

Red wheels

Since I was 10 years old I have had my own set of wheels. I inherited them from my grandparents who sent me my uncles imported bicycle. All this ofcourse after I had already started peddling on one that was rented by the hour.

From the age of 10 to 17 I cycled everywhere. Distance was not an issue. It was freedom, to come and go as I pleased. No doubt within the stipulated hours laid down by parental authority. Initially it was to school and back, then to shop for the home, to meet friends. Later, discovering the neighbourhood with friends riding pillion or on their own bikes. Even then there were not many of us “girls” on wheels. Parents would be worried about the physical consequences or the societal repercussions. But, to us girls it was freedom.

Freedom to let your hair fly in the wind and feel the wind in your lungs.

There have been 3 major routes in the earlier part of my life. The first to school, the second to my friends home not far away. The third was when I joined art school. All other visits were usually linked to any one of these routes.

I rode a red “Speedking” by Gazelle. Took extremely good care of it and ensured that it never let me down. I rarely had an accident with it and in those days could give a mean peddle to some of the best in the area. Much later, I discovered that I had been nicknamed along my regular route as “jet”.

In those days we all cycled. There was no status attached to it. It was either that or walk or take the bus. So we cycled and believe me we were in much better shape thanks to that. The big thing was to cycle all the way to Gandhinagar, which I have done atleast twice in my teenage years. Once with my schoolmates and then again with my mates from art school. What a ball we had. The truckers and villagers shocked to discover girls riding on the highway among the gang of boys.

After a sabbatical of kinds that lasted nearly 12 years and the loss of two bycles, my second set of wheels arrived. This time an investment from my own earnings a black Kinetic Honda on instalment. This went faster and without any effort, just a flick of the thumb and wrist.

Wow, the rush was incredible. No covering of the face and arms like the girls do today. No it was full on in the wind at 60-70 km/hr. Zipping out to Gandhinagar for meetings was not a tedious task it was sheer joy. No doubt even then, only ten years ago traffic was much less. The step well of Adalaj was waiting for our visit and so was Vishala. All these places from our youth that were so far away.

Lucky for me my spouse did not drive at all, no doubt being Dutch he would have given me a run for my money on a bicycle any day. But the Kinetic Honda was my domain and we sped about on it, a sight to take in, more so when I was heavily pregnant with our son and still zipping around, husband and all.

It is on this two-wheeler that I walked out on my marriage of 13 years with my son barely two.

Then I bought my first car, a red Matiz. It was my all; it saw me through the roughest period in my life. My brother who encouraged me to step on it cannot believe what he started. In no time my confidence gained I was zipping the highways at night to loud music. Anyone could join as long as they put up with my music and speed. Now distance was even a lesser issue, given the opportunity and cash for petrol I would have driven all over India. My baby saddled in the back with bottles of milk and his choice of music “Shubha Mudgal”.

There are many who have made midnight runs to Gandhinagar and back or Kheda and back. Many a tape that was replaced after a good listen, eventually when I sold the car I did not have the heart to remove the Bryan Adams from the deck. Given the choice I would have never sold the car, it would have been in my possession long after it would have been decommissioned as a compacted box of scrap. Unfortunately that was not to be and the red Hyundai Viva I drive now replaced it.

I am one of those who haven't a clue about the engineering of a car. Yet I am incredibly sensitive to the feel of one and will drive the garage nutty trying to get a problem sorted out. Luckily have never been stuck somewhere where I have had to actually change a tyre. I know the procedures but have not tested my strength yet.

Strangely no women's magazines carry articles with such information. They usually talk about how to service the man in your life, beauty tips, shoes, clothes and expensive jewellery. Beyond this you will get advise on child and pet psychology or household tips and recipes. On the other hand it is the accepted thing to see women in hitherto male domains of hosting shows on cricket, gadgets and cars, the so called typical male interests.

I am a regular at the local book stores and believe me its getting tougher to reach the so called women's magazines as the area is surrounded by men catching up with their feminine side. Not that I have a gender issue here, but may it's time we started talking about getting in touch with our masculine side.