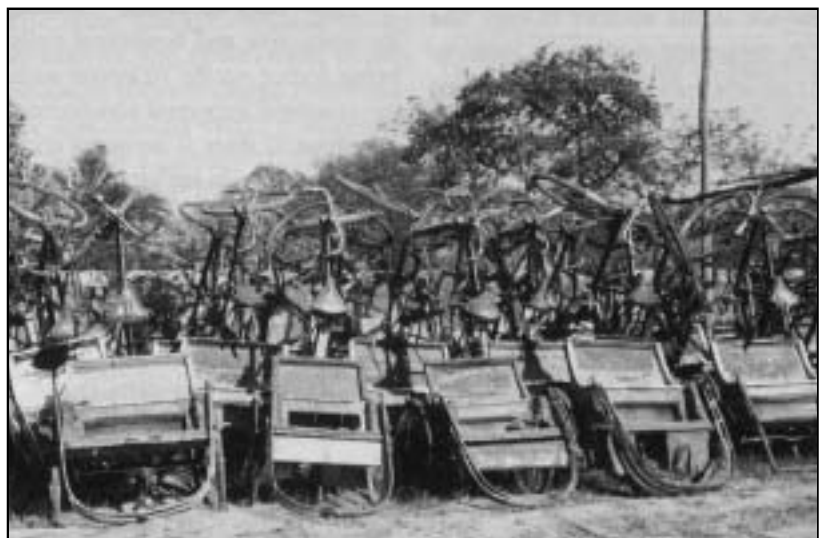
The Additional Secretary of Delhi State government takes an easier course, saying that the government

is contemplating a systematic study through expert agencies to assess the impact on traffic conditions in Delhi. He claims that this study needs to be done before any decision to de-license rickshaws is taken. He also adds that "seven associations of rickshaw pullers connected with the activities of rickshaws have expressed their opinion against the repeal of Cycle Rickshaw Bylaws and, before any decision to the contrary is taken by the government, this will require further interaction and proper processing of various views expressed in this regard". To the best of our knowledge this process has not yet begun.

The Police Response

The most detailed response in Court was submitted by the Delhi Police. The main argument submitted by T.N. Mohan, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), against the proliferation of rickshaws in Delhi is as follows:

"Delhi being a cosmopolitan city... it is the endeavour of the traffic police to provide traffic management at par with the other Capital Cities of the international community. Allowing unlimited proliferation



Seized rickshaws -thousands are destroyed every year.

of non-motorised, slow-moving components of vehicles on city roads is a step in the reverse direction and not towards development and progress. To make Delhi a modern city with efficient transportation system, it is deemed appropriate not only to restrict the movement of cycle rickshaws but other similar modes of transportation, such as bullock-cart, tonga, thela, etc., too which are required to be curbed on main travel corridors, arterial roads, Ring Roads, and other heavy-carriage ways, and important areas of Delhi, so as to ensure smooth flow of traffic. The effort of the traffic police is to improve the traffic conditions in the city and remove impediments that obstruct traffic flows.”

The DCP (Traffic) further submits that currently there are approximately 37 lakh vehicles registered in Delhi. This number exceeds the total number of vehicles registered in the other three metropolises – Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata.

Presumably, all these are motorised vehicles, as most cycle rickshaws are not registered with city authorities since their very existence has been declared “illegal.” Why are city authorities using the phenomenal increase in the number of cars and other motorised vehicles in Delhi to put an arbitrary quota of 99,000 on cycle rickshaws in Delhi? Why not try to control the number of cars, for example? Singapore has done just that by making individual car ownership prohibitively expensive and making public transport cheap and accessible because it does not want its island nation to be choked by pollution. Our policy makers do the contrary. With even nationalised banks offering car loans at subsidized, low, or negligible interest rates, people are still encouraged to buy cars. Government officers, university teachers, and

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public sector and bank employees have for years been coaxed into buying cars by loans at absurdly low rates of interest, even when market rates were 3-5 times higher than the rates charged to them.

If Delhi today has more cars than Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai put together, it is because of the abundance of government vehicles, subsidised car loans by the government to middle-class families, and a very inefficient public transport system. Not only do motorised vehicles cause an inordinate amount of congestion, but they also cause awful amounts of atmospheric pollution. Delhi’s air is among the most polluted in the world, and, in such a situation, the government’s ban on non-polluting vehicles like cycle rickshaws is suicidal.

Constitutional Equality Denied

Apart from ecological reasoning, the restrictive and tyrannical policy being forced on the rickshaw sector raises several important constitutional questions. If there is no quota on the number of cars in the city – a vehicle owned only by relatively affluent citizens – how can the government impose a restrictive and unrealistic

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quota on a vehicle used mainly by middle- and low-income groups, without violating the principle of constitutional equality? We ask for no special consideration for low-income groups. We simply ask for equal consideration and equal right to road space.

When the number of cars increases in the city, the government responds by widening roads, by making six-lane, fast-track motorways and building endless fly overs at phenomenal cost to the national exchequer. However, when there is a comparable or even lower increase in the number of rickshaws, the government responds by imposing bans and restrictive quotas. Why this discrimination in

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favour of the better off and against the poor? Why not be honest and declare that only the wealthy elite, with one car for every member of the family, have the right to be citizens of Delhi? Why not throw out the rest of the people, so that Delhi can match the opulence and glamour of First World cities? So what if the upper classes have no cooks, no ayahs, no drivers, no garbage pickers, no *maalis*, no tailors, no plumbers, no electricians, no masons, no vegetable or fruit suppliers, no clerks, no typists and sundry other service providers. It is a small price to pay for making Delhi roads look like German autobahns!

Even if the city administration succeeds in banning the use of cycle rickshaws, what about the lakhs of people who use private bicycles? They, too, move slowly. Is the government

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ready to ban the use of bicycles as well?

There are hidden assumptions in the rejoinder that demonstrate an amazing lack of sensitivity on the part of the police to the genuine and legitimate requirements of Delhi's citizens. Most of the arguments presented by the Police Headquarters and by the NDMC represent illegal usurpations of power, violate peoples' constitutional rights, are discriminatory, and betray a desire for slavish imitation of urban centers in other countries that operate with very different requirements. The basic question is: 'Smooth flow of what types of traffic for what purposes? Who gains, who loses?' Efficient administration is based on getting a good grip of the ground realities in your own city as well as the ability to respond to the legitimate needs of various categories of citizens living in that city or region. If policy planners live in cloud-cuckoo land, none of their schemes and dictates, no matter how 'modern' they sound, can yield efficient, fair, and constitutional administration. Government laws and regulations in a well-ordered society are meant to make life safe, secure, and convenient for citizens rather than to harass and tyrannise them. Those who wish to make Delhi "at par with the other Capital Cities of the international community" should also ensure that the average incomes and wages of Delhi's citizens match those of people

living in San Francisco, Toronto, Sydney, or Bonn.

The modes of transport and the speed of traffic flows in richer, First-World nations cannot be emulated by India for the simple reason that even today the vast majority of people in India, including those living in Delhi, cannot afford to own and operate motorised vehicles. If the government were to ban all rickshaws after gifting motorised vehicles and petrol expenses to every citizen who needs to commute to work, for educational or other necessary requirements such as shopping, for visits to a dispensary during illnesses, and so on, hardly anyone would object. Until then, a

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large number of Delhi's citizens will have to walk or cycle to work.

As long as a large part of the city's goods (fruits, vegetables, paper, wood, building material, sanitaryware, etc.) have to be transported from the wholesale and retail markets to customers through *thelas* or trolley rickshaws, the government is duty bound to provide special road tracks for slow-moving traffic. If 90 percent of the city's garbage is collected in such rickshaws, the government has no right to pretend that those rickshaws have no claim to road space. If the vast bulk of fruits and vegetables are transported from Delhi *mandis* to local markets in trolley rickshaws, the government would be causing a severe economic crisis and lead to civic breakdown by negating the legitimate requirement of these vehicles for road space. As long as a large number of parents have no choice but to send

their children to school by cycle rickshaws, our administrators should not have the right to ban rickshaws from city roads simply because these humble vehicles offend their sensibility by reminding them that New Delhi is not yet on par with New York or the suburbs of Los Angeles.

Body Vote of Citizens

Despite the existence of draconian laws to curb the number of cycle rickshaws in Delhi, the number of these vehicles has grown from a few hundred in the 1950s to nearly six lakhs today, as per government's own rough estimates. This clearly shows that Delhi's citizens are voting with their bodies in favour of rickshaws. The growing numbers of these vehicles, even in the supposedly forbidden zones, is ample proof that they are meeting a vital requirement of Delhi's citizens, a majority of whom cannot afford motorised transport – cars, taxis, and autorickshaws – for their daily commutes. It is time that our rulers recognise that the humble cycle rickshaw cannot be wished away through bureaucratic fiats.

If the government is so averse to seeing rickshaws and *thelas* on Delhi streets, we suggest the following easier ways of dealing with the growing number of rickshaws: Instead

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of the current policy of confiscation/impoundment and destruction of cycle rickshaws, why not simply fine a person Rs. 500 each time he or she uses a rickshaw in forbidden zones? This way, the administration might garner a better idea of the laws of supply-and-demand and understand that it is not just the despised poor who use cycle rickshaws, but that even middle- and upper middle-class people require their services for at least some part of their commuting needs. How else can you explain the appearance of rickshaws even in elite areas, such as Defence Colony, Civil Lines, Nizamuddin, and the University Campus? If the government tries to penalise the numerous well-off empowered citizens who use rickshaws, they will have a virtual civil rebellion on their hands.

Despite Hostile Propaganda

Even though middle- and upper middle-class people regularly use cycle rickshaws as there is nothing to match their convenience for short-distances, a good number of them might endorse their removal from the city, thanks to the hostile propaganda engendered by the City administration against rickshaws. For example, I live in the opulent Civil Lines area of Delhi where every family has at least one, if not two or more, cars. There are no *jhuggi* clusters or lower middle-class colonies in our midst. The ban is more “strictly” enforced here because Delhi’s Lt. Governor’s Office is situated here and the L.G is openly hostile to the presence of rickshaws in Delhi.. Yet, despite his distaste for cycle rickshaws, and the area being officially notified as a prohibited zone, rickshaws still proliferate in this area and in many other neighbourhoods previously devoid of them.

Why? Clearly, because even relatively opulent households would be terribly inconvenienced if rickshaws were removed. Let me

illustrate from the case of a typical upper middle class family in my neighbourhood. Both the husband and wife have a car each, which they use for commuting to their respective work places. However, when my neighbour’s old mother has to go to a nearby market for daily shopping or to the bank or for a visit to the local doctor, she has no choice but to use a cycle rickshaw! For one thing, auto rickshaws are not readily available. You have to walk or wait until a vacant one turns up. Secondly, an auto rickshaw demands Rs.25-30 for even the smallest of commutes, whereas a cycle rickshaw will charge only Rs 5-10 for the same distance. In addition, auto rickshaws make a big fuss about going short distances and often refuse to go altogether.

Similarly, if the teenage children of our well-off neighbours want to go to shopping, or to their respective colleges, to visit friends, or to go to a movie, public transport is required, despite the fact that their family might own two cars. Even upper middle-class people cannot afford to hire taxis to take children to movies or to attend college. All these families also employ cooks, gardeners, security guards, chauffeurs and other service providers. All these employees per force use rickshaws whether to run errands for their employers or for their own families.

The bus-stop nearest to where I live is more than a kilometre away. Therefore, people depend on rickshaws to get to the bus terminal or to a scooter stand, since no other mode of transport is easily available. I own a

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car, yet when I have to go to the local market to purchase my daily or weekly requirements, I prefer to take a cycle rickshaw because of the difficulty of finding not just a parking space, but even space in which to drive the car without getting it dented and scratched all over — not so much from rickshaws, but from other motorised vehicles. Also the rickshaw man will wait while you pick up things from different shops and *rehdis*, and even mind your goods, all for an extra Rs 5 or 10. One cannot get an auto rickshaw or taxi to perform such a service for such a moderate charge.

Sure Recipe for Corruption

The ban on rickshaws in areas where there is an active demand for their services only facilitates corruption and bribery. Rickshaws cannot proliferate in banned areas without the collusion of the police and officials of the municipality, particularly as these two arms of the government employ fairly draconian powers to curb rickshaws by impounding and confiscate them, inflicting heavy fines and destroying miserable vehicles, causing loss of crores of rupees to persons in the sector.

Efficient Use of Space

By banning the use of rickshaws in large parts of the city, the administration is forcing people to use cars, to burn petrol and diesel, and to cause traffic congestion and more pollution in an already poisoned city. Even a cursory, honest glance shows us that cars occupy far more road space than do rickshaws as they are bigger and, because they run much faster, require at least 15 feet of road before and behind them, with 5 feet on with each side for road safety. By contrast, cycle rickshaws can move much closer together without causing accidents and fatalities. A car is used by no more than 4 to 5 people –

although most of the time, only one or two people use a car at one time. By contrast, a rickshaw carries at least 60 people for commutes within a single day. Thus, rickshaws represent the most economic use of road space, while cars use road space in a most wasteful fashion.

A Post-Modern Vehicle

It is ironic that our colonial-minded administrators treat non-motorised vehicles as relics of a backward, pre-modern past, when even in Europe and America, large numbers of people are beginning to use bicycles, not only for daily commutes, but also for holiday trips to even high altitude places such as the Alps. Cycling is considered ecologically healthy as

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well as a good exercise for the body. The use of cycles as the most popular means of transport in cities like Beijing is legendary. In Singapore, colourful cycle rickshaws driven by well-fed young men are a tourist attraction. Recently, the city of Oxford imported a number of cycle rickshaws from Delhi. University campuses in America, Canada, Australia, and Europe are teeming with bicycles today. Gone are the days when driving a car to the campus was a fashion statement or a status symbol. Today, the bicycle has emerged as a post-modern symbol of enlightened living. Yet, ironically, our policy makers are likely to realize the economic and ecological value of these vehicles only after they have wrecked the industry

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in India and when cycle rickshaws have to be imported into India from Japan or Europe, providing huge cuts and commissions for our *babus* and *netas*. We took Yog seriously only when it returned as Yoga with the US stamp of approval! We take herbal medicines seriously only when Americans start patenting and selling them in shiny capsules at exorbitant prices. Until then, we treat it as unscientific mumbo-jumbo. A similar fate awaits us with the cycle rickshaw. We will take it seriously only when Ford or Toyota starts manufacturing it as a post-modern “green” vehicle for the ultra-fashionable.

Scapegoating the Poor

Cycle rickshaws are held responsible for our traffic snarls. Our traffic conditions are chaotic, not because of rickshaws and *thelas*, but because there is a total lack of

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imagination and good sense in working out the rules and norms of traffic flow in the city, as well as a callous disregard for the legitimate needs of different categories of citizens. For example, barring the colonial Lutyen’s Delhi, and a few posh colonies of South Delhi, most commercial and residential areas of Delhi have no pedestrian-friendly or usable sidewalks. As a result, most pedestrians end up walking on the road. Similarly, there are no special tracks for slow-moving traffic - cycles, rickshaws, and *thelas*. Instead, they have to battle for the same space with trucks, buses, speeding cars, and other motorised vehicles. Not surprisingly Delhi’s fatality rate is far higher than that of metropolitan cities. Of most other countries. In 2002, 1,696 people were killed on the Delhi roads, majority of whom were pedestrians and cyclists.

There is very poor enforcement of speed limits in Delhi. Traffic moves in dangerous, deadly ways. In most business districts, shopkeepers, office owners, and customers park cars in front of their establishments, blocking one-fourth to one-half of the road space on a daily, regular basis without paying even a nominal fee for that wasteful misuse of public space. Public transport remains so highly inadequate and poor in quality that more and more people are compelled to buy and commute in their own cars, scooters, and motorcycles. The number of motor vehicles far exceeds the road space available, especially considering the poor management of parking spaces. Since the City administration has made no proper provision for hawking spaces, a necessary requirement in the Indian milieu, street vendors position themselves chaotically, when and where they can find a spot.

What we are witnessing is the total absence of administrative acumen,

total lack of knowledge of how to allocate public spaces in a rational and efficient way. The hapless citizen gets punished and harassed for this incompetence and civic chaos. The urban disorder we see all around us is not just typical of Delhi with its burgeoning population, as smaller towns and cities with tiny populations are even worse off. If we go to Bhatinda in Punjab, Bindki in Uttar Pradesh, Patna in Bihar, Gauhati in Assam or Chaibasa in Jharkhand, we find the situation to be far worse than in Delhi.

The Delhi Master Plan includes a separate track for slow moving vehicles. The Supreme Court judgement in the M.C. Mehta case also underscores the need to separate non-motorised vehicles from those that are fast moving. The failure to segregate different categories of traffic causes traffic snarls and chaos. City administrators should be penalized for this failure, as well as for misguiding the court to believe rickshaws to be the main cause of traffic jams. Instead they are getting away with instigating hostility against poor rickshaw pullers by letting loose a systematic campaign among the better-off, car-owning citizens in Delhi that rickshaw operators are the cause of road chaos, so that many middle- and upper-class people have been misled into believing that these impoverished people, who perform crucial and growing public transport services, are a social menace and need to be driven out of the city to make it “efficient and modern.”

Good governance is about administrators acting as mediators between different groups of citizens with their contending claims on public space and public services and goods. However, in India, our rulers tend to play the contrary role of spreading disaffection and feelings of hostility among different classes of citizens by

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exacerbating their conflicts and by creating conflicts where none exist, as evidenced in this case.

Migration Control Measure?

Another argument that is often used against allowing the rickshaw sector (as well as other similar self-employed groups such as street vendors) to proliferate is that this “encourages” rural migrants to gravitate towards big cities, placing serious strains on civic infrastructure. Therefore, administrators invariably talk of the need to “control” the number of such migrants. It is time we understood that the poor migrate in search of work only to those places in which there is a visible demand for the services they can provide. A large number of working-class migrants come here in response to a growing market demand for certain services due to the large inflow of higher-strata people migrating to Delhi from smaller towns as IT professionals, teachers, doctors, lawyers, writers, journalists,

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and business men and women. If we do not dare to stop a computer engineer from Kanpur or a journalist from Patna from moving his/her base to Delhi, how can we realistically talk of controlling the influx of the poor, who come to provide much needed services to these better off people as cooks, drivers, street vendors, etcetra? If, in the process, the city is becoming “over crowded,” we have no choice but to pay the price for allowing the Indian farm sector to remain trapped in poverty and for allowing the overall economy to remain so sluggish, that people can find no viable sources of livelihood in their hometowns or villages.

The number of rickshaws in a city is determined by market demand rather than by bureaucratic fiat. At a time

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when we are talking of liberalising our economy to make it more market driven instead of bureaucratically controlled, why not allow for the same logic to operate in the rickshaw sector and other occupations such as street hawking, providing employment to the poor? Our economy will remain stagnant if the notorious License-Quota-Raid-Raj continues to exercise its deadly stranglehold on the livelihoods of the poor, who need freedom from needless bureaucratic controls, which depress their incomes and make it impossible for people to move out of poverty. Thus, liberalisation is far more urgently required for the poor than for the corporate sector.

Police Denies Bribes

Although, by his own admission, the CP (Traffic) has informed the Court that the police had impounded 24,105

cycle rickshaws from January 1 to July 31, 2002, he says that the police is not guilty of bribery for the release of these rickshaws. If the official figure of impounded rickshaws is as high as this, one can imagine how much higher the unofficial figures are.

No rickshaw operator can survive in Delhi without a well worked-out understanding with the police and municipal officials. The system works as follows: The existing policy allows for only one rickshaw license per person. However, 99 percent of the rickshaws in Delhi are owned by operators who own a small or big fleet for which they get *benami* licenses made in bulk by paying off municipal inspectors. For every licensed rickshaw, an operator owns several unlicensed ones, because even after bribes, officials will not allow him to have his entire fleet legalised, as that would make him feel secure enough to resist bribes for the rest. Using this web of illegality, rickshaw operators are made easy targets of extortion, both by the police and by the MCD. I have filmed numerous interviews with people in the rickshaw sector making open and clear allegations about how much money per month they are made to cough up. Since the 'Red' zones have been demarcated in such an unrealistic and mischievous way that no rickshaw can ply without "violating" zonal restrictions, it has given the police enhanced opportunities for corruption and harassment.

Most rickshaws are not impounded when their pullers enter the so-called "Red" or prohibited zones. Policemen on duty simply deal out a couple of *lathi* blows along with rough slaps and choice abuses and, then, force the puller to part with Rs. 5 to 10 for every time they are "caught." The smart ones enter into a discreet arrangement with the police and pay up on a daily or

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weekly basis. We have detailed information on the bribe rates required for rickshaws to cross into forbidden territory in different zones of Delhi. Many who don't work out regular *hafta*, are "impounded" for a few hours or days and are let off after appropriate pay-offs.

As for the DCP denying the charge of beatings, I can offer several filmed interviews with rickshaw pullers testifying how often and how brutally they are beaten by the police without provocation. Beating and tyrannising rickshaw pullers and vendors is a favourite addiction and sport for many of our police personnel.

Head Aches? Cut it off !

Another favourite justification for the crackdown on rickshaw pullers is that too many illegal Bangladeshi migrants are being absorbed in this sector. The implication is that the existence of the rickshaw sector encourages illegal migration. This is bizarre logic indeed! Bangladeshi migrants have also taken to garbage picking and recycling. By this logic, we should also ban garbage picking and let the accumulated waste matter spread even more disease and squalor than we already have. The laxity of our Border Security Force and the inability of our government to prevent illegal migration cannot be used as an excuse to ban perfectly legitimate and necessary occupations. It amounts to cutting off a person's head to cure his headache!

Rickshaw pulling plays a crucial role as a much needed buffer between poverty and destitution for a large number of people who come to cities as economic refugees from impoverished villages. This is one of the few occupations that requires neither capital investment nor specialised skills. A poor villager comes in by the morning train, gets an introduction to a rickshaw owner through a fellow villager or *biradari bhai*, and starts plying the rickshaw that very day, so that in a few hours he has earned enough for his own upkeep. He works for a few months, saves all he can, and returns to his village with much needed cash savings that help his village-based family to survive. They are able to carry on with small farm holdings due to regular money inflows from the family member who earns it by pulling a rickshaw or some such mode of self-employment. If the government closes these measly avenues of livelihood for the poor, it will only force people to take to crime.

Today, it is mainly the adult and able-bodied male who migrates to cities in search of work, leaving women, children, and the aged behind to earn a little income from the farm sector. If even casual, seasonal sources of employment and money are shut off by the government, poor farm families will not be able to carry on agricultural operations, as farm income does not yield even the monetary investment needed to keep agricultural operations going. In such a situation, whole, destitute families will flock to our cities in place of the one or two men of each family who come in as seasonal migrants. This holds good for Bangladeshis, also. Until we find ways to stop illegal migrants from entering India, is it not better for them to earn their living through hard work rather than crime? If no avenues of employment exist, people don't stop

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looking for ways to survive; they simply take to other avenues, such as drug peddling, theft, prostitution and other anti-social activities that offer them means of subsistence.

Rickshaws Cause Accidents?

The argument used by the DCP (Traffic) that “cycle rickshaws are extremely traffic hazardous and accident-prone specifically on roads where the volume of fast moving vehicles is fairly high” and that they “pose a serious hazard not only for occupants using them, but also for those in fast moving vehicles” is a dangerous inversion of the facts. We challenge the police to produce figures to prove that the rate of accidents caused by rickshaws is anywhere as high as those caused by motorised vehicles. We also challenge the DCP (Traffic) to prove that serious harm has been caused to people in fast-moving vehicles on account of being hit by a rickshaw. Even a casual reading of newspapers tells us that road fatalities are mostly caused by speeding trucks, buses, and cars. We have never heard someone being run over and killed by a cycle-rickshaw! The most for which they can be held guilty is that they add to the slowdown in the speed of traffic in areas where there is already heavy and chaotic clutter. But that can easily be dealt with by creating separate tracks for slow-moving traffic.

In any case, if imposing a ban is the government’s remedy for accident-causing vehicles, let them ban trucks, buses, and cars which top the list of vehicles causing fatal accidents! The DCP further states that

since there are over five lakh cycle rickshaws operating in Delhi, “it is difficult to educate and inculcate road safety awareness among rickshaw pullers.” Curious logic, indeed! Most bus and truck drivers are very aggressive in the use of road space; many car owners drive like maniacs. Why not ban all those vehicles that top the list of those causing accidents and fatalities?

If the government is serious about controlling the “rickshaw menace,” an easy way to enforce the ban is to dismiss from service concerned traffic



policemen, local SHOs, and municipal inspectors of areas in which rickshaws are seen plying, despite the ban. This

Government makes a lot of claims about launching poverty alleviation schemes and special measures to help the poor.

In actual fact, most government policies are designed to wreck people’s livelihoods, to depress their incomes and force them into a web of illegality.

The bureaucratic mindset in India (barring a few exceptional, sensitive officers) considers that the only rationale for their existence is to make the life of citizens as difficult as possible.

would indicate that the government means business rather than creating another avenue of corruption. If government functionaries know that their job is on the line, they will hesitate to sabotage the ban on rickshaws by letting them ply with suitable bribes. Let those who are responsible for enforcing government laws and regulations actually be held accountable if city bosses want their laws to be taken seriously. Today, citizens treat law-enforcing agencies with utter contempt and cynicism, because laws are used mainly for the purposes of extortion and harassment and not as they should be, for the common benefit of all citizens. This is promoting criminalisation of government agencies and disaffection towards state machinery. Such a state of affairs encourages the rule of mafias, which is something we must try to halt.

Wrecking Poor Livelihoods

In well-functioning democracies, the state undertakes a whole range of social security measures for the benefit of vulnerable sections of society, such as unemployment benefits, free medical coverage, old age pensions, food subsidies, and housing support to honour every citizen’s right to a minimum standard of living. Government makes a lot of claims about launching poverty alleviation schemes and special measures to help the poor. In actual fact, most government policies are designed to wreck people’s livelihoods, to depress

their incomes, and to force them into a web of illegality even when they are engaged in perfectly legitimate activities. What is happening in the rickshaw sector is apt testimony of this.

The bureaucratic mindset in India (barring a few exceptional, sensitive officers) considers that the only rationale for their existence is to make the life of citizens as difficult as possible. The best of laws and policies are sabotaged at the altar of bribery. As a result, most of our bureaucrats and politicians have not learnt the ABC of governance or planning, as they are too busy running extortion rackets.

Spread Rule Awareness

No doubt, many rickshaw pullers, especially those who are recent migrants to the city, are not aware of traffic rules. But that is understandable, considering that no systematic attempt has ever been made by the police to spread awareness among rickshaw pullers or even other road users. That is why Delhi is notorious for its incredibly high rate of accidents and fatalities on roads. The traffic scene frightens everyone, including those who have driven in dense metropolitan centres the world over. Cycle rickshaw pullers are easy targets and convenient scapegoats, because they are not a very powerful group among our citizens. However, even if all of them were to be removed once and for all, Delhi roads are not going to become safe and uncluttered, unless:

- a) Traffic is properly regulated.
- b) Due space is made for all categories of road users, not just for cars.

Cycle rickshaw pullers are easy targets and convenient scapegoats, because they are not a very powerful group among our citizens.

MANUSHI has offered to the Police, that we will take responsibility for spreading awareness among rickshaw pullers

- c) Traffic norms are inculcated systematically among all citizens, with special focus on new migrants and illiterate people.
- d) Police desist from accepting bribes to let off people who commit traffic offences.

Rules Awareness Campaign

Our police have not yet learnt to behave in a civil manner with the poor and vulnerable classes of citizens, who receive slaps and *lathi* blows from the police instead of education on traffic norms. MANUSHI has offered to the Commissioner (Traffic Police), that we will take responsibility for spreading

awareness among rickshaw pullers regarding how to behave responsibly on our roads by the following methods:

- a) At our own expense, we will create small audio-visual capsules on traffic rules and regulations, which can be easily understood by literate and semi-literate people. We will take these on a mobile van to various rickshaw stands in Delhi to ensure that the message spreads widely.
- b) We will offer these capsules to DD and other Delhi TV and radio stations free of charge for regular telecast as a public service.

If the police authorities so desire, they might consider collaborating with us on the project by sponsoring free spots on television so that other road users may also benefit. □

We Apologise for Our Lapse

In issue 133 of MANUSHI, two words were inadvertently deleted in the Epilogue to Amita Sharma's article "Innovations Cannot Last Forever : Official Response to Why Eklavya was Axed". This piece was written as a rejoinder to Ramakant Agnihotri's article, "A Black Day in Education : M.P. Government Clamps Down on Eklavya". Since the paragraph made little sense minus the two deleted words, we are publishing below the full text of the "Epilogue". We thank Professor Agnihotri for pointing out the error to us.

" We respect the professionalism of MANUSHI which gave us the opportunity to respond to the critical article by Eklavya on the DPC Hoshangabad's decision to have the common textbooks of the Government used in Hoshangabad, and the decision of the Government of Madhya Pradesh to uphold that view. This article had to go into some length in discussing the academic issues involved, as Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme was basically an exercise in academic improvement, and the people upset with the decision, other than paid employees of Eklavya, have been academics."
Amita Sharma, Secretary, Primary Education, Government of M.P.