

An Experiential Ethnography of Randonneuring: A Study of Hyderabad Randonneurs

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by

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DECLARATION

I, **B. Vinod Kumar**, hereby declare that the research embodied in the present dissertation entitled, “**An Experiential Ethnography of Randonneuring: A Study of Hyderabad Randonneurs**” is an original research work carried out by me under the supervision of Prof. M. Romesh Singh, Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, and is original. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree at this university or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Dissertation entitled “**An Experiential Ethnography of Randonneuring: A Study of Hyderabad Randonneurs**” submitted by **B. Vinod Kumar** bearing Reg. No **15SAPH04** has carried out the research work embodied in the present in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, School of Social Sciences, is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from Plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

Further, the student has the following publication before submission of the thesis/monograph for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in the relevant area of his research:

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

Anthropology and Sport

The complex interplay between sports and culture is explored in the anthropology of sport, an active field of research. It has gone through various stages of growth over the years, each highlighted by shifting viewpoints and methodologies. Pre-conceptual, conceptual, and post-conceptual phases can all be distinguished in this progression.

In the early period, there had been sporadic investigations into sports within the larger discipline of anthropology prior to the 1960s. Even if they were informative, traditional anthropological studies tended to concentrate on other facets of human culture, often overlooking the relevance of sports as a cultural event. Anthropology turned to secondary accounts of sporting activities presented by a few anthropologists. E. B. Tylor was one of the first to look into the reports on games of different cultures to trace cultural evolution. While showing the similarities between Hindustani *pachisi* and the Mexican game of *patolli*, he puts forward his speculations and argues for the Asiatic origin of the games in Mexico. He further extends it and says there is an Asiatic cultural influence on the Mexican civilization (Tylor, 1879). Stewart Culin, the most notable in the early years, turned his focus on games and sports. He was the first ethnologist to produce a comprehensive and systematic account of the games and sports activities of 225 different Native American tribes (Sands, 1999).

The other notable work in the first half of the twentieth century is Raymond Firth's (1930) "A Dart Match in Tikopia: A Study of the Sociology of Primitive Sport". Raymond Firth seems to be one of the first to realize the significance of sport and what it could offer in understanding human behaviour. He presents a first-hand account of Competitive Dart throwing on the island of Tikopia. For him, sport is "an integral feature in the life of primitive peoples, offers several problems for investigation"(Firth, 1930, p. 95). Further, he points out a few questions about the organization, nature of the play, recreation, bodily exercise, and other characteristics of pride, shame, curiosity, sympathy, and loyalty. He recognizes the multi-faceted nature of sport and suggests a field of research that can study the relation of "primitive

sport" to other aspects of social life with its "unique cultural value" (Firth, 1930, p. 96).

From the 1960s, the next three decades until the 1990s were termed the "conceptual period" by Robert Sands. The conceptual period signalled a dramatic change in how anthropology has approached the study of sports. Scholars started to systematically investigate the cultural aspects of sports after realising how significant as expressions of human civilization they are. The rise of significant individuals and ground-breaking work during this time helped to shape the profession. It saw publications that explored the concepts of Sport, Culture, Society, and Games involving race, power and social inequality in influential journals like *American Anthropologist*.

One of the significant anthropological contributions came in 1973 from anthropologist Jerry W. Leach and filmmaker Gary Kildea in the form of an Ethnographic film, *Trobriand Cricket: An Ingenious Response to Colonialism*. The film focuses on issues of cultural contact, identity, symbolic forms, and the performances of the Trobriand culture. This period was marked by the development of The Anthropological Association for the study of play (TAASP) in 1974, with Edward Norbeck being the catalyst (Sands, 1999).

The ceremonial elements of sports, the function of sports in forming identities, and the social hierarchies ingrained in sporting practises were all subjects of research. A noted few in anthropology have taken up sport as a serious endeavour at the end of the 20th century. In 1985, the first-ever text recognizing and making it an explicit area of study, the anthropology of sport was published by Kendall Blanchard and Alyce Cheska titled *The Anthropology of Sport: An Introduction*.

While some others have focused explicitly on specific sports: George Gmelch (1978) published a book titled "Baseball: The Player's Game". He explores various aspects of baseball, including its history, rules, and gameplay. He delves into the personal experiences of the baseball players and the social and economic forces that shape the sport. Gmelch emphasises that the values and attitudes of the players are shaped by their experiences on and off the field, as well as by broader societal factors such as race, class, and gender. Overall, he offers insights into the culture and social dynamics of the sport.

Joseph S. Alter (1992), focuses on Wrestling in India. He published his book titled "The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India" in 1992. He

explores the physical cultural and social significance of the sport. He argues that wrestling is an embedded cultural practice that reflects broader social and ideological values. He examines the complex relationship between wrestlers and their bodies, arguing that the wrestler's body is not just a tool for physical performance, but also a site for the construction of identity and the negotiation of power. He also discusses topics such as the impact of modernization on traditional wrestling practices, the commercial aspect of the sport and the caste dynamics in the sport. While Catherine Palmer focused on Cycling (Palmer, 1996), and Belinda Wheaton on Windsurfing. Robert Sands mentions his works on collegiate sprinting, basketball and surfing (Sands, 2002).

A revised introductory text (Blanchard, 1995) and an edited volume examining a wide range of topics from discussing the approaches that anthropologists take to study sport, such as functionalism, interpretive anthropology to the ways in which religion, politics, gender intersect with sport and anthropology have appeared. The book gives a comprehensive overview of the field of anthropology of sport. These and other articles later recognized the importance of sport, which is long due and cannot be marginalized anymore, if one must understand the culture and society as an integrated whole.

The emergence of the post-conceptual era in the 1990s marked the continuation of the anthropology of sport's development. Scholars have been using an increasingly multidisciplinary approach during this phase, drawing knowledge from disciplines including sociology, psychology, history, physical education, and kinesiology, but little contribution came from anthropology (Sands, 1999). A growing amount of attention has also been paid to globalisation, specifically how sports relate to larger global trends and how they are shared, consumed, and altered internationally. In current discussions within the subject, issues related to racism, gender, class, and the body have also assumed a prominent position.

Significance of studying sport

The most straightforward reason for studying sports is the ubiquitous nature of the sport, which is present in societies worldwide. The most compelling reason is the prospect of how much studying a sport can reveal about human behaviour and the societies we live in (Dyck, 2004; Sen, 2015). It requires serious attention, like any

other institution of society, to understand human behaviour. It has received very little attention from anthropologists and social scientists for a long time (Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Sen, 2015; Sands, 1999; Blanchard, 1995). It is now acquiring growing consideration from scholars from diverse fields looking at and linking various aspects to improve our understanding of human behaviour. The world we inhabit cannot be imagined without sporting activity. Sport is an international phenomenon; it transcends regional and national boundaries. It is undoubtedly clear with all the engagement with sports such as Football, Basketball, Cricket, and the like. For example, Football now has 211 associations worldwide (see FIFA.com).

Upon an extensive review of anthropological literature, it becomes apparent that the subject of sports has received relatively scant attention. A unanimous agreement among scholars in the field of sports studies is that sports have been marginalized and their significance undervalued while advocating for the exploration of sports as a valuable avenue for enhancing comprehension of societies. However, the precise factors contributing to the historical neglect of sports research during earlier periods remain enigmatic. Nevertheless, numerous scholars have postulated various speculative reasons to address this gap in understanding. Presented herein are some of the key rationales put forth by researchers in this regard. Anthropology, by definition, as the study of non-modern and 'primitive' societies, has in the past excluded the study of sports and competitive games because they were perceived as central features of modernity (Archetti, 1998). Another factor linked to the anthropologist's childhood as they might not have indulged in sporting activities and hence could not see the importance of studying sports (Blanchard, 1995).

Holism being one of the benchmarks of anthropology, describes cultures as integrated systems of interlocking behaviour, institutions such as sport "have been overlooked or ignored as being either non-tangential or non-existent in non-western (society)" (Sands, 1999, p. 7). The classical ethnographies known for the so-called complete ethnographic account of the people have little to no mention of the play element; for example, Malinowski's influential work on Trobriand society, which is regarded as 'complete', lacks the description of sport or games. Robert Sands, a prominent scholar in the sub-field of Anthropology of Sport, presents the reasons given by Blanchard, who "offers potential reasons for the neglect of sport (as) early "fathers" of the discipline were not active in their childhood, and this could have created an avoidance or at least, minimization of the importance of sports" (Ibid.).

And Robert Sands attributes the "recent paradigmatic struggle between postmodernism and positivism" (Ibid.) as the current lack of interest in the sport.

Questioning the future of anthropology and whether it has been stuck to its traditional methods and inquiry, Robert Sands reminds the warnings given by Peacock, Roy Rappaport, Blanchard and others. They suggest a required transformation with an emphasis on concerning matters as problematic to society; otherwise, it may lead to the extinction of the discipline if not kept up with the emergence of interdisciplinary approaches, which are seen as a significant threat. Robert Sands opines that "for anthropology to survive and prosper, the student must be able to connect this very traditional discipline with contemporary and extensive research on the modern human condition" (Sands, 1999, p. 9). As a student of anthropology, statements like these encourage me to explore and venture into a different area of research. It also answers the question: why choose anthropology of sport as an area of study? The features that help anthropology differentiate from other social inquiries, which are its holistic perspective, cross-cultural comparison, and fieldwork method, which includes participant observation with the emic perspective, provide an edge over other disciplines in understanding human beings.

It is evident from the literature that the studies are from western anthropologists. The authors in the early period were confined to tribal cultures, and later as the discipline progressed, it spread its enquiry into understanding human behaviour breaking the boundaries, i.e., moving towards village studies and later to the urban space. Therefore, it is significant to investigate the aspects of sport and culture in the eastern world, particularly in India, from the eyes of Indian social scientists. In continuation, the next section will shed some light on India's literature concerning the sport.

Sport in the Indian context

In 2015, Ronojoy Sen published a much-needed comprehensive history of sports titled *Nation at play: a history of sport in India*. The book answers questions about how cricket being a colonial import, has dominated the sporting scenario in India. He presents a clear picture while pointing out the significant factors that played an essential role in the transformation that took place in the past centuries. Sen explores the development of sports in India from the colonial era to the present in the

book. In addition to exploring the social and cultural significance of numerous sports in India, such as cricket, hockey, and football, he investigates the ways in which sports have been used to advance Indian nationalism and identity. Also, he tries to reason out the answer to the much-asked question of why India, with a billion-plus population, is unable to perform well on the international stage, such as in the Olympics. The book makes the case that sports have been instrumental in shaping Indian nationalism and creating a distinctive sporting culture in India. One of the book's central ideas is that sports are more than just physical activities; they are also cultural practises that reflect and reinforce social and political structures. Sen contends that a variety of factors, including colonialism, religion, caste, and regional identities, have shaped the development of a distinct Indian sporting culture.

Sen draws on a variety of sources throughout the book, including historical documents, interviews with athletes and sports administrators, and media coverage of sporting events. He also investigates the effects of globalisation on Indian sports, such as the rise of commercialization and the growing influence of Western sporting practises. Overall, "Nation at Play" offers a comprehensive and nuanced examination of the role of sports in Indian society and culture. It provides a distinctive viewpoint on the connection between sports and nationalism, as well as illumination on the complex ways in which sports are incorporated in larger social and political contexts. (Sen, 2015).

In the same year, a book titled *Sport, Culture and Nation: Perspectives from Indian Football and South Asian cricket* by Kausik Bandyopadhyay was published. He examines the connection between South Asian sports, culture, and nationalism with an emphasis on cricket and football. Bandyopadhyay investigates how football and cricket have been used to promote and maintain these identities in his book, which contends that sports have been significant in the development of national identities in South Asia. He also looks at how these sports are interpreted socially and culturally in the area, as well as how they mirror and support larger social and political institutions. The idea that sports are not only physical exercises but also cultural practises that are influenced by larger social and historical factors is one of the book's main themes. Bandyopadhyay investigates the function of sports in forming national identities and in fostering social and political change. He talks about how sports like football and cricket have been utilised to advance nationalism and national unity.

Bandyopadhyay uses a variety of sources throughout the book, including historical records, media accounts of sporting events, and interviews with athletes, sports officials, and fans. Additionally, he looks at how globalisation has affected these sports in South Asia, particularly the growth of commercialization and the spread of Western sporting conventions. In conclusion, "Sport, Culture and Nation" offers a thorough and comprehensive account of how sports in South Asia shape national identities and cultures. It provides a fresh viewpoint on the connection between nationalism and sports and illuminates the intricate ways in which sports are woven into larger social and political circumstances in the area. (Bandyopadhyay, 2015).

In India, in the recent past, the sport has become synonymous with cricket. Several written accounts comment on how this colonial sport has been ingrained into our society. Sports cannot be ignored to understand Indian society and culture. For instance, In India, a cricket match never goes ignored and often makes it to the front page of the newspapers. Ronojoy Sen, a political historian, rightly quotes Sarvepalli Gopal about the place of cricket in the Indian context; he says, "Indeed frequently- it (Cricket) is the brightest spot of the Indian scene. When we despair of our politicians, Sachin Tendulkar keeps up our spirits"(Sen, 2015, p. 5). The sport (Cricket) transcends all religions and all languages. Ronojoy Sen commented on the scope of what a sport (Cricket) is capable of and how it is not merely a sport when combined with commerce, entertainment, and politics. He further says, "...along with Bollywood films, Cricket is the only glue that binds the diversity of India". He also quotes a Sri Lankan writer who says it the best: "Sport can unite worlds, tear down walls, and transcend race, the past, and all probability. Unlike life, sport matters."(Sen, 2015, p. 10).

Works related to sports other than cricket are relatively rare in the Indian context. During the last two decades, most works that have surfaced in sports are from historians. Cricket has been the dominant sport in the sub-continent for the past few decades. It has become the central focus of many authors. The works of Ramachandra Guha, i.e., *the states of Indian cricket* (2005), *A corner of a foreign field: The Indian history of a British sport* (2002), *the Picador book of cricket* (2001), *Spin and other turns: Indian cricket's coming of age* (1994), *Wickets in the east: An Anecdotal history* (1992) and Boria Majumdar, i.e., *The Illustrated History of Indian Cricket*

(2006), *Lost Histories of Indian Cricket: Battles of the Pitch* (2004), *Twenty-two yards to Freedom: A Social History of Indian Cricket* (2004), can be a good example.

The aforementioned publications make it abundantly evident that cricket was the only sport in the Indian setting to attract as much attention from social scientists and academics. The popularity of cricket in India can be attributed to a number of factors. First, 200 years of British rule, during which time their officers had an impact on the Indian elite that eventually expanded to other groups in Indian culture. Second, India's victory in the 1983 Cricket World Cup contributed to the sport's growth in popularity. Last but not least, all you need for a game of cricket is a ball and a bat. This makes it adaptable and inclusive of all societal groups (Sen, 2015).

Coming to the present scenario, following the global trend, sport in India is shaping faster than ever. Even though there seems to be a growing concern and recognition for sports like shooting, badminton and wrestling after the 2008 Beijing Olympics, sports other than cricket have been underrepresented (Sen, 2015). Hence, there is a need to look at sports in the current scenario.

The Indian government, in the recent past, has started addressing sports persons before and after events, especially the Olympics and Commonwealth Games. Such actions imply that India is making efforts to move from a unicentric (one sport dominating and having a gigantic impression) to a multicentric sporting nation (having varied sports interests). For example, from the identity of a Cricketing giant to bringing back the lost glory in India's national sport, i.e., Field Hockey, and now making its mark on the international stage in Shooting, Badminton, Boxing and Wrestling. This will transform how sports and sports persons are viewed, building a positive environment and enhancing the culture of the sport.

The growing range of sporting activities has led to various attempts to understand sports by making divisions and sub-divisions on different levels looking at multiple aspects. To understand and capture this culture of the sport, one of the prominent publishing houses has brought the "The Routledge Critical Studies in Sport" series. The first in the series of books focused on the rapidly growing 'lifestyle sports', also known as 'alternate sport', making a key distinction from 'mainstream sport'. The mainstream sports are understood as 'dominant sporting practices' comprising all the major sports, such as Football, Cricket, Tennis, and Wrestling. The concept of "alternate sport" is elaborated on in the following section.

Lifestyle sport

While things are changing at the mainstream level, there are also what academics and scholars variously term 'alternative', 'lifestyle', 'post-industrial', 'postmodern', 'action-sports', and 'extreme' sports are emerging throughout the world. According to Belinda Wheaton (2005), the 'labelling' of specific sporting activities appeared in the 1980s with the work of Nancy Midol on the 'new sports' and 'whiz' sports movement in France. Midol and Broyer (1995) developed an argument indicating "new sports forms and new communities" based on 'whiz sports'. The idea of 'alternative sport' translated into 'extreme' sport as an all-embracing label in North American popular media discourses (Wheaton, 2005). The increasing number of labels is indicative of the wide range of activities. Scholars such as Rinehart (2000) attempted to list the activities ranging from indigenous folk games to ultra-marathoning to various media spectacles.

The distinctions are being made on multiple aspects, i.e., forms of play, artistic sensibilities, risk and the same. Wheaton suggests "to move beyond simplistic and constraining dichotomies such as traditional versus new, mainstream versus emergent, or other related binaries such as sport versus art" to understand the meanings attached to sporting activities.

The differences in the sports forms are highlighted by the debates, their meanings, values, identities, and so on, which can be endless, but what is significant is its potential challenge to traditional ways of 'seeing', 'doing' and understanding sport (Rinehart 1998b; Midol and Broyer 1995 in Wheaton 2005). The elements of the various sporting activities interchange and have few characteristics that are different from the traditional rule-bound, competitive, and masculinized dominant sports cultures (Ibid). Even though Lifestyle sport is a less all-embracing term, it is used in the thesis as it is more appealing to randonneuring.

A similar phenomenon has started to take shape in the Indian context, making its way into people's lifestyles from the mid-2000s. A glance at the urban behaviour concerning physical activity and sport will suggest the gaining popularity of 'running culture', which gave rise to a sub-culture known as 'marathon culture' in the last decade. Similarly, this decade (from 2010-19) is marked by the growing popularity of 'Cycling Culture', which is giving rise to a sub-culture known as 'randonneuring'. Randonneuring is a form of cycling. It is a long-distance organized cycling sport and

is categorized into endurance cycling sport. It is also known as audax riding. It is an international phenomenon considering its presence in more than 60 countries and growing participating numbers yearly. It has been practised for a little over 100 years. Randonneuring is one such human sporting activity growing exponentially in India and other countries such as the U. S. A, Japan, apart from the European countries and France, where it has originated. It is part of what we can now call the "Global culture." The ubiquitous nature of sports in this contemporary world is undoubted (Dyck, 2004).

Another notable factor is that the riders participating in randonneuring events are neither professional athletes nor have relevant sports careers. Contrary to what is generally understood, they are people from everyday life having regular jobs. Making a note of this, Heike Bunte writes, "these riders neither make a profession of their adventurous extreme sport nor are they specially born to this kind of activity". It is even more intriguing/compelling to understand how these ordinary people are able to accomplish such physically and mentally demanding efforts, i.e., riding 200 km, 300 km, 400 km, 600 km, 1000 km, and 1200 km within the set time limits. How do they finish these events, which might, for most people, appear to be an extraordinary achievement and, for some, a ludicrous activity on the surface? The thesis examines the specific sub-culture of cycling – randonneuring culture, i.e., randonneuring experience, events, and riders in the context of Hyderabad, seeking a profound understanding.

The final step of a ride does not often end at the finish line but mostly finds expression in various forms of giving shape and meaning to the experiences. Roger N. Lancaster quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Expression is like a step taken in a fog – no one can say where, if anywhere, it will lead" (Mascia-Lees, 2011, p. 93). Randonneuring experiences and stories have been expressed in multiple formats and recently multiplied through blogs, vlogs, and other electronic media sources to the cycling cultures/ communities in the world. They indicate the presence of a virtual community where the stories find sustenance and inspiration (Chernekoff, 2012). These narratives suggest that their authors did not just go for a recreational bike ride. These astounding stories reveal something more than what catches the eye of the observer or the reader. Looking at the rider stories, travel scholars have noted the significant role it has been playing in the lives of randonneur, their families and society at large. Seeing the increasing number of participants and the profound effect

on the people involved in that activity makes one wonder and be inclined to understand what is randonneuring deeply. Not just intellectually but experientially. To understand the sport, various sports ethnographers have been using what is known as "experiential ethnography" where "ethnographer becomes just another informant providing information and experiences to the understanding of the culture" (Sands, 2002, p. 124). It is necessary to explore and be open to the possibilities it might offer in understanding human nature and human behaviour.

Before delving into the intricacies of randonneuring, it is imperative to acquire a comprehensive understanding of cycling, as it provides a contextual backdrop. Consequently, the following section provides a concise overview of the pertinent literature pertaining to cycling.

Cycling: its various forms

Cycling accelerates human motion, but from a functional point of view, it caters to various functions, such as commuting. Cox, in his edited book *Cycling Cultures*, reveals the diversity of cycling practices and shows how it is inappropriate to understand within the bland singularity of the term "cycling". He further clarifies by putting forward three broad categories, i.e., utility, sport and leisure and the significance it holds in the policy-making of a city or a region to be inclusive of the diversified users (Cox, 2015). Cycling is profoundly diverse, and it can be observed from the joyful play of children to the occasional leisure rider to the highly trained athletes competing at the highest stages, such as the Olympics. For example, it is used as non-motorized means of transport for mobility purposes, physical activity for fitness purposes, racing for sporting activities, and touring for leisure and recreational activities.

Cycling: an active transport choice

Cycling has been primarily studied to understand non-motorized transport and mobility behaviour (Spinney, 2009) within urban centres of Europe and America, as cycling is seen as the logical solution by health policymakers and city planners for several problems faced by urban populations. One of them is the threat of an 'obesity epidemic' due to an increase in the sedentary lifestyle among the high-income groups,

therefore, turning towards cycling as one method of 'active transport' for improving physical and mental health (Steinbach, Green, Datta, & Edwards, 2011). It has been considered the most efficient mode of transport in some cities. European cities in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands have succeeded in making cycling an unremarkable transport choice, and Australian and North American cities are seen as relatively rare (Pucher & Buehler, 2008, cited in Steinbach, Green, Datta, & Edwards, 2011). The increase in daily cycling practices will reduce the growing concern for air pollution in urban centres, simultaneously answering the transport congestion while increasing the overall well-being of the human population.

The objectives of the majority of the scholars are "to predict and standardize movements so that 'appropriate' infrastructure can be designed and built" (Spinney, 2009). Spinney rightly points to how most of the researchers have begun their studies "with a pre-conceived idea of what cycling as a practice entail, and it is without fail either transport - getting from A to B" without paying much attention to the experiences in between A and B or see cycling as "a particular form of scenic leisure activity" (ibid.). My work focuses on combining those two aspects of cycling, i.e., capturing these experiences in the context of scenic leisure activity with certain aspects of sport attached to it, such as competitiveness and reward for the activity.

Another drawback is the assumption of the researcher on what cycling could mean to the riders and what determines informing those meanings is also an area that is not taken into serious consideration by the scholars who study cycling behaviour (Spinney, 2009). The data from London travel diaries suggested that the plurality of meanings attached to cycling and the choices of the people who do and don't cycle maybe culturally determined (Horton, Cox, and Rosen, 2007, cited in Steinbach, Green, Datta, & Edwards, 2011).

The methodologies used are primarily quantitative because the researchers' major goals are to uncover health-related answers and make plans for wider populations. So, some are using online surveys and questionnaires (Fernandez-Herdia, Monzon, & Jara-Diaz, 2014), while others are additionally choosing to analyse secondary data like census data (Caulfield, 2014). The project directors or financiers consider compressing the results and discoveries of an extensive amount of data into a tabular format to be the most efficient method in terms of time, effort, and comprehension.

Few of them turned to in-depth interviews (Steinbach, Green, Datta, & Edwards, 2011), where they looked into the qualitative nature of the experiences and behaviours of the populations. As qualitative research involves an enormous amount of time, effort and resources, skilled researchers opt for the quantitative methods.

Cycling: As a sport

As mentioned earlier, the dominant notions of practising cycling in everyday life concerning policy-making are in line with the environment and health but with little emphasis on technology, the body, and the personalities of the sportsperson.

Departing from the earlier works on cycling, Catherine Palmer's (1996) Ph. D. thesis titled: *A life of its own: the social construction of the tour de France* throws light on one of the most significant sporting events in the world, i.e., Tour de France. It becomes one of the prominent anthropological works in sport as it presents an insider perspective on the sport. The yearlong fieldwork from July 1993 to August 1994 in Isere is concerned with representations of French cycling life, focusing on the characteristics and personalities of the cyclists. This ethnographic account draws on interpretive anthropology and acknowledges the multi-locale aspects involved in practising it. The key elements around which the thesis runs are the fetish nature of the tour de France, the bikes, the body and the mountains. It also gives an account of the enduring French cultural identity in the face of commercialization and globalization.

The works on this front are rare, as we can infer from Palmer's comments that "commitment to cycling life is intense and engaging" and cycling as a sport demands a high level of competitiveness and is determined primarily by physical skills (Palmer, 1996, p. 34-35). And one should note competitive endurance cycling sport such as the tour de France are considered the most challenging sport as they spend up to 7000 Kcal in a single race and needs supreme fitness to be a part of it. The video reference helps us understand the demanding nature of the sport. The intensity of the above activity can be better understood in comparison to the recommended dietary allowances for Indians in 2020; for a man weighing 60 kg having sedentary work to heavy work is 2320 and 3490 Kcal/d. Therefore, it presents arguments as to why there is not much interest in similar studies among sports scientists (Youtube video title: The tour de France explained in animation).

In a publication titled *Philosophy of Sport: Key questions*, Emily Ryall rightly argues that "studying sports-related subjects; far from being 'easy' or 'non-serious' academic subject that it is often portrayed as" (Ryall, 2016, p. 7) because of its multi-disciplinary nature "demands a lot from its students". The multi-disciplinary in the sense that a sports researcher should have an understanding of the body physiology, biomechanics, nutrition and the like to sustain the efforts to reach the destination and fulfil the qualifications.

Inferences/ observations drawn from the review of the literature:

- Anthropologists do not so widely explore sports ethnographies, which is rare in the Indian context.
- There is a growing interest in lifestyle sports which are attracting ever-increasing participation in the urban context.
- Sports scholars, who interacted closely with sports people have started giving more importance to the multiplicity of meanings attached to sporting experiences than their classifications.
- In the three broader categories of cycling culture, i.e., utility, sport and leisure, only the utility facet has received fair attention, whereas sport and leisure facets of the cycling culture have not been explored in depth by researchers.
- The auto-ethnographical genre with self-reflection and narratives could significantly contribute to enhancing the qualitative understanding of the sport and sports behaviour.

Conceptual /Theoretical framework

The ethnographic description or the describing the cultural reality of the sport is given importance in the thesis. The factual knowledge is presented to address the first objective by covering the history of the sport of randonneuring in India and Hyderabad. The processual knowledge, which combines the tacit knowledge of being an immersed participant, is described through an experiential account of the randonneuring. Several concepts are employed to explain the elements of the culture of randonneuring.

Kendall Blanchard specified the importance of the straightforward ethnographic description of sports activities as there is not much literature present covering various societies around the world. He further makes it explicit by writing, "Not all anthropological research is tied to or defined by a major theoretical model. Some basic ethnography, and cultural descriptions are guided by only a few assumptions or definitions. The ethnographic description is the essential raw data of anthropological analysis and cross-cultural research (i.e., ethnology). For this reason, the fact that it is less theoretically sophisticated or specialized than some ethnological research does not limit its importance" (Blanchard, 1995, p. 82-83). This statement clearly justifies the detailed description of the events and the data presented in the thesis in various forms is in itself important.

The idea of working from the fundamental aspects is known as the first principles of thinking or reasoning. The foundational concepts are recognized for studying the culture of randonneuring, which are human experience (explored through the anthropology of experience, experiential ethnography), the human body (explored through the anthropology of the body, the idea of corporeal testing), the bicycle (explored through the ideas of Arjun Appadurai from his work titled 'The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspectives and critical estrangement).

As the thesis title uses the term "experiential ethnography", I intend to understand the concept of experience and its usage in anthropology. It is recognized and agreed upon by a number of scholars as something foundational to theorizing in anthropology and is often taken for granted and not brought into question by many (Throop, 2003, p. 220). I have dedicated certain sections to understanding and articulating the concept of experience that seemed much necessary to the research work.

Focusing on the human body and seeing the human body as what Marcel Mauss pointed out in his influential work *Les techniques du corps* (Techniques of the body, 1934), that "the body is man's first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man's first and most technical object, and at the same time technical means, is his body" (Mauss quoted in Soukup & DVOŘÁKOVÁ, 2016). Aiming to establish the anthropology of the body, as a concept authors Martin Soukup and Michaela Dvořáková described through an example of how

"Anthropology can examine the body on three structural levels, which correspond to the three main types of cultural elements: artefacts (modification of the body), norms (disciplination of the body) and meanings (semiotization of the body)" (Soukup & DVOŘÁKOVÁ, 2016). In the context of the study on a sub-culture of cycling, i.e., randonneuring, if the human body is the first and most natural instrument, then the bicycle would be the second and the artificial instrument. Here, the "bicycle" is critically looked at through the concept of "critical estrangement".

'Ramified performance theory' by John Macaloon – is used to analyse the native categories that are used to classify the sport. The concepts such as 'work' and 'play' are integrated into the culture of randonneuring are looked at by borrowing a model from Kendall Blanchard (1995).

In explaining the profound experience of randonneuring, I took to some of the concepts to better understand various aspects of the randonneuring activity. The idea of 'corporeal testing'. The concept of 'Flow' by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is used to explain certain experiences.

Objectives of the thesis

- 1- To understand the historical account of Randonneuring and its origins in India and Hyderabad.
- 2- To explore and articulate the embodied experience of Randonneuring.
- 3- To examine the meanings attributed by participants to the sport of Randonneuring.
- 4- To examine the impact/influence, the riders attribute to the experience of Randonneuring.

The concern of the present thesis is to address and articulate the process by which randonneuring is sustained as a cultural practice—using ethnographic material based on multiple stages of fieldwork: passive and active i.e., moving from being a beginner cyclist to randonneur and super randonneur is undertaken in Hyderabad, India. The events are an organized sporting display of shared passion and, for some, a shared obsession. The thesis exemplifies that the experience of the event has an

absolute power to transform the participants in myriad ways; their perceptions and their life itself.

One of the other concerns of the thesis is to understand the "experience" of the randonneuring events from the participant's point of view i.e., emic view. Understanding the uniqueness of these randonneuring events, which have been an attractive force for more than a century throughout the world, has been growing exponentially in India in the past decade. The experience of the events is beyond its ephemeral boundaries. Although the complexity in understanding the human experience is so taken for granted. I seek a deeper understanding of the term, as it is fundamental to epistemology.

Significance and the scope of research

There could be numerous ways in which the research can find its relevance. The significance of the work can be seen in the areas such as the anthropology of sport, anthropology of experience, anthropology of the body, autoethnography, changing urban lifestyle and throwing light on leisure aspects of society. One of the foremost aspects is bringing attention to the much-neglected element of sport in Indian society and its relation to the other aspects of society. As pointed out earlier, making a critical distinction between mainstream sports and alternate or lifestyle sports provides a better outlook.

Another significance would be on the methodological front, i.e., throwing some light on the epistemological aspects of research and raising some critical questions regarding some of the fundamental concepts involved in the research, such as experience, human body and embodiment, which have taken a back seat.

In particular, the research helps in understanding the meanings attached to the sport and the motivations behind the randonneuring activity. Randonneur's experiences help understand the mind in different environments and states of physical and mental conditions. It further gives clarity on how the concept of 'flow' is experienced by participants in the sport of randonneuring.

Additionally, it is significant to know the origin and nature and understand the growth and trajectory of randonneuring in India. It is similar to a marathon culture (long-distance running events), which has become a global phenomenon. Annually,

marathons are conducted in every major city globally, which attracts thousands of people to participate in the events. Governments, multinational corporations, and every other organization are taking part and driving the events in the name of health, well-being and fitness.

Research Methodology

The ethnography of sport in the Indian context is in a nascent phase. One does not come across many sports ethnographies in this field. Therefore, the study adopts the exploratory research design in carrying out the research. The exploration results will be known only in hindsight and need certain openness to the numerous possibilities it might lead to. Hence, it is pointed out in various places in the thesis that the research process is as important as the result itself.

The description of the randonneuring phenomenon is very much part of qualitative research. The quantitative data is also presented wherever necessary. However, the focus of the research is specifically the randonneuring experience. The method of experiential ethnography is used in the anthropology of sports by Belinda Wheaton as windsurfer, Anne Bolin as body builder, Jane Granskog as a triathlete, Susan Brownell as heptathlete and Robert Sands as basketball player, collegiate sprinter, collegiate football player and a surfer (Sands, 2002). It includes the use of participant observation as a method. The method of participant observation emphasizes intense community interaction. The method has its limitations as it is time-consuming, but its advantages outweigh other factors. It helps in building rapport and trust with the informants and, at the same time, brings authenticity to the text. These methods distinguish anthropology from other disciplines of study.

Experiential Ethnography

The entry into the relatively new area of the anthropology of sport requires a little departure from that of the traditional fieldwork method of participant observation to what Robert Sands (1999, p. 16) terms the "Experiential ethnography", which he "advocates complete immersion into the population over a long period, where the ethnographer travels through a series of "doors" or stages, each

door providing a deeper understanding of the culture and requisite behaviour of the population".

Further states that "Ethnography does not have a set procedure for data acquisition and analysis"(Ibid.), which implies that he has taken advantage of anthropology being in a state of flux. He tried to introduce a general research orientation, which increases the research design's flexibility to choose a mixture of tools that fits a variety of field situations, especially in the anthropology of sport.

The experiential ethnography method has certain advantages, i.e., "in the nature and validity of the data and resultant description of the population of athletes, were culturally specific and accurate representation" (Robert Sands 1999, p. 18). He suggests the intensive participant method where researcher participates "in every aspect of their interaction"; "travel through numerous layers of participation from a passive observation to extensive participation, not only in behaviour but in a cognitive understanding of the cultural universe"; "a lengthy stay"; where "observation becomes integrated within the participation" and "interaction forms an important part of validation" (Robert Sands 1999, p. 26).

Bowlin and Stromberg writes that, "At the heart of the ethnographic inquiry is a desire for truth: the truth about what others think and feel and do the truth about the reasons that justify their thoughts and actions, and the truth about our relations with them" (Bowlin and Stromberg 1997 in Robert Sands 1999, p. 27). To uncover the truth "language can describe but fail to carry "meaning".... However, if the experience of physical and social actions, including language, is experienced by the ethnographer for an extended period of time in an intensive manner, then meaning is not a quest but is *lived*" (Robert Sands 1999, p. 27, 28).

The intense participation in the field helped to identify me as a member of the cycling community and kept away the tag of the anthropologist in the initial passive stage of the study. It was observed and understood that to tap into the cultural knowledge of the cycling community, it is necessary to be immersed in the ways of the cycling group completely. Robert Sands further points from his studies that being a sprinter or a football player first. Then as a researcher helps in the cognitive alignment with the native, whereas being known as a sprinting anthropologist or Football playing anthropologist will "introduce the added problems of cultural transmission, translation, and interpretation" (1999, p. 30).

Robert Sands, from his experiential ethnography, tries to advance the method of the ethnographic process keeping in mind the limiting factors of the method as the universal application is not possible. This process of ethnography is both a description and an autoethnography, termed a successful Ethnography. The "text" brings together all the roles, such as researcher, observer, participant, informant, and group member. Hence the prominent "voice" of the ethnography is the researcher where "me as a source, or I the expert" is present (Robert Sands 1999, p. 32). Suggesting that a part of ethnography consists of narrating a personal experience, which encapsulates the idea of "radical empiricism", which insists to "make ourselves [as researchers] experimental subjects and treat our experiences as primary data" (Michael Jackson, 1989, quoted in Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 50).

In classic participant observation, the researcher has to enter the field area or into the community for the study. The fieldwork experience can be categorized into two stages in general, one being "passive research" and the other being "active research" (Blanchard 1995, p. 85). The passive stage is a process of getting acquainted and building rapport to establish relationships with the informants.

For this study, I have chosen an explorative path. Keeping in mind and arguing that the "passive research" stage does not require serious involvement, I established myself as a cyclist and a member of the riding community in the initial years of the research work. Being passive helped me to build a rapport that aided in data collection. The added advantage of studying passively was that most of the city's regular cyclists first knew me as a cyclist. Therefore, fellow riders identify me as an anthropologist only at a later interaction, i.e., before, after, or during the ride, or maybe outside the riding experience in a different social context altogether.

The selection of the Hyderabad Randonneurs club for this study is motivated by several compelling factors. Firstly, being among the pioneering five clubs in India, it holds historical significance in the context of randonneuring. Secondly, its geographical location in Hyderabad, one of the rapidly expanding cities globally, offers a unique perspective on the sport's development and dynamics within an urban setting. Moreover, the researcher's role necessitates access to economic and cultural capital to conduct this research effectively. Considering the nature of cycling and the researcher's position, the Hyderabad Randonneurs club emerged as the most suitable and logical choice for facilitating the execution of this study. "The use of case study research is based on the argument that understanding human activity requires analysis

of both its development over time and the environment and context within which the activity occurs" (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 107). A significant part of my work is precisely aiming at that aspect. The study seeks to understand the depth rather than breadth of the phenomenon.

A sample refers to the subset of a specific population. The study population is Hyderabad Randonneurs, all those who have registered with Hyderabad Randonneurs Club and completed at least one brevet, i.e., 200kms. Randonneurs are the riders who have finished at least one brevet, and Super Randonneurs are the riders who have finished all 200 to 600kms in one season. Approximately 25% of the Super Randonneurs are chosen as a sample that represents the population.

Given the qualitative nature of the research, non-probability sampling methods, such as purposive sampling, quota sampling, and expert sampling, are employed as deemed appropriate. The selection of informants is based on their specific roles and responsibilities within the Hyderabad Randonneurs club, as well as their prior experiences participating in brevets as both volunteers and randonneurs. The focus primarily centers on individuals who hold the title of Super Randonneurs, considering their extensive and longstanding affiliation with the club. These Super Randonneurs have taken on various pivotal roles, including but not limited to being club representatives, organizers, randonneurs, and volunteers, significantly contributing to the successful organization of events. Notably, some informants may fall into multiple sample categories, especially organizers who are also active randonneurs themselves. This research approach aims to gain comprehensive insights from those deeply involved in the club and its activities, leading to a nuanced understanding of the Hyderabad Randonneurs community.

The sample size for this study comprises approximately 25% of the total super randonneurs associated with the Hyderabad Randonneurs club as of the conclusion of the 2017-18 season. Data on the participants engaged in the brevets were collected through collaboration with the organizer and the club's website. Additionally, interactions with some group members were facilitated with the assistance of the organizer. It is important to note that certain interactions occurred spontaneously in unforeseen circumstances during the fieldwork, necessitating adaptive research approaches. As is well-acknowledged in anthropological research, not all aspects of fieldwork can be meticulously planned. Hence, these unforeseen opportunities were

embraced and integrated into the study, enriching the ethnographic data and contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the context under investigation.

Having pointed out earlier, the study is an attempt to get a deeper understanding of the randonneuring experience. It has been further divided into two parts. One part is trying to establish a typical journey of a single case, here, what I call "a cyclists' journey" or, more precisely, "a randonneurs' journey." A significant amount of time is spent over three years both on and out of the saddle, in and out of the field, to get past the surface and know the depth of the cultural experience of randonneuring.

The quota sampling was employed to ensure the representation of diverse sample with gender and the different time periods in mind. The second part focuses on the narratives of the randonneurs, which are categorized into three groups, i.e., 1) riders who had finished the Super Randonneur series before the 2017-18 season and did not continue to participate. 2) riders who had completed the Super Randonneur series before the 2017-18 season and continued to participate. 3) the new Super Randonneurs, who have earned the title in the current season, i.e., 2017-18. I fall into the third sampling group.

Apart from the informal gatherings and discussions that arose naturally in the field setting the questionnaire's, semi-structured interviews are recorded as part of the process while supplementing and aiding in acquiring the data. Complimenting the interviews, I have used the relevant cycling podcast interviews such as 'Hit The Road' and 'The Indian Cycling' taken from websites which are publicly available for cycling enthusiasts to consume.

The sport ethnography is focused on endurance cycling events, and it was necessary to consider the time to build the required endurance to participate in 200km to 600km brevets. Being an endurance runner for the last few years helped me to some extent regarding specific fitness, but it was necessary to keep in mind that it is entirely a different sport altogether. Hence, I need bike handling skills and require a sufficient amount of training to transition into attempting those events. Through sustained practice over the years, some functions in the body and abilities have become intuitive, i.e., they seem so natural at first glance from others' perspectives but have taken considerable time to adapt to that state. The primary example would be balancing the bike, which is fundamental to riding and using cleated shoes, where it

slowly becomes second nature after a certain time and sitting on the bike for long hours.

Two primary components hold significant importance in the context of cycling: the human aspect and the technical component, which involves cycling equipment. Cycling activities necessitate specific gear, including cycles, helmets, appropriate clothing, lights, and other safety essentials, which are mandatory for participating in cycling-related events. These measures are crucial for ensuring safety and minimizing potential risks while riding on roads, especially during nighttime endeavors. Consequently, engaging in cycling demands a substantial financial investment to acquire the necessary equipment.

As a researcher, I personally participated in four brevets during the 2017-18 Randonneuring season, spanning distances of 200km, 300km, 400km, and 600km. These experiences contributed to my qualification as a Super Randonneur, demonstrating my involvement and familiarity with the cycling community. Throughout the research process, I made use of available resources to the best of my capabilities to conduct the study effectively and comprehensively.

Using a holistic perspective, which is one of the critical characteristics of anthropology, I bring in relative concepts and try to make some necessary connections to amply the arguments and the significance of the study. To highlight the importance of the process rather than the outcome; the journey rather than a destination; cooperation rather than competition; Arguably, the aim of the research is not to get to any conclusions but to a deeper understanding of what it is to be a human being and the possibilities—a deeper understanding of the contents of the human mind, i.e., human suffering both physical and psychological. Being a Super Randonneur and having experienced the events, I write as one of the representatives of the Randonneuring community. My story could be taken as a representative sample or a typical Randonneur story.

To adequately support the above arguments ethnographically, I take into account the events, actions and interactions between the cyclists riding in and around Hyderabad, those who are associated with Hyderabad Randonneuring club in various capacities and majorly focusing on the in-depth interviews of the Super Randonneur's of the Hyderabad who have completed the Super Randonneur series during 2016, 2017 & 2018 seasons.

Limitations of the Study

The nature of research requires mid to high levels of physical fitness and involves maintenance of the fitness for longer durations. The adaptation of the body and building skills relevant to cycling for long distances was a slow burn. Therefore, it was more time consuming than anticipated.

Cycling as a sport is a relatively expensive sport. Proper management of resources, especially economic resources, is necessary to sustain the activity and stay relevant in the field.

The work necessitates a multi-sited ethnography, as the nature of the field is always in constant movement. The rides ranged from 50km to 600kms covering multiple districts and sometimes crossing state borders. The study moves out of the single sites and local situations of conventional research designs. The examination of the circulation of the meanings, objects and identities were hard to keep track off as they diffuse in the time-space.

Chapterisation

The thesis has been organized into six chapters.

The first chapter provides an introduction and presents the review of available literature, objectives of the study, the methodology employed in understanding the subculture of randonneuring, limitations of the study, and the organization of chapters.

The second chapter briefly discusses the historical background of the development of bicycles in different periods. The chapter's primary focus is on the origin of randonneuring and presenting the history of randonneuring in India and of Hyderabad Randonneurs. It also describes the location and the ambience of Hyderabad and the surrounding region while providing maps of the major randonneuring activities in Hyderabad. This will provide some necessary sense of geography in which the randonneurs emerge from the cycling community in Hyderabad.

The third chapter deep dives into the experiential ethnography, which involves multiple stages of transient experiences, described in length moving from a novice cyclist to becoming a Super Randonneur. The first section engages with the

discourses related to the concept of experience and understands how it has been understood in anthropology at a fundamental level. The section gives a basis to the organization of chapters in order to articulate and express the profound randonneuring experience and present the cultural reality of the randonneuring. The following sections in the chapter detail the passive stages of the fieldwork before venturing into the randonneuring events.

The fourth chapter focuses on the active stages of the typical Randonneurs journey while presenting a first-hand experiential account of the journey. The chapter details the events from an insider perspective, adding quantitative data, topographical maps, and graphical representation of the data.

The fifth chapter is a thematic exploration of the discourses related to Randonneuring and lifestyle sports, such as attitudes to 'risk', 'travel experience', 'suffering', identity and so on. The chapter provides narratives of various super randonneurs, which helps understand the meaning attached to the experience of randonneuring and its impact on their life. It also draws insights from the relevant fields of research such as psychology and neuroscience in an attempt to build a holistic understanding of the cultural experience of randonneuring.

The last chapter summarizes the thesis and presents some concluding comments on the study.

CHAPTER II: Roots of randonneuring:

A brief history randonneuring in India and Hyderabad

Randonneuring is a sub-culture of a broader culture of cycling. Cycling is a physical activity of riding a bicycle. Then, we need to ask what a bicycle is? According to the Meriam Webster dictionary, a bicycle is "a vehicle with two wheels tandem, handlebars for steering, a saddle seat, and pedals by which it is propelled" (Merriam Webster). It is a commonsensical description, but anthropologists have always been cautious around "common sense" because it has often proven to be neither common nor sensical. Anthropologists have more often brought insight into what is taken for granted many cultures. The word bicycle signifies different things to different people at different times in history. As Vivanco demonstrates how the image we have of 'a bicycle' may not be accepted universally, the more complex realities of the object itself differ from our own images of it (Vivanco, 2013). The complexities only become apparent when the 'bicycle', is put to scrutiny.

The first part of the chapter outlines various events related to the origin of the bicycle. For example, when of a bicycle is closely related to what is a bicycle? It also explores the multidimensional character of bicycles as objects. Using the concept of critical estrangement, "making the bicycle strange," helps understand the complex socio-technical object whose meanings are shaped through its histories, production, and uses. Therefore, a brief history of the cycle is provided. It is essential to look at the emergence of the bicycle as a technology and its adaptations, which are fundamental to holistically understanding cycling as a culture. All of these provide the necessary historical context in which randonneuring originated.

The second part of the chapter moves on to the history of randonneuring. The 'what' and 'when' questions are pivotal to the emergence of randonneuring. The third part of the chapter moves away from the broader world context and focuses on randonneuring in India, particularly in the city of Hyderabad.

A Brief History and Evolution of Cycle:

The cycle was invented in the early 19th century. It went through many changes throughout the last two centuries. It is considered as one of the simplest forms of technology today. The origin and details of the bicycle are debated by historians. The term 'bicycle' is understood to have come into use during the 1860s giving birth to a new consumer culture for cycles. The cycle industry emerged as one of the first and expensive mass-produced luxury durable consumer goods in Europe and the United States of America. The cycle industry led to the 'good roads' movement promoting quality roads and streets and, therefore, to the rise of the automobile industry. The bicycles also played a vital role in the Victorian-era social transformations, including women's rights. The Velocipede, the high-wheeler, and the safety bicycle are the most general cycle types discussed by historians (Vivanco, 2013).

It all began with a dream of inventing a horseless carriage. This became a reality in Germany in 1817, with Von Drais unveiling the horse replacement vehicle, a "Laufmaschine" (running machine). It has a frame and wheels with no pedals. It was propelled by running. It was variously known as the "velocipede," "Draisine," and "hobby horse" (Vivanco, 2013). It took two more decades, i.e., in 1839, to become a mechanically driven bike. Even though there is little evidence, much credit for the invention of the cycle was given to a Scottish Blacksmith, Kirkpatrick Macmillan. By the 1860s, the bicycle was manufactured using a wooden frame, metal tires with pedals, and a crank on its front wheel. For its uncomfortable ride on the not-so-well-laid roads, it earned the nickname-"Boneshaker." Improving on the design, Eugene Meyer, in the 1870s, created the High-Wheeler bicycle. It was made with a metal frame and rubber tyres, which offered a much more comfortable ride. It had two spoked wheels, a large one in front and a small one at the rear. It resembled a British penny and farthing coins hence known as "Parth Farthing" in Britain. It became popular during the 1870s and 1880s.

The actual bicycle, which is very similar to a modern bicycle, was born in 1876. It featured a strong metal frame and chain powered by two pedals and two wheels. It was invented by the Englishman Harry John Lawson and is known as the safety bicycle. The rider was closer to the ground, making stopping easier, and the powering shifted to the rear wheel, keeping the riders' legs safely away from the rotating front wheel. A breakthrough came through another Englishman in 1885, John Kemp Starley, who developed the first commercially successful version known as the

Rover. Another significant improvement came through an Irish Inventor, John Boyd Dunlop, in 1888 after his son was prescribed a dose of cycling by a doctor. Therefore, to make his son's ride comfortable, he fits tyres that can be inflated, and this clever idea revolutionised the bicycle.

The critical aspects attributed to the bicycle's success are the innovations in the production, designs to increase manufacturing efficiency, and cost-cutting measures to make it affordable to larger populations. One of the notable figures in expanding cycling was Col. Albert Pope, who saw a business opportunity. He established his company Columbia Bicycles, and became the largest bicycle manufacturer in the world. The departmental specialisation and some other key advances in metallurgy and other relevant standard and interchangeable parts were pioneered at the company. The electrification of the factory to provide lighting for night shifts which further helped to create a continuously moving assembly line was provided by Thomas Edison. This was considered as one of the first for mass production (Vivanco, 2013). By the 1890s, in Europe and the United States bicycles became a craze as interest in two-wheeled machines grew significantly. An article from the New York Times in 1896 enthused that "the bicycle promises a splendid extension of personal power and freedom, scarcely inferior to what wings would give" (Andrews, 2017). The activity was viewed as liberating as it promoted 'automobility'. The users attached new meanings and status to bicycling as it became of a symbol of progress and being modern (Vivanco, 2013). Like many innovations, the bicycle promoters too were not free of social controversies. There were concerns about the health consequences of cycling, the perception of cyclists by other road users and the surrounding social reform among women.

The mass production of the bicycle contributed directly to the automobile industry's rise and laid the foundation for a new concept of personal mobility. Bicycle historian Aronson wrote "The bicycle did the dirty work for its mechanised successor in a variety of ways" (quoted in Vivanco 2013: 34).

The early 20th century saw the explosion in bicycle designs with simple variations to the safety bicycle and penetrated well into European and American markets. This was the first bicycle boom that appealed beyond the upper and middle classes to the masses. The bicycles were exported to colonised regions in Africa, Latin America, and Asia as a global commodity and technological artefact (Anrold & DeWald, 2011; Vivanco, 2013). Bicycles made it to India during the colonial period.

India was one of the important markets for the British rule. The annual importation has scaled up dramatically from thirty-five thousand by 1913-14 to more than two hundred thousand by 1951-1952. Even though there was competition from Germany, other European producers and Japan, Britain held the significant share of the Indian market with manufacturers such as Raleigh, BSA, and Rudge-Whitworth (Anrold & DeWald, 2011, p. 974). By the mid-1940s, Indians started their domestic industries that created a host of local goods such as bells, stands, and carriers and the services to bicycle users. After independence, the introduction of high import tariffs and changes in postcolonial policies had brought down imports and gave rise to domestic manufacturers such as "Hind Cycles" (Anrold & DeWald, 2011, p. 976). Advertising and the evolving marketing techniques with hire-purchase and loan agreements led to the sharp decline in prices of the bicycles and diffused to small towns and villages by the 1950s (Anrold & DeWald, 2011).

Apart from the broader safety bicycle, which played as a common inexpensive transportation machine, with numerous improvements, like the addition of gears and suspensions. Vivanco (2013) recognizes an important feature of technology that it changes as it 'evolves', this feature marks the central idea of the contemporary consumer culture too. The bicycle became lighter and stronger with aerodynamics, making it more efficient. The pace at which technological innovations are taking place is unprecedented. The same is true for the bicycle and noting this dynamic, Vivanco (2013, p. 40) presents the common saying among bicycle enthusiasts if they are asked 'When is the bicycle invented'? (raised, the answer would be) 'Yesterday'. Over time, advanced motorised vehicles like motorcycles and automobiles have replaced pedal-powered machines as a convenient means of transport. This gradually led to the bicycle being relegated to the status of an inferior machine. School-going children and economically weaker sections who could not afford a motorcycle used the bicycle. The motorised vehicle became the adult norm and a symbol of high status.

In the 1970s, the new meanings attached to the bicycle as an alternative to automobiles began circulating. One of the factors to this acceptable change was the oil crisis. The people of America became aware of the benefits of bicycling in terms of physical exercise and energy-efficient transportation. Furthermore, the greenways movement provided the connection to bicycle advocating for bicycle paths. This awareness suddenly gave rise to the demand for bicycling, which came to be known

as the "second bicycle boom" (Vivanco, 2013, p. 106). This spike in demand has accelerated the upward trend towards more specialisation and increased versatility of the bikes.

In India, during the past decade, the second bicycle boom is starting to emerge in the major urban centres. The second bicycle boom is marked with wider users of lightweight geared bicycles and an emerging interest among adults as they make health-conscious decisions regarding physical exercise, transportation, and recreation.

The year 2017 has been celebrated as the bicentennial year of the cycle by various cycling-related organisations worldwide (Washington Post, 2017; Vishnavi, 2017). Cycling as a system of motion has been adopted by numerous people and for various purposes. It was used as a vehicle for transportation in Europe. Later it became a sport during the 1860s with a race in France. Then a recreational activity during the 1880s and continued ever since.

Randonneuring: the shoots

The term 'randonneur' has its origin in the French language. The cycling community has adopted the term with its French roots. Another term with French roots, associated with cycling is 'brevet'. For most non-cyclists the terms randonneuring and brevet may be new. Before focusing on the history of randonneuring in India, the following section discusses the history of randonneuring.

What is Randonneuring?

The term 'randonneur' originates from the French term '*randonee*', roughly translated as a long trip, outing, and the like. Therefore, a person engaging in such activities is called a 'randonneur'. In cycling, a rider who attempts to ride a long distance within an allocated time is commonly referred to as a 'randonneur'.

Randonneuring is a form of cycling, though it is hard to define, because of its multi-faceted nature and the different meanings associated with it by every randonneur. Another way of understanding randonneuring is to understand it by what it is not. It is certainly not a race but a test for oneself against the time, the weather and the route. It is not a competition to race with other riders. Every rider who finishes the ride is treated the same. In randonneuring, unlike the competitive cycling

races, the riders are not focused on winning. The principal aspect of randonneuring is self-sufficiency; the rider can only get help provided at the checkpoints along the route. If a rider seeks assistance from the supporting members in between the checkpoints, they will have to face a time penalty or even disqualification from the event. Randonneurs are free to buy food supplies or get their bike repairs at any shops they come across in their course. Any rider who has completed a 200 Kilometre 'brevet' will be entitled to be called a 'randonneur'. The term 'brevet' also originated from France and roughly translated into a 'patent', 'certificate', or 'diploma' (Randonneurs USA). In randonneuring, the long distances starting from 200km each event is usually referred to as a 'brevet'. The riders have to carry a brevet card throughout the course that is to be produced at the checkpoints and get it stamped with timing details by the event official or a volunteer present at the checkpoint. It acts as proof for the rider. Table 2.1 shows the distances and the time required for the riders to finish the brevets and opt for the respective medals.

Table 2.1: Randonneuring Distance-Time

Distance (in Km)	200	300	400	600	1000	1200	1400
Time (in Hrs.)	13.5	20	27	40	75	90	116:40

Source: Audax India Randonneur Website.

Origin of Randonneuring:

The "audacious" effort of a group of Italian cyclists on the 12th of June 1897 between Rome and Naples, a distance of 230 Kilometres, marked the start of the randonneuring. The group stuck together with a captain leading and setting a sufficient pace to get the job done in a day without anyone dropping out. It was a unique accomplishment as the riders were commoners, i.e., not specialists or trained riders. The riders were successful in proving that even ordinary riders can ride long distances. Randonneuring is associated with the term 'Audax' as the clubs are named in that form and also came to be known as 'Audax riding'. The Latin root word 'audax' means 'to dare'. This kind of long-distance effort has spread among the cycling enthusiasts and has garnered much attention in the press. (Randonneurs USA).

Later in 1904, Henri Desgrange, founder of the Tour de France, initiated Audax France, looking at Audax Italiano. As a result, the Audax Club Parisien (ACP) was newly created by Audax France in the same year, which became the authority to certify brevets ridden under Audax rules in France. Until World War-I, only 200 kilometres was considered a brevet, and it has spread rapidly in France, overseeing several other clubs. Here, the clubs or the groups with the most participants who successfully met the challenges were awarded. Unlike racing, the most noteworthy point is that the rider is not trying to outride other riders; it is essential to ride in a group.

After the war, in 1921, the ACP split and some of the riders created L'Union des Audax Cyclists Parisiens (U.A.C.P.) which is now known as L'Union des Audax Francaises (U.A.F.). The rides organised by UAF are known as Brevets Audax, which is to be ridden at an average speed of 22.5 kilometres per hour under the direction of ride captains, whom riders should not overtake (Audax Club Parisien Randonneur).

Audax Club Parisien (ACP)

21st September 1921 is marked as the inception of ACP. The major distinguishable factor is that the riders in the events organised by ACP can ride at their own speed hence called the 'allure libre' club, which is considered free speed bicycle tours comprising various distances. The members of the ACP retained the name 'Audax Club Parisien' and organised brevets des randonneurs, adding the first 300kms event on 11th of June, 1922; the first 400kms event on 22nd of July, 1923; and the first 600-kilometre ride on 30th of June and the 1st of July, 1928 to the existing brevet of 200kms. On the 15th of August 1934, the first 1000kms event was organised.

Since 1976, ACP has spread to many other nations. During its early spread, initially, it was restricted to a few European countries and was called Brevets Randonneurs Europeans. Later, in 1983, it became known as the Brevets des Randonneurs Mondiaux (BRM) in nine countries. The ACP sanctioned brevets are now followed with the same rules and regulations in all the 60 plus nations (as of 2019) of the Randonneurs Mondiaux. These international events, with its location and schedules for every year are displayed on ACP website. The ACP/BRM events are the only eligibility criteria for participating in the Paris-Brest-Paris or getting awards such

as Randonnuer-5000 or Super Randonneur medal (Randonneurs USA). Most riders attempt to become a Super Randonneur. One must complete a 200, 300, 400 and a 600 BRM in single season in order to opt for a Super Randonneur Medal. The title of Super Randonneur is the most sought after and one of the biggest motivators in participating the brevets. Today, the participation numbers themselves demonstrate that Audax Club Parisien is one of the largest cycling clubs in France, and its presence is across the globe (Audax Club Parisien Randonneur).

Randonneuring in India:

In India, Audax India Randonneur (AIR), is recognized by Audax Club Parisien (ACP) for conducting and overseeing all Brevets de Randonneurs Mondiaux (BRM) and Audax events. The first 200 km BRM was conducted in India on the 31st, of January 2010 in Mumbai. BRM's were started by Satish Patki, a long-distance cycling enthusiast from Mumbai. After that, India's first overnight 400 km brevet in August and 600 km brevet in September was organised in Pune. Therefore, providing a complete Super Randonneur series for the riders in 2010. That helped the riders to qualify for the 17th edition of Paris-Brest-Paris in 2011. The person who has coordinated with ACP and led not only randonneuring but the ultra-cycling phenomenon in India is Divya Tate, who has been a national representative of India and has facilitated all the brevet events under AIR since 2011. She is also one of the first group of riders from India and the first women rider in India to qualify for the 1200 km Paris-Brest-Paris, an Audax ride in France, 2011 edition (Audax India Randonneurs; Shyam, 2019; Pal, 2019).

Established in 2010, Pune Randonneurs is the oldest randonneuring club in India. In 2011, there were total of three clubs including Pune Randonneurs registered with ACP. The other two are namely Randonneurs India and Bangalore Brevets. All the riders who do not have a have club to affiliate with chose to be registered under the Randonneurs India club. The rides were more personal. These riders were riding at different places of the country while complying with all the rules of the ACP. Just to get a perspective, there were 340 riders who finished various brevets i.e., homologations and ridden a total of 1,01,100kms i.e., homologated kilometres by the end of 2011 season (Audax Club Parisien Randonneur).

Audax India Randonneur (AIR): Growth

Table 2.2 shows the growing popularity of randonneuring in India since its inception. In 2010, riders registered with AIR had clocked 30,100 homologated kms in the whole year, while the meter stopped at 44,14,600 km in 2021, with India taking no. 1 spot in the country rankings. All the years have seen an incremental increase in the numbers with the exception of 2020, as there was drop in the numbers because of the pandemic situation. The participation records have been consistently broken.

Since 2014, AIR has become much more organised with a website allowing riders in India to know all the event details i.e., the route, elevation gain, checkpoints, and fellow riders. A few long-distance cyclists took on themselves to create the website that acted as a proper platform, which has further accelerated growth and popularity of the event. There is a clearly visible jump in numbers from 2013 to 2014 i.e., from 2,78,500km to 6,90,100km and this can be attributed to the opening up of the website. Similarly, there is a big spike in the 2021. The reason for more than 3X spike is because of the centenary BRM 200 organized by various clubs throughout the world. As a global community of Randonneurs celebrated by turning up in an unprecedented number to participate in the 200km BRM which marked 11th September 2021 has the completion of 100 years from the inception of ACP on 11th September 1921. 4,750 riders registered at 60 clubs form across the country for the centenary brevet (Singh, 2021). The historical event has contributed significantly and made India top the world country ranking with 44,14,600 homologated kilometres. India not only obtained number 1 position but left a significant gap compared to other countries. Japan and Russia have secured 2nd and 3rd position with 22,48,000kms and 15,58,400kms respectively (Audax Club Parisien Randonneur).

Table 2.2: Shows the growth of Audax India Randonneurs (AIR) participation from its inception and number of homologations in each event.

Total Indian Clubs	Country Rank	Year	200km homologations	300km homologations	400km homologations	600km homologations	1000km homologations	Total homologations	Total no. of Kilometres ridden
		2010							30,100
3	19	2011	174	81	47	37	1	340	1,01,100
7	14	2012	436	150	100	48	3	737	2,04,000
9	14	2013	627	183	110	72	11	1,003	2,78,500
15	10	2014	1379	459	262	203	50	2,353	6,90,100
19	11	2015	1567	505	316	254	29	2,671	7,72,700
25	6	2016	2595	938	579	418	54	4,584	13,36,800
34	3	2017	3156	1279	916	723	52	6,126	18,67,100
49	3	2018	4092	1785	1251	1073	260	8,461	27,58,100
63	4	2019	4312	2031	1556	1283	127	9,309	29,90,900
74	3	2020	2225	1080	673	543	45	4,566	14,09,000
75	1	2021	8625	2720	2002	1783	3	15,133	44,14,600

Source: Audax Club Parisien website documents. [URL: <https://www.audax-club-parisien.com/en/our-organizations/brm-world/>]

Homologation refers to an approval process whereby certification is issued by ACP. A single rider can have multiple homologations.

From the inception, long-distance cycling enthusiasts have been pivotal in forming clubs at their respective cities and towns, registering with AIR for conducting the brevets. As a result, more cyclists started venturing into randonneuring, taking it as a challenge and popularising randonneuring in India. The growth has been multi-fold. As shown in Table 2.2, as of 2021, 75 clubs in various cities are part of Audax India Randonneur, which organises the brevets in their respective cities. The total number of brevets went up from 50 in 2011 to 830 in 2021, excluding Brevet Populaires (Audax India Randonneurs).

In fact, it is observed that some of the major city clubs that have experienced a rapid growth in numbers have established a new club adjacent to the old ones. For example, New Delhi has two Randonneuring clubs namely: Delhi Randonneurs and Lakshya Randonneurs. Similarly, Mumbai has three clubs, working in the name of Mumbai Randonneurs, Cycling for all and Navi Mumbai-Kalyan.

Brevet Populaire events are 100km-entry-level events for riders interested in long-distance cycling. These kinds of events aimed at popularizing the randonneuring culture. With the rise of the Brevet Populaire (BP) events from 2019, the total number of events related to randonneuring jumped significantly to over 1000 events. As shown in Table 2.3, with the increase in the number of qualifying events, the number of Super Randonneurs went up from 185 in 2015 to 957 in 2019. The drop in the number of Randonneurs achieving the Super Randonneur (SR) title in 2020 is due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 2.3: Shows year-wise Audax India Randonneurs - Total Super Randonneurs (T.SRs), total no. of Super Randonneur Qualifiers (SRQs) and Brevet Populaire (BP) taken place.

Year	T.SRs	SRQs	1000km	1200km	1400km	Fleche	BP	Total Events
2015	185	249	4	4	0	1		258
2016	324	274	7	4	0	2		287
2017	451	386	13	7	0	1		407
2018	787	439	22	5	1	3		526
2019	957	639	21	16	0	5	148	829
2020	415	745	27	13	3	9	219	1016
2021	708	830	1	2	0	0	195	1028

Source: Audax India Randonneurs website. [URL:

<https://www.audaxindia.in/events.php>]

The overall growth in the riders achieving the SR titles reflects the immense possibility and inherent capabilities of being human. Even though multiple factors contribute to growth, the most important is the ability to transform oneself by constantly pushing one's physical and mental limits. The researcher experienced the event first hand by riding 200kms, 300kms, 400kms and 600kms and acquired a Super Randonneur title in 2018 shares and agrees with the narratives of various super randonneurs that the activity of randonneuring has a fundamental transformative nature. The activities certainly test the riders' limits while facing uncertain challenges like riding in the night, sleep deprivation, and varying temperatures and terrain. In the process, the riders have to dig deep inside to find mental and physical strength to finish the challenge. Going through such difficulties the riders find meaning.

India and international participation

Paris-Brest-Paris (PBP)

Paris-Brest-Paris (PBP from here onwards) is a premier event in randonneuring and is considered an Everest of the randonneuring, one of the toughest of all cycling events. All the other audax events act as qualifying events before any rider can attempt PBP. At the same time, all the other audax events can be considered as smaller peaks that seem like Everest for cyclists at various stages.

In 1931, ACP created the prestigious 1200 km randonneuring event: "Paris-Brest-Paris Randonneurs," which runs every four years. PBP was conducted as a race till 1931. The same brevet rules apply. The cut-off time to finish the PBP ride is 90hrs. Considering the mortal nature of the ride and a real test for the cyclists, from 1975, ACP had made some of the events mandatory to participate in the PBP. These are the Super Randonneurs Qualifying events; in other words, it is necessary to finish the Super Randonneur series, i.e., 200, 300, 400, and 600 km rides in the same year in which PBP will be organized (Paris Brest Paris).

The PBP 19th edition organised by ACP during 18-22 August 2019 saw participation from 66 countries, 6674 riders registered, out of which 6418 turned up at the starting line. In this oldest and prestigious international event, three hundred twenty-five participants represented India through AIR. Considering India's third representation, it is quite a big jump in numbers compared to its first two

representations, i.e., in 2011 and 2015, it saw 15 and 53 participants, respectively (Audax India Randonneurs).

London Edinburgh London (LEL)

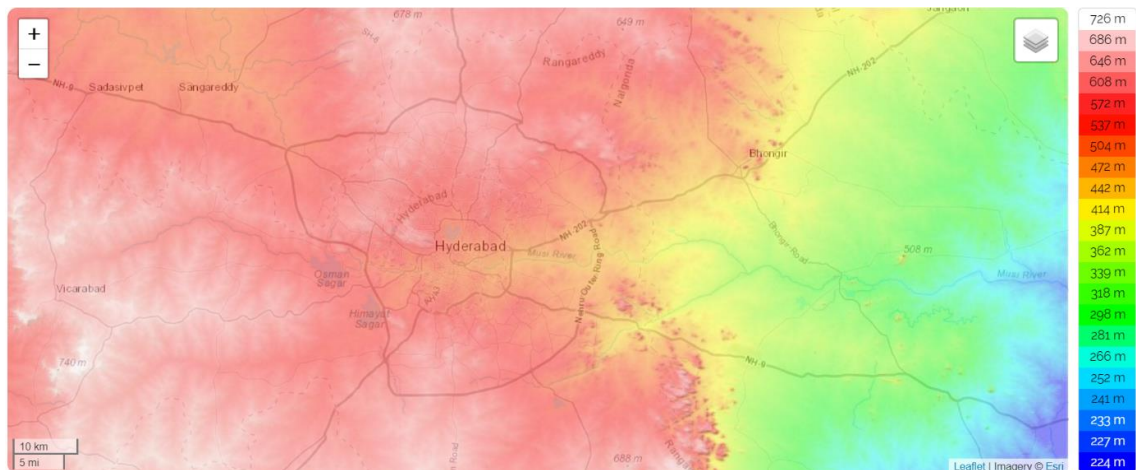
London Edinburgh London (LEL) is a 1500 km self-supported cycling event conducted every four years while keeping a 2-year gap between LEL and PBP. The time limit for the event is set to 125 hrs to finish the ride. It offers a unique way to experience the United Kingdom. There are no qualifying events per se to participate in the event. Eight participants from India have attempted LEL 2013 edition, out of which 1 participant could finish in time. A much larger contingent of participants from India attempted LEL 2017 edition. 10 out of the 53 participants finished in time, and another 7 completed the distance but outside the time limits (Audax India Randonneurs).

Hyderabad Randonneurs Club

Hyderabad Randonneurs Club is situated in Hyderabad, Telangana, India. Hyderabad Randonneurs club is an organisation that conducts audax rides under the name AIR. It is one of India's largest and fastest-growing clubs in terms of riders qualifying for SR's and by the total number of homologated kilometres.

It offers unique topography and challenge to the riders as it is placed on a Deccan plateau. It is necessary to trace the territorial landscape. Cycling needs certain familiarity with roads that cyclists regularly encounter. As Wolch recognizes, "it is impossible to understand human society without accounting for its geographical underpinnings" (quoted in Palmer, 1996, p. 48). Indeed, landscape exists independently of cyclists, but its perception is profoundly shared by the cyclist's works. The sensual world of cycling paints a territorial map of its own. The cycling terrain and environment allow cyclists to build key strategies for rides for various purposes, from serious training to leisure riding. Noting the significance, Palmer writes that "landscape has the power to inform and transform social relations" (1996, p. 49). Cycling builds a profound understanding of the environment and geography, which no other transport could provide. The geographical landscape of Hyderabad plays a crucial role in the construction of cycling as social practice.

Map 2.1 Topography of Hyderabad



Source: topographic-map.com website

As anthropologists have long realized, it is common to see the environment descriptions in the ethnographical accounts and their implications in the production of cultural landscapes. The first few pages are often filled describing the ambience of the field sites of the ethnographers.

A brief discussion on Hyderabad is an important consideration. Being a cosmopolitan and multi-cultural city, its various developments in the past few years have certainly affected the economy and shaped the social life of the population. In fact, Hyderabad topped the list of global short-term growth city amongst 130 cities, according to JLL's research reports in their 'City Momentum Index' (CMI) 2018 and 2020 published on their website (Jones Lang Lasalle Incorporated). Hyderabad's prominent position in the global Information Technology (IT) domain, primarily attributed to favourable governmental policies that have facilitated the development of cutting-edge facilities and attracted multinational companies to the city. As a result of this growth, there has been a notable rise in the number of individuals engaging in cycling, with a significant representation from the IT sector.

Charting the territorial landscape of Hyderabad is necessary; it is out of this backdrop cyclists emerge. Mapping Hyderabad and its surrounding in cycling terms are essential to understand the cycling world's nature and examine it. Each riding route's cultural and geographical features have their particular character.

Hyderabad Randonneurs and its beginning

Hyderabad Randonneurs was established in 2012. It was previously known as Hyderabad Brevets. Typical of the other clubs in India, the rides before 2014 were conducted at a personal level. Few riders took initiation understanding the necessity to build a standard platform to help the riders participate in the event. Initially, Sunil Menon, a fitness enthusiast, took responsibility for conducting the brevets. Later it was shifted to "The Bike Affair" cycle store. Finally, the cycle store was taken as the base for operating anything related to the Hyderabad Randonneuring club.

One of the early randonneurs in Hyderabad, who also played a significant role in organising the randonneuring events, recalling a ride from 2013, says that the riders were given a cue sheet that mentioned the route (See Annexure-route card). As there were no manned checkpoints, it was hard to verify the ride, i.e., to check whether the rider had followed the specified route and obeyed the audax rules throughout the ride. The randonneur states that it was difficult at times to contact the club and the respective representative. The detailed calendar of events was not presented. The riders felt the need to make it more informative, which could help them plan the ride in a much-informed way and enjoy the spirit of randonneuring. When asked about the spirit of randonneuring, he says, "it is like a long meditation on the bicycle, being with oneself for long periods and being self-sufficient."

A group of cyclists, all like-minded, who have at least completed a brevet and have a detailed understanding of the randonneuring came together to form the first organising body to take responsibility for the Randonneuring events in Hyderabad. The organising body consisted of Dr. Muralidhar Nannapaneni -President, Mr. Raushan Kumar-Vice-President, Mr. Abhimanyu Pamulapati - General Secretary, Mr. Krish Aggarwal-Treasurer and the role of Executive members are opted by Mr. Krishnendu Basu, Mr. Gokul Krishna, Mr. Bharath V Reddy, Mrs. Anitha K Manda, Mrs. Anupa Lakshmi Murthy, Mr. Kanthipudi V S Kishore, Mr. Rajeev Kalva, Mr. Pradyumna Penmetcha, and Mr. Krishna Mandava. The body has coordinated with Audax India Randonneurs (AIR) representative, Divya Tate of Pune Randonneurs. AIR, too, was at a formulation stage at that point. The AIR website became operational in 2014. The website acts as a platform for riders that provides all the necessary details of the brevets. It registered itself as a society to take care of the operations.

The role of the ride responsible

There is a ride responsible for every brevet, who takes care of all the formalities and leverages the resources to organise the brevet. Generally, the ride responsibility is taken by randonneurs who have substantial exposure to randonneuring and volunteer to take up the task. They are widely known and respected in not only the randonneuring community but in the larger cycling community.

In the 2014-2015 season, there were nine brevets organised by Hyderabad Randonneurs, and Krish Agarwal has taken the role of ride responsibility for all of them. The 2015-2016 season can be said as a significant year for the Hyderabad Randonneurs club as it gained much more visibility and enthusiasm from the riding community. Unlike any other season, the 2015-2016 season saw the most number of randonneurs taking the role of ride responsibility, i.e., seven riders for the twelve brevets during that season. The season also explored some new courses and start points for the brevets, which are continued to be used in the following seasons. The season ended with the first 1000km randonneuring event, 'The Gran Fondo'. In the 2016-2017 season, a total number eleven brevets were organised in which Rajeev Kalva had played the role of the ride responsible in six, in two by Gokul Krishna and one each by Anupa Lakshmi, Anita Manda and Christopher Blessing.

During my fieldwork period, i.e., 2017-2018 season, there were twelve brevets organised in total. Out of which, seven were taken care of by Rajeev Kalva, three by Hemanth Sai Chandan and two by Gokul Krishna. Rajeev Kalva was the organiser for all the four brevets in which I have taken part as a rider/ randonneur.

The season 2018-2019 is special, as it is preceding the Paris-Brest-Paris 2019. Keeping in view of PBP, the brevet calendar was prepared. They are giving a more significant number of options for the riders to qualify for the PBP event. It saw the highest number – sixteen brevets in the season while Rajeev Kalva was the ride responsible for fourteen, and the rest two were taken care of by Hemanth Sai Chandan. This season also saw the introduction of the 'Fleche 24-hour' event. The rules for the Fleche are quite different from regular brevets. Fleche focuses more on team riding, with at least three riders finishing the ride together. It should be ridden continuously for 24 hours with no stops over two hours. At least 25 km must be ridden in the last two hours; therefore, to verify there is a "22-hour" control point. The minimum distance for the Fleche 24-hour ride is 360 km.

Ethnographic interviews revealed that a very few randonneurs have taken the role of ride responsibility for a majority of the brevets conducted in the Hyderabad Randonneurs. While other randonneurs occasionally joined them, helping in volunteering to take care of certain checkpoints. Relatively few people decide to assume this obligation for a number of reasons: Organizing a randonneuring event involves a multitude of tasks, including route planning, securing permits, coordinating with volunteers, managing registration, providing support, and ensuring participant safety. This complexity is daunting and deter potential organizers. Organizing a successful randonneuring event is a time-consuming endeavor. This includes pre-event preparations, on-the-day logistics, and post-event follow-up. For riders and randonneurs with busy schedules or other commitments, dedicating the necessary time to organize an event is challenging. Effective organizers typically have experience in randonneuring, which provides them with a deep understanding of the needs and expectations of participants. They also need knowledge in areas such as route planning, safety protocols, and logistics, which acts as a barrier for less experienced individuals. Organizers often rely on volunteers to help with various aspects of the event, such as staffing checkpoints, providing support, and ensuring participant safety. Recruiting and coordinating volunteers is a complex task.

Withstanding the obstacles, there are committed individuals who possess a strong enthusiasm for randonneuring and are eager to assume the position of coordinators. By giving riders the chance to push themselves and discover new routes, they frequently have a significant impact on the development and prosperity of the randonneuring community. Experienced organisers also frequently offer insightful guidance and assistance to individuals who aspire to assume this position in the future.

Hyderabad Randonneurs Club:

The club's growth is visible and demonstrated through the numbers in Table 4. The overall mileage has increased exponentially. The significant jump in the numbers is seen in 2018 because of PBP's anticipation and euphoria. As 2019 is a PBP year riders have to complete the SR series in order to qualify for applying to the most prestigious randonneuring event. Table 4 shows the highest number of participations

in 1000km event which reflects the interest of the riders who are testing themselves and bracing to take up 1200km PBP challenge and add one more feather in their caps.

Table 2.4: Shows year wise Hyderabad Randonneurs participation data from its inception.

Year	No. of participants in 200km event	No. of participants in 300km event	No. of participants in 400km event	No. of participants in 600km event	No. of participants in 1000km event	Total No. of participants	Total km
2012	27	8	12	6		53	16,200
2013	57	17	3	3		80	19,500
2014	101	38	19	12		170	46,400
2015	158	39	34	18		249	67,700
2016	257	137	53	37	6	490	1,41,900
2017	181	63	44	27	9	324	97,900
2018	227	82	71	88	46	514	1,97,200
2019	184	76	56	49	13	378	1,24,400
2020	30	14	3	4		51	13,800
2021	331	52	24	34		441	1,11,800

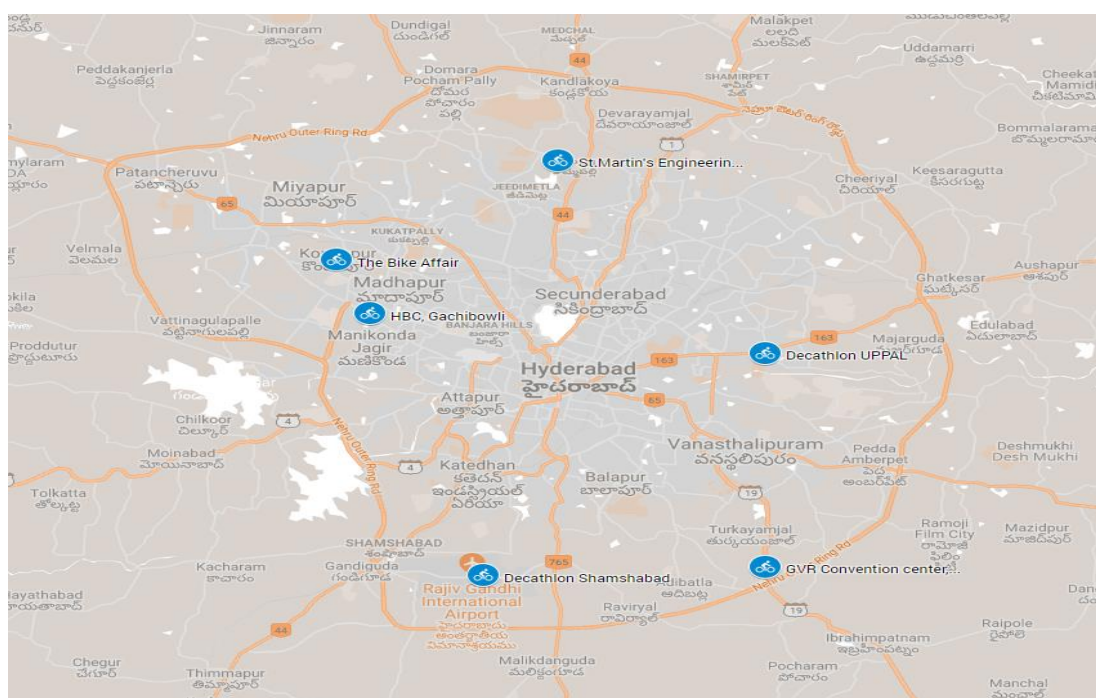
Source: Audax Club Parisien website documents. [URL: <https://www.audax-club-parisien.com/en/our-organizations/brm-world/>]

A closer examination of Table 2.4 shows a drop in the homologated kilometres and participation since 2019. The reason for that is not a lack of interest but the establishment of Secunderabad Randonneurs and Karimnagar Randonneurs clubs in the Telangana State. Some of the riders who were previously affiliated with Hyderabad Randonneurs chose to associate with the new clubs. Thus, resulting in lesser participation numbers in the Hyderabad Randonneurs.

Start points, Controls, and other significant places

The places in which the brevets are conducted are determined majorly by the course direction. During the initial seasons, the starting point of the brevets in Hyderabad was usually the bicycle store 'The Bike Affair' (TBA), Kondapur, located on the west part of the Hyderabad city for all sorts of distances. Later on, the starting points are chosen based on the direction of the ride. St. Martin's Engineering College was selected to be the point for the brevets whose course of direction is towards the northward of Hyderabad. Likewise, Decathlon-Shamshabad for South, GVR Convention Centre-Manneguda for South-East and Decathlon-Uppal for East. Eventually, the bike station "Hyderabad Bicycling Club" (HBC), Gachibowli, replaced TBA for brevets running towards the West. The starting points of the brevets are chosen mainly on the outskirts of the city to avoid heavy traffic and pollution.

Map 2.2: Showing the Starting points of the brevets



Source: Google Maps

Table 2.5: Providing links for all the prominent Hyderabad randonneur events route maps.

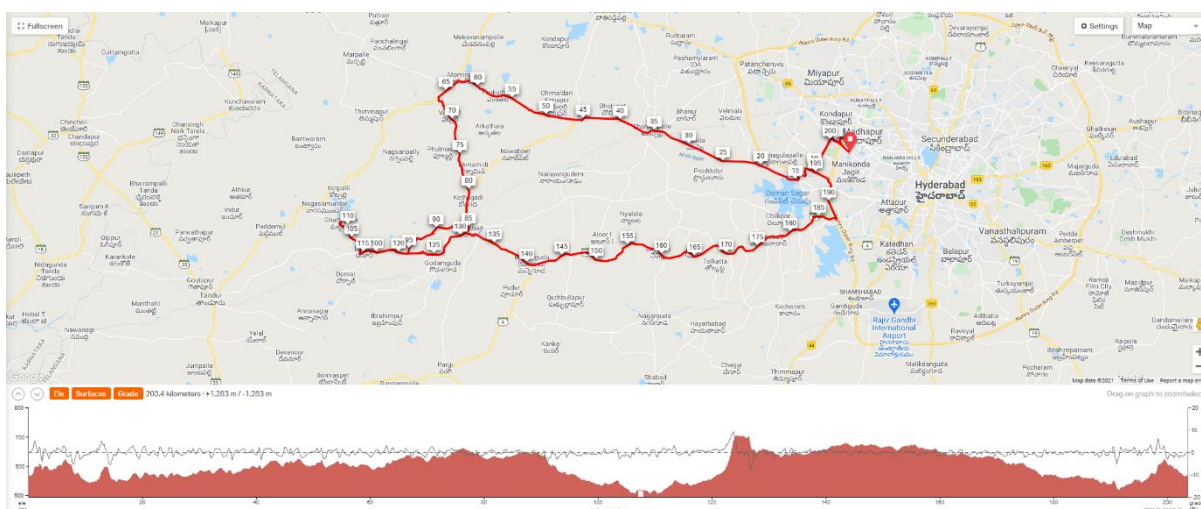
Hyderabad randonneuring events	Distance	Route maps
Heaven & Hell	200	https://ridewithgps.com/routes/26393153
Bhongir Fort Ride	200	https://ridewithgps.com/routes/12037624
Knight's Ride	200	https://ridewithgps.com/routes/12285018
Myriad Monkeys & Pocharam	200	https://ridewithgps.com/routes/16705564
Tour of Neelagiri	300	https://ridewithgps.com/routes/10976391
Hyderabad-Nizamabad-Armour	400	https://ridewithgps.com/routes/9555955
Into The Wild	600	https://ridewithgps.com/routes/10010964
The Two States	600	https://ridewithgps.com/routes/11857395
The Gran Fondo	1000	https://ridewithgps.com/routes/18534242
Sir Arthur Cotton Ride	1000	https://ridewithgps.com/routes/26695187

Source: Audax India Randonneurs Website and ridewithgps website

Generally, there are three to four 200 km brevets offered by Hyderabad Randonneurs Club in each season. The greatest number of riders with varying levels of experience take part in the 200 km brevets. Every season starts with 200 km brevets and progresses upward towards 600 km and 1000 km brevets with three weeks break in between the brevets offering sufficient time to rest and recover. The 200 km brevet titled “Heaven and Hell” is a very widely known brevet among the cycling community in Hyderabad, which often sees the largest participation. The brevet explores the western part of the Telangana, and the highlights of the brevet are Ananthagiri Hills and Kotepalli Lake. It is often organised twice in every randonneuring season, once in winter and once monsoon. The other 200 km brevet covers the east part of Telangana, and the highlight of the brevet is Bhongir Fort. The “Myriad Monkeys and Pocharam” 200 Km brevet is the third one that covers the

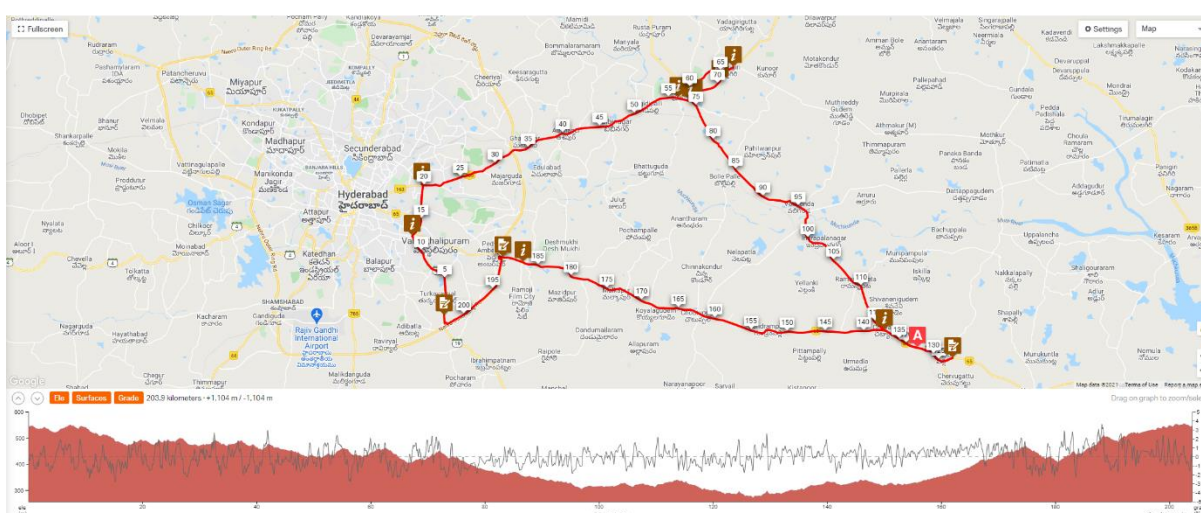
smaller section of Telangana's northern side. The highlight of the ride is the experience of riding in the Narsapur forest. Unlike the three brevets mentioned above that are ridden during the day, the fourth one is organized to experience and adapt to the night riding, which is necessary for someone looking to challenge themselves for getting a Super Randonneur title. This is often organized in the month of April as the temperatures rise during the day.

Map 2.3: 200 km Heaven and Hell brevet: route and elevation profile



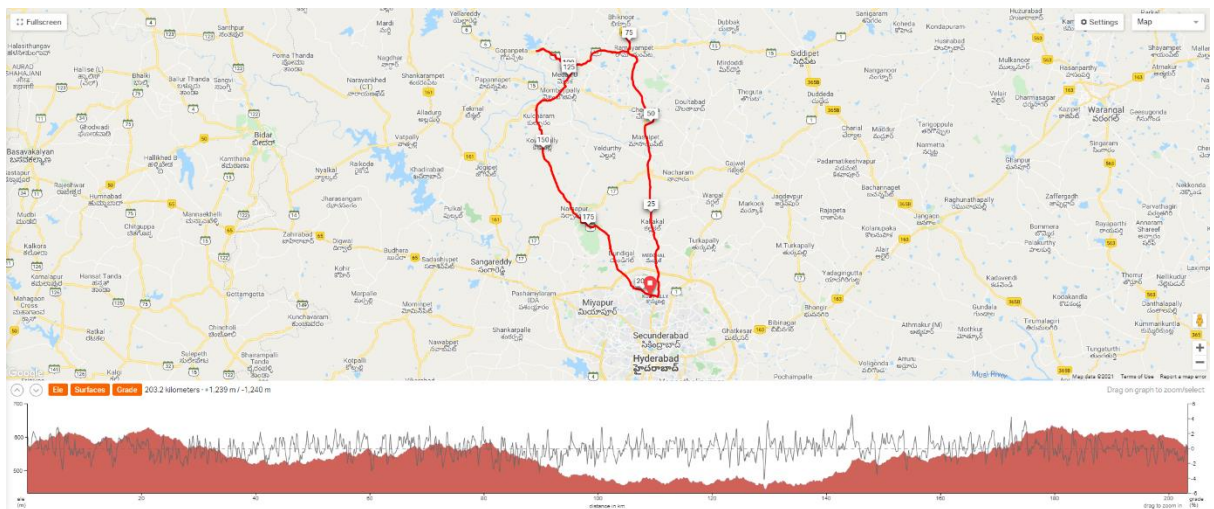
Source: Audax India Randonneurs website

Map 2.4: 200 km Bhongiri Fort Ride: route and elevation profile



Source: Audax India Randonneurs website

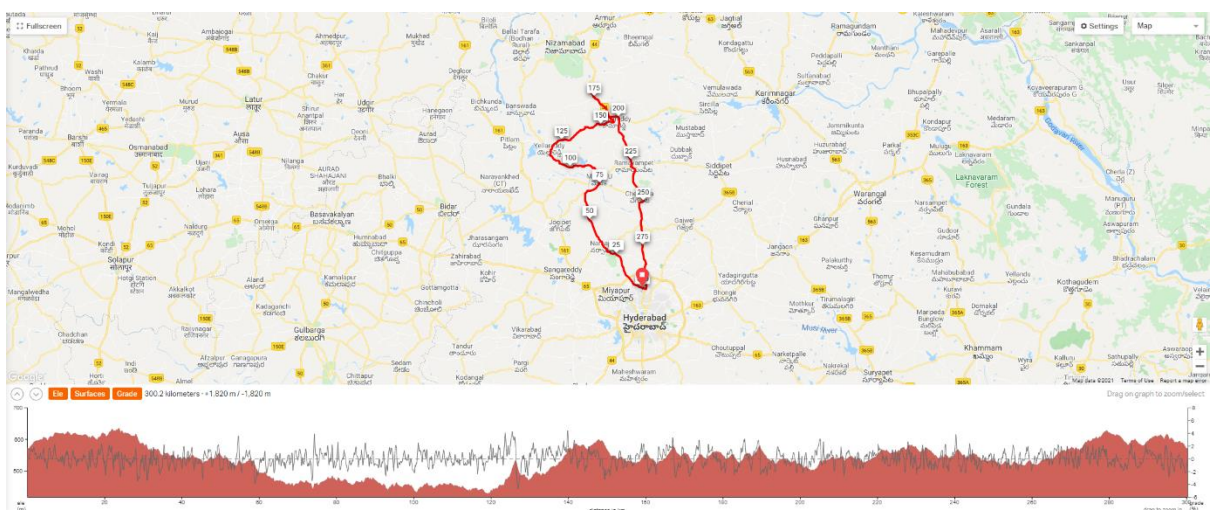
Map 2.5: 200 km Myriad Monkeys: route and elevation profile



Source: Audax India Randonneurs website

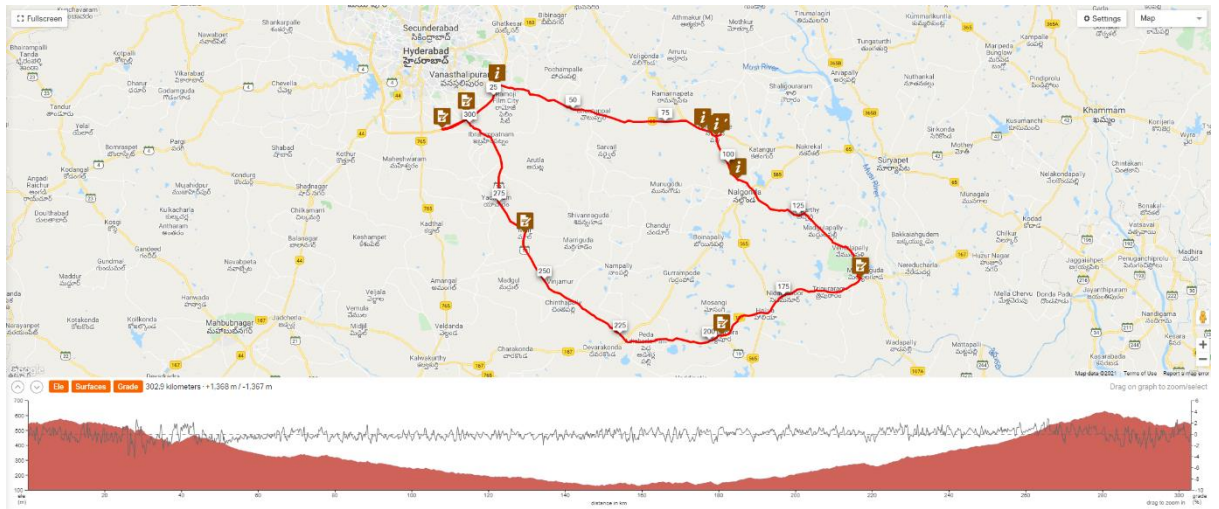
There are two brevets each of 300 km, 400 km, 600 km and 1000 km in every randonneuring season organized by Hyderabad Randonneurs Club. They are arranged in such a way that a rider could qualify for becoming a Super Randonneur twice in one season. One set of the series at the beginning of the season, i.e., from November to January and the other set of the series at the end of the season, i.e., July to September. The two 300 km brevets are set in opposite directions, one towards the north-west, i.e., Yellareddy, Narsapur side and other towards the south-east, i.e., Miryalaguda, Nalgonda side of the Hyderabad city.

Map 2.6: 300 km Yellareddy: route and elevation profile



Source: Audax India Randonneurs website

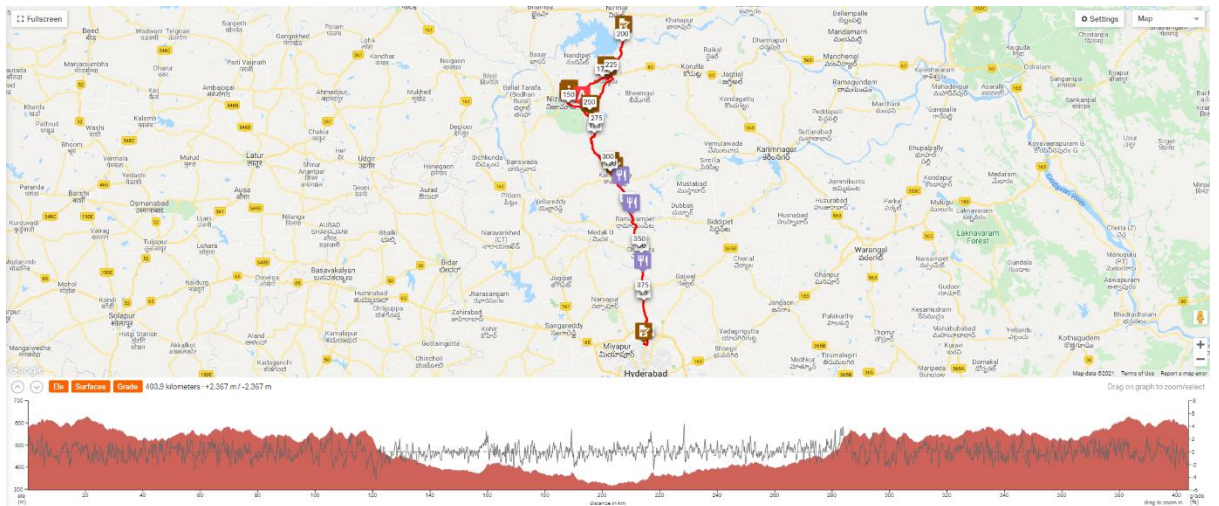
Map 2.7: 300 km Tour of Neelagiri: route and elevation profile



Source: Audax India Randonneurs website

For the 400 km brevets, there is only one route which is often used that Hyderabad-Nizamabad-Armur, which is towards the north side of Hyderabad city. Close to 90% of the ride is on the National Highway-44.

Map 2.8: 400 km Hyderabad-Nizamabad-Armur: route and elevation profile

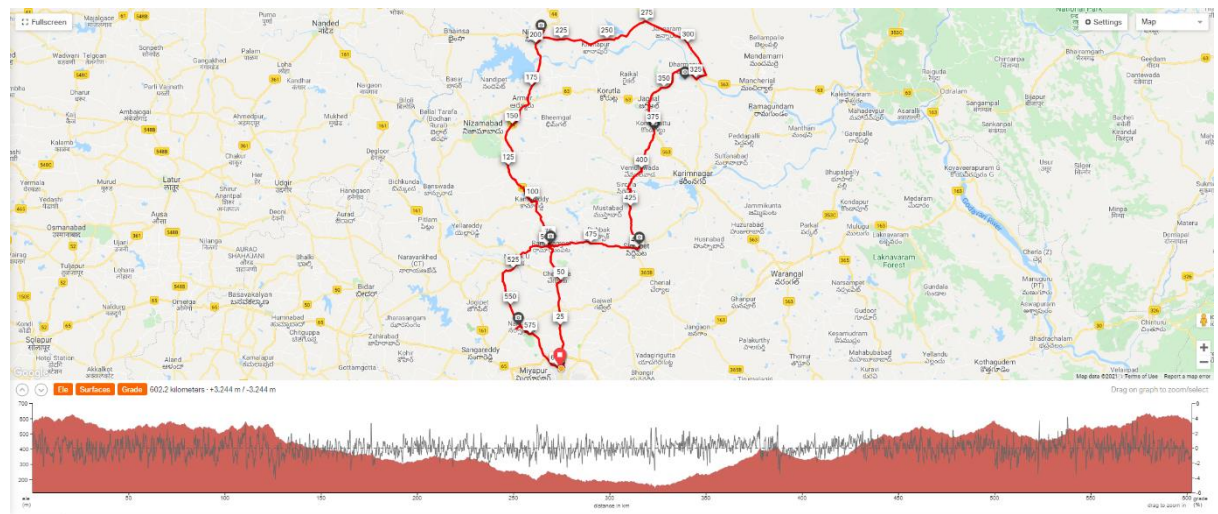


(Source: Audax India Randonneurs website).

For 600 km brevets, the most often used route is the Northeast part of the Telangana, i.e., Karimnagar. The course ventures into deep forest sections; hence the event is titled “Into the Wild”. Another route is also used for the 600 km brevet that

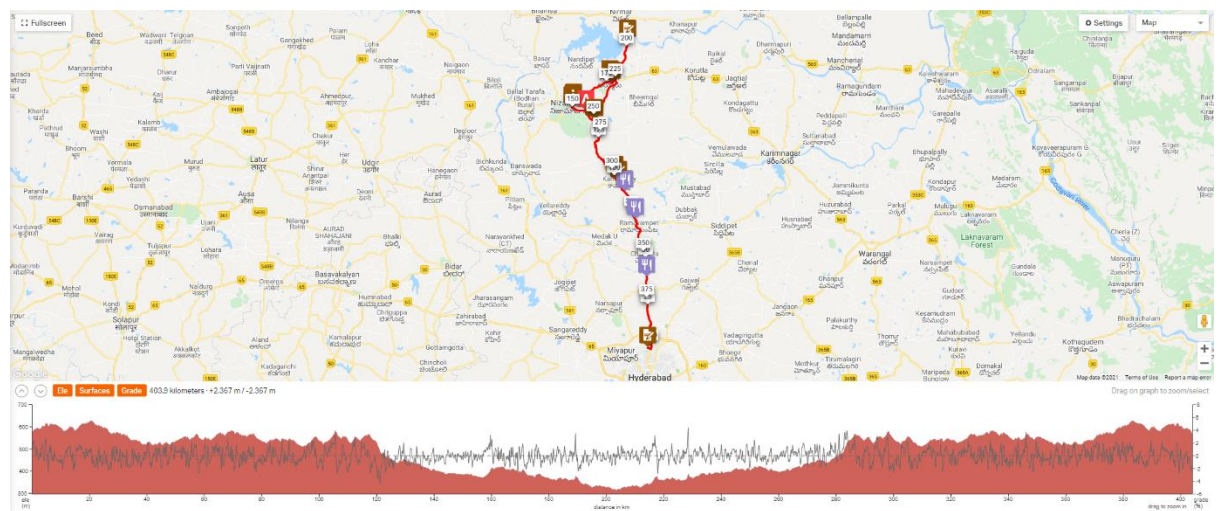
goes towards the south of Hyderabad city covering parts of Mahabubnagar and Kurnool.

Map 2.9: 600 km Into the Wild: route and elevation profile



Source: Audax India Randonneurs website

Map 2.10: 600 km The Two States: route and elevation profile

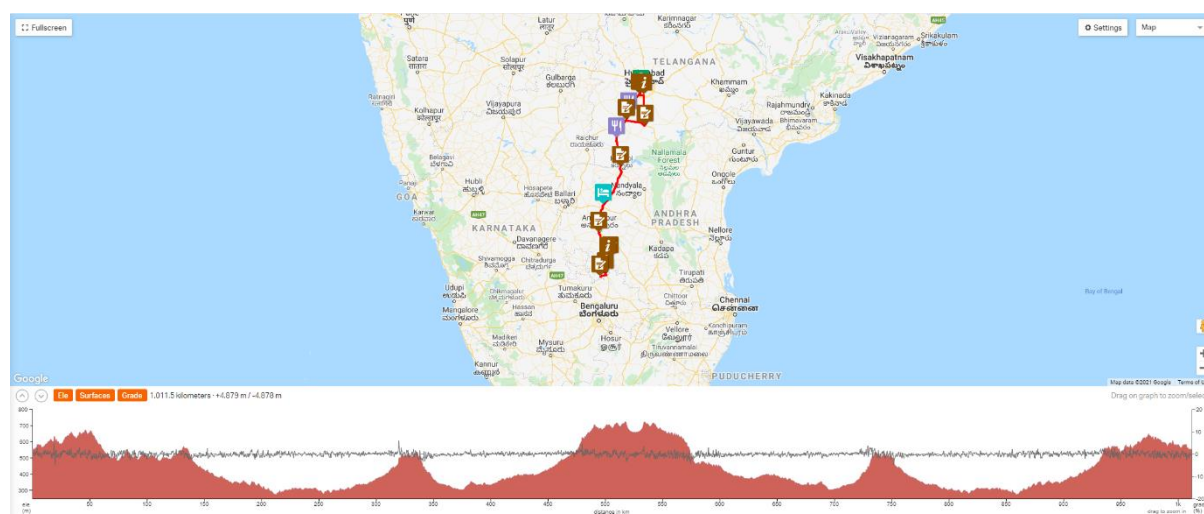


Source: Audax India Randonneurs website

Apart from the series of brevets that benefit the rider to qualify for the Super Randonneur title, the Hyderabad Randonneurs Club also offers 1000 km brevets for someone looking to go beyond the SR title. There are two events: one is titled “The Gran Fondo”, and the other is known as “Sir Arthur Cotton Ride”. The 1000 km brevets support the riders who are looking forward to the international brevets such as Paris-Brest-Paris (PBP) - 1200 km and London-Edinburgh-London (LEL) – 1400 km

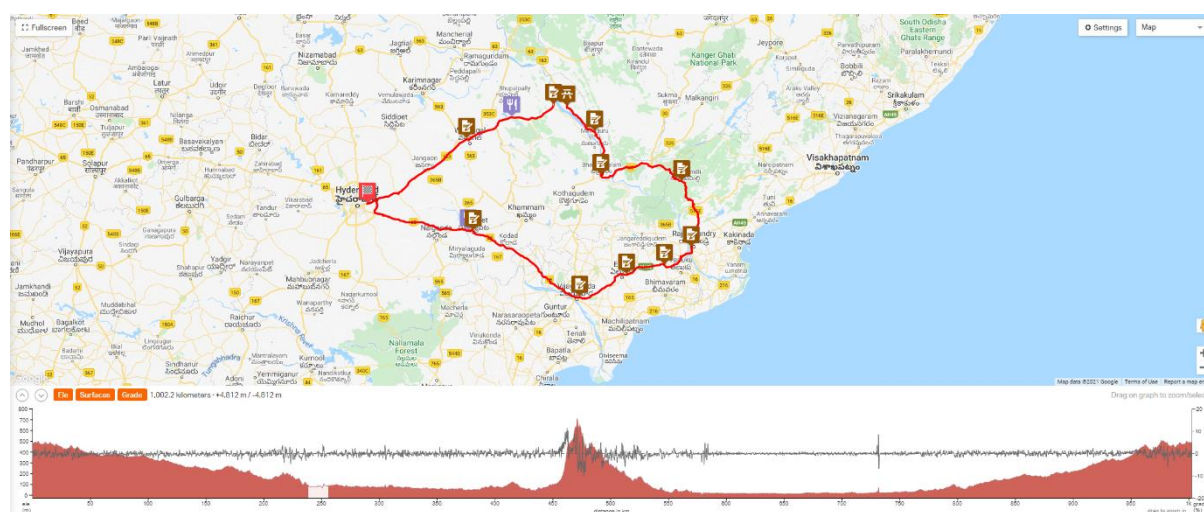
events. The brevets act as a bridge in filling the gap between 600 km and 1200 km events.

Map 2.11: 1000 km Gran Fondo: route and elevation profile



Source: Audax India Randonneurs website

Map 2.12: 1000 km Sir Arthur Cotton Ride: route and elevation profile



Source: Audax India Randonneurs website

Overall, the brevets organized by the Hyderabad Randonneurs Club cover all the directions from the Hyderabad city, offering a wide array of riding experiences to the randonneurs.

The significant observation is that the emergence of randonneuring in India and Hyderabad depended primarily on the activities of key individuals from varying backgrounds who provided the time, energy and technical expertise necessary while building a community to establish the sport. Randonneuring has picked up pace and

will only accelerate from here on as more and more awareness is created through the Brevet Populaire events to popularize the brevets, with rising health consciousness among the city dwellers backed by cycling-friendly infrastructure in urban spaces.

The growth will not only be restricted to cities as several two tier and three tier towns in India are conducting randonneuring events. The reasons are: randonneurs often seek out routes that offer natural beauty and a break from urban congestion. Towns generally have lower levels of traffic congestion and pollution compared to major cities. This creates a more pleasant and safe environment for cyclists, encouraging them to explore the area through randonneuring. Towns, especially those in close proximity to natural reserves, and scenic areas, can provide appealing settings for randonneuring. Improved road networks, make towns more accessible and attractive for cyclists. Towns with well-maintained roads and cycling-friendly infrastructure are becoming hubs for randonneuring enthusiasts.

All of these factors will eventually contribute to more cyclists participating in randonneuring events making it a growing sport culture in India. The changing culture of sports and sports behaviour as suggested by the study, indicates the shifting ideas of leisure and lifestyle among the urban dwellers in India. Understanding these changes can help form better bottom-up, environmental, health and transportation policies for sustainability.

CHAPTER III:

Autoethnography: Passive stages

Chapters 3 and 4 are written in chronological order. The chapters are an auto ethnographical account of the experience of bicycling and randonneuring in Hyderabad. It is divided into three stages. Chapter 3 presents a detailed descriptive account of passive stages and how I was moving through the stages of the study. In stage 1, I describe how I stepped into the cycling world. This stage is marked by learning the cycle's know-how and getting acquainted with the city's cycling community. In stage 2, I enter into the passive phase of the fieldwork, i.e., further improving my skills, training and gauging my fitness level. A pilot study is undertaken to understand the on-field situation. In Stage 3, which is covered in chapter 4, I have participated in the randonneuring events as a randonneur completing the Super Randonneur series. The chapter provides specific anecdotes to build a better context for understanding the subjective experience of randonneuring culture. The conceptual usage of the experience is discussed in the following section before moving to the experiential account.

Anthropology and Experience

The concept of experience has been discussed by Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner through the well-known edited work titled "The Anthropology of Experience", published in 1986. Victor W. Turner attempts an etymology of the term "experience" in his book *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982) and presents that it has derived from the Indo-European base *per-, which means "to, attempt, venture, risk". He adds that "the Germanic cognates of *per* relate the experience to "fare," "fear," and "ferry," since *p* becomes *f* by Grimm's Law. The Greek *perao* relates the experience to "I pass through," with implications of rites of passage. In Greek and Latin, experience is linked with peril, pirate, and ex-per-iment." (Victor & Edward, 1986)

Turner took inspiration from the German thinker Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and his understanding of the concept of an experience, *Erlebnis*, also known as "lived through." He wrote that "reality only exists for us in the facts of consciousness given by inner experience" (Dilthey in Turner and Bruner, 1986:4). Bruner clarifies

that experience is not confined to sense data or cognition or "the diluted juice of reason" but includes feelings and expectations. Further points that lived experience comes to us "as thought and desire, as word and image, (and forms) the primary reality". It is unclear what he meant by "consciousness" and "reality", which are some of the most researched and debated topics in the last three decades in various research fields.

To Dilthey, the relationship between the experience and its expressions is dialogical, i.e., mutual dependence. In Bruner's words, "experience structures expressions and expressions structure expressions." In understanding and expressing the experience, culture plays a significant role. Dilthey says, "our knowledge of what is given in experience is extended through the interpretation of the objectification of life, and their interpretations, in turn, are only made possible by plumbing the depths of subjective experience." (Turner and Bruner, 1986:6) We can see that the core of knowledge is genuinely in understanding subjective experience. And articulating one's experience needs a memory bank of words, which is purely limited to the exposure of the previous literature. Some expressions, i.e., work in the form of texts, define and illuminate inner experience by enriching and clarifying human experience.

Another significant view is held by Geertz, who maintains that "experience is never simply 'mere experience' but is always 'an experience', that is, an 'interpretive replay [of an event] as we recollect it to ourselves and recount it to others" (Throop, 2003:226).

Experience and Knowing

'Experience' is one of the foundational concepts in building knowledge, which is often taken for granted and remains largely unquestioned. Even though it is used widely, it is somewhat surprising to see the lack of conceptual clarity. It is significant to look at the concept of experience "not only as a central area of investigation but also as the ground upon which all later speculation, description and explanation are erected" (Throop, 2003). A few have examined the concept itself. Victor W. Turner, in his essay on experience, points out that "anthropology is most deeply rooted in the social and subjective experience of the inquirer. Everything is brought to the test of self; everything observed is learned ultimately on his [or her] pulses" (Victor & Edward, 1986). The future is always uncharted territory. Research demands one to be

a sceptic and ask questions. So, how and where to start the enquiry? The normal tendency is to have no doubts about existence and take everything for granted. To put it in Victor W. Turner's words, "we dolefully conclude, jettison present joy or abandon the sensitive exploration of what we perceive to be unprecedented developments in mutual human understanding and relational forms" (Victor & Edward, 1986). The statement appears to express a sense of sadness or regret about having to make a difficult choice. The choice involves giving up on current happiness and letting go of the careful examination of experience, which can be significant and make unprecedented advances in how humans understand and relate to one another. This decision might be a result of some kind of conflict, limitation, or necessity that forces to prioritize something else over these pursuits.

The section presents the arguments and examines the views on experience, which is the most fundamental aspect of life. I think a primary conceptual limitation with the term 'experience' prevents a deeper understanding of the fullness of the social and cultural processes.

It is illuminating to wonder about the mental states, reality, and existence. So, it seems logical to start from the beginning. Hence, I take to Thomas Nagel's book titled *What Does It All Mean?* (1987) pays attention to an essential question through a dedicated chapter on "How do we know anything?". Thomas Nagel asks a series of fundamental questions and tries to present all the arguments one can think of. In his words, "whatever you believe-whether it's about the sun, moon, and stars...history, science, other people, even the existence of your body is based on your experiences and thoughts, feelings and sense impressions...Everything else is farther away from you than your inner experiences and thoughts, and reaches you only through them...the only experience you can actually have are your own"(Nagel, 1987). In a similar line of thought as Throop's understanding of the human experience, the experience becomes "the ground" one of the critical concepts moving forward.

Self-reflection and self-awareness play a significant role in considering the nature of the field of study. Reflection is a powerful way to enhance understanding. As the American philosopher John Dewey puts it, "we do not learn from experience; we learn from reflecting on experience". I have presented and reflected upon my own experiences and thoughts, which are the most authentic and reliable sources of information.

Even though it is a very well-known fact, unlike science, I mean scientific observation, life does not happen in a lab, and the instrument is the human body; in other words, the human body as an agency, which is undoubtedly the most complicated instrument which requires far more attention than it is typically given. In the case of randonneuring, a deeper understanding of the body is necessary. Understanding one's own physical and mental capabilities, what are their limits? Is there any limit? Who puts them? If one is willing to go even deeper, we can ask ourselves, "What is it to be a human being?" "What is possible and what is not possible?" All these questions arise.

It is necessary to note the difference between knowing by words, i.e., intellectually and knowing by experience, i.e., experientially. A German philosopher, Arnold Schopenhauer, best says, "thoughts reduced to paper are generally nothing more than the footprints of a man walking in the sand. We indeed see the path he has taken, but to know what he saw on the way, we must use our own eyes".

The reality, experience and expression.

Another critical problem that various authors in the Anthropology of experience try to emphasise is distinguishing the terms used to articulate the concepts associated with the experience. The paradoxes present in this sphere are dealt with in *Social Experience and Anthropological Knowledge*, where the authors note that "anthropological knowledge is embodied in words, and yet social experience-such as fieldwork-lies beyond language" (Hastrup & Hervik, 1994).

One of the most significant aspects of the anthropology of experience is of making a "critical distinction between reality (what is really out there, whatever that may be), experience (how that reality presents itself to consciousness), and expressions (how individual experience is framed and articulated)." And it is crucial to recognise the "inevitable gaps between reality, experience, and expressions, and the tension among them" (Victor & Edward, 1986). The expressions of one or the other form cannot be taken as equivalent to reality but employ several different forms of expressions to advance our understanding of reality, the experience and the expression.

We may then engage at different levels, and some of the authors have confined themselves to certain levels; for example, Dilthey makes a "distinction between mere "experience" and "an experience": the former is received by consciousness, it is an individual experience, the temporal flow; the latter is the intersubjective articulation of experience, which has a beginning and an ending and thus becomes transformed into an expression" (Victor & Edward, 1986)

Experience and Observation

A critical distinction can be made between the concepts of experience and observation. The latter implies describing someone else's action from outside as a spectator to an event. Whereas "an experience is more personal," as one not only engages in activity but shapes it. The criteria for distinction is that "the communication of experience tends to be self-referential."

Observation is a great tool where the objects of study have no internal action. It only helps to record the activity from outside. For example, if the researcher were using only observation to research randonneuring, they would see people riding their bicycles through a pre-determined route for hours together with necessary breaks to refuel and rest. The researcher would never have an understanding or an insight into what does it happen to the body when one rides, ranging from 200kms to 600kms, what a randonneur goes through emotionally, how they feel at varying distance in the blazing sun, in the heavy rains, in bone biting cold weather, while climbing mountains, in descending them and while riding in pitch dark nights with a sleep deficit.

Given the nature of randonneuring, observing a sport like randonneuring is nearly impossible as the riders are always moving. Those mind-boggling distances, not in groups like what is known in professional bicycle races as a 'peloton' but in the numbers of two or mostly riding solo.

Even the much revered "participant-observation" by anthropologists cannot be employed when the researcher himself is mostly riding solo or at the maximum, riding with another rider for few kilometres and meeting few other riders at the checkpoints or the refuelling points. It is even more challenging for the researcher to observe others while he/she must understand and dig deep to find motivation and complete

these extremely exhausting events with uncertain weather conditions and situations. John MacAloon, in addition to his theoretical contribution to the study of sport, strongly advocated the ethnographers experience the concrete and particular social reality for themselves and refrain from "fetishisation of theory in the academy" (Besnier, Brownell, & Carter, 2018). There is a need to move further down to understand the experience of such events. Therefore, experiential ethnography is justified in this context. Even Kala Poewe rightly points out that experiential ethnography is "a natural consequence of the method of participant-observation" (Poewe, 1996, p. 177).

A noteworthy contribution comes from C. Jason Throop (2003), who reviews the works of various scholars such as Joan Scott, David Scott, Robert Desjarlais, and Cheryle Matingly, who share a dissatisfactory view on the usage of the concept of experience. He further situates the significant works of anthropologists Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz in the critical dialogue on experience. Throop suggests a complementary model of experience which is 'phenomenologically' grounded while organising the experience temporally by taking key insights from scholars of various traditions. He attempts to lay the groundwork for using the concept of experience in anthropological theory by drawing on the writings of William James, Edmund Husserl, and Alfred Schutz. He presents it as the fact that there are "significant differences between the way the world appears to our consciousness when we are fully engaged in an activity and the way it appears to us when we subject it to reflection and retrospective analysis" (Jackson, 1996 quoted in Throop, 2003, p. 235).

Individual experience as the unit of analysis

Individuals are the smallest units in the social fabric. Everything starts at an individual level and then slowly diffuses into the groups in a number of different ways based on the times in which they live, the situations and the context. It all begins with a single thought, with a single person. We cannot change the world without changing ourselves first. The limiting factor with experience is that "we can only experience our own life, what is received by our own consciousness." When we cannot even comprehend our own experiences, understanding others' experiences seems to be further away from our understanding. Even though incomplete, we can share experiences with certain censors or represses or with varied capacities of awareness

and articulation based on the situations. So Dilthey tries to get around this limitation by saying that "we transcend the narrow sphere of experience by interpreting expressions...Expressions that are presented to us by the cultures we study; they are what is given in social life." Which may constitute representations, performances, objectification, texts and many more or, as Bruner puts it, as "encapsulations of the experience of others, or as Turner wrote, they are "the crystallised secretions of one's living human experience" (Victor & Edward, 1986)

The understanding of human-related subject matter is not restricted to anthropology alone. Dilthey presents that "when we experience human states, give expressions to them, and understand these expressions." It is necessary to ask what are the human states Dilthey is speaking about. How many states of experience are there? And are these states accessible to each one of the human beings? These seem to be fundamental questions one needs to consider before getting further. Hence, we get into the ontological aspects, which deal with the nature of things and epistemological elements, which seek to know how and what we know.

Throop weights using different methodologies, giving access to pre-reflective, a real-time unfolding of the social activities and reflective varieties of experience. The subsequent sections and chapters present the journey of becoming a super randonneur, stage by stage, drawing from the above conceptual understanding of experience. The following sections explore more than one form of representation to enhance the knowledge of the sub-culture of randonneuring.

Stage 1: The Beginning of the cycling Journey (August 2015 – June 2016)

As is well known, getting acquainted with various parts of the cycle and the jargon used in cycling is necessary. Learning is a process and needs constant engagement to understand the terms and concepts used in the world of cycling. Understanding that distance is a critical factor for the entire cycling discourse is essential. Therefore, the chapter pays sufficient attention to the distance, leading to several decisions in the field.

Getting into the world of cycles and buying the ‘Bike.’

Before taking up the study, I had little experience and knowledge of riding a geared bicycle. I visited Hyderabad Bicycling Club (HBC), a public store that Greater Hyderabad Municipality Corporation (GHMC) set up to encourage bicycling in Hyderabad city. It is a rental facility. I used the facility to understand more about a geared bicycle and went for rides not above 10kms as the bicycles were not in good condition. My thought process was, "even if the bicycle broke in between, I could walk back to the facility". After a few rides and knowing what was necessary for riding, I decided to buy a geared bicycle. I kept a fair budget of thirty thousand rupees. I reached that budget after talking to close acquaintances and online window shopping. All the extra fittings (bottle cages, lights etc.) and cycling wear (cycling shorts, helmet etc.) were primary and essential for bicycling.

After a few months of settling into the Doctoral program, i.e., while doing my course work, I decided to buy a bicycle from a bike store suggested by my coach¹. I went to the bike store named The Bike Affair (TBA from now onwards), which started in 2010. A well-known store in the city and located four km from where I used to stay. When I reached TBA and enquired about the bikes (bike and bicycle are synonymously used), I was surprised as the starting price was thirty thousand and moved upward. I instantly understood that I needed to recalculate my budget. The bikes were stunning, aesthetically very appealing and attractive. I was curious, confused and surprised at the same time. Even after so many years, the world of cycles and cycling doesn't seem to stop amazing me. I was asked several questions about the purpose, the terrain, and the distance I expected to ride. Then I understood that I needed much more clarity on various aspects which I did not consider before. Little did I know then, but I was scratching the tip of a mountain.

There are several bikes designed considering each one of the factors. I was shown the fundamental differences and the basic typology with their names very appropriate (see figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3), i.e., a) The Road bike: meant for riding on good roads, having thin tyres and lightweight. b) The Mountain bike: is meant for off-road biking, with wider tyres, suspension and on a heavier scale, and c) The Hybrid bike: is an in-between meant for roads but can handle off-road routes as well, with

¹ Trained me for more than 4 years in the University to participate in various national level running events. He is also well acquainted with cycling and uses a geared bicycle.

moderate wide tyres and weight. As I said before, this is a very basic typology. It goes deeper and deeper if one is willing to dive into it with various permutations and combinations regarding the group set and the materials used in the bike.

Learning about them, I understood that I need more time and exposure to make an informed decision. I visited another bike store: Yellow Jersey, to see what kind of bikes they had to offer and compare the prices. I could not find more options, and maybe I had already decided to buy a bike I saw in the TBA. After sleeping over it for a few days, browsing some websites and watching videos about cycling, I went to the store. I decided to buy a hybrid bicycle because of its flexibility in terms of usage, i.e., both for transport and to improve my fitness. Considering my budget, it was the closest, even though on the upper side. One of the factors which propelled me was that TBA staff members were cyclists themselves; therefore, it made it even more sensible to go to them.

Figure 3.1: Road Bike



Source: The Bike Affair website

Figure 3.2: Mountain Bike (MTB)



Source: The Bike Affair website

Figure 3.3: Hybrid Bike



Source: The Bike Affair website

The economic context in which the purchase is happening is necessary to understand the purchase process. The context of buying a bike and not being truthful about the price is typical in the leisure cycling sphere. The cyclists often reveal and express with humour that the actual costs of the cycles are kept secret to their families and only revealed to cyclists. Even I faced that dilemma and decided not to disclose my expenses during the initial purchase. I had to borrow money from my father under the pretext of other necessary expenses such as university fees, room rent, etc. I could not tell my parents that I was buying a cycle that cost a bomb. They would be shocked, and a hundred questions will be asked. Hence, I did not bring the discussion to the table then. First, I had to convince myself that it was all worth the expense. After a few long-distance rides and some clarity on my research work, I told my parents about the bike and its price. The reaction was as expected; after all, the bicycle cost more than two months of my father's salary. I was able to convince them that it was all worth it. These anecdotes are essential because they tell the lower-middle-class families' mindsets, their thoughts about money, and the socialisation process. It presents the context in which I bought the bicycle and the later experiences that it brought with it.

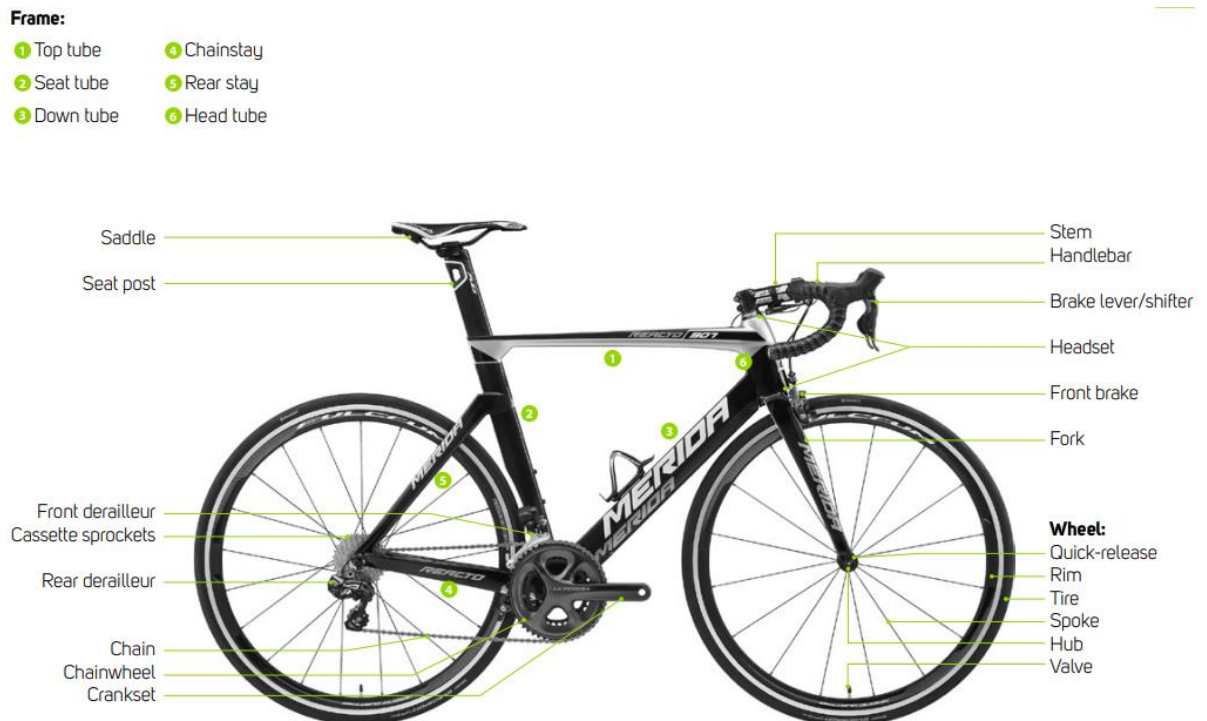
Typically, the owner takes us to the adult section when we go to the general bicycle shop. We look at the existing bicycles and try them out in the store. After selecting the bicycle, they fix the bell and the cycle stand. It would hardly take 1-2hrs for the entire process. I bought two bicycles in the past. They were used for commuting inside the campus within a radius of 5kms. Each of them cost me around three thousand rupees. I had to buy the second cycle because the first one was stolen. It took so much effort to convince my parents to get another one with the promise of being more responsible and cautious towards my cycle. The fear of losing the bicycle had made me buy a lock and a steel chain to tie it to a pole to ensure more safety.

However, purchasing this kind of bike was a different experience altogether. Even after a few months of research, talking to close acquaintances, and all the input from the TBA staff, it still took an entire day to buy the bike. It was the most expensive thing I have ever bought in my life. The thought that I have evaporated two and half months of my father's salary in a single day makes me think about justifying the purchase even more. The TBA members have convinced me to go for a better bike than what I was getting in my budget. Thinking long term, I opted for quality clothing

and accessories, which made me spend close to fifty thousand even after a 10% discount. I thought of it as an investment rather than an expense being optimistic about the possibilities it might add to my life in general.

It will make much more sense if one understands the gear bicycles' essential parts. The changes in each of them can only be understood after a riding experience, and one can truly appreciate the bike research and aesthetic. It is more of a qualitative aspect of the bike. Therefore, I will throw some light on it before I move ahead. The bike can be broken into three major parts (see figure 3.4): 1) The frame, 2) the wheels, and 3) Group set. The frame gives strength. It is the skeleton of the bike. The bicycle companies majorly work on designing the frame. Steel, alloy and carbon are the materials used in most bikes. The wheel consists of hubs, spokes and a rim. The tire is mounted onto the rim so that it encases the tube. The tires provide the friction necessary for moving the bike forward on the riding surface. The group set is a closed circuit that propels the bike and brings it to a stop. It consists of the crank, chainrings (front cogs), cassette (rear cogs), chain, brakes, derailleurs and shifters. There is a group set hierarchy (see table 3.1).

Figure 3.4: Components of a bike



Source: The Bike Affair website

Table 3.1: Bike group set hierarchy

BRAND	ELITE	RACE	ENTHUSIAST	MID-RANGE	ENTRY	BASIC
						
						
			 			

Source: Bike exchange website

Table 3.1 highlights what type of riding each group set is best suited to, where each sit in the overall hierarchy, and how they compare to each other. The price is the result of the change in the materials used and the combination of the components. It is generally observed that a decrease in the weight of any components will increase the price.

I finalised a hybrid bike (see figure 3.3) having a Claris group set (8x3 gearing: 8 in the back and 3 in the front known as eight-speed). The basic level group set from the Shimano brand. The number of rear chain wheels (sprockets) on the cassette indicates the speed, which may range mostly between 7 and 11. I understood what customisation truly meant for the first time in my life. The frame size, stem length, seat height and so on are adjusted according to my height, arm length and leg length, respectively. Taking into consideration every minute detail and after every minor adjustment, I was told to go for a test ride. Even though I was riding a regular bicycle for more than five years, I never paid the necessary attention to some of these basic adjustments, even as simple as saddle height, which could make such a big difference in riding. It was way more comfortable than I expected; there was ease in riding with the least effort. To my surprise, I never imagined that cycles could move that fast. All the above is just the basic level adjustments.

Apart from that, there is something called "bike fit", which goes even deeper into many technicalities of the riding style, sitting postures, weight distribution, fitness level etc.—going through this entire buying process somehow felt justified for

the money I spent. The accessories necessary for the rides are attached to the bike, such as the bottle cages, front and rear lights, a strap to hold the bicycle handpump and a saddle pouch to hold the tool kit in an emergency. The tool kit consists of three small levers that help open the tyre, small rubber patches to cover the punctures and a mini tool that helps open the screws in case minor corrections are required. The cyclo-computer was fixed to show the basic metrics of speed, average speed, trip distance and overall distance. I was excited and interested to see all of these on a bicycle. It was almost like a motorbike but completely human-powered and of course, without any fuel. The fact that I was going to be independent made me even more satisfied with the purchase.

First ride/ race on Independence Day, 2015- 50Km race.

On 15th August 2015, just after a week of buying the bike, I registered for a 50km ride cum race. The event had all kinds of participants, from beginners to highly skilled riders. It also has a competitive segment, with a cash prize for the top finishers. These kinds of fitness-related events have become a norm in cities worldwide. The best part of these kinds of rides is the support and being amidst a bigger group of cyclists, which gives a sense of security that is most necessary for beginners like me. These rides help in building acquaintances with fellow riders and aid in the socialization process.

Learning about the gears:

Knowing when and how to change gears might seem simple, but it ends up a little complicated in the learning phase. Throughout the week, I was getting familiar with the gears and their combinations. Fellow riders identify most bikes in terms the number of gears (sprockets) they have at the rear wheel, usually ranging between 7 to 11; hence referred have 7 speed to 11 speed, respectively. Cyclists who ride road bikes ignore the front chain rings as they have only two chainrings. But for beginners, it is a little confusing in the starting. Both mountain and hybrid bikes have three chainrings on the front; therefore, more options and combinations are available. My bike had eight gears on the back and three chain rings in the front, $8 \times 3 = 21$; some refer to them as 21 speed. I was advised by the cyclists (TBA staff) to use the combination of chain ring 1(smallest) with 1,2,3 gear, chain ring 2(mid) with 4,5,6

gears and chain ring 3(largest) with 6,7 & 8 gears. Cautioned to avoid cross-chaining (the extreme gear combinations), chain ring 1 with 7,8 and chain ring 3 with 1,2,3 gear as there are more chances of damage to the chain.

So, what do gears actually do? They allow controlling the cadence (revolutions of the crank per minute) while climbing or descending. In other words, they help maintain relatively steady pedalling and reduce the effort to find a comfortable pace, especially on the climbs. With some practice, I slowly got the feel of the gears and learnt not to shift gears while pedalling too hard as it is hard to shift; therefore, anticipating the right gear combination well before a climb is essential for a smooth transition. It was also advised not to shift gears when the bike is stationary. All this information helped me to be more cautious and, at the same time, be more efficient with the bicycle.

The First 50km ride cum race: An Anchor of experience

The preparation!

Within a week after purchasing the bike, I signed up for a 50km ride cum race event. I had not ridden more than 10km before that, but I was sure that 50km was doable without much practice. I suppose that was coming from the understanding of my body, my energy and my fitness which is rooted in all the athletic training and my active involvement in various sporting activities in the past. The past running activities have acted as an anchor of experience for taking decisions relative to that kind of experience. Therefore, what I refer to as an "anchor of experience" plays a pivotal role in the decisions making process to take up activities that otherwise lack prior experience.

A day before the event, I collected the race kit, including a Bib and a T-shirt, at the Hyderabad Bicycling Club (HBC) situated at Gachibowli, 10km from my residence. I have taken care of the nutrition, the necessary rest and the bike set-up. With a little bit of anxiousness woke up. I dressed up in cycling attire and rode to the start point. I was a few minutes late. I saw a big group of riders passing in the opposite way.

The ride

For the first few kilometres, I cruised past many riders pedalling hard. The cyclo-computer was showing speeds over and above 30km/hr. I was learning on the go and trying to understand the responsiveness of the bike and my body more and more with each pedal. I tested the highest gear combination, i.e., 3(front) X 8(rear) on a downhill, as there was no traffic and the cyclo-computer flashed a 48km/hr speed. That felt like flying. From what biologists found out, there seems to be a chemical basis for every experience, and in those terms, it is called an adrenaline rush, a kind of "high" state of mind. In standard terms, this kind of experience is a little hard to explain as it brings in a mixture of feelings, some of which can be articulated and some I feel can only be experienced; no amount of articulation can do justice. There was excitement, thrill, fear, a sense of freedom, anxiety and many more and all at once. Even though it lasted just a couple of minutes, these indescribable moments are registered deep in the memory to be remembered and savoured. I never imagined that cycles would reach that kind of speed.

The race/ride is a to and from the type of course, i.e., to reach the 25km point and turn around. There was a checkpoint at the turnaround point. I covered the first 25km in 50 odd mins, i.e., I was averaging above 25km/hr. The second half was exhausting, and my legs were in immense pain. The return from the turnaround points, i.e., the last 25km, took nearly one and a half hours to ride. I completed the race in 2:20mins. After finishing the ride, there was a sense of accomplishment, achievement and satisfaction of a different kind. They further triggered a drive to improve my speed and a motivation to ride longer distances without hurting my body too much. Therefore, the obvious way is to train. Simply, it means spending more time on a bike, practising riding and strengthening my body, especially my legs and core. These kinds of experiences either make or break new habits. As mentioned earlier, this ride cum race acted as an "anchor of experience" relating to all the cycling activities I took up later in the cycling journey.

A positive first cycling experience that emphasizes comfort, safety, enjoyment, and a sense of achievement is more likely to lead to habit formation and a positive perception towards cycling events. Conversely, a negative experience characterized by discomfort, fear, or frustration may discourage future participation. Providing a supportive and enjoyable first experience is crucial for fostering a long-lasting love for cycling.

Initial rides

For the next few months, I participated in the rides organised by Hyderabad Bicycling Club (HBC) and The Bike Affair (TBA). The TBA organised frequent rides. There were three kinds of rides catering to different sets of riders. For beginners and leisure riders, TBA was conducting Saturday rides which typically range between 25 and 40kms with speeds around 20km/hr. The Saturday rides are mostly ended up visiting the famous spots in the city, such as Golconda Fort, Charminar, Gandipet Lake, Ameenpur Lake etc. They are slow-paced with multiple stops. Fitness enthusiasts and serious riders have Sunday rides that go beyond 50kms with speeds above 25kms/hr. These rides are mostly confined to the National Highways and are non-stop. And there were night rides during the weekdays for riders who wanted to experience riding at night. Riding at night is a different experience altogether, especially in the city's outskirts with no traffic, low pollution and cool weather.

Social media, primarily Facebook and WhatsApp, are used to communicate about the rides with all the necessary details. The rides have a meetup point, where most riders start the ride, and few riders join somewhere in the route. Every ride is unique; the riders change, the environment, and the pace changes. Therefore, the experience, with all the topography and geography registering within the riders. With every ride, the efficient use of the gears increases and the balance ingrained into the body slowly becomes second nature with almost no thought or effort required to carry that action. The sense of direction also improves with time.

As the rides increased, the rapport with the cycling community and the TBA staff was built. Attending necessary "Do It Yourself" (DIY) workshops with fellow riders to learn how to fix the punctures and other minor adjustments that one may encounter during the rides helped in becoming a little more independent and confident going for long-distance rides. The initial fear of becoming stranded alone in some far away, unknown place has slowly withered away with the knowledge of handling the bike, attending the workshops and knowing the areas with the growing number of rides.

Stage 2: Passive stage (July 2016 - October 2017)

Field Experiences

The fieldwork was planned in a phased manner. The passive stage began with experiencing the first brevet and preparing for the super randonneur series for the 2017-18 season. The active stage brings the riding and volunteering experiences during the super randonneurs series and the entire 2017-18 season.

Passive stage

Preparation period

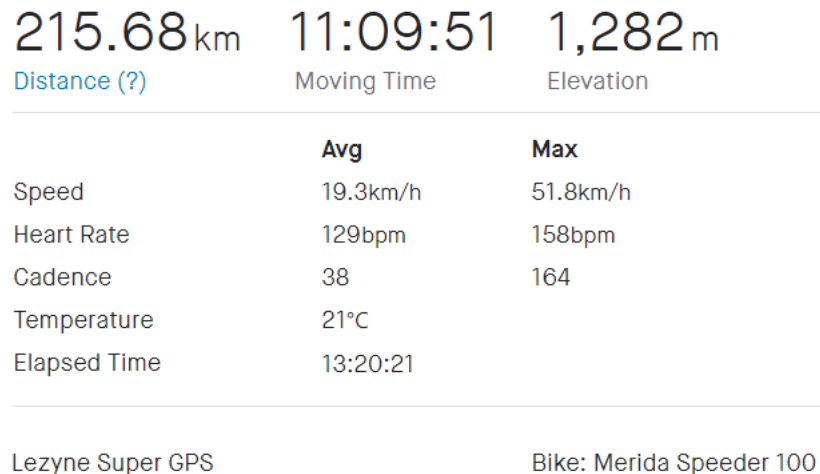
In the initial ride phase, the longest ride was around 150kms, which acted as a base for stepping up to the challenges of the longer distances. With all the initial rides, I was confident enough to attempt my first 200km brevet (randonneuring event). A pilot ride was planned to clarify the fieldwork timeline and the appropriate methods and gauge my fitness level. I have participated in the event as a rider/randonneur. The passive fieldwork stage began with the randonneuring event with all observations, note-making and various ride metrics in place. I have started using the Strava Application² for recording the rides. The fellow riders suggested it. It is one of the most used applications by cyclists around the world. It is a go-to application for any cyclist to track personal rides and helps keep a tab on activities related to cycling and other cyclists. Figure 3.5 and map 3.1 present the 200km brevet overview with map and elevation below.

I participated in my first brevet, the longest ride of my life. It was not as challenging as I imagined it to be because of the pleasant weather on the day. It was drizzling during the first half of the ride, and the tailwind helped in the second half, which reduced the effort I needed to put in. The ride's most challenging and best part was riding the Ananthagiri hill without stepping down. The hill was one of the most discussed aspects of the event. The event is titled "Heaven and Hell", and the hill represents the "hell" part of the ride, which comes after 110kms of riding. For most of the first 130-odd kilometres, I rode with fellow riders, but after that, I ended up riding alone. I misjudged a turn and had to ride an extra 15 kms. Because of the slight detour, I had to put some extra effort into reaching the last but one checkpoint on

²App used to record various metrics like the distance, time, elevation, speed etc.

time; otherwise, it would have been a comfortable ride. I finished the ride with 10 minutes to spare-elapsed time at 13:20:21 (see figure 3.5). The cut-off was 13:30mins for finishing the ride; otherwise, it would have been considered a "Late Finish".

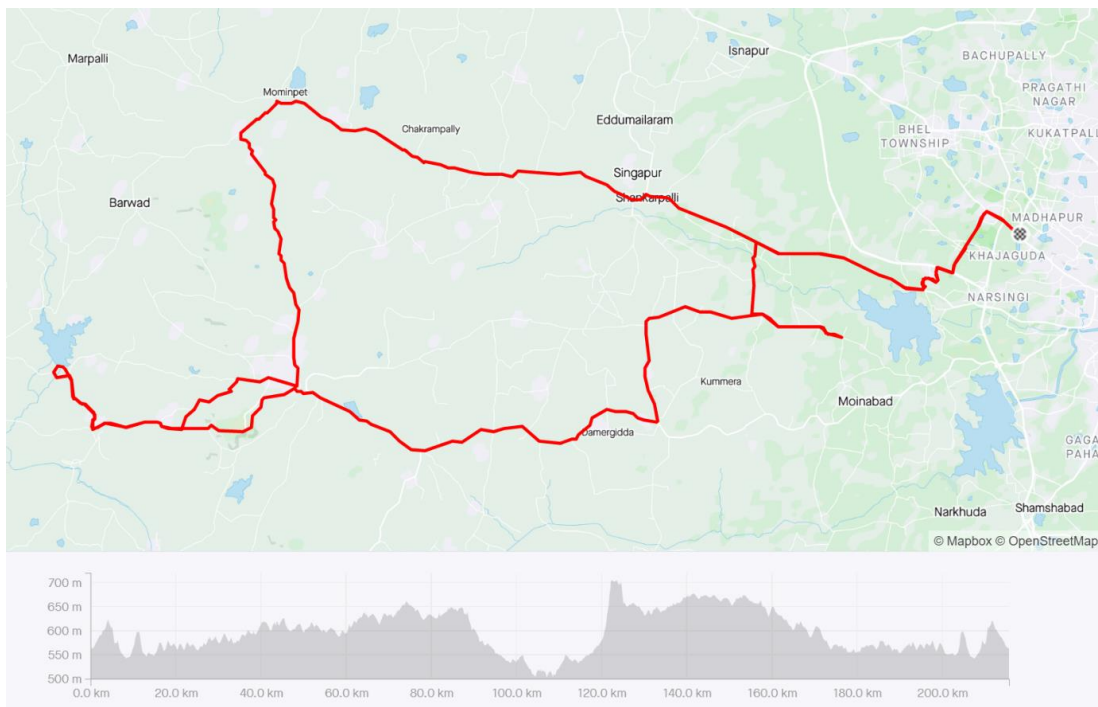
Figure 3.5: 200 BRM overview



Source: Fieldwork data from Strava website

I was awestruck by the landscapes near Kotepally lake and Ananthagiri hills. The experience was much more enriching than riding a bicycle for 200-odd kms. After the ride, I realised that I could do much better with some more training. My body, especially my legs and back, are still adapting to long-distance cycling. I felt the need to buy a road bike, considering the possibility of how it could enhance the efficient use of my energy with reduced effort and an increase in speed, which could further help in some spare time to interact with fellow riders and focus little more on the surroundings in the field.

Map 3.1: 200km BRM map and elevation profile

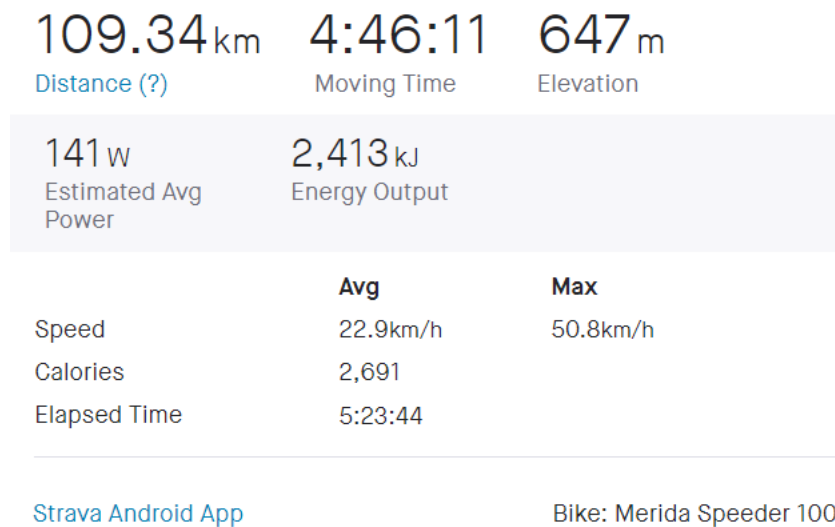


Source: Fieldwork data from Strava website

After the successful completion of the 200Km brevet in 2016, I became a "Randonneur". It acted as one of the indicators of gauging the cyclists riding experience, which adds certain respect and credibility to the cyclist in the cycling community. As mentioned, to improve my overall fitness, I started training with help from a physical education teacher and attended yoga sessions at the university. The cycling training schedule included four cycling workouts and two weekly strengthening sessions. Among the four, one was hill repeats. I used Strava App to record and observe the progress.

As the training was in progress, Hyderabad Randonneurs Club organised a 109km ride titled "The Pearl Ride". These rides are known as "brevet popular" and are a common practice by cycling clubs worldwide to bring some visibility to the club and attract riders to participate in brevets. The pearl ride overview, map and elevation are presented in the figure 3.6 and map 3.2.

Figure 3.6: The pearl ride- overview



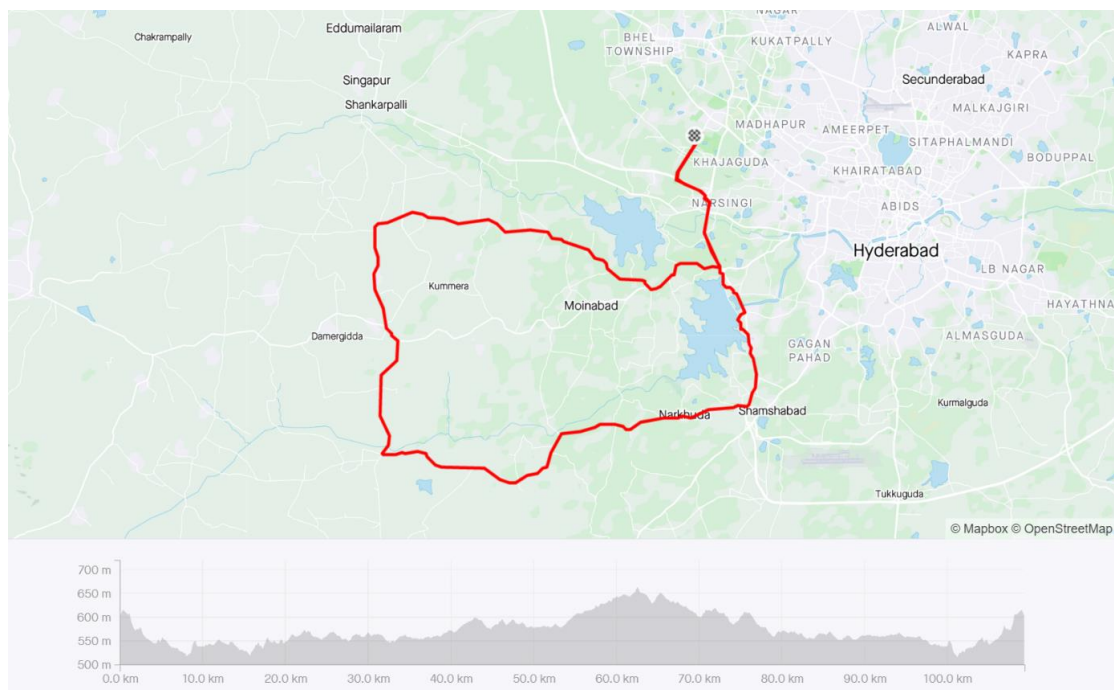
Source: Fieldwork data from Strava website

This was an excellent opportunity to see the results of two weeks of training, the workouts' effect and to time my 100 km ride. My target was to achieve 25 km/hr: average speed and complete the race within 4:30 mins. Jersey was one of the key attractions to participating in the ride as I did not have a proper cycling jersey, and they seemed expensive to me in the stores. I picked up the ride kit in a cafe the day before the ride. The commute to pick up the kit helped me understand that the weather was humid; hence hydrated pretty well for the ride. It is always hard to sleep the night before any big event because of the excitement and the anxiety. I woke up around 2 a.m., with a bike check and nutrition in place, and rode to the starting point, i.e., Indian School Business, Gachibowli, which was 6km from my residence. It worked as a good warm-up for the ride. The ride attracted a considerably very big group of cyclists from the city. I started riding with a bigger bunch of riders and slowly caught up with the first bunch of riders. We reached the first checkpoint, which was around 30kms. They provided fruit juice, and we fueled up and continued riding. I could not keep up with the two riders riding ahead of me. There was a heavy headwind until the second checkpoint. I started feeling hungry, so I had some bananas and dates provided at the checkpoint. I filled up my water bottles and mixed some electoral powder.

I rode alone from there to the endpoint, following the cue sheet. My navigation skills improved with the rides but were still not entirely up to the mark. I

made a minor misjudgement at the third checkpoint but realised it pretty soon and went back on track. I finished 6th overall. Even though it was not a race, it built some confidence to gauge my fitness levels with other riders. I did not reach my targets, but I was pretty close. I could see a significant improvement in my riding. The average speed shot up, and I was much more comfortable holding certain positions (aero position) on the bike for extended periods. All this was visible within two weeks of the training schedule. I finished the ride surprisingly with much fuel left in my body. The ride gave me satisfaction and boosted my confidence. Even though I was on a hybrid bike and the first bunch of riders were on road bikes, I could keep up with them for a significant time and distance. Some of the acquainted riders acknowledged my effort, and some expressed how they were surprised to see me finishing the ride that fast. The point here is to understand how the human psyche plays out in certain situations, and these circumstances, in a way, reveal more about ourselves than the outside world. These again influence one to take certain decisions in life, which have unknown consequences. It is often observed that the consistency and improvement of any cyclist are highly respected and appreciated by the cycling community.

Map 3.2: The pearl ride- map and elevation profile



Source: Fieldwork data from Strava website

Cycle Racing

Apart from the rides related to randonneuring, I participated in some local races and training rides to keep in touch with the cycling community. The snapshot of the races is given below.

Race 1

1. **Event Type:** It is a Mass start race, is a different race format suggests that all participants started together, and the one who completes the course in the least amount of time is declared the winner.
2. **Organiser/Date:** The Bike Affair (TBA)/October 16, 2016.
3. **Category:** Non-road bike, indicating that the race involved bikes other than traditional road bikes. This category might include mountain bikes, hybrid bikes, or other specialized bikes designed for off-road conditions. I used a hybrid bike with cleats.
4. **Distance:** The race covered a total distance of 50 kilometers. This is a significant distance and typically requires both endurance and strategy.
5. **Result:** I secured the second position in the race in Non-road bike category.
6. **Finishing Time:** I completed the 50-kilometer race in 1 hour, 33 minutes, and 6 seconds (1:33:06).
7. **Average Speed:** My average speed during the race was 30.9 kilometers per hour. This indicates a consistently high pace throughout the competition. This was only possible because of my training sessions and with all the milage covered in the past stages of the study.

Race 2

1. **Event Type:** Mass start race.
2. **Organiser/Date:** The Bike Affair (TBA)/December 10, 2016.
3. **Category:** Non-road bike i.e., hybrid with cleats.
4. **Distance:** The race covered the same distance as Race 1 - 50 kilometers.
5. **Result:** I secured the first position in my category.
6. **Finishing Time:** I completed the 50-kilometer race in 1 hour, 28 minutes, and 37 seconds (1:28:37).
7. **Average Speed:** Your average speed during the race was 32.3 kilometers per hour. There was a slight improvement in speed.

8. **Improvement:** I improved the timing by 5 minutes compared to the previous race. The fact that both races covered the same route allows for a fair comparison. Consistency in factors such as the route helps isolate variables, making it clearer that the improvement is likely due to changes in the approach and training.

My participation in these mass start races indicates a commitment to competitive cycling, specifically engagement in the cycling activities conducted by the local cycling clubs and form connections with other groups of cyclists who participate in racing. It gains respect as well as trust from the other cyclists. Mass start races often demand a combination of physical endurance, strategic decision-making, and technical skills due to the shared starting point and the potential for close competition.

Race 3

1. **Event Type:** Mountain Bike (MTB) Race.
2. **Organiser/Date:** Decathlon/December 4, 2016.
3. **Distance:** The race covered a distance of 10 kilometers.
4. **Experience Level:** It was your first-time participating in a mountain bike (MTB) race.
5. **Challenges Faced:** During the off-road section, I encountered difficulties, at times having to walk. This suggests challenging terrain and the need for technical skills in handling a MTB.
6. **Result:** I secured the 8th place with a surprising timing of 23 minutes and 22 seconds.
7. **Sponsorship:** The Bike Affair (TBA) sponsored the mountain bike without that I could not have participated in the event.

Participating in a Decathlon MTB race signifies a shift to off-road cycling, introducing a different set of challenges compared to road or mass start races. The choice of a mountain bike sponsored by TBA indicates the importance of equipment in this discipline.

The challenges faced during the off-road section, such as the need to walk at times, highlight the technical demands of MTB racing. Off-road courses often feature

uneven terrain, obstacles, and changes in elevation, requiring riders to possess not only speed and endurance but also excellent bike-handling skills.

The surprising result of securing the 8th place in my first MTB race indicates adaptability and a quick learning curve. It suggests that, despite the initial challenges, I was able to navigate the course effectively and compete well against other participants.

How MTB Racing Differs from other racing formats:

1. **Terrain and Course:** MTB races are typically held on off-road trails, including dirt paths, rocky terrain, and sometimes steep descents. This contrasts with road races that take place on paved surfaces. The varied terrain in MTB racing demands a different skill set and bike setup.
2. **Bike Handling Skills:** MTB racing requires superior bike handling skills due to the technical nature of the courses. Riders need to navigate obstacles, make quick turns, and handle challenging descents, which are not as prevalent in road or mass start races.
3. **Equipment:** Mountain bikes are specifically designed for off-road use, featuring sturdy frames, wider tires with aggressive tread patterns, and suspension systems. The choice of a suitable MTB, is crucial for performance in these races.
4. **Physical Demands:** While all cycling disciplines demand physical fitness, the nature of MTB racing introduces additional challenges such as bursts of power for overcoming obstacles and the need to quickly recover after technical sections.
5. **Race Dynamics:** MTB races often have a more dispersed start due to the challenging terrain. Riders might encounter single-track sections where overtaking can be challenging, making strategic positioning crucial.

In summary, participating in an MTB race offers a unique experience with distinct challenges compared to road or mass start races. Success in MTB racing requires a combination of technical skills, adaptability, and physical fitness tailored to off-road conditions. The choice of appropriate equipment plays a significant role in MTB racing success.

Pain and Injuries

The term endurance in these kinds of endurance activities is kept for a reason. What do we endure? We endure pain. Pain tolerance is a significant aspect of these endurance activities, and one must train for longer durations to help the body get to certain pain tolerance levels. The topic of pain is discussed in length by Jean E. Jackson in the chapter 'Pain: Pain and Bodies' in the book titled 'A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and embodiment'. Jean points out that pain can be "both an aspect of mind (experience) and brain (produced by neurological structures and processes); pain illustrates some of the problems associated with mind-body dualism." Murat Aydede and Guven Guzeldere note that the "fundamental tension between what can be quantified as the 'objective' measure of pain as characterised in terms of tissue damage and the 'subjective' criterion of when to categorise a given experience as pain is, in fact, prevalent in pain research" (2002: S267)." (Mascia-Lees, 2011:396).

It may seem paradoxical, but people seek pain of a certain kind; they find meaning in it. There are many popular phrases about pain and growth, especially in the world of sport, such as "no pain, no gain". Lance Armstrong, the most famous cyclist in the world, describes his view on pain in his book, *It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life*, "Pain is temporary. It may last for a minute, or an hour, or a day, or a year, but eventually it will subside, and something else will take its place. If I quit; however, it lasts forever" (Armstrong & Jenkins, 2000). During the initial stages, the riders endure much pain because the learning curve is very steep in the beginning. Especially the last few kilometres of every ride in the initial stages of cycling are always harder. Apart from the muscle sours, which are inevitable and necessary for growth and improvement, there are pains that may become injuries when neglected. These unattended may even turn into chronic pain and do permanent damage. The pains shift during the course of riding. One needs proper guidance or support to overcome these pains.

During the preparatory period, I experienced pain in the outer part of the knees and immediately consulted the physical education teacher; with a proper focus on strengthening specific supporting muscles, I could get rid of the pain. Then the pain in the lower back and glutes started coming up during the longer rides, focusing on strengthening those muscle groups. As mentioned earlier, it takes long periods for the body to adapt to endure sitting for long periods on the saddle. All the places where there is contact with the bicycle become numb such as the palms on the handlebar,

glutes on the saddle and the feet on the pedal. Every cyclist finds a unique way of adapting to these pains. The saddle sores are an inevitable part of the longer rides. The most common ways riders try to overcome them are by getting a comfortable saddle, wearing appropriate clothing and using creams to lessen the impact.

There is a fundamental change in how one thinks or understands when one moves into an uncomfortable or challenging situation. These endurance activities give the riders an array of options and provide the best environment to explore the possibilities. Even though the body constantly reacts to our environment, it only comes to one's awareness when it reaches certain levels of apparent signs. Similarly, there comes the point when one asks questions about life that never popped up in the normal movement of life. Everything comes into question, which is otherwise taken for granted or paid little to no attention. It is generally said that it is more of mental than physical suffering, which one must overcome as the riding distances increase. This is because the mind always seeks pleasure over pain. In the fight or flight option, it always chooses the latter, and it is necessary to fight that constant thought of overcoming the resistance from the mind while moving to unknown territories, experiences and states of mind.

Every season brings a new set of challenges to the riders in its own way. Through experience, one understands which climate is best suited for them. For example, winter is the hardest in my case, as my body doesn't do well in a cold environment. And for some, it may be summer. The rainy season is the most dangerous as the roads are not conducive to riding. The group rides are cancelled when it rains. During one of my workout schedules, wanting not to miss any workout ventured out to finish the exercise in the rain. Even though I was extra cautious, I pushed hard in the last stretch as I was about to finish the workout. The visibility was low, and I could not control the bike in that heavy rain; the brakes failed, and the bike skidded on the road. I had severely injured my left knee and scratched it all over the left side of my body. The helmet and the gloves took some damage. It took me more than two weeks to recover from that fall. The whole schedule went off track, but I could maintain my fitness through other minor exercises and nutrition in control.

Upgrades: a level up

Considering some of the non-riding conditions such as rain, roads, time and so on, many cyclists look towards indoor trainers to keep up the physical activity. In a similar thought process, I bought a basic cycling indoor trainer. The trainers are engineered so that the bicycle easily fits into the trainer and somewhat gives a road-like experience. The resistance and others parameters are adjustable to the needs of the riders. The advantage is that they are convenient and help build consistency in training, irrespective of the weather and other limiting factors.

One of the major upgrades for a cyclist is using cleats. Cleats are an attachment to a cyclist's shoe. It clips onto the bike's pedals. It helps the riders apply the force and give better bike control. It feels like the bike is attached to our legs and therefore becomes an extension of our body. It takes a few rides to get used to cleats. Almost every cyclist might have experienced a "cleat fall". A cleat fall happens when the cyclist forgets to unclip the cleat from the pedal at the end of the ride, which leads to the loss of balance and fall. It is a funny experience. Cleat falls do not hurt because they are slow and happen when the bike is stationary. They happen until unclipping becomes second nature to a cyclist. I switched to cleats and experienced three cleat falls. I had practised clipping and unclipping cleats hundreds of times on the trainer before I ventured out. I trained well with cleats on the hybrid bike.

The most significant upgrade is the road bike. It's a complete game-changer. It's much lighter and faster, with higher gearing options and better geometry. Adding all that and cleated pedals felt a super boost. Apart from that, I got speed, cadence sensors, a heart rate monitor and a fitness tracker, which is used to protect all the data in one place and have a better measurement; even though all these seem expensive for my income bracket but felt worth the experience.

All the above is done keeping in mind the brevets I had to complete to finish the Super Randonneur series (i.e., 200, 300, 400 and 600kms). The period before the actual event(s) is generally referred to as 'base building' or 'base miles' or 'preparatory period' in the fitness or sports world. A strong base mileage helps prevent injuries and improves recovery rate, i.e., faster recovery from exhaustive long rides.

Table 3.2: Showing cycling activity during the fieldwork

Year	2016 (from July-Dec)	2017	2018
Distance (km)	3147.8	3,879.0	2,418.1
Time (HH:MM)	147:40	184:22	119:44
Elevation Gain (m)	15,973	25,286	14,802
Rides	183	298	169

Source: Fieldwork data from Strava website

Table 3.2 presents the overall cycling activity data during the period of fieldwork, both passive and active stages. Before July 2016, i.e., in the initial stage, the data was not recorded but could have certainly done more than 2,000kms. The cycling mileage comes to around 10,000 kms overall. The distances covered, the time spent on the bike and planning, figuring out the routes and training with proper nutrition, recovery and the elevation gain indicate the physical effort and mental strength with lot of deliberate practice helped realise the objectives of the study to bring more deeper understanding of being and becoming a cyclist.

The cumulative experiences of the past played a significant role in taking decisions, which helped me to take up the challenge or even think of attempting to achieve the title of a 'Super Randonneur'.

CHAPTER IV:

Autoethnography: Active stage

The chapter is in continuation of the previous chapter and follows the chronology. It is a detailed descriptive account of the active stage of the study. As a randonneur, it is the last stage of the three stages. In Stage 3, I participated in the randonneuring events as a randonneur completing the Super Randonneur series, i.e., riding 200, 300, 400 and 600km brevets in the 2017-18 season (November-October) and participated as a volunteer in the entire season.

Stage 3: Active stage (November 2017 – February 2018)

The annual calendar of Randonneuring is from November to October. This is known as a Randonneuring season. There are Twelve Brevets scheduled by Hyderabad Randonneurs for the 2017-18 season (see table 4.1). The brevets are planned in such a way that the riders can scale up step by step to finish the Super Randonneur series. A three-week gap is maintained between the brevets for recovery and preparation. There are no brevets scheduled in the months of May and June, keeping in view the high temperatures of the region. In fact, even the 200km brevet in April is a night brevet. The active stage of field work has been carried out for the entire 2017-18 season. The active stage is divided into two sections. One section discusses the experience of riding, and the other looks into the experience of volunteering in the brevets.

Table 4.1: Hyderabad Randonneurs Club Participation and results for the season 2017 – 2018

#	Date	Brevet	Researcher as	Completed	DNF	LF	Total
1	04-Nov-2017	200km	(Volunteer)	57	2	4	63
2	25-Nov-2017	300km	(Rider)	55	5	-	60
3	16-Dec-2017	400km	(Rider)	44	4	-	48

4	06-Jan-2018	600km	(Rider)	35	8	2	45
5	26-Jan-2018	1000km	(Volunteer)	30	4	-	34
6	18-Feb-2018 11-Feb-2018	200km	(Volunteer) (Volunteer ride)	80	7	3	90
7	28-Apr-2018	200km	(Volunteer)	46	9	1	56
8	07-July-2018	200km	(Volunteer)	44	6	2	52
9	28-July-2018	300km	(Volunteer)	27	8	-	35
10	01-Sept-2018	400km	(Volunteer)	27	3	-	30
11	22-Sept-2018	600km	(Volunteer)	18	13	-	31
12	19-Oct-2018	1000km	(Volunteer)	16	6	-	22

Source: Audax India Randonneurs website

DNF= Did Not Finish, LF= Late Finish

PHASE – I: RANDONNEUR

As we can see from the table, I have participated as a rider or randonneur in some brevets and volunteered in others. Both experiences are quite different from one another. Being a rider/randonneur requires much more physical and mental preparation. The experience is much deeper and more intense. As the distance increases, one has to dig deeper and deeper into one self to find strength, motivation and meaning to complete the brevet.

Table 4.2: The first phase: from Randonneur to Super Randonneur

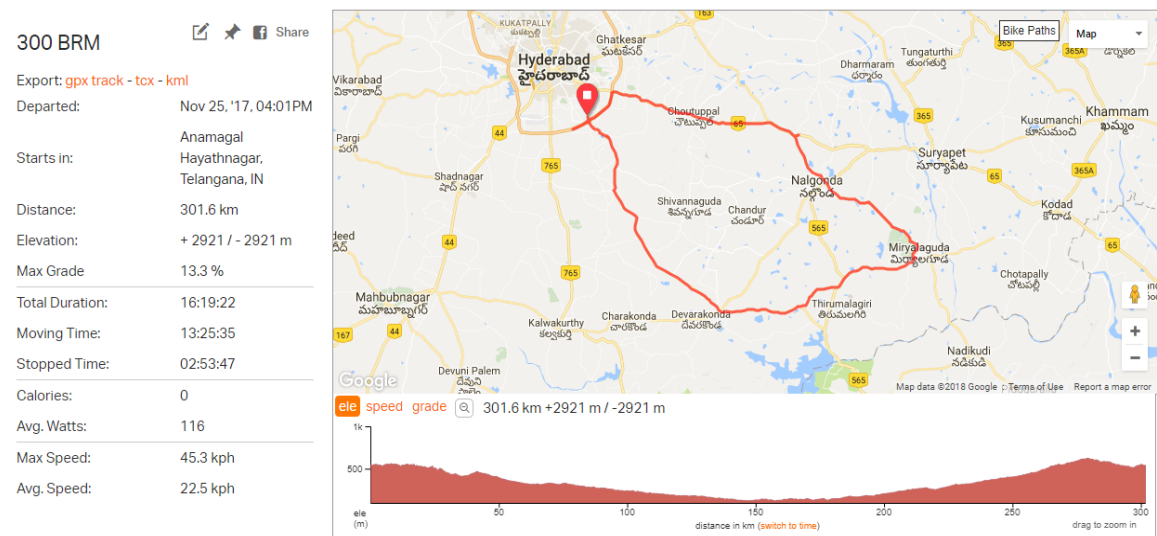
Months	Nov 2017	Dec 2017	Jan 2018	Feb 2018
Distance (km)	636.8	1095.2	910.2	431.3
Time (HH:MM)	29:54	48:40	44:35	24:04
Elevation Gain (m)	4,385	8,077	4,681	2,220

Source: Fieldwork data from Strava website

300km BRM - 25th Nov 2017

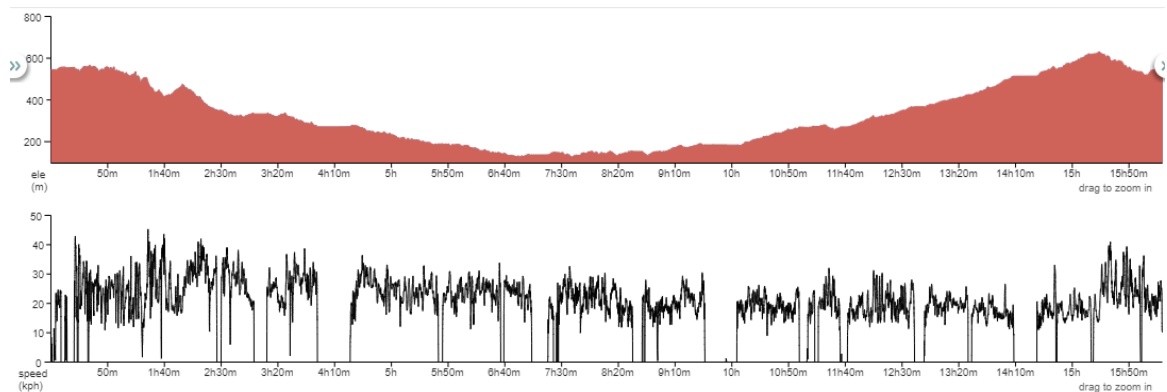
It is the second brevet of the season. The event's name is "Tour of Neelagiri". Most of the riders who aim to become super randonneurs for the season have started with a 200km brevet organised on 04th Nov 2017. In the 200km brevet, 63 riders participated, out of which 57 successfully completed the ride while four riders finished late, i.e., out of the cut-off time, and two riders could not finish the brevet. The 300km brevet saw most of the 200km brevet riders and a few riders from other clubs. The riders need to complete the 300km brevet in 20hrs 00mins. A detailed account of the brevet is given in the following sections. Map 4.1 and figure 4.1 show the overview of the ride and the elevation profile of the ride.

Map 4.1: Showing the ride details and the route map with the elevation of the 300km BRM



Source: Fieldwork data from [ridewithgps](#) website

Figure 4.1: Shows the elevation profile, time, and speed with the pit stops during the 300km BRM



Source: Fieldwork data from [ridewithgps](http://ridewithgps.com) website

To the Start Point

On 25th Nov 2017, after a good rest or I should say forcefully rested in anticipation of the amount of physical exertion and loaded the body with carbohydrates for the past two days. All the necessary fuel/snacks packed (electrolyte, chocolate, chikky bars) and necessary gear in place, I started riding from my room at 12:30 p.m. and went to the TBA store (6km away) to pick up an extra front light in case of emergency from a fellow cyclist, working in the TBA as a Technician, and a Randonneur himself.

The start point of the 300km brevet was on the other side of the city, which was close to 30km from where I stay. According to Google maps, the shortest route is cut across the city, which seemed to be a bad idea riding through the traffic and wasting energy before the longest ride of my life. So, the solution was to find out if any riders near my residence are taking part in the brevet who have a car and a bike rack and are willing to offer a ride. A fellow cyclist and a randonneur working at TBA helped me to get in touch with a fellow rider who is taking part in the brevet, who stays in the Kondapur area, which is around 2km from the TBA store. We planned our meeting point and time a day before the ride.

I rode to the fellow riders' place as planned at 01:30p.m. We put our bikes on the car rack. We took the Outer Ring Road (ORR) to reach the starting point of the brevet as it is the fastest route. On the drive, we had a good conversation. He was excited to know that I was doing a Ph. D. in randonneuring. During the drive, he spoke about his cycling experiences in general and also compared it with foreign

countries with regard to cycling and the attitude of other commuters (cars and motorbikes) towards cyclists. He suggested I write about the negative side of cycling, i.e., accidents, deaths and etc. I asked for his consent to take an in-depth interview about his experience of randonneuring. He happily agreed and was even more eager to share his experiences.

Start point: 0.00km [16:00] GVR Convention Centre

The start point was GVR Convention Centre, Manneguda, Telangana. A total number of 60 participants registered for the 300km brevet. As we stepped out of the car, I saw a few riders taking out the bikes from their car racks. Those who were not having car racks removed the wheels to fit the bike into the back seat. They were fixing them back at the start point. Most of them seem to know each other. A joyful and enthusiastic atmosphere with all happy faces, joking around and introducing one another. We dismounted our bikes from the racks. The cars were parked adjacent to a functional hall. I greeted some of my fellow riders. Some of them recognised me as a volunteer in the 200km brevet, which took place on 04th Nov, three weeks earlier.

The ride responsible was greeting everyone. We took our respective brevet cards, filled out the consent forms, and got our bike check and stamping done on the brevet card. It is mandatory to have the bib no attached to the bike. I forgot to bring my bib no. Card. Therefore, the ride responsible gave me a temporary one and asked me to return it after the brevet. It is a general observation that many first-time riders may, because of anxiety, over-excitement and little negligence, not go through the e-mails which were sent before the brevet and end up at the start point asking for last-minute solutions in order to ride. The beginners somehow manage with the help of fellow riders. I was no exception to that. The bananas were provided by the organisers. I had a few bananas before the start of the ride. I introduced myself to some of the riders, and they all showed interest in knowing about my research.

The first bunch of riders started on time, and others followed in smaller groups. I started with one of the later groups. We crossed the road and started riding. Within two kilometres into the ride, there was confusion at the outer ring road junction. Everybody took a right turn, and I ended up all alone trying to understand

the map and the cue sheet given at the start point, after a few minutes of waiting and feeling lost. I called the ride responsible, and he suggested I follow the cue sheet. I decided to take the route which other riders had taken. It took some effort to catch up with the other riders. All through the effort, I was wondering at the back of my mind whether it was a good idea to sprint in the first few kilometres of a 300kms ride. The ambience was wonderful as the sun was setting down. I started seeing the riders coming from the opposite way, and that was a big relief. I slowed down a bit, anticipating to catching up with the last group of riders.

Check point 1: 8.40km [16:15-17:25] Kongara Kalan Rd junction underpass

I rode to the checkpoint and turned back as there was no one at the checkpoint. I realised we started from the wrong side of the road hence all the confusion. I crossed a few riders, wondering and not knowing how to respond while crossing fellow riders. With few, there was exchanging of smiles, and with few others, it was just greetings; with few, it was small introductions.

I introduced myself to some of the riders while riding. They were all ready for having some kind of conversation as we had nothing else to do other than riding. The riders spread out and moved at their comfortable speeds. We were riding on the service road adjacent to the Outer Ring Road (ORR), which slowly merged onto the National Highway 65 (NH-65) towards Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh. I had never imagined that I would be riding on the same stretch of the ORR road where I used to go for morning runs. It triggered some memories. It was 2km away from the village where I spent my entire childhood.

Another general observation is that riders with the same pace and randonneuring style, i.e., eating, resting and sleeping, naturally form a group of two to four and finish the rides. After spending a sufficient amount of time and energy with the cycling and cycling community, any rider could recognise an experienced rider from a beginner just by looking at the riding style and the way one handles the bike. One of the first set of riders whom I met during the first stretch of the randonneuring journey was a man and a woman rider. Both of them seem to enjoy their ride on very good road bikes using cleats. One of them is equipped with expensive gadgets, i.e., cycling GPS device, speed and cadence sensors. They looked like experienced randonneurs. I greeted them and initiated a conversation.

I found that both of them have done not one but multiple Super Randonneur series. The woman rider's name sounded familiar, and later I found that she was very well known in the cycling and running groups in Hyderabad. And she was also one of the first woman Super Randonneurs of the Hyderabad Randonneurs Club. To clear up the confusion in my head, I cross-checked with the fellow rider to know whether I had covered the distance as he followed the route given in the cue sheet. There was a sense of relief after I learned that I had completed the exact distance. I found it fascinating to see the number of gadgets the male rider had on his bike handle bar. It looked like a mini desk. I was slowly crossing them and caught up with another rider who had come from Chennai to participate in the brevet. He was a research scholar. We shared research experiences and how he made friends through participating in brevets in Hyderabad and Vijayawada. He says Randonneuring helps him get in touch with his riding friends and is a way out of his normal work stress/ life routine.

We entered the National Highway 65 (NH 65) towards Vijayawada. Especially the section between Hyderabad and Vijayawada is known as an expressway. The traffic was picking up slowly while the sun was setting. I got into a higher gear and pedalled faster than before to maintain an average of above 25 Kmph to cover the extra distance before losing the daylight. I passed by some of the riders, and one of them tagged along. It slowly turned dark. I switched on my front and tail lights and kept them in the lowest mode, sceptical about whether they would last till daylight. The head and tail lights are mandatory as every rider must ride through the entire night.

The rider who tagged along was not from Hyderabad. He was a young rider, came from Bangalore to participate in the brevet and belonged to Bangalore Randonneurs Club. I told him about my plan for reaching the next checkpoint, i.e., maintaining a certain speed, taking breaks at certain intervals, refuelling etc. He was riding a basic level road bike with a torch on his helmet and a dim tail light. He had no light on his handlebar. The vehicles on the National Highway were moving much faster, so pre-cautiously, we stuck to the extreme left on the road, not crossing the white marker line on NH 65. Being a little extra cautious, I rode behind him because his tail light was not visible properly. He seemed new to randonneuring, especially to the night riding. When enquired, he said it was his first 300BRM, and he could not plan much for the ride. He came with a single 500ml water bottle with no electorates or energy bars. It clearly showed that he has little experience in riding long distances.

We both rode together, one after the other, taking breaks at every 20kms of riding while occasionally sipping the electrolites. He seemed exhausted as he was sweating heavily and could not keep up the speed. We took a couple of breaks munching some energy bars before reaching the second checkpoint.

Check point 2: 90.80km [18:40-22:03] Kamineni Hospital

We reached the second check point at 19:59 after 4 hrs of riding. The checkpoint was buzzing with a lot of red lights blinking and three cars parked with songs playing in the car. The red lights are the riders' tail lights, and the cars belong to the volunteers. There were more than 20 riders filling water bottles, eating packaged food brought by the volunteers and some of them checking their bikes. I leaned my bike to a car nearby and completed the formalities, i.e., the time stamp on the brevet card from the volunteer. We had an option to choose either curd rice or sambar rice. I picked up a box of curd rice as it seemed a safe option with no *masala* stuff. It tasted really good. I introduced myself to some of the riders while having dinner. The riders who finished their dinner continued their journey while a few of them dropped in to have their dinner. Most of the riders discussed the route, the elevation profile, and the traffic and shared their previous experiences.

As I was still new to the road bike, until this checkpoint, I was sensing minor back pain because of a lack of flexibility. It was necessary to adapt to the sitting posture on the road bike. I endured the pain throughout the ride. Physically, everything else was going fine. Without wasting much time refilled my water bottles, mixed electoral, had a banana and tucked one in the jersey pocket for the future.

From the second checkpoint, I started riding with many new riders. We had to take a U-turn and move out of the Highway into the village roads. Some of them stopped to buy energy bars and cool drinks at the next junction. The village roads were far better to ride, with much less traffic and pleasant air. Now my fellow riders were all middle-aged men in their 30's and 40's. I introduced myself and started conversing with two riders, there was not much scope for interaction while riding. In a later conversation, while riding, I learnt that one of them had already finished a Super Randonneur Series in the previous season. He was riding a hybrid bike. He was using a Garmin Forerunner 920XT watch, the same one I was using to track the distance, speed, heartrate etc. From there, we both rode together for most of the brevet. We had

some interesting conversations on a number of topics throughout the ride at night. Having noticed him pedalling quite hard with not using his gearing options, I suggested he maintain a certain cadence to reduce stress on the knees. He seems to have got used to riding on the highest gear. We took a few short breaks to stretch and refuel before reaching the third checkpoint. He said he prefers cool drinks in the brevets, and likewise, most of the experienced riders seem to stick to a particular kind of food to avoid any discomfort or disturbance during the ride. Self-awareness plays a key role in all the decisions they make on the ride. Nalgonda was the only major town we passed through. The roads were in good condition, and the traffic was very minimal.

Check point 3: 152.80 [20:30-2:11] Miryalguda Bypass & Sagar Rd Jn.

We reached the checkpoint at 23:06hrs after 7 hrs of riding. The volunteers were from a single family. Some Police officers and journalists were present there. We finished our formalities first. I had a couple of bananas and refilled the water bottles. Later few riders spoke to the camera and posed for a picture. Not wasting any time, the co-rider and I moved from the checkpoint. We had to take a right and enter a narrow road. We took a toilet break just after crossing the village.

One interesting fact about the Hyderabad being situated on a plateau is that when one moves away from Hyderabad, the altitude starts dropping gradually. While coming towards the city, the altitude steadily increases. The V-shaped elevation is visible from the elevation profile given in fig 2. It is a similar case with almost all the brevets conducted in Hyderabad. Therefore, Hyderabad provides a different experience compared to any other brevets in the country. The first half of the brevets are easy to ride, whereas the second half needs a lot of effort to complete the brevet.

The riders are generally suggested to ride in a group or at least in two's during the night time. Normally there will be riding partners whose riding speed matches. After an hour-long of silent riding, we took a short break. That section was pitch dark. The experience of riding in the pitch dark with only a small beam of light that can show only a few meters ahead is unexplainable. The silence, the pleasantness and the rhythm of the pedalling. It felt like a trance. I had never experienced it before. It was like a dream, and the time just flew. I thought to myself that these are the kind of

experiences that might be one of the reasons which bring the riders back to participating in the brevets.

Check point 4: 196.20 [21:46-05:05] Peddavura

I and the co-rider reached the checkpoint at 01:49. There were a few volunteers and the ride representative waiting for the riders. Some riders were sleeping on the floor in front of the shops. They were the first set of riders who reached the checkpoint. We finished the formalities and refilled our water bottles. I did some stretching to relieve the muscles. I tried to take a nap but could not do it because of the mosquitoes. A group of riders woke up and started riding. Somehow, I was not getting sleep even though tired after riding for almost 10 hrs and being an early sleeper throughout my life. Hence, I thought of riding instead of wasting time. My riding partner was game for it. He already mentioned that he is used to sleeping late because of his work schedule.

We started riding through a village; roughly after 10kms, I started feeling sleepy. I suggested a break; hence we stopped at a closed restaurant with a water tank. I looked at my watch, which showed 213km with a low battery indicator. I had to stop and save it. I washed my face, had some snacks and started riding. I started feeling colder than before and realised that it was not because of a drop in the temperature but the absence of gloves. I left them at the water tank, where we took a pit stop. We were clear that riding back and picking would add another 20km, which would be a waste of energy and time. So, I called the ride responsible, who was at the 196km-check point, told him the exact location, and he picked it up for me. But in the end, I lost them. Those were my most expensive gloves. The incident taught me a good lesson to be a little more careful with cycling wearables.

As we moved, I saw some riders sleeping under a small shed. We took a small snack break in between. Around 235km, we were badly in need of some coffee or tea to keep us awake. Luckily, at one particular village junction, we stopped as one of the first tea stalls opened. We drank two cups of tea, with some biscuits. That worked for a few kilometres and but I had to struggle with sleep. Somehow managed to keep riding in a half-awake state and reached the check point.

Check point 5: 263.80 [23:53-09:35] Mall

To our surprise, we were the first ones to reach the checkpoint. The volunteers were waiting in a car. The clock was ticking at 6:05, and the sky lightened up slowly. We finished the mandatory signatures and drank tea with some biscuits. I did some stretching and started riding again. Gradually I lost sight of my fellow rider. I kept pedalling hard. Slowly I picked up some speed as the weather was cool and thought of finishing before the temperatures rose. I enjoyed the last 20-odd kilometres of the ride as the roads were in very good condition, the weather was pleasant, and there was little elevation. Riding through the thick morning fog is one of the unique cycling experiences.

End point: 302.90 [01:00-12:00] Finish

I reached the finishing point at 8:21 a.m. There was a sense of relief and accomplishment. The volunteer at the end point congratulated me, took my brevet card, and asked whether I wanted a medal, and I promptly said "yes" and paid the required amount in cash (which was mandatory) and was informed to all the riders through an e-mail). I learnt that my fellow rider reached the finish point a few minutes before me. I saw him leaving in his car. We exchanged wishes for finishing the ride. He left the place as he was in a hurry to get back to his home. Slowly the riders started finishing their ride. We congratulated each of us. We started taking photographs with our fellow riders with the "I finished 300km" banner in the background. I interacted with a few of them. Most of them looked tired but happy to accomplish what they had started. Out of the 60 participants, 55 successfully completed the ride, and five did not finish (DNF).

As you can see from figure 4.1, it took me a total of 16hrs 19mins. To complete the 300km with a moving time, i.e., the time on the saddle is 13hrs 25mins and resting time of 2hrs 53mins. The total mileage covered by the riders in the brevet is 16,500 kms.

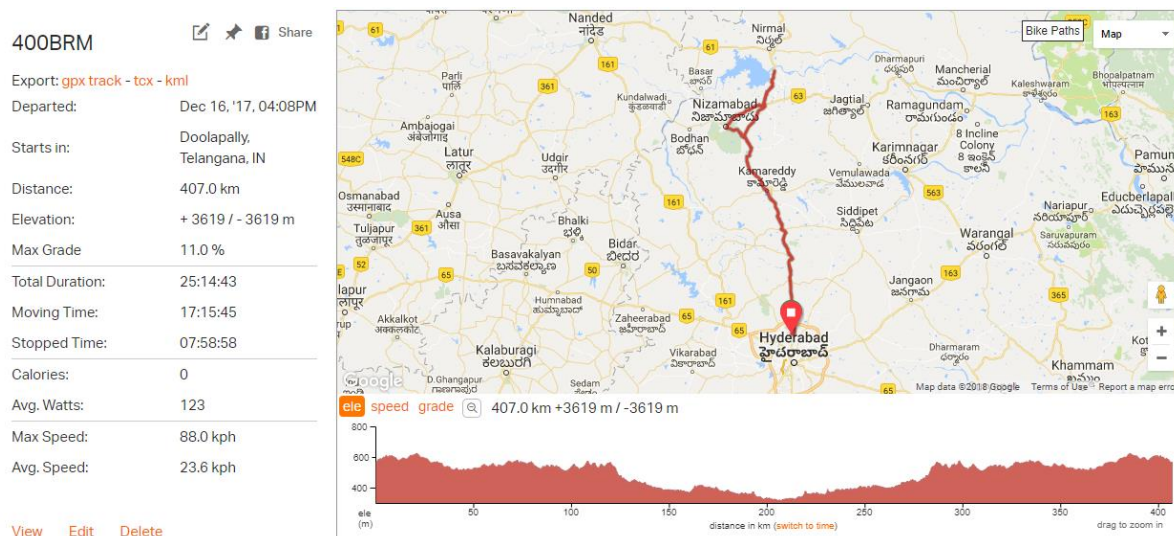
The riders who finished started moving to their respective residences. As I was riding without taking much rest throughout the night, I could not stop myself from napping under a tree until more riders finished their ride. I went back in the same car with the fellow rider. I tried not to sleep in the car but could not help it as I was completely exhausted after the longest ride of my life. Some riders call their family

members to get them back home safely. Some take rest and recover before moving to their places.

400km BRM - 16th Dec 2017

It is the third brevet of the season. The event's name is the "Hyderabad-Nizamabad-Armooor" ride. The 400km brevet is planned on the National Highway 44 (NH 44) except for a small portion that moves out to Nizamabad. Most of the riders who are aiming to become super randonneurs for the season are halfway completing a 200km and a 300km brevet in the past six weeks. The riders need to finish the 400km brevet in 27hrs 00mins to qualify.

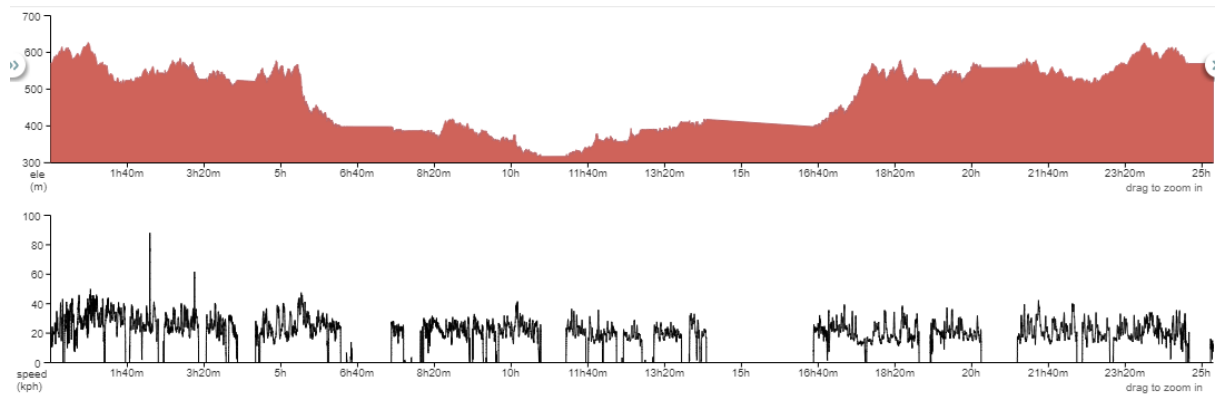
Map 4.2: Showing the ride details and the route map with an elevation of the 400km BRM



Source: Fieldwork data from ridewithgps website

*Max speed is showing wrong due to some technical error.

Figure 4.2: Shows the time taken and the speed with the pit stops during the 400km BRM



Source: Fieldwork data from [ridewithgps](http://ridewithgps.com) website

To the Start Point

On 16th Dec 2017, I followed a similar approach to the 400km brevet as I did for the 300km brevet. Rested well in anticipation of the amount of physical exertion and took care of the nutrition. The start point was St. Martins College, Kompally, Secunderabad. The college is a little over 30kms from my residence. Reaching the start point was similar to the 300km brevet in terms of the timing, i.e., the brevet start time was 16:00hrs hence planned with a fellow rider who is continuing his journey to becoming a Super Randonneur like me. We were present in the college by 15:30hrs.

Start point: 0.00km [16:00] St. Martins College

The atmosphere was completely different from other brevet starting points because of the college and students. A fairly large group of students were taking short interviews of the riders. It was a lively evening.

The ride responsible was Rajeev Kalva for the 300km brevet. The volunteer team greeted everyone and took care of the pre-ride formalities (brevet cards, filling the consent forms, bike check, stamping and timing). We quickly finished the pre-ride formalities, and with many familiar faces from the previous brevet (300km) around, we exchanged greetings. I and my co-rider started a few minutes late, missing the flag off with the larger group of riders.

The plan was to hydrate every few kilometres, take a small break after riding for every 25km and refill the bottles wherever possible. I and my fellow rider used the drafting technique (a formation used in cycling to save energy and resistance from the

air). We implemented the plan pretty well until the first checkpoint. The terrain was rolling. We could maintain above 25kmph speed on average, as you can see from map 4.2 and figure 4.2.

Check point 1: 90.50km [18:140-22:02] Kamareddy Junction

By 20:15, we were at the Kamareddy. It was an auto checkpoint, so we searched for an ATM and took a transaction slip as proof. We skipped dinner, fuelled ourselves with a piece of cake, and filled our bottles as my co-rider said he managed to arrange food at the second checkpoint. Two more riders joined us during the snacking time in the bakery.

We started riding even faster as there was a gradual decrease in the elevation. Especially the stretch after 123kms was even more fun. We caught up to some of the fellow riders. We were touching 50kmph speeds. The roads were in good condition with not-so-heavy traffic on the NH 44. Most of them were riding road bikes. While enjoying the ride, some riders reminded us that we had to take the same route while returning, which would be challenging because it would be an inclination, and we have to ride in the heat.

Checkpoint 2: 142.70km [20:12-01:31] House after Ajantha Rice mill

At 22:28hrs, we were at the checkpoint. It was a house, hence had all the comforts like bathrooms, a place to sleep, blankets etc. The volunteers were taking care of the formalities as usual. Some of the riders were resting. Some were getting ready to leave. As planned, we got food from my co-riders friends. I had a light meal, being sceptical about the discomfort it might cause. Few of the riders enjoyed the meal. The organisers provided the fruit juices and other drinks at the checkpoint. We took some pictures and interacted with our fellow riders. We had spent more time than necessary at the checkpoint. It is always advised by the experienced randonneurs not to spend much time at the checkpoints as we lose valuable time. And instead take breaks where and when necessary during the ride, i.e., to rest, sleep or refuel.

I started riding with a big group from the checkpoint. We were riding at the back of the pack. Just 4kms into the ride, there was a puncture to the co-riders rear wheel. Our puncture workshops (conducted by TBA so riders can solve small troubles such as punctures) came in handy. We solved the issue using our puncture kit (which

includes a spare tube, levers, rubber patches, gum, a small piece of rough paper and, of course, an air pump). These are generally carried by all the experienced riders in a bag- which is either fixed to the saddle, often known as a saddle bag or to the handle, known as a handle bag. It took us some time as it was dark. A small group of workers who were around watched us. They were fascinated to see our cycling attire and our bikes (which is usually the case at every stop). They asked a number of questions regarding the ride; while answering their questions, we fixed the puncture. Having enquired about the place we needed to reach, the workers suggested a short route to reach there, but we ignored them as that would lead to disqualification.

Once again, we ended up being one of the last riders in the brevet, as we lost some time fixing the flat. During that period, some of the riders passed us. We picked some speed and moved into the Nizamabad town (I got to know after the ride was uploaded to Strava app, to my surprise, I became the king of the mountain (KOM) for a segment in that stretch), which shows that we were the fastest riders who covered that particular segment. After a few kilometres of intensive riding, we saw some red lights blinking far from us and caught up with them. There was some relief that we were no longer the last riders. We slowly moved ahead of them. We entered a village, and we heard the barking of the dogs from far. By the time we were about to exit from the village, they were right behind, chasing us, and we started peddling at full speed. Our heart rate and speed spiked. Fortunately, we outran them. The dogs' and cyclists' related stories are often shared in conversations among cyclists. It is fun in the aftermath, but at the time when in the situation, it is quite scary.

After riding a few more kilometres, we saw some cars parked and blinkers on. We understood that it was the ride responsible and the volunteers. They were offering hot tea, which was hard to resist as the temperatures were getting colder than expected, and it also helped us to be awake to ride through the night. We stopped for a tea break and moved along with the next set of riders.

Check point 3: 178.60 [21:15-03:54] Mahipal Reddy Statue

Along with my riding partner and three more riders, I took a selfie at a statue which was an auto checkpoint. After a few kilometres, we entered NH 44 again. We took a pee break, rested for a few minutes at a bus shelter, and planned a non-stop ride to the next checkpoint, which is halfway, i.e., 203kms and the U-turn point. I started

drafting, and we crossed some of the riders. At around 195 kms, we started seeing some riders on the other side of the road. They seemed to be the first bunch of riders. It was a kind of relief as we were not that far from the U-turn point and finishing the first half of the brevet, i.e., 200 km. We kept riding at a good speed.

Check point 4: 203.00 [21:59-05:32] SBH ATM (Soanpet)

This, too, was an auto checkpoint. Hence, we took a selfie with the ATM in the background as proof. ATM was closed, and the riders slept wherever they could find a place. Some were sleeping on the floor, and some were on the steps in front of the ATM. I was tired and hence took a much-required 15min nap. Later, I filled the water bottles and added a little electorale powder to replace the salt lost in the body and to avoid any chances of getting cramps. I refuelled myself with two bananas and kept one in the jersey pocket for consuming later in the ride. Bananas and the electorates have been the go-to option for me since my running days. The temperatures were slowly declining. Therefore, I put on my warmer, which I squeezed into the front handle bag anticipating the situation and continued our return journey.

We can see from fig 4 that there is a gradual downslope till the turning point, which means that the first half is the easiest part as it is downhill; on top of that, we have fresh legs and bodies completely rested. The second half is always the hardest in almost all the brevets conducted in Hyderabad because of its geographical position, i.e., being on the plateau.

Riding at night has its own advantages as well as its disadvantages. The advantages would be no heat, less traffic, less pollution, and less mental exhaustion when the long climbs are not visible. Disadvantages are majorly related to safety, with a higher risk of accidents on the National highways and visibility of the riders.

We calculated the distance to the next checkpoint, which was 57kms and targeted to cover that in 3hrs, but sleep was a big hurdle to overcome. This was one of the hardest parts of the brevet. We have taken 6-7 breaks which included three naps. I kept two orange candies in my mouth to counter the sleep. They were effective for little time in keeping me awake, but nothing could hold longer. We somehow managed to reach the next point.

Checkpoint 5: 260.20 [23:46-09:21] House after Ajantha Rice mill

We reached the checkpoint at 6:40 in the morning. It was the same house that was used as the second checkpoint. We finished the formalities first. I used washroom. Set the alarm for 45mins and instantly went into a deep sleep state. I woke up with the alarm only to realise that there were 140kms of a ride to reach the final checkpoint. I motivated myself to get up with inadequate sleep. I experienced moderate pain in my lower back and slight stiffness in the upper back, neck and shoulders. I did some stretching to loosen up the tightness and pain. The organisers were providing the breakfast, and I loaded myself with plenty of *Idlies* and coffee to start the ride strong. I realised that I had spent 2hrs at the checkpoint. I quickly calculated the time left and the necessary speed to maintain to cover the distance; that is to say, I had 10hrs left to cover 160kms with the blazing sun on top with no tree cover as it was open National Highway and with all the ascent. All these calculations with the fear of losing extra time on any unfortunate bike breakdown. Hence, I dropped the idea of riding together with others and started pedalling away.

I was occasionally crossing the riders. I have pedalled past close to 10 riders who were all riding alone at their own pace during the 47km stretch between checkpoints 5 and 6. The temperature slowly started to rise. I could only see the road, which was mostly ascending all the time. There were very small breathers in between the ascents. It was like a rolling uphill. The ascents took a long time, but the descents lasted for a few seconds. I hardly took any breaks before reaching the next checkpoint.

Check point 6: 307.00 [01:14-12:28] HDFC ATM (Kamareddy)

The time was 11:00. It took me 2hrs 15mins to cover the 47kms to reach the checkpoint. It was an automated checkpoint. Therefore, I took a photo in front of the HDFC bank as proof. I fuelled up with two glasses of orange juice. It felt delicious. I was planning to have lunch at Zyka restaurant and pedalled hard without taking a break until I reached the restaurant. I covered that stretch which is 18 kms, within an hour and sat for lunch. The time was 12:20hrs. I saw some of the riders having their lunch and some leaving after finishing their lunch. I sat with the group of riders on a bench, and there were two women riders among them. I ordered a plain Dosa and curd rice, keeping in mind the scorching sun. All the riders were enjoying their meal and

discussing several aspects of the ride, i.e., the temperature, the elevation and their plans to reach the finishing point.

One common observation is that most of the riders, especially the experienced ones, are generous, willing to help, give advice and caution to the new riders. They often offer to pay for the lunch, dinner or any drinks and lend the tubes, lubes, air pump and any other necessary tools without hesitation.

After lunch, I took a small break and filled the water bottles by adding electrolyte powder. Motivating myself that it is just 75kms from the restaurant started pedalling towards Hyderabad. I did not take a break for the next one and half hours. It was midday, the sun shining hard, riding for the past 20hrs with little sleep and on top of that, there was a headwind. Riding in those set of conditions will make anyone realise the importance of everything which otherwise is taken for granted in life. A tree, a glass of water, or a cool breeze will feel like heaven.

My bottles were empty hence stopped at a roadside shop, bought some packaged cold-water bottles and filled up my bottles. There were 50kms of rides left to finish the brevet. I did some stretching and started pedalling slowly. Gradually, it became harder and harder to ride. At times I wondered whether the air pressure in the wheels was low because of the heaviness I was feeling in my legs. I realised it was because of the headwinds and my cumulated effect of riding for the last 20 odd hours without proper sleep. There was numbness in some places, and pain in some, and it was becoming uncomfortable sitting on the saddle. It is hard to explain the exact state of my mind and body in words. It was a mixture of feelings. I was unable to sit on the saddle for long. Neither was I able to get out of the saddle and ride, i.e., the dancing or out-of-the-saddle technique. The dancing technique gives power, but it feels like the thighs are burning from inside just after a few seconds into that position. It was literally hell. I was unable to maintain any position for a longer time. Therefore, regularly I was switching between them. The transition between the positions is both painful and relieving at the same time.

The thoughts of quitting the ride kept arising. I was struggling to justify the situation I put myself into. I just kept telling myself that "it is almost over" and pushing myself to the finish line. In these moments, I felt there was no need to suffer this much, depriving my sleep and jeopardising my health. During the last few kilometres, there was a number of moments where I thought of not participating in any other brevet and quitting randonneuring for life.

We can see in fig. 5 how the speed drastically slowed as I was struggling and trying, not thinking of anything else but just finishing the ride. I am in one of the most uncomfortable states in my life. It is uncharted territory, and I have never been in that state. It's a mixture of feelings, physical pain at a number of different places, mental and physical exhaustion and many indescribable experiences. I felt that I was most vulnerable in that state at every level. It is hard even to think correctly. In those moments, any minor disturbance might irritate or cause anger. While I came closer and closer, those thoughts slowly disappeared.

When I was entering the outskirts of the city, suddenly I heard a dog barking and started pedalling as fast as possible. The dog chased me for a few hundred meters. It was a dreadful experience. My heartbeat shot up instantly at that moment. I entered the Medchal town, and from there, it was only a few kilometres of ride. There was full of traffic, noise and commotion. I was paying more attention to my surroundings and trying to remember the right exit from the Highway to reach the college. I did not want to make a mistake and end up riding even one extra meter. I found the right exit, took the turn, and from there, it was around a kilometre to the finish point. I saw the college, which brought so much relief and satisfaction.

End point: 403.90 [04:08-19:00] Finish

In the end, I survived the longest ride of my life. Finished the formalities of getting the stamp, timing noted and returning the brevet card. Before handing over the brevet card, I took a picture of the card. The timing on the card was 16:50, which means I have finished 407kms in 24hrs 50mins with close to 2hrs 10mins to spare. The cut-off or the closing time was 19:00hrs.

As I entered the college ground, there were a few riders who finished the ride are relaxing. Few college students and members were congratulating the riders. I suddenly forgot all the pain and suffering and found myself experiencing a great sense of accomplishment and joy. I greeted the college members and congratulated my fellow riders. The college principal felicitated us with a shawl for completing the 400km ride. It felt wonderful. It was the first time in my life I received a felicitation. It was a symbolic gesture on the part of the college principal to recognise and appreciate the effort of the riders.

With all the pains at a number of places in my body, I did some stretching to relieve the pains. Slowly riders were finishing the ride. Most of the riders finished in the last two hours. My riding partner was also part of one of the last set of riders. I congratulated all of them. Out of the 48 participants, 44 successfully completed the ride, and four did not finish (DNF). As you can see from fig 3, it took me a total of 24hrs 50mins. To complete the 400km with a moving time, i.e., the time on the saddle is 17hrs 15mins and resting time is 8hrs. The total mileage covered by the riders in the brevet is 17,600 kms.

The discussion immediately shifted to the next brevet that is 600kms. The first-timers like me were wondering about the difficulty and the pain one has to endure. In contrast, the experienced riders or the Super Randonneurs who had already finished riding those distances encouraged others. I was questioning and doubting myself whether I would be able to complete a 600kms ride. From that state of mind, it seemed impossible just having experienced the suffering while riding the last 50kms of the 400kms brevet and imagining there would be 200kms more left to complete the 600kms brevet. Even though it is obvious, I was sure that the 600kms brevet would be far harder than 400kms, but experientially I now understood what it takes to complete these rides. It was both physically and mentally exhausting. At the same time, it was exciting that I would be known as a Super Randonneur for the rest of my life. In order to achieve that, I must train and equip myself in a better way to tackle that challenge. I had 19 days to prepare for the 600kms brevet.

Riders moved to their respective residences based on their conveniences. Most of them had bike racks attached to their cars and hence strapped them to the racks. Those who did not have a bike rack simply slid the cycles in their vehicle back seat, and others whose residences were nearby pedalled back to their places. My fellow rider dropped me at his place in his car, and from there, I came back riding. I reached my room at night around 22:00hrs traversing through the city traffic.

600Km BRM - 06th Jan 2018

It is the fourth brevet of the season. The event's name is "The Two States" ride. It is kept that way because the ride covers two states, i.e., Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The 600km brevet is planned on the National Highway 44 (NH 44) towards Bangalore. This brevet would be the final brevet for riders who have completed 200km, 300km and 400km brevets and attain the Super Randonneur title for the season. The riders need to finish the 600km brevet in 40hrs 00mins in order to be qualified.

Preparation for 600km brevet

Having suffered the last few kilometres of the 400km brevet, I doubted whether I could complete the 600km brevet in 40hrs. Recovery from the 400kms ride took close to 3 days to walk with no pain in my legs and a little more than a week to recover completely. While I was wondering what kind of training would help to tackle the 600km challenge, I started strength workouts especially focusing on core muscles, lower back and quadriceps. Fortunately, I found a festive 500 ride, i.e., a few riders took up the challenge of riding 500kms between Christmas and New Year's Eve. That seemed perfect for my training.

All the logistics were well planned. We had a support car to carry our luggage and supplements. We booked the rooms for stay at the destinations for day one and day two. We formed a 7-member group willing to participate in this challenge/ adventure/ intense training. There were two super randonneurs (who have done 200, 300, 400 and 600 brevets) in the group, two randonneurs (who have done a number of 200 brevets) and two young, experienced cyclists who have done a number of century rides before. The group was fairly young, with the youngest being 15 and the oldest being around 35 years of age.

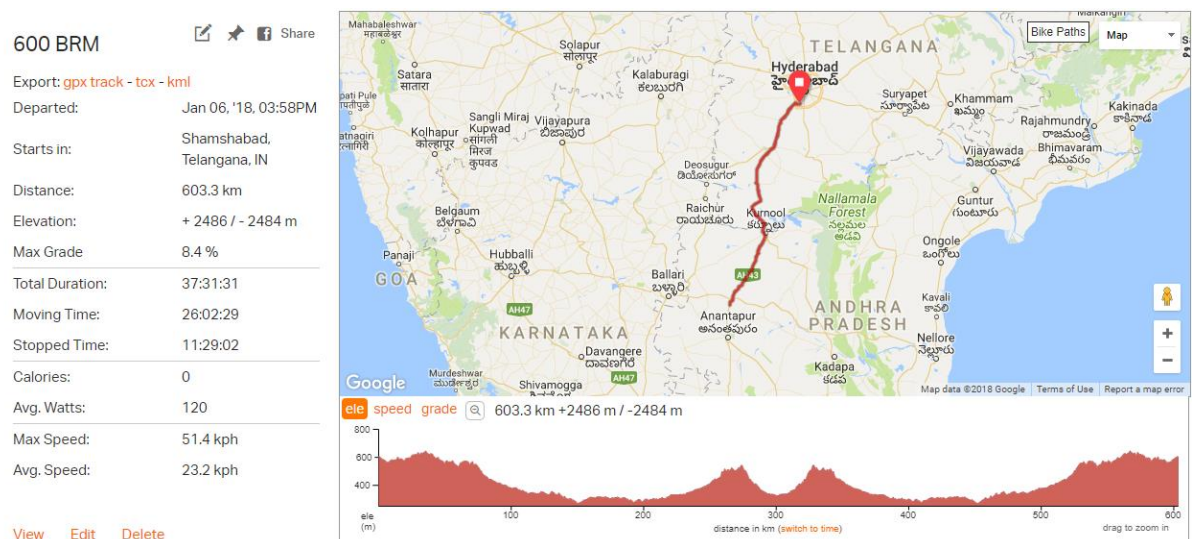
Everything went well according to the plan. On day 1, we started from Hyderabad on first light to Nagarjuna Sagar, covering 138 kms by lunchtime. We took proper rest for the rest of the day. On day 2, we rode from Nagarjuna Sagar to Srisailem, covering 180 kms with major climbing sections on the second half of the day. On day 3, we rode from Srisailem to Hyderabad, taking a different route, covering 200 kms. We covered a total distance of 518kms with the toughest climbs of

my life. The tour acted as a much necessary training ride, which simultaneously built physical strength and gave me enormous confidence to participate in the 600 BRM.

To the Start Point

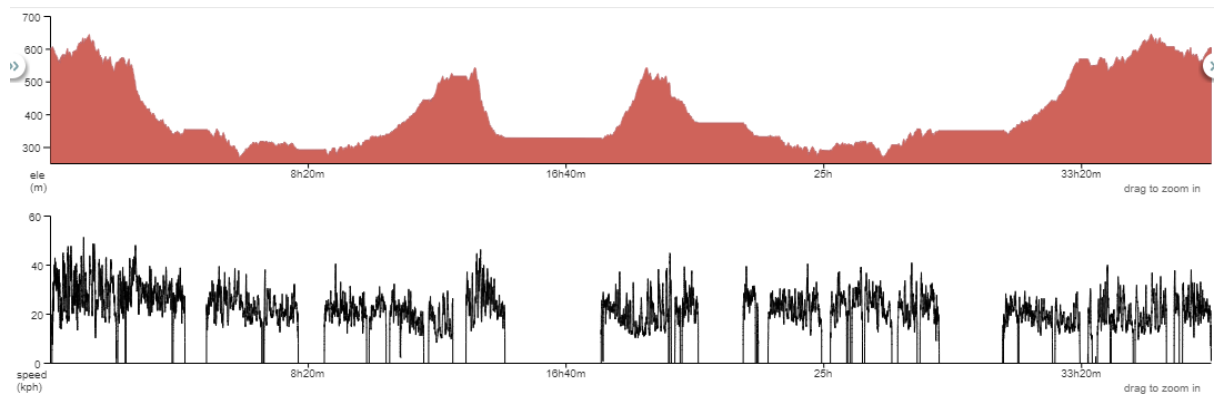
On 06th Jan 2018, a similar approach was followed to reach the start point. In anticipation of the event, thinking of sleep deprivation for two nights and the volume of riding, I took care of the nutrition and rest. The day before the ride I slept early, around 19:00hrs and woke up after 11hrs of sleep. I checked the condition of the bike and had a heavy breakfast. The start point was Decathlon, Shamshabad, Telangana. The sports megastore is around 35kms from my residence. Reaching the start point was similar to the 300km brevet in terms of the timing, i.e., the brevet start time being 16:00hrs hence planned a meetup point with the fellow rider who is continuing his journey to becoming a Super Randonneur like me. Similar to the earlier rides, the start point of the 600km brevet was kept on the outskirts of the city. I attached my bike to the car rack and jumped into the car. We took the ORR to reach the place as it is the fastest route. Map 4.3 and figure 4.3 shows the overview of the ride and the elevation profile of the ride.

Map 4.3: Showing the ride details and the route map with an elevation of the 600km BRM



Source: Fieldwork data from [ridewithgps](#) website

Figure 4.3: Showing the time taken and the speed with the pit stops during the 600km BRM



Source: Fieldwork data from [ridewithgps](http://ridewithgps.com) website

Start point: 0.00km [16:00] Decathlon, Shamshabad

We reached the start point around 15:30hrs. Most of the riders were dropping in with their cars. We dismounted our bikes from the racks. The cars were parked in the parking area, i.e., in front of the Decathlon sports store. We exchanged greetings with our fellow riders. Most of them are familiar with each other as they have ridden the previous brevets together. Some of their family and friends joined them to cheer them at the starting point.

The ride responsible was greeting everyone. We took our respective brevet cards, filled out the consent forms, and got our bike check, stamping and timing done. I have practised riding with the cleats for the Festive 500 and suffered a bit. Therefore, I was sceptical about completing the entire ride with cleats. Hence put an extra pair of normal shoes in the fellow rider's support car. My fellow rider has taken permission to have the support car following the rules of the brevet, which states that it can only be used at the checkpoints. I wore the cleated shoe and switched on the Strava app to record the ride.

I started the 600km ride with the group. The roads were good, and the weather was pleasant. Slowly picked up some speed and moved to the front of the group. Having ridden in the middle or at the back in the previous brevets, this time, I decided to ride with one of the most experienced Super Randonneurs and seasoned riders to know how they ride. They maintained a good average speed. They were occasionally using the technique of drafting to use their energy efficiently.

Check point 1: 70.50km [18:04-20:42] Jadcherla ATM

We reached Jadcherla at 18:25. Three of us took a selfie with the Jadcherla board in the background. We did not enter the service road which takes us into the village—instead continued on the highway bridge in order to save time by avoiding all the traffic and commotion in the village. I first noticed that my fellow riders were not taking many breaks between the checkpoints. They are drinking and snacking while riding. One of them wrapped homemade sandwiches in aluminium foils. They were neatly packed into the jersey back pocket as an option for snacks to avoid outside food. I was able to keep up with them. They seemed a little competitive but also encouraging and very cooperative. They ride together in almost all the brevets. They are known as good riding partners in the randonneur groups.

As we can see in the graph, the first section of the terrain is rolling. Hence, we could maintain a good average speed. The Festive 500 practice ride seems to have paid off as I maintained the speed with much less effort, and wearing cleated shoes made a difference. I was still not that confident with cleats riding in traffic and groups. Slowly it turned dark, and we switched on our front and backlights. With hardly any breaks, we reached checkpoint 2.

Checkpoint 2: 123.60km [19:38-00:14] Kothakota Bypass road (National Dhaba)

The time was 20:17 when we reached the Dhaba. The volunteers who were present at the checkpoint were surprised. We covered 123 kms in 4hrs 17mins. I think that is one of the fastest centuries I have done. The average speed was close to 30km/hr.

I ordered curd rice and others opted for roti, dal and chicken curry. Meanwhile, some other riders joined us. Without wasting much time, I continued with the first set of riders. Slowly we three separated. I was behind and saw their red taillights slowly moving away and disappearing. I was riding all alone on the National Highway and thought of catch up but I refrained from doing so because I had close to 450 kilometres of riding left. I sensed some pain in my feet due to cleats and uneasiness in my stomach. The pain slowly started to build up in my abdomen and my feet. I started looking for washrooms to relieve myself. I was riding alone and had no idea how far the next rider behind me was. I could not trust any stranger with the bike

hence continued tolerating the pain. Even though there were petrol bunks every few kilometres, I did not stop till I reached the next checkpoint.

There was a steady increase in the vehicles on the National Highway heading towards Bangalore. I kept myself on the extreme left, not crossing the border white line marking the end of the road. The buses were zooming past, and I could feel the air pressure even at a few meters distance. Sometimes they were so fast that it felt like somebody suddenly nudged me from the side. It was scary and demanded extreme alertness on the part of the riders. The riders will be thrown off the road at the smallest contact, and the drivers of the other vehicles won't even feel the impact or detect the collision.

Checkpoint 3: 190.60 [21:36-04:42] Kurnool Toll Gate

I reached the Toll Gate by 23:48hrs. I used the washroom facility available at the toll gate. It was a big relief. Then I found my fellow riders support car. I immediately switched to my normal running shoe, which I kept in the car anticipating the situation. It was another relief. Generally, I don't drink any beverages, but I made an exception in all the randonneuring events. I drank a cup of coffee to keep myself awake. The temperatures were getting low. I put on my sweater and enjoyed the warmth of a bonfire at the toll gate. I spent a considerable amount of time at the checkpoint, i.e., close to an hour. Thinking of riding with other riders waited for some time for other riders to catch up.

I started riding with another rider who was part of the Vizag Randonneurs club. He was around my age group. I was riding behind for some time and occasionally shifting places. There was no scope for a conversation while riding on the national Highway. As we can see from the graph, there is a gradual ascent for close to 80 kms from the checkpoint and a sudden drop in the elevation till the turning point, i.e., the 300km mark. We managed to keep up the speed for a few kilometres with regular breaks. The plan was to reach the turning point as fast as possible before the day break and take good rest. It just remained as a plan as we could not ride fast. It became harder and harder for two major reasons. The biggest hurdle is battling with sleep; the second is elevation gain. The speed dropped; the number of stops increased. We reached a point where it felt it was impossible to ride without taking a nap as we

were drifting onto the Highway—just realising how fatal it could be on the National Highway. Therefore, we thought of taking a nap.

We found a bus stand and slept on the iron bench. It was one of the deepest periods of sleep. The temperature was really low. I was cautious because my body doesn't do well in low temperatures. Even after being precautious, I woke with the feeling of 'chillness' or 'coldness' touching my backbone. That was the first time I experienced and understood what the word 'bone-chilling' cold meant. It was like a shock. I just woke up and stood up straight. My body was cold to the core. I felt that if I did not generate enough heat as fast as possible, something might go wrong inside my body. My co-rider was awake. The day was breaking. I could see the first light; it was all downhill from there to the turnaround point, 33kms away. We decided to ride as fast as possible without any breaks until we reached the checkpoint. We pedalled hard to generate enough heat in the body and then maintained a good pace, i.e., above 30km/hr. We covered the 33km stretch in 1hr without any break.

Check point 4: 300.50 [01:01-12:02] Gooty- Ravitheja Hotel

We reached the checkpoint at 06:40hrs. This means I have managed to ride 300kms in 14hrs 40mins. I still had 300kms to cover in 25hrs 20mins. The organisers arranged some rooms in a hotel for using washrooms and taking rest if one is willing. We quickly went to the rooms and freshened up. We kept our mobile phones and lights for charging. We went to sleep to recharge ourselves, keeping an alarm for one and half hours. The bed was a luxury, having slept in places where I never thought of sleeping, i.e., bus stops, roadside veranda's, on culverts etc., because of the tired state. I slipped into a deep sleep right away, and within a minute or so, the alarm rang, or it felt that way in my experience. These kinds of moments make me wonder about time. Regarding subjective experience, time is relative because it depends on the state of mind. I had no option but to get up as I had spent more than enough time, and the fellow riders reaching the checkpoint could use the room. I had *idli* and *dosa* for breakfast, and refilled my bottles. While I had breakfast, some riders were starting from the checkpoint, and some were reaching. I quickly made a calculation and a plan in my mind seeing the cue sheet. I spent 3hrs at the checkpoint. I had 25hrs 20mins minus 3hrs, i.e., 22hrs 20mins to cover the second half of the journey. That seemed pretty easy on the paper and calculating mathematically, but in reality, with all the

tiredness, elevation, weather and other life's uncertainties, it is completely an unknown territory in terms of my experience. I just planned to reach the next checkpoint in 5hrs, which is 100kms away, which seemed doable given my condition.

At 09:45hrs, I started from the checkpoint taking a U-turn a few 100meters from the hotel. The organisers gave their best wishes, and I was off alone on to the National Highway. Just after a few meters of riding, I could see the long climbs. I just kept my head down, not giving too much thought into it. I kept riding. I was unable to keep up the pace, and slowly my speed came down below 20km/hr. I saw one of the riders ahead of me and thought of reaching him as fast as possible. After a few minutes, I caught him. We rode together for a few minutes. He could not keep up the speed and took too many breaks; hence I moved ahead. The sun was right on top, and there was a slight headwind too. With the way I was struggling to ride and the speed I was going, I wondered many times whether that was because of lesser air pressure in the wheels, but I was wrong every time I checked. It was the elevation and the headwind which was making me feel that way. I did not indulge in too many thoughts and kept pedalling slowly, and gained some momentum after the first elevation section was covered.

As the feeling of boredom was just started setting in, I saw three riders far away. I motivated myself to reach them as fast as possible. Hence after a few minutes of riding caught up with them. Three of them seemed to be around forty years of age—one of them riding a hybrid. I introduced myself and had some conversation, which was a kind of relief, taking my mind off from the riding for some time. We stopped for a drink break. I drank soft drink after a long time as it seemed necessary to top up with some much-needed sugar. We refilled our water bottles and kept riding together.

It is very common in randonneuring to come across people who break most of the assumptions which naturally forms about the riders at first glance. For example, the general perception is that people who ride long distances such as 200km to even 1200km brevets are male riders who are extremely fit and young may be in their twenties with nothing else to do but train hard and participate in this kind of events but the facts are quite contrary to all that I just said. Most often, the riders are middle-aged men; almost all of them are working professionals having families and are not so fit physically compared to the mainstream sports persons.

At around 12:35hrs, we stopped at a Dhaba to have lunch. I used the washroom available just to ensure nothing unusual happened in the latter part of the ride. I ordered Zeera rice, curd and an Omelette. Meanwhile, some of the riders joined for lunch, and a few others passed by. We had lunch. I was thinking of taking a good rest for one hour or so till the sun cools down a bit and also give some time for the body to digest the ingested food. Few riders took a nap and started moving. As there was nobody willing to rest for so long and I, too, not wanting to ride alone, went with a known rider. He was of my age and had done super randonneur series before. We drafted for 10kms. We had to stop as my fellow rider was feeling uneasy in the back. We found a place under a tree and tried to stretch and rest for a bit. After a 15mins break, we decided to move. We slowly picked up some speed as the terrain was rolling.

Check point 5: 400.40 [04:09-18:42] Kurnool Town – SBH ATM

Without stopping in the town, we crossed the Kurnool town around 16:30hrs thinking of taking a break at the Kurnool toll gate, which was 12kms away. We took a selfie at the toll gate and joined a few other riders who were fuelling up with soft drinks and fruit juices.

It took me close to 7hrs to cover the last 100kms, whereas the actual plan was to cover it in 5hrs. Therefore, I felt it was much necessary to compensate for that lost time. We decided to reach the Pyramid Food Point by 20:00hrs for having dinner, which was 70kms (cumulative distance is 484kms) from the Tollgate. Suddenly we felt energised and fresh, picked up some pace using drafting technique. The terrain was rolling with a long gradual inclination. It was fun riding past some of the two-wheelers and small trucks. To see their surprised faces and curious looks. It so happened that we pushed ourselves and became a little competitive with the small truck. On the decline, we crossed it, and, on the incline, they crossed us. It went like that for 20 mins or so; without knowing, we covered quite a distance. We reached the state border. The border police security asked a few questions and took selfies with us. We crossed some of the riders, and the rider from Vizag, whom I have ridden the last night, joined us. The organisers parked their car on the side and encouraged the riders while offering some snacks. During these long rides, it always helps and lifts the mood whenever the rider comes across a fellow rider or the organiser, or any

familiar face. The organisers, being randonneurs themselves and having experienced this, ensure they are present at the right places to give that much-needed boost. The night was breaking. It always seems like magic in the sky during the sunrise and sunset. The atmosphere just brings some pleasant feeling, and the sceneries just get 1000times better in these times. All the visuals captured in our memories, especially during these moments, make the ride even more worthwhile.

Randonneuring gives new perspectives to life. It makes one notice things that otherwise go unnoticed in life. It throws light on the deeper dimensions of ourselves. It touches our core. It makes us ask questions starting with 'why,' which are the questions hardest to answer. These are life-changing questions that make people find themselves. One starts to appreciate simple and normal things which are taken for granted.

We reached the Pyramid Food Court at 20:40mins. Even though we reached 40 mins later than what we had planned, but we were happy to reach. The organisers and some volunteers were present, one among them was a friend, fellow rider and a super randonneur, and others were his friends. I ordered veg-biryani and lassi. Some of the other riders joined. We had our dinner together and thought of taking a nap. The temperatures were getting really low. It was the first weekend of January. As it was cold outside, we slept in the friend's car for a good hour. It was refreshing after the nap.

There was some trouble with the Strava app on which I was recording the activity. This being the longest ride of my life and also much necessary for the research, it becomes very important to have the record. It often seems very necessary to record the activity and post it in cycle groups social media accounts and just to keep it for self-evaluation. There appears to be a need always to record the activity and have a digital footprint. This gives a sense of accomplishment, attention, external validation, appreciation, respect from peers and all others while motivating one to continue doing the activity and simultaneously inspiring others to do the same. As I was not well acquainted with using the application, I asked for help from co-riders. They could not do much, but the organiser, having faced a similar problem, helped the app to work and resume my activity. That gave me a big relief.

Another major aspect in randonneuring or cycling, in general, are cycling outfits and gear, which are attention grabbers: the flashing lights, skin-tight clothing and other fancy gear, including the bikes themselves. Whether on-road or at any

pitstops, people tend to get drawn. Riders are sometimes stared at and raise a number of questions. The entire food court was paying attention to the riders, and some of them enquired about the ride. The surprised and awe look on the on-lookers or the general public, when they listen to the riding distances, the time one takes to ride the distances and places visited are very commonly observed.

Having spent 2hrs at the food court, we started moving at 22:40hrs. The next checkpoint was 47kms away. It was all uphill from the food court to the checkpoint and all the way to the finish/endpoint. We hardly managed to keep a 20km/hr speed. The saddle soars started to make it even harder, adding to the incline and cold weather. Some of the other riders were slowly passing by, and we tried to keep up for some time and then let go. With a couple of pit stops for stretching and refuelling, the body managed to reach the checkpoint.

Check point 6: 531.00 [08:30-03:24] Jadcherla ATM

The clock was ticking at 01:14mins. It took us a little over two and half hours to cover the last 47 kms. The checkpoint had a car parked with the blinkers on and some of the riders stretching and chatting. The discussion was mostly around the saddle soars as everyone faced similar pains. It is humorously discussed while sharing some tips and experiences on how some have tried different kinds of creams to overcome the pain. After finishing the formalities and stretching a bit, we started from there. Suddenly, the bike felt heavy. I got down and pumped air through the small pump attached to the bike.

The last 70kms of the ride was the hardest part of my entire cycling journey. I counted every kilometre, and it felt like eternal torture. The saddle soars were becoming unbearable at one end. At the same time, the toughest and trickiest part was to conquer sleep. I had to take more than four breaks in the next 40kms due to sleep and saddle soars.

It is hard to explain the different kinds of pains. It is painful to sit on the saddle for more than 5mins; at the same time, it is painful to ride in the "out of the saddle" style, which I could only hold for a few seconds. Within those few seconds, the quadriceps or the muscles in the front part of the thighs feels like they are burning from inside. The transition is between these two is even more painful, but I had no

option but to shift between the two every 5 to 6mins. In addition to all the pains, there is sleep deprivation. I had to take multiple naps in the span of 40kms in the bus stop shelters. I was all alone for the most part of the last 30kms.

Suddenly a car stopped in front of me. It was the volunteer's car. As revealed earlier, one of them, being friends and a randonneur, understood my plight. Took a small break and I thanked him for stopping the car. And from that point, it was 30 kms to the finishing point.

Just after a few minutes into the ride, two riders caught up with me. They are very well known in the randonneuring circles. One of the riders is in his fifties, and he has already finished multiple SR's. The other one is of my age group and attempting his first SR. They often ride together in the brevets. We took a much necessary tea break to generate some heat and help to be awake to push to the finish line.

In the last 30kms, there was a surge in the traffic with all the buses and trucks on the Highway. And the last 7 kilometres into the final stretch towards the Shamshabad Airport was pleasant. We rode together till the end. Riding with them helped in keeping a good pace and also took my mind off the pains.

End point: 601.30 [10:48-08:00] Decathlon, Shamshabad

We reached the endpoint at 05:30hrs when the day was breaking. After 37hrs and 30 mins of being on the road, the journey came to an end. There were few riders and volunteers who congratulated us. We finished the formalities of handing over the brevet card and took some pictures. As I mentioned earlier, age and other factors get defied in randonneuring and here was the perfect example; among the three of us who finished the ride together, one of the riders revealed that he was 56 years old. I was 26 years old, and the other rider, who was 28 years old, could not keep up with him.

As everyone was exhausted and sleep-deprived, most of them chose to rest a bit in their cars and then leave to their respective residences. Few riders took help from their family or friends to drive them back. As the cut off is 40hrs, there was two and a half hrs time left for others to complete. Being sleep-deprived, I, too, slept in a car with the heater on in one of the rider's cars for one hour. After getting the necessary rest, I recovered a little and stepped out of the car to see how other riders were finishing. The last hour saw the most riders finishing the ride. We exchanged congratulatory remarks. Most of them had completed the Super Randonneur series in

the present season and have achieved the SR title. Some first time and others added one more to their series of achievements. I had to ride a 200km brevet to officially become a Super Randonneur.

At last, I saw my fellow riders support car coming in. I saw three riders in the car. I enquired about their ride. They explained why and when they had decided to drop out of the ride. They dropped after riding around 400 kms. The major reasons are cramps and unfixable issues with the bike. I felt sorry for them. Out of the 45 participants, 35 successfully completed the ride, eight did not finish (DNF), and 2 of the riders finished out of the cut off time hence categorised as a late finish (LF). As you can see from fig 6, it took me a total of 37hrs 31mins. to complete the 600km with a moving time, i.e., the time on the saddle is 26hrs 02mins. The total mileage covered by the riders in the brevet is 21,000 kms.

We discussed about the ride, and while doing so, I dozed off for a few minutes in the car journey. My fellow rider was kind enough to drop me at my room as I was not in a condition to ride even for 4 kilometres. I thanked him for everything he had done. I had a heavy breakfast and slept the entire day and night. I woke up the next morning with muscle soars in most parts of my lower body and pain in my wrist, neck, lower back and glutes. It took me more than a week to recover completely from the longest ride of my life.

200Km BRM - 11th Feb 2018 (Volunteer ride)

Volunteer ride

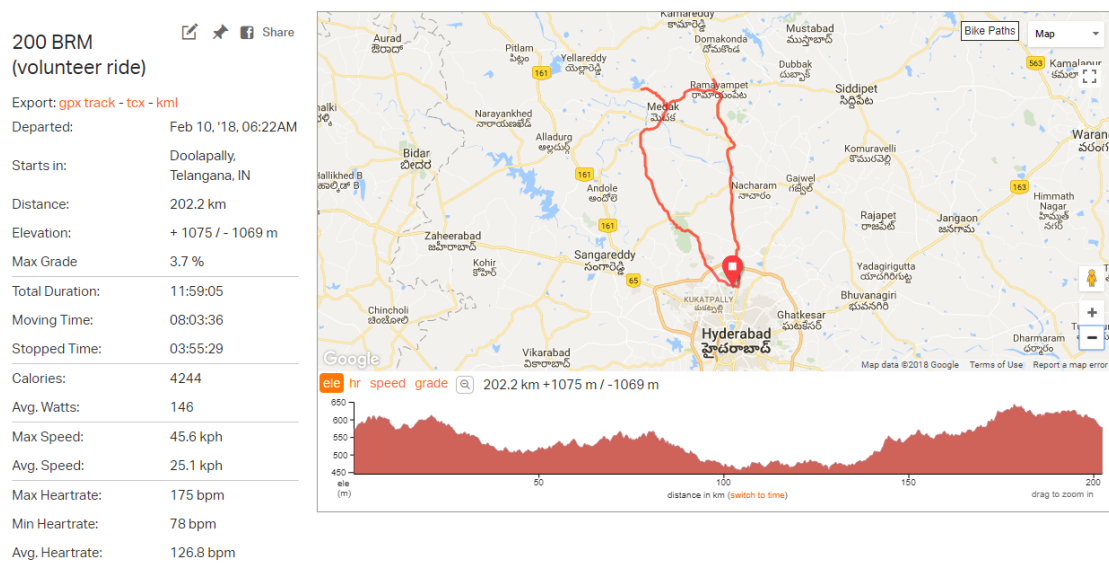
As the name suggests, a volunteer brevet ride is an opportunity for the volunteers to ride the same route as they cannot ride the route while volunteering for the brevet. As per the rules, it can either be done within one week prior to the brevet or one week later to the brevet. Prior notice should be given to the Audax India Randonneurs with the details of the riders, and the route should be sent for approval for the volunteer ride.

In anticipation of a higher number of participants for the 200km brevet, the ride responsible suggested a greater number of volunteers required to conduct the

brevet. The ride was scheduled one week prior to the brevet. As it helps the volunteers to know the route well in advance and at the same time experience riding the route.

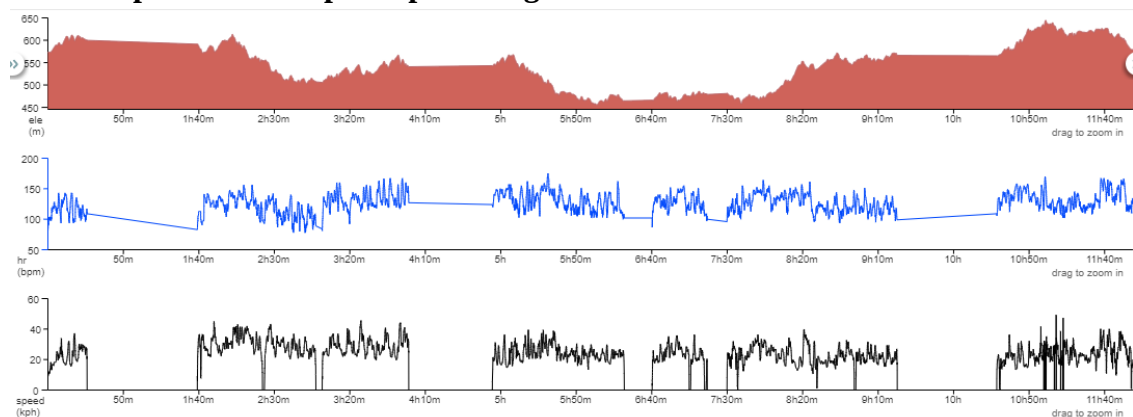
Six volunteers came forward to participate in the volunteer ride and offered to volunteer on the next weeks 200km brevet. All the planning and details were discussed through a WhatsApp group. One big difference is that there will be no manual checkpoint, i.e., all the checkpoints are automatic in the volunteer brevet ride. In other words, an ATM slip or a restaurant bill or a selfie should be provided as proof.

Map 4.4: Showing the ride details and the route map with an elevation of the 200km BRM



Source: Fieldwork data from ridewithgps website

Figure 4.4: Showing the time taken, the heart rate (in the blue-middle graph) and the speed with the pit stops during the 200km BRM



Source: Fieldwork data from ridewithgps website

To the Start Point

The start point was St. Martins College, the same as the 400km brevet start point. As it was on the other side of the city, I coordinated with a co-rider to reach the place. After a good night's sleep, I woke up early, around 03:30hrs and rode to the co-riders place by 05:00hrs. It was 10kms from my room. The bikes were safely placed on the car rack. We reached the starting point before 06:00hrs.

Start point: 0.00km [06:00] St. Martins Engineering College

There were six riders. It was a different atmosphere as there were fewer riders and not much hustle. This time I knew every one of them. All of us started the ride around 06:20hrs. Just 9kms into the ride, there was a puncture for one of the riders; hence we all stopped. As it is common in brevets, most of the riders are prepared for small breakdowns. We were all geared up for this. He tried to fix the flat it did not work. We tried with a new tube, and it got punctured too. We thoroughly checked the tyre and used all our expertise to solve the issue. With multiple trials and help from a help co-rider/randonneur living close by, we managed to bring the bike to working condition. During the later attempts to fix the bike, the rider offered to give up the ride and told us to move on with our ride as we were wasting so much time. But all of us were determined to find a solution and ride in a group. This camaraderie of not giving up on fellow riders can often be seen in the randonneuring events.

We spent one hour and twenty minutes fixing the issue. We had a considerable amount of time. The closing time of the first checkpoint is 11:05, which means we had to cover 67 kms in 3hrs. It was a challenging situation. With only two breaks in between and using the drafting technique, we were able to reach the checkpoint well within the closing time.

Check point 1: 76.20km [08:14-11:05] Zyka Restaurant

At 10:20hrs, we reached the restaurant, and all of us sat there for a good breakfast after some strong riding. We managed to cover the 67kms in 2hrs and 20mins, roughly translating to 29km/hr average speed. Which is quite fast considering it is a randonneuring event. Rolling terrain with pleasant weather helped the ride to be

smooth till the second checkpoint. Figs. 8 and 9 show the overall elevation and the details of the ride.

Check point 2: 111.70km [09:17-13:27] Pocharam Wildlife Sanctuary

We reached the Pocharam Wildlife Sanctuary at around 13:00 hrs. I took some rest, and the weather was breezy and mostly cloudy. We stopped for a sugarcane juice at Medak and continued our journey. We planned to have lunch around 150kms, but we could not find any restaurant and ride for the next 15kms in search of one. We managed with some chikkis till we found a Dhabha just before entering the Narsapur town. All of us, being famished, had a sumptuous lunch around 16:00hrs and rested for a while as there was less than 40kms of ride left.

Check point 3: 168.70 [10:58-17:15] Narsapur.

We crossed the Narsapur town and entered the forest section. All through the forest, there were monkeys on both sides of the road. That stretch had a bit of ascent and felt like the air in the tyres was less. The bike was feeling a little heavy too. With a couple of breaks in between, we raced in the last stretch to bring the moving average speed of the 200kms brevet to 25km/hr. We were successful in doing that by the end of the ride.

Endpoint: 203.10 [11:53-19:30] St. Martins Engineering College.

We reached the college at 18:20hrs which was 12hrs from the time have started. The moving time or the saddle time was 08hrs 03mins. It was the fastest brevet ever done by me. By completing a 200km brevet volunteer ride, I have officially completed the Super Randonneur Series and became a "Super Randonneur". Everyone congratulated me on that note, which felt quite an achievement. The title will stay for a lifetime, and the unique experiences of these rides will probably last till the last breath.

On 18th Feb 2018, just after a week after the volunteer ride, the main brevet took place. The event name was "Myriad Monkeys and Pocharam". Out of the 90 participants, 80 successfully completed the ride, seven did not finish (DNF), and three of the riders finished late. The total mileage covered by the riders in the brevet is 16,000 kms.

Super Randonneur (SR) title

Within the cycling community, earning the coveted "Super Randonneur" designation is of utmost symbolic and practical value. With this accomplishment, a cyclist has demonstrated their commitment to long-distance cycling as well as their commitment to endurance. Becoming a member of the exclusive 'Super Randonneurs' list from the esteemed Hyderabad Randonneurs club upon completing the challenging 'Super Randonneur' series has endowed participants with a distinct and unparalleled cycling experience, elevating their status within the cycling community. The prestigious 'SR' title, once acquired, becomes a permanent recognition, setting individuals apart from being mere 'bicyclists' and firmly establishing them as accomplished 'SRs.' This coveted title bestows upon riders a heightened sense of credibility and reverence among their peers in the cycling fraternity. Moreover, it fosters an immediate and profound connection between Randonneurs and those who have achieved the esteemed 'Super Randonneur' distinction. The acquisition of the SR title not only enhances one's insider status but also facilitates research endeavors, enabling easy access to fellow Super Randonneurs for interview purposes and furthering scholarly investigations within the cycling community.

Earning the title of "Super Randonneur" has several different meanings in the cycling community. In addition to signifying a remarkable feat of physical and mental strength, it also signifies membership in the elite group of endurance cyclists. Within the cycling community, the title generates a sense of pride, respect, and admiration, fostering personal development and motivating others to start their own paths of discovery and success.

The experiences of riding the long distances to achieve the SR title invokes the distinctions made by Dilthey, Victor turner, Dewey and Abrahams in terms a “mere experience”, “an experience” and “a typical experience” becoming part of the critical discourse in the anthropology of experience.

In summary of the last two chapters on auto-ethnographic accounts of cycling, it is observed that initially embraced as a leisure activity, gradually evolves into a structured pursuit involving increased mileage, competitive racing, and ultimately, long-distance cycling endeavors such as randonneuring. This study explores the progressive journey from leisure cycling to achieving the coveted status of a super randonneur.

1. Leisure Rides and Skill Development:

Leisure rides form the foundational stage, allowing individuals to develop basic cycling skills, build stamina, and establish a connection with the activity. During this phase, cyclists become familiar with their bicycles, gain confidence in handling various terrains, and enjoy the recreational aspects of cycling.

2. Increasing Mileage and Endurance Building:

As enthusiasm grows, individuals often transition to longer rides, gradually increasing mileage to build endurance. Structured training programs may be introduced, focusing on interval training, hill climbs, and other techniques to enhance cardiovascular fitness and muscular endurance.

3. Entry into Competitive Racing:

Participating in local cycling races becomes a natural progression, introducing riders to the competitive aspect of the sport. Racing experiences contribute to developing tactical skills, the ability to handle group dynamics, and improved speed.

4. Long-Distance Cycling and Randonneuring:

Long-distance cycling, often exceeding 100 kilometers, becomes the next challenge. Randonneuring events, such as brevets, provide a structured platform for cyclists to test their limits. Cyclists gradually adapt to self-sufficiency, navigation, and time management, crucial skills for successful randonneuring.

5. Progression to Super Randonneur Status:

A super randonneur designation is achieved by completing a series of brevets of increasing distances within a single calendar year. The journey requires meticulous planning, mental resilience, and the ability to sustain physical exertion over extended periods.

Key Factors Contributing to become a Super Randonneur:

Physical Fitness: Each phase demands a progressive improvement in physical fitness, emphasizing cardiovascular health, muscular endurance, and strength.

Technical Skills: From basic bike handling to advanced navigation, cyclists acquire technical skills crucial for undertaking long-distance rides.

Mental Toughness: Randonneuring, especially over extended distances, requires mental resilience, determination, and the ability to overcome fatigue and challenging conditions.

Strategic Planning: Successful super randonneurs exhibit adept planning skills, managing time, nutrition, and rest to optimize performance across diverse terrains.

In conclusion, the transition from leisure cycling to becoming a super randonneur is a multifaceted journey involving incremental skill development, increasing physical demands, and a growing passion for the sport. This study underscores the importance of a systematic progression through various cycling phases, ultimately leading to the accomplishment of challenging long-distance randonneuring goals.

CHAPTER V:

Thematic exploration and possible explanations of expressions

We are social beings, and we want to share our experiences. The experiences find expressions and are communicated with fellow beings. Dilthey writes, “experience urges toward expression...The arts depend on this urge to confession or declamation. The hard-won meanings should be said, painted, danced, dramatized, put into circulation” (Quoted in Victor & Edward, 1986, p. 37). Critical to the randonneuring, the riders express that some write after participating in a brevet and then publish them in personal blogs, social media platforms, and print publications circulated through local and national media. These narratives or rider stories are conceptualised and theorised by scholars such as Victor Turner from the anthropology of experience or from the performance theory perspectives.

The chapter analyses the narratives of twenty-six Super Randonneurs of Hyderabad Randonneurs Club. These account for the first hand. They become part of the primary data and, combined with those published in virtual places, discuss various themes related to randonneuring. Mike Robinson, a travel theorist, who claims that “these various conceptions are structured around what travel writing does – constructing imagining spaces, dramatising performances, feeding the reader with the dreamscapes and psychic sustenance and generating moments of liminality” (quotes in Chernekoff, 2012). The narratives or the conversations I had during the field work were not only interesting but inspiring. Before diving into the thematic look at the narratives, the demographic profile of the Super Randonneurs is presented in the following section.

Demographic Profile of the Super Randonneurs

The essence of a community or a group cannot be measured by numbers alone. However, they bring about an account that would complement the qualitative aspects of the community.

Audax India Randonneurs website was the primary source from which the data has been segregated to find out the list of Super Randonneurs affiliated to Hyderabad Randonneurs Club. By the end of the 2017-18 season, there were little over 100 riders who had qualified for the Super Randonneur title affiliated to Hyderabad Randonneurs Club from its inception in 2012. I conducted twenty-six semi-structured interviews of the Super Randonneurs from Hyderabad Randonneurs Club for the study. That is approximately 25% of the total population. Apart from that, as a cyclist and Super Randonneur myself (Qualified during the study) and living in Hyderabad, I have had the opportunity to observe and interact with a wide variety of riders who are cyclists, racers and randonneurs for over three years.

According to the data available on the Audax India Randonneur website, in the season 2017-18, 41 riders qualified for the title of Super Randonneurs from the Hyderabad Randonneurs Club, and I was one among them. There is close to a 200% increase in the number of Super Randonneurs from 2014-15 to the 2017-18 season at the regional level. It is noted that a new set of riders joins every year (see Table 5.1), including the riders who have become seasoned Super Randonneurs. Hyderabad Randonneurs club has seen 20-plus new riders qualifying for the SR title year on year between 2014 and 2018. The numbers suggest consistent interest in the new riders who want to achieve the 'Super Randonneur' title. The data also suggests a steady increase in the seasoned randonneurs from six Super Randonneurs to eighteen in three years. That means most riders are not one-time participants and are likely to continue participating in the randonneuring events and become what Heiki Bunte calls 'permanent event rider(s)'. Among the Super Randonneurs I interviewed, four respondents categorically stated that they would not participate in an entire Super Randonneur series in the future but may continue to participate in other cycling events and smaller randonneuring events such Brevet Populaires and 200km Brevets.

Table 5.1: Super Randonneurs affiliated to the Hyderabad Randonneurs club.

Year	SRs from HR	New SRs in HR (YOY)	Seasoned SR's
2014-15	22	22	
2015-16	31	25	6
2016-17	27	20	7
2017-18	41	23	18

Source: Audax India Randonneurs website

Occupation profile of the Hyderabad Super Randonneurs:

Hyderabad, a major metropolitan city in India, has emerged as a leading hub in the global Information Technology sector due to its conducive business environment and strategic governmental policies. These policies have fostered the establishment of state-of-the-art facilities and incentivized multinational corporations to invest and operate within the city's boundaries. Consequently, this economic boom has influenced various aspects of Hyderabad's society, including the city's transportation dynamics, with an observable increase in the number of cyclists, particularly among the IT workforce.

The study analyzed a sample of 26 randonneurs in Hyderabad and revealed distinct patterns in terms of their professional affiliations. Of these participants, 12 were employed in the corporate sector, indicating a substantial representation from IT industry. Six participants were identified as self-employed or engaged in business activities, while four belonged to the service sector. The remaining participants represented diverse professional backgrounds. The major underlying factor driving the popularity of cycling among IT professionals is health. The sedentary nature of desk jobs in the IT sector has been well-documented, leading to concerns regarding the potential adverse effects on employees' health and well-being. As a result, many IT professionals have become increasingly health-conscious, seeking avenues to incorporate physical exercise into their daily routines.

Financial Condition of Randonneurs:

The study gathered income-related data from 26 participants, revealing that the financial condition of the majority is robust, with 20 respondents earning above 6 lakhs per annum. Notably, six participants did not disclose their income information. This finding suggests that randonneuring tends to attract individuals with a relatively comfortable financial standing, as the sport requires investment in high-quality equipment and leisure time for long-distance cycling activities. As long-distance cycling demands both time and monetary investment, the cyclists' preference for imported cycles priced above 30 thousand highlights the sport's relatively expensive nature.

Technological Preferences of Randonneurs:

Cycling, particularly in the long-distance context, has witnessed technological advancements that aid enthusiasts in recording and analyzing their physical activities. Among the surveyed riders, the usage of fitness apps and gadgets was widespread. Seventeen respondents owned Garmin products, which comprise premium and imported watches or cyclo-computers known for their accuracy and advanced features. Furthermore, 19 participants utilized the Strava application, a popular platform for sharing and analyzing cycling data. These technological tools provide cyclists with valuable insights, allowing them to be part of cycling communities and view the activities of other riders.

Age Distribution of Respondents:

The collected data on the ages of twenty-six participants, allowing for the determination of their average age, which was found to be 36. The respondents were grouped into four distinct age categories for analysis. Ten riders belonged to the age group of 21-31, while eight fell within the 31-41 range. Six participants were in the 41-51 age category, and two individuals were categorized in the 51-61 group. This distribution provides valuable insights into the age demographics of randonneurs, showcasing the diverse representation of individuals across various age ranges. This indicates that randonneuring appeals to a broad age range, attracting participants from younger adults to middle-aged and beyond.

Marital Status of Respondents:

The study also investigated the marital status of the respondents to understand the prevalence of married individuals in the randonneuring community. Among the twenty-six participants, fifteen were married, constituting a significant proportion of the participant pool. Moreover, the prevalence of married individuals among the respondents underscores the significance of family and social commitments within the randonneuring community. Interestingly, all three female respondents were married, highlighting the commonality of marriage among female randonneurs.

This research aligns closely with Heike Bunte's field observations, as reported in his study (Bunte, 2015). Bunte noted that during his fieldwork, he encountered

several men aged 40 or older who had received medical advice to engage in more physical activity, such as swimming, running, or cycling. Among these options, many individuals opted for cycling as their preferred mode of exercise. Subsequently, some of these individuals transitioned into becoming randonneurs, participating in the challenging long-distance cycling sport.

Similar patterns were observed in the present study, wherein respondents across diverse age groups demonstrated a strong interest in cycling, particularly long-distance randonneuring. Notably, individuals aged 40 and above emerged as prominent participants in the sport, possibly indicating that this age group is more receptive to medical recommendations for increased physical activity and is more inclined to choose cycling to fulfil such requirements. The findings of both studies collectively suggest that cycling, especially randonneuring, serves as an appealing option for individuals seeking to incorporate more exercise into their daily routines, particularly when guided by medical advice.

Similar cases were found in my study. One of the respondents answer to how he entered the world of cycling is given below:

“I came across randonneuring when I was researching about cycling. At that point I was injured (running injury) and not doing much physical activity. I started cycling in the gym. While searching on the internet, I came across the 200km rides and other longer distance rides. I did not personally contact anyone to ask about ‘which cycle to buy and all’. It was completely my own research and decision to get into cycling. I came across various blogs and cycling forums.” [I-17]

Self-Perceived Social Class:

The study explored the participants' self-perceived social class, revealing that 22 of the respondents considered themselves belonging to the middle class. However, two individuals chose not to disclose their social class, while two others identified as part of the upper class. This self-reported data provides an understanding of the diverse social backgrounds represented within the randonneuring community in Hyderabad.

Cycling experience of the randonneurs:

This research indicates that, on average, Super Randonneurs participated in approximately fourteen randonneuring events. The data reveals that the minimum number of events attended by a single randonneur is five, while the maximum is thirty. This variation suggests that some riders have completed multiple Super Randonneur series within a single season, demonstrating a remarkable level of commitment and achievement. On the other hand, there are individuals who have continued their participation over time, accumulating a substantial number of events, thus establishing themselves as seasoned Super Randonneurs. This diversity in participation patterns highlights the varying levels of dedication and engagement among Super Randonneurs, contributing to the dynamic nature of the sport and its participant community.

Educational qualification of Super Randonneurs:

The data collected on the educational qualifications of 26 Super Randonneurs indicate a commitment to educational pursuits among the cycling community. Remarkably, all respondents completed their graduation, attesting to a high level of educational attainment within the group. Moreover, 11 participants pursued post-graduation degrees, reflecting a dedication to advanced studies. One respondent possessed a PhD degree, highlighting the presence of highly educated individuals among Super Randonneurs in Hyderabad.

Sources of Information on Randonneuring:

The study sought to identify the primary channels through which individuals gained knowledge about the sport of randonneuring. The results revealed that over 60% of respondents discovered randonneuring through their social circles, including friends and colleagues. This indicates the pivotal role of word-of-mouth communication and personal networks in spreading awareness and interest in the sport. Notably, cycling associations such as TBA (The Bike Affair) and HBC (Hyderabad Bicycling Club) served as valuable sources of information, drawing the attention of a considerable number of participants to randonneuring opportunities. Furthermore, internet search platforms, particularly blogs related to cycling, played a

relatively minor role in introducing individuals to randonneuring. Only one respondent reported gaining knowledge about the sport through online sources, suggesting that traditional channels of communication and personal interactions have been more influential in disseminating information about randonneuring.

The Randonneur's Bike:

The findings indicate that a significant number of riders in the study possess more than one bicycle, with 14 out of 26 participants owning multiple bikes. The narratives gathered from the participants reveal a common pattern in their cycling journey, where individuals typically start with an MTB (Mountain Bike) or a Hybrid bicycle and subsequently upgrade to a Road bike for enhanced speed and efficiency, mirroring the experience of the researcher as well.

A vast majority of the riders (21 out of 26) use Road bikes for their participation in randonneuring events. These Road bikes fall within the higher price range, with costs ranging from 20 thousand rupees up to three lakhs. The data shows that a significant portion of the bicycles used (20 out of 26) are priced above 50 thousand rupees, with nine of them being priced above one lakh rupees. This suggests that the majority of randonneurs invest in high-end and expensive bikes.

Participants justify the higher cost of these bikes based on the exceptional experience they provide during rides. They view the purchase of such bicycles as a one-time investment that yields invaluable returns in terms of achievements, health benefits, and signalling their expertise and experience within the bicycling community.

In conclusion, the data clearly indicates that a considerable number of randonneurs opt for premium and high-priced bikes, particularly Road bikes, which they perceive as an essential aspect of their cycling journey. These bicycles are viewed as worthwhile investments that contribute to the overall enjoyment, success, and recognition in the realm of cycling.

Randonneuring and the problem of classification

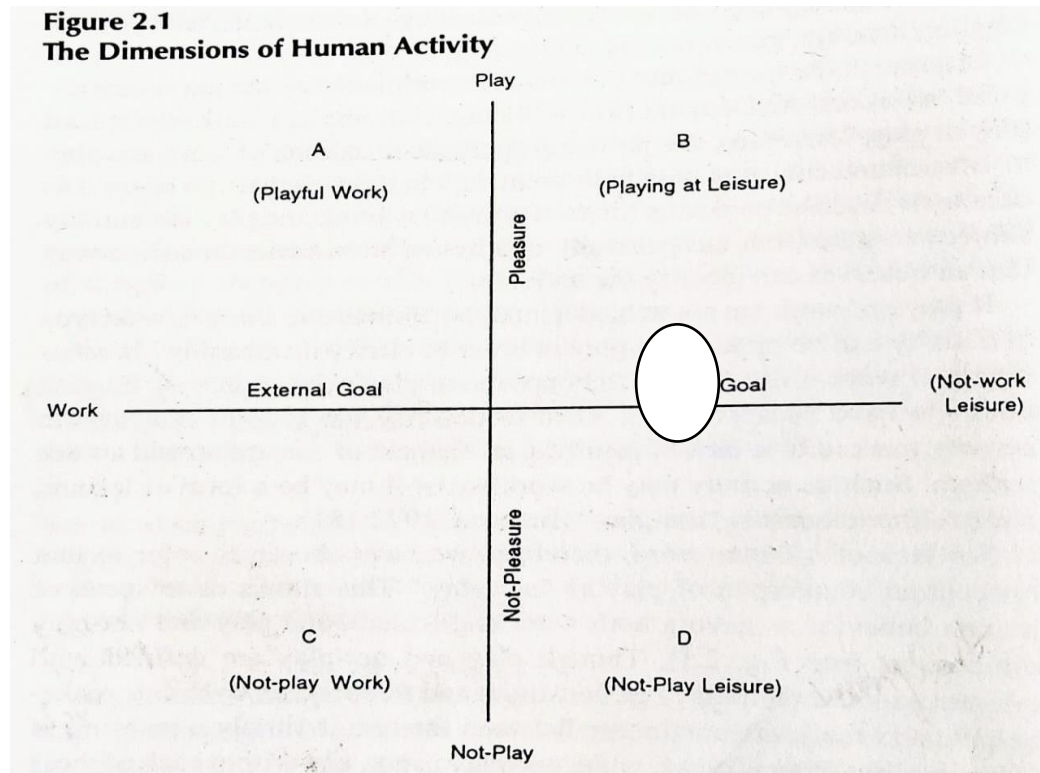
The temptation to define and classify is always present in order to communicate better. The caveats of defining a sport are identified by Kendall Blanchard (1995), where he suggests looking at “the relationship of between work and leisure; the nature of play; the work and play dimensions of sport; sport as game” (1995, p.36). Therefore, a better understanding of the sport is arrived at through the relationship between the concepts. The most noteworthy of the above are the work-leisure dichotomy, which has universal significance. He further points the change of conceptualizations and values while tracing the concepts to early Greeks to the advent of industrialization. For Greeks “work was seen as a temporary aside to the general, overarching leisure process and was to be avoided if at all possible” (Blanchard, 1995, p.37). He points to the changing conceptualizations and values with the advent of industrialization and modern capitalism, where the perceptions were reversed. However, historian Bernard Mergen, through his work among the labouring class in the United States, suggested that attitudes towards “work ethic” and “leisure ethic” is not so uniform throughout history. The advocates of the leisure ethic “hoped that organized recreation would result in a unified and improved national culture” (Mergen quoted in Blanchard, 1995, p. 38).

Another significant concept is “play”. Taking the lead from the discussions on play by Blanchard, “play is viewed as a behavioural form having both biological and cultural dimensions that is difficult to define at the exclusion of all other behaviour, yet is distinguishable by a variety of traits. It is pleasurable, voluntary, set apart by temporal parameters, marked by a make-believe quality, but made real by its unreality” (Blanchard, 1995, p. 42).

In order to define the activity of randonneuring, Kendall Blanchard’s (Blanchard, 1995, p. 46 Figure 2.1: The dimensions of Human Activity) chart is used. A four-quadrant model was developed in terms of the varying amounts of work, leisure, play, and not-play to understand the whole range of human activity and to address the problem of defining the sport. The model has two continuums, the first line has play at one end and not play at other, similarly second line has work and non-work (leisure) at both ends. The first is the measure of pleasurable and the latter is of purposefulness. In quadrant A – activities that are goal oriented and work like but an element of enjoyment is present (i.e. playing at work). Quadrant B – includes many

forms of leisurely play, the activities that one simply involves just for fun with no explicit external rewards. In quadrant C – the forms of work that are not enjoyable but they are done out of sense of duty and commitment to objectives outside the activity itself. Quadrant D – has are those activities with a sense of boredom, not pleasurable but engaged in purely for the sake of engaging in the leisure.

Figure 5.1: Placing randonneuring in the Dimensions of Human Activity



Source: Adapted from Blanchard (1995, p. 46)

The circle in the four-quadrant model is where (see the above figure 5.1) randonneuring can be placed, i.e., in quadrant B but in varying degrees according to how one is approaching the activity. It also enters into the quadrant D, when it becomes boring and not so pleasurable or loses the playful characteristic for some periods in the longer brevets.

Roberte Hamayon, in her book “why we play”, questions the usefulness and essentiality of classification and explains how it is always helpful but “inevitably incomplete” and how it is of little help in understanding the activity itself. She further points those typologies as relatively dependent on the study's objective, which further depends on the author's field. She endorses to the philosopher Colas Duflo's notion of

classification which states that “all classifications are equivalent” and “are equally valid” pointing to fulfilling their intended goal and how they are suited for their different purposes (Hamayon, 2016).

Taking cue from John Macaloon, who offered an explanation of what sports actually are with his ‘ramified performance theory’, suggests to start any study of public events with the analysis of the native categories that are used to classify the sport (Besnier, Brownell, & Carter, 2018). Therefore, while trying to understand randonneuring, looking at how the Super Randonneurs of Hyderabad Randonneurs categorise randonneuring would be helpful.

Endurance Activity

The Audax India Randonneurs website describes the randonneuring as a long-distance endurance cycling. As mentioned in chapter two the long-distance ranges from 200km to 1200kms. The responses from the randonneurs clearly indicate randonneuring as an endurance sport with no exception. One of the informants who is into endurance sports says this:

It is endurance sport, it gives you a chance to test yourself, to see how much more you can do and what more can you achieve? [I-13]

The notion of ‘corporeal testing’ is entwined with that of epistemological understanding of the self. The curiosity to know the human limits is one of the fundamental aspects and the attitude towards that plays an important role.

Randonneuring has different connotations. The meditative nature of the randonneuring is often heard. For example, one of the Super Randonneurs explains what randonneuring means:

For me, the randonneuring, I have always felt that it is a long meditation, a meditation which is not done sitting under a tree or sitting in a remote location, but a meditation which is done while you are also riding on the road. So, you are with you for those 13 hours, 12 hours, 20 hours or you know, those X number of hours which you are riding on your bicycle that whole period you are on your own, that is actually what the randonneuring is all about. It's a self-supported ride. You are not really supposed to take any external help

for that matter, you are not supposed to take lift from anyone in order to travel a distance or you're not supposed to really go out of the route what is decided and all. So, everything you need to manage that is the whole fun, the challenge, the excitement of being on your own that is exactly what is meditation being on your own you know, so, that is what enthrals me and keeps me and has kept me going this whole journey so far. - [I-06]

All the randonneurs, with no exception, simultaneously agree that randonneuring is an adventure sport, pointing to its adventurous nature. For an adventure seeker, I would argue randonneuring is one of the best ways to experience the world: the vast and varied landscapes, the varying temperatures of the sun and the moon.

All the randonneurs also confirm that randonneuring is a lifestyle sport, as it requires many changes in their lifestyle to attempt and participate in the randonneuring events. These changes include sleeping habits, eating habits that are fundamental to living and life itself. Making these changes in their lifestyle is not easy as it sounds; therefore, somebody who is serious about riding long-distance cycling will need to put deliberate efforts and take actions to shift their lifestyle to participate in randonneuring. In the book “Cycling Cultures”, Peter Cox classifies randonneuring activity as serious leisure (Cox, 2015), indicating that even though it is a leisure activity, one cannot be casual about participating. These kinds of activities as it may be fatal to the riders.

Recreational Activity

Even though counter intuitive, few of the randonneurs consider randonneuring to be a recreational activity especially the shorter brevets i.e., 200km and 300kms which do not stretch beyond a day.

This further indicates that the seasoned super randonneurs as well as the randonneurs who ritualistically stick to certain brevets enjoy participating in 200km brevets.

There are randonneurs who do not want to risk too much, they draw a line and don't want to push too extreme. These riders express that it is counterproductive to go beyond in terms of health benefits and also do not want to get themselves into sleep deprivation states, where one is most vulnerable. This is true to certain randonneuring events especially longer distances and with higher elevation gains.

Hallmarks of randonneuring: camaraderie and perseverance.

A strong spirit of cooperation and camaraderie is observed between the participants. This stems from empathy, as every rider goes through similar physical and mental challenges. The fellow randonneurs understand at a deeper level what the rider is going through both physically and mentally; for example, in a 600km event after riding, say 300 or 400km with minimal sleep. The riders naturally find a riding partner during the ride who has a similar approach towards the randonneuring. I found that same riding partners are continued for many randonneuring events and are recognised as a duo by the rest of the randonneuring community as well. The camaraderie is clearly visible between the seasoned randonneurs. I found few cases where one rider would drop off or DNF the brevet in case the riding partner is unable to continue for any serious reason with respect to health or injury.

One best part was all these 300, 400 and 600, every time we were riding, I used to be the slowest one amongst me and my co-riders. They used to wait for me. But that last 30 km I used to get energy out of nowhere man. It is like you want to just get done with. In 600 we made sure to wait. We stopped at the gate and all the four of us finished together. – [I-02]

All the randonneurs unanimously agree that randonneuring is more to do with mental strength than of the physical strength. There is a struggle with anxiety and fear which is always lurking in the background. Building up the confidence with every pedal one takes, every passing kilometre on the highways, on the climbs, on the descents. The idea is to do the same thing maintain that consistency for longer periods. It is a long journey. It teaches something unknown about the self along the way.

Changing notion of Competition

The conventional concept of competition often involves people trying to outdo one other in order to accomplish something, get noticed, or win. Competition in this context is sometimes seen as a comparison between competitors, with an emphasis on outperforming one another in terms of talent, performance, or accomplishment. It can be seen in a variety of fields where people or teams compete against one another to select a victor or a top performer, including sports, business, academia, and entertainment.

On the other facet, competing with oneself, often known as self-competition or self-improvement, is setting personal objectives and attempting to outperform prior performances, capabilities, or accomplishments. In this kind of competition, evaluation of oneself and personal development take precedence above peer comparison. It is an innate desire to advance yourself, learn new things, and reach new milestones.

Some of the riders found it hard to categorise randonneuring, which shows the complex nature of the activity or the event. For example, one of the first group of Super Randonneurs of Hyderabad Randonneurs says:

I never participated in any competitive event. With respect to any sports. To be honest, I have been doing this for myself. The first competition, probably my first competitive sport I got into was the brevets only, it was not actually a competition. It is not a competitive event. But that is the sport which gave me the first medal of my life as well. - [I-06]

This passage demonstrates how the rider struggled to define and categorise randonneuring. While ultimately rejecting it, the rider acknowledges that there is a competitive component to it. This is so that the cyclists can compete in the randonneuring events against themselves and the clock. The riders do not face off against other riders. Regardless of the finishing times of other riders, they are awarded

a medal. As a result, randonneuring does not conform to the traditional definition of competition.

While traditional competition can encourage excellence, spur innovation, and incite excitement, competition against oneself can promote self-awareness, personal development, and the pursuit of one's full potential without relying only on external standards or comparisons. The riders whose aspirations align with later are drawn to lifestyle sports especially activities such as randonneuring and marathon events.

The Motivators

The triggers to make up a decision and take action to set that direction are pivotal. For some it is external factors and for some it is internal factors.

Almost all the super randonneurs used the words like “insane” or “crazy” when I asked what was the initial thoughts when they heard of randonneuring events i.e., riding 200kms and other long-distance rides. The word “insane”, implies and encompasses all of these meanings “it is impossible” “unreasonable” “unbelievable” or simply “undoable”. What is exciting for one may interpreted as ‘crazy’ by other. One rider expresses it this way:

This is madness, who rides for so long? Because at that point of time riding 40-50 kms was itself a huge deal right. you don't know that there all these multi day races and all... I somehow liked it, like you were always scared of something like this is impossible. This was one of those things. Where, ok you were like when you hear people talk about 600 brevet and now 1200 brevet. But you were like I don't want to drive a car for 600kms, why would I ride a cycle? But then it is actually very simple. We get scared and all but it is more like you are with your friends, eating and you are riding. It is as simple as that, once we start it. – [I-02]

One of the young riders who started commuting to his college narrates his cycling journey.

My father used to be a bit fancy about bicycles, and he used to buy a lot for me. So, I used to ride Firefox (cycle brand) when I was in the third class/ fourth class. After I finished my residential schooling from 6th to 12th grade, I joined an undergrad course. So, the first year went very plain, but still, I was excited to do something. I used to rent out bicycles from HBC and ride here and there, and it was a huge shift from that kind of environment to this. After I got a cycle for myself, I started commuting to college. I used to ride 20 kilometres even on an exam day, and my parents or my friends, everybody used to think I'm crazy. Because parents generally have that feeling right? In exams, you should be careful go 2hours before and they don't even support if I go in bike or something. And they were anxious when I said I want to ride a bicycle and go, which is first time. So yeah, but I went to all the exams on bicycle with that sweaty dress and all. I used to write exams. So, I used to be super crazy initially. – [I-11]

The motivation to continue randonneuring changes as riders become more experienced. It does not remain the same throughout the event as well. Initially it starts getting a Randonneur medal and the title of a 'Randonneur' and a 'Super Randonneur' but slowly during the journey shifts to self-awareness, self-reflection space combined with a satisfaction in helping others co-riders and first-time riders to reach their goals. One of the woman riders' narrative, who has done multiple Super Randonneur series in a single season exemplifies this,

I have never thought about triple SR. I have never planned for triple SR. I was supporting. I wanted to support the new rider that started brevets newly. I met him during Hyderabad 300 brevet. He was riding very well. And he wanted to do 400 and 600. I thought if I support him, he would be able to complete 600. because of little experience that I have. So, because of that motive on my mind. I wanted to support him in turn I completed my triple SR that happened in that way. I wanted to do only one SR because I wanted to do 1000km. I met with an accident last November in Bangalore. And my short-term goal was to experience 1000. So, for 1000 the logical

steps are 200, 300, 400 and 600. So, for that title, this series, and I wanted to do thousand and stop there, but this 600 Trichy brevet interested me because it was through my hometown. Then once I did 600 people encouraged me, they said "why not do 400, 300 so that's how I get triple SR" and that how it turned out."

I was sitting in the office one day; I was just browsing and saw a picture of running when I was just looking at marathons. Probably it was the marathon season. And I wanted to do one half marathon. So, I didn't know about the running plans and all that. But every day I used to since 2012 I have been going to gym. So, it only started with wanting to reduce my weight and become fit after the birth of my second child.

So, I started just going through sites and what it feels? what is marathon? I got a picture. And 2014 I did my first half marathon. And after that I got bitten by medals. I wanted to get many medals, because it was easy to win and get one medal. So, I registered for second half marathon in Bangalore, which was very good. After that I thought maybe I should duathlon, cycling and running with Hyderabad Triathlon. But I didn't have a cycle. I didn't have practice. So, in my gym I practiced for four days for about 20-25 minutes for four days. And then directly went there and took gearless bike I did 20 kilometres and I climbed Microsoft hill without any problem. I didn't get off my saddle. That is when I realized "probably I'm a naturally cyclist because I didn't feel anything, because 20km is a big distance for a newcomer. So that is when I started thinking about it. And in 2015 April, I went and bought a cycle because I heard about 200-kilometre brevet. One of my friends was telling me that my runner friends said "you should do at least one 200-kilometre brevet". He wanted to do, I got interested, I thought, "maybe even I should try because I have seen what half marathon feels like, so let me see what 200-kilometre brevet feels like". Then, I bought the cycle I started doing 20 kilometres. And the first weekend, I was introduced

to the ride planner group in Hyderabad by KM. Today happens to be his birthday. So, 50 kilometres was my first long ride with the group. And after that slowly, I wanted to do more and more. – [I-18]

Shifts in the motivation

The study recognizes significant shifts in the motivations of the riders from the initial rides to becoming a Randonneur and a Super Randonneur.

KM, he mentioned that once I am an SR, I will be an SR for life, I didn't know what that meant. Initially. He said if you do 200 300 400 and 600 then you'll be called SR. Otherwise, again, you have to start. So, I didn't know what it meant. All I thought was once a completed 200 I will get the medal if I don't complete 300, 400, 600 they will take back that medal I understood it that way and I thought "oh my god, I will lose my medal after all the hard work. Therefore, I should complete SR"

Initially, medals motivated me. That's what I thought, but later in each of the rides except the 200 because I was very excited. And it was all very new for me. - [I-18]

Another rider during his 600km brevet had a revelation of kind and after completing his first Super Randonneuring series moved completely away the brevets but understood the true essence of randonneuring i.e., touring and continued to with kind riding without any set time limits and exploring Indian villages on bicycle. To give some context, the rider could finish the 600km brevet ride due to injury hence took the only and last option available for him to complete the Super Randonneur series by going to brevets conducted in Vishakhapatnam.

Vishakhapatnam has very less traffic outside the city. So, there was no much control points unlike in Hyderabad. There was only one at the 300km U-turn point. They are flat roads and almost I was having a gap of one to two hours with my other riders during the day time. At night as many as suggested to be with the group. So, I spent more than one hour taking the pictures, swimming in the side by river, talking to people more than an hour in the day. No one will believe that like why we spend time on that because while doing that brevet, I thought 'okay, it just means we are riding on time, we wanted to finish one hour or two hours in advance and going back. There we are not enjoying the nature thoroughly; we're not talking to people.' That's where I decided myself randonneuring is fine, long ride is fine but it's not for the medals. I think I'm correct in that way. Randonneuring is not only brevet, it's a long ride right! Brevet has particular stipulated time but randonneuring I think I'm correct, it is a long ride. So, I thought there should not be any particular timeline to finish a thing like when you want to enjoy the ride, talk to people. The purpose cycle is that. It is a good weapon kind of thing like to motivate others to take up cycling. Now a days everyone has a motorbike like the mobile. There are many houses thousand lakhs of others they don't have cycle. It is to tell to the society like why we are doing Cycling, it is not only for events, but it is beyond that. we are to tell them that 'we are not just mad people to cycle through the nights and days, 20 hours, 40 hours. There should be some message with the event. So, we had to spend time with the people when we are having lunch or dinner. We will be discussing only with our fellow beings, but we are not talking to people. Like why we are cycling? by this what we are gaining? That's when I decided 'okay, I do randonneuring, but not brevets. That was my last brevet. – [I-19]

This narrative clearly shows the changes in the thought process of the riders and also the shift in the motivation to continue cycling and add their subjective meanings to the activity.

Randonneuring: A challenge

Randonneuring is a challenge which must be answered. It is an epistemological enquiry of the individual. It is fundamental to knowing, knowing about the “self”. Knowing the limits of the self. Some of the excerpts from the narratives demonstrate these:

The narrative of one of the youngest randonneur gives an insight into how things shaped during his first experience of becoming a Super randonneur and completing a 1200kms brevet. At the age of 18, (eligibility criteria to participate in brevet), after buying a bicycle in a Decathlon store for his daily commute of 40 km, he gets excited and starts questioning the human capabilities by seeing a 200 km brevet poster from Hyderabad Randonneurs.

So, when I bought the bicycle in decathlon, I saw the poster of Hyderabad Randonneurs. So, I was like, ‘I got to know it properly from TBA, I just knew that there is something called 200’ and during the exams, I was figuring out what is randonneuring and all. But after I got to know properly, it's only one week. So that Sunday, I rode my first 100 kilometres. The next Sunday, I rode my first 200 kilometres. So, the first hundred was super suffering. I tried to keep up with these guys. V, S and Sa was too young. I mean, he just joined TBA. So, I was riding with them initially, I was keeping up with them. But then I suffered at the end. So, I had a crash. I was riding at the edge of the road. And you know, right when one thing goes you fall down so that happened. So, I came back, I came back home and my parents are like, why do you have to do this. So, I was feeling hundred kilometres is I felt so tough, hundred kilometres because it also got hot. So, I was thinking ‘how will endure the whole day’. If I'm finishing 200 then it will be amazing. So, at the 200-start line, I don't know how this came but I registered and it used to be like marathon you have to go a day before collect your brevet card, Bib, kit everything. So, they organized it, and they made it a huge event. They kept it in HBC. So I went, collected came back. Sunday morning when we started there...how can someone ride 200 kilometres on a

bicycle and even my father was excited because he's a lot into sports... So, when I said there is this thing called 200 kilometres I'm planning to attempt. He was like, wow, 200 kilometres on a bicycle is something else then I was thinking if I do 200 kilometres, it's like, amazing and I have achieved something in my life kind of thing. So, then I bought a bicycle and I just started testing myself to the college to exams I used to ride 20 up and 20 down. So, I thought it should be a practice and then I saw poster on Facebook. When I liked Hyderabad Randonneurs and read about R, K and P going to the 1200-kilometre brevet in Bombay. That was like a super motivator for me. Like, how can someone ride 1200 kilometres? Then I thought I should meet these guys one day kind of thing. So, in that 200, I started figuring out how this Audax membership works. I registered. I went to The Bike Affair on a Saturday to get a reflective vest. So, then they said they have a ride on Sunday I can join. That's when I when I met V and all of these guys on that ride. So, I went on Saturday to buy a reflective vest that is just like, you know, three weeks after I bought a bicycle. the three weeks went into exams, the week after that was a TBA 100. And a week after that is a 200 brevet. I got to know it properly from TBA, I just knew that there is something called 200 and during the exams, I was figuring out what is randonneuring and all. But after I got to know properly, it's only one week. So that Sunday, I rode my first hundred kilometres. (Okay,) the next Sunday, I rode my first 200 kilometres. So, the first hundred was super suffering. I tried to keep up with these guys. Venkat, Subash, Sampath was too young. I mean, he just joined TBA. So, I was riding with them initially, I was keeping up with them. But then I suffered at the end. So, I had a crash. I was riding at the edge of the road. And you know, right when one thing goes you fall down so that happened. So, I came back, I came back home and my parents are like, why do you have to do this. So, I was feeling hundred kilometres is I felt so tough, hundred kilometres because it also got hot. So, I was thinking how will endure the whole day. If I'm finishing 200 then it will be amazing. So, at the 200 starts, I don't know how this came but I

registered and it used to be like marathon you have to go a day before collect your brevet card, Bib, kit everything. So, they organized in a.., they made it a huge event. They kept it in HBC. So I went, collected came back. Sunday morning when we started there...

– [I-11]

It was similar to my own experience with running when I heard about 10km and 21km running events at 17 years of age which changed my whole perception of being human and the endurance aspects. That led to challenging various other facets of living and questioning along the way.

Another rider who is above 50 years age, answers to why he has taken to randonneuring. In his words,

It is just a challenge. I have been cycling for many years now so let us see. It is like asking a marathon runner what motivates him. People get into running and then they say "okay, what is the ultimate thing". See at my age obviously I can't get into racing. And in fact, you will be very surprised I think, there is something called Hyderabad Racing League (HRL), they do racing events near Medchal. Once they had a little bit of racing kind of thing in Gachibowli Stadium, inside the stadium you do loops. So once in fact P, me, K and a couple of more people also we also went there. So, we did that, the so-called racing, although there were various age groups, 20 to 25 groups and so on. We were just having fun. So, we've seen that obviously racing is not that. So, what is the other alternative to being in cycling etc. Since as I said we're doing a lot of riding in and around Hyderabad. We used to do lot of rides, 20, 30, 50km rides maybe a little more of that, and we said "Okay, randonneuring is alright, we will get into this thing and then keep doing". Otherwise, you just can't get up a day and then say "Today, I'm going for a 300km ride. No! you don't do that". So, this is one opportunity to do it. It is a little bit of challenging in terms of controlling sleep or having proper food and building endurance.

– [I-16]

Early childhood association to bicycle

Bicycle-related early experiences can significantly affect an individual's later interest in sports like randonneuring. Here are a few ways that early exposure to bicycles can influence a person's connection to randonneuring: introduction to cycling, building physical skills, development of independence, sense of adventure and exploration and formation of positive memories and associations.

We used to go to school. The school is about five kilometres. In fact, I used to carry both my brothers on the same cycling. it was a big cycle. My father is six feet tall. And then maybe he had that cycle from long time ago. We learned it by cross-peddalling and then slowly graduating upward. But I think I was in the seventh standard or eighth standard. So that is when my proper cycling of long distances, other than fun, commute to places started. – [I-16]

Young children who ride bicycles can experience excitement, freedom, and exploration. It can create a favourable association with bicycles as a mode of transportation and enjoyment and provides the groundwork for a lifelong enthusiasm for cycling.

It is more likely to hear randonneurs having a memorable past experience of cycling in their childhood. One of the randonneurs narrates

I have so many memories. I know I learned cycling very late. My brother, I have a younger brother. He learned to cycle before I did, much before I did. And the condition that my dad had, you know, if he wants to buy a cycle for us, then both of us should know riding. So, then he had really tough time teaching me. So, every time someone came to our house, everyone this is a visitor on a cycle, we would just please let me just take it for a while and then he would teach me. He's like, "akka you are so heavy", you know, all my cousins were like, "you're so heavy. I can't teach you" and all that stuff. So, I was very demotivated, you know, I'm like, I can never ride a bike. I'm so heavy all that stuff. When I was young, right? And then one fine day, somehow, I learned cycling. And that's it. There was no looking back.

after that. This was when I was in seventh grade. And one of my cousins had a really old bike. So, it was like a family tradition; it has been passed on from cousins to cousins. A really short bike. And I was always tall. And the brakes weren't good. So, every morning I would go get the brakes fixed. 50 paise and then he would fix it. Every morning. I would go to the repair shop, get it fixed. And just go on the cycle everywhere from the ration shop to the vegetable market everywhere you know. Then, when I came to ninth grade, my dad bought a BSA SLR cycle.

So, I was actively riding cycle to ground. My commuting was through cycle. morning and evening I would ride five kilometres to ground and come back then go to school on cycle and then go to tuition on cycle. So, I use that a lot during the ninth and 10th grades. - [I-13]

A person's interest in and participation in cycling activities like randonneuring in later years can be greatly influenced by good associations with bicycles formed in their early years.

Important role of families in Randonneuring:

Families are integral to the world of randonneuring, helping to make this special kind of cycling both successful and enjoyable for riders of all skill levels. Families' understanding, encouragement, and support provide randonneurs the confidence to follow their passion and build a sense of community and accomplishment together.

Families are the cornerstone of support for randonneurs, having a significant impact on their path. Family members are essential to the randonneuring experience, whether they are supporting from the sidelines during a difficult ride, helping with logistics, or supplying emotional support. Here is an excerpt from one of the randonneurs talking about the support from the family members.

My family members and friend's look at me as a crazy guy who wanted to go for cycling. But they do really support me whenever I go for an event. And one such experience I want to share. I was doing a

300 kilometres brevet. I think this was one on 19th of November. So, what happened was I dropped my kids at my parents' place before I go to the ride. So, I started from there and reached this GVR convention; by surprise, I forgot to carry my lights and vest. And without this the organizers will not allow you to ride the brevet.

So why I have forgot is because I have packed a bag from my home. And then I went to my parents' place. Then I actually forgot the bag over there. So, it has my lights, it has my vest and some food. The whole pack I forgot. On that day, I was also taking another randonneur and his bike. So, he came and, in that rush, we forgot all these things and we just moved from that place. And we came to Manneguda, that GVR convention. And I was not allowed to start because I don't have the mandatory things. so luckily because I was also doing few of the other rides. So, people recognized me over there and they said "OK man, we will give you a spare light" and other person gave me a vest. I got small light and another light from a randonneur whose is having a spare light. He said "this light could help you for four hours." This is a night ride three hundred kilometres. So, all was set, and then I was on a ride. But I was still not satisfied. Because this light would only come for four hours. And I'm not sure how we will ride as the later part of ride, it's all dark, and I will not be able to. So, I called my dad saying that "Dad, I forgot the lights at home, No, this ride is not happening." So, he said "okay, I'll bring them, I'll bring them" and he committed saying that "I will bring them, you continue with the ride with whatever you're having." So, on that day, I actually dedicate this ride to my dad, because I was riding on a bicycle 300 kilometres and he rode almost 200 kilometres on a motor bike only because he wanted me to finish this ride. He brought the lights; he brought the vest. And he said "all the best, don't worry about anything. I'm here." So that was the support that I received from my family. My wife takes care of my kids, whenever I'm out, she prepares some kind of snacks or like a chapati

or a bread. So, without my family and their help, I will not be able to do any of these rides. – [I-20]

Key Challenges in Randonneuring

In randonneuring, each cyclist must overcome a variety of obstacles that put their physical stamina, mental fortitude, and logistical planning to the test. These difficulties include:

Distance and Time Management:

Randonneuring entails travelling across significant distances in a limited amount of time. To ensure they can finish the ride in the allocated time, each rider must carefully control their pace, energy consumption, and rest stops. To avoid burnout or falling behind schedule, it becomes essential to strike a balance between speed and sustained endurance.

Nutrition and Hydration:

For randonneurs, maintaining energy levels during lengthy rides is crucial. To replace calories, electrolytes, and fluids lost throughout the ride, each rider must develop and implement a comprehensive nutrition and hydration plan. It is a challenge that calls for careful planning to balance appropriate refuelling with the restrictions of carrying supplies and accessing food breaks along the route.

Riders have a fair amount of understanding about their body and the activity which also demands that understanding. Some riders avoid spicy and stick to something light on their stomachs during the rides. But other riders enjoy having their food with no exceptions. When enquired about this, one of the riders said

*you burn so many calories, might as well treat yourself (laughing)
with something better – [I-15]*

When asked about nutrition, another rider said the following:

Regarding food, I keep grazing three to four days before the ride. I keep eating small quantities and I don't believe in high protein or carb or fat diet whatever I feel like, I eat. During the ride I have heavy breakfast, heavy lunch and heavy dinner. Same timings as I have my breakfast at home and for lunch, more or less, we manage because at least on the roadside anywhere we get. The distances and control points are fixed in such a way that there will be something around that time. So, whatever is available usually I have full meals or curd rice for lunch and dinner invariably I have curd rice. – [I-18]

“The randonneurs must know individually how much nutrition is required for a distance, where to get it and how to carry it...Randonneurs also decide on their own how long they should sleep...Randonneuring demands the development of the capacity for creative improvisation within the limits of what is possible” (Bunte, 2015). Every has their own strategy based on their own understanding of their body. This can be seen in the following narratives

*I plan because every 20-25 kilometres I have to eat so for that I plan what stuff I need to carry, for example morning six o'clock before right starts eight o'clock is the breakfast. So, for first two hours I need to have a tea or something I can't ride continuously for 40-45 kilometres I want to break after at least 30 kilometres. I mean my strategy has been to maintain a moderate speed not go too fast unless required and then I don't tire my body at all.
– [I-18]*

Weather and Environmental conditions:

During their rides, randonneurs frequently encounter various weather and environmental circumstances. Performance and rider comfort can be substantially impacted by heatwaves, strong winds, rain, cold weather, and varied terrain. Each rider must adapt to the changing weather conditions, dress appropriately, and modify their riding technique accordingly. Weather can be a friend or foe. When there are tail winds and clouds, it is a friend. Otherwise, it can be difficult.

One of the Super Randonneur explains their ordeal with weather, and contrasting out the box quick fixes.

In 600, it started raining in the beginning only. (After Zyka, there is turn and we reached a town.) There it rained like crazy. All the three were like it doesn't make sense getting wet in the first 100 kms, we have to ride 600. So, we stopped off in the side... Another funny part in that 600 was since it was raining. People and all were like buying those water proof covers for shoes and all. And then there was Fran. Fran comes and stops at a wine shop. Asks for two plastic covers and ties his shoes and goes. And there is a guy next to him who bought 5000 Rs worth water proof covers. So, at 100kms we stopped there for half an hour and then we started. 600 was bad for us that way, we were pushing the cut-offs... But then once these two things got over, the rains stopped but the roads were bad. – [I-11]

The weather is mainly taken into consideration when planning the clubs' seasonal calendars. For example, in the Indian context, significantly fewer brevets are conducted during the summer months because of the higher temperatures.

Physical and mental challenges are, to an extent, in the rider's control, whereas the weather and the terrain are not. The geography can be studied and prepared in advance as the route is uploaded before the ride. The terrain is a certain factor, but the weather is the most uncertain factor, and no amount of preparation may help. The riders have to judge the conditions and take quick decisions spontaneously.

Sleep Management:

The need of sleep is particularly noteworthy when it comes to randonneuring. Randonneurs take on difficult rides that cover hundreds or even thousands of kilometres in a set amount of time. In this context, managing sleep becomes crucial to success in finishing these physically demanding rides.

Endurance cycling can cause both physical and mental exhaustion. Each rider must design a fatigue management plan, which may include using power naps or well-timed rest intervals to refresh their bodies and minds. Effective sleep management is

crucial for randonneuring events since lack of sleep can impair cognitive function and increase the risk of accidents.

Randonneurs must carefully balance riding time and rest intervals, including sleep, to preserve physical endurance, mental sharpness, and general well-being throughout the event. This is necessary to satisfy these difficult standards.

Noting the importance of the sleep, one of the riders explain their sleep management,

if it is a smaller brevet, it really doesn't matter until 300 but for longer brevets for 400 and 600 more than food, sleep is important because very very rested body is essential.

Lucky, I tested it out in during the thousand all the time for me 10 minutes or 15 minutes naps two or three breaks 10-minute naps is enough for me to do a 1000 I don't have a sleep for one hour or two hours. last 600 I had knee pain and because of that my speed was very low I could not ride so I didn't have the luxury of sleeping anywhere and luckily for me if I sleep for 10 minutes it is more than enough, I will recover because I do a little bit of yoga and I'm sleeping I relax each of my muscles and because of that my recovery is fast and after 10 minutes I feel fresh. I relax each and every Muscle. – [I-18]

Another rider shared his sleep strategy

So, in 600, one good thing was, where ever we stopped no, the other people were talking, I was just sleeping. It was 5 minutes, 10 minutes, I was just sleeping completely. I used to keep my bike between my legs, I used to take off my saddle bag, put it under my head and I used to happily sleep. – [I-02]

Navigation and route finding:

Randonneuring routes frequently cross uncharted terrain, such as rural areas, distant locations, and intricate urban environments. Individual riders must use route cues, maps, or GPS equipment to find their way around the course. Maintaining precise

navigation necessitates attention, map-reading abilities, and the capacity for quick judgements, particularly in low-light or high-stress circumstances.

Mechanical Problems and Equipment Management:

During the rides, equipment malfunctions or mechanical problems might arise, causing difficulties for individual riders. The ride can be disrupted by flat tyres, broken chains, or malfunctioning parts, which necessitate immediate repairs or new equipment. Riders can overcome such obstacles by carrying the essential tools, spare parts and by possessing fundamental mechanical knowledge.

Motivation and Mental Resilience:

Randonneuring puts cyclists' mental fortitude to the test. Endurance rides can be mentally and physically taxing, with occasional bouts of exhaustion, with times of uncertainty, doubt, or discomfort. For overcoming difficult circumstances and obtaining the intended outcomes, it becomes essential to maintain motivation, an optimistic outlook, and mental focus along the journey.

Other challenges are anyways there, obviously riding distances like 400 and 600 kms takes about 27 hrs to 40hrs you need to build a stamina within yourself. That's not just physical stamina but that's also mental stamina. As a randonneur I am sure everyone works towards that. For physical stamina you do a lot of strength training, and then you make sure that your diet is in control and stuff like that and that is how you prepare yourself for physical stamina and mental stamina you also try to avoid any stress or other things that might you know come in way for randonneuring right because when you are cycling for those distances you want to have a very cool and clam mind. I cannot have lot of family pressure or professional pressure and in that pressure if I am riding, I am going to get into problem. So those kinds of challenges are there which means that we need to really keep yourself physically and mentally fit for doing randonneuring. – [I-01]

Safety and emergency preparedness:

When randonneuring, safety comes first. Individual cyclists are responsible for prioritising their own safety by obeying traffic rules, wearing the proper protective gear, staying vigilant and riding carefully. Additionally, cyclists manage unexpected situations more skilfully by being ready for emergencies, being familiar with basic bike maintenance, and having access to emergency contacts.

my biggest challenge is you know the security concern of doing a randonneuring event in India right, because we are all by ourselves in middle of the night in middle of nowhere and with not that kind of awareness of cycling like that happens. abroad there is awareness of cycling right, there is a kind of respect or like you know a special space given for cyclist abroad but here you are cycling on the road, people think that you know you are coming and occupying their road right. So, in that rage they actually sometimes come and harm you right. So, my biggest challenge I feel is you know the security concern especially doing it in India. Or unless at least India becomes quite aware that cycling is also a sport that many people will follow and once that kind of acceptance comes within people then I am fine with it other than that unless that is happening, I think that will be challenge to do brevets in India.

So, the way I do (tackle this security challenge) is that I tried to do whatever I think is the best right. One of them is like whenever I am riding in the night hours, I always have a support vehicle with me. Right, because as a worst come scenario if something happens in the middle of nowhere, at least I know that my vehicle is just a call away. So that I make sure for every night brevet, I will definitely have a support vehicle with me. That's one major thing, second thing is I also try to tag along with someone at least a group of two minimum rather than riding alone. In the day time I ride alone that's fine but at night I am very specific that I ride with the group. Yeah so, I think these two things I take care during my brevets. - [I-01]

It takes proper training, experience, and careful planning to overcome these obstacles. Successful randonneurs build their physical stamina, mental toughness, and efficient strategies to overcome these challenges and reach their own aspirations in this challenging activity.

Types of randonneurs

The randonneurs may be classified into two groups based on continuity in the leisure sport. One group: I borrow the term used by Heiki Bunte (2015) the ‘permanent event rider(s)’ who continue to participate in the rides and help in the sustenance of the activity. The other group riders are those who experience the randonneuring and move on to other activities. For the permanent event rider, taking part in brevets becomes a kind of ritual.

Some of the randonneurs prefer few memorable rides of the year, their focus is to enjoy a particular course and repeatedly ride it to test their fitness level year on year.

Based on the technical knowledge, the riders can be divided into skilled and un-skilled. Even though all the riders are expected to know the basic skills like fixing the flats, changing the wheels it is surprising to find that quite a number of randonneurs do not know the basics even after finishing many brevets and becoming SR’s. The un-skilled riders depend on the co-riders for help; it is rare to not get help from co-riders because of the camaraderie.

The importance of knowing the basic skills is given below as narrated by one of the senior riders, who has done multiple Super Randonneur Series rides with a couple of incidents as example. In his words...

It is very very important because unless you know how to do a basic flat repair and changing of the tube etc. and I mean my sincere advice is they should not get into this riding, taking up long distance riding without the basic of flat fixing. I do it in generally about 20-25 minutes from totally flat to change everything and then back on the road again, I can do it in that time, but if one is not able to do it, if you don’t know how to change it and then inflate it etc. it is very, very

problematic because you never know, if you are able to take more time, then it takes away your time. If you're not able to do it then you should consider yourself very lucky if some help comes.

In fact, V very famously, he had a flat between ORR and Uppal, there is a place just about 15 kilometres short of 1000km ride. He had a flat, we were riding together and then he was not very conversant. So, I had to help him out. if nobody's with you, or even if somebody's there with you, but sometimes if there is a lot of pressure with the time, you don't like to hold them back. So, it becomes problematic. First, he rang up ride responsible for some help but I was there and then we just done quickly and then we're back on the road. But we lost about 20-25 minutes. Although it is not timed, we always had among ourselves that little bit of, not exactly a bet, but a lot of leg pulling. Sometimes D and P, they are together all the time and they normally finish last. Finish last means they utilize the time completely but over a period of time P become little faster. So, he started finishing little faster. So, he keeps on boasting like "sir, I have beaten you in brevet and all those things" (laughing). this is not big deal. But if you don't know the flat fixing and then basic things it becomes tricky. Then depending, irrespective of whatever distance you are doing you just have to give up. You feel bad about it. It is very, very important.

In fact, the five flats I had on the heaven and hell ride. Had I not known this thing then I would have folded up right in the first flat and then in spite of having so many punctures I finished I think about 20 minutes in time. So, it is very important. – [I-16]

He further notes that there are workshops conducted by cycling shops and individuals to overcome this problem.

Transitioning from running to randonneuring (runner to a randonneur)

The data strongly suggests that many Super Randonneurs have a running and working out in a gym as a background, using these activities as a foundation for their fitness and weight loss endeavors. The gradual inclusion of cycling as cross-training allowed them to achieve a well-rounded fitness routine while reducing the risk of running-related injuries. The transition to cycling proved to be both rewarding and fulfilling, shaping these individuals into dedicated and accomplished Super Randonneurs.

The following narratives testify this

In 2014, I had a wish to do one half marathon. I am a runner basically. When I was sitting in office one day, I was just browsing and I saw a picture of running when I was just looking at marathons. Probably it was the marathon season. And I wanted to do one half marathon. So, I didn't know about the running plans and all that. Since 2012 I have been going to gym. So, it only started with wanting to reduce my weight and become fit after the birth of my second child.

So, I started just going through sites and what it feels? what is marathon? I got a picture. In 2014, I did my first half marathon. And after that I got bitten by medals. I wanted to get many medals, because it was easy to win and get one medal. So, I registered for second half marathon in Bangalore, which was very good. After that I thought maybe I should duathlon, cycling and running with Hyderabad Triathlon. But I didn't have a cycle. I didn't have practice. So, in my gym I practiced for four days for about 20-25 minutes for four days. And then I directly went there and took gearless bike I did 20 kilometres and I climbed Microsoft hill without any problem. I didn't get off my saddle. That is when I realized "probably I'm a naturally cyclist because I didn't feel anything, because 20km is a big distance for a newcomer. So that is when I started thinking about it. And in 2015 April, I went and bought a cycle because I heard about 200-kilometre brevet. One of my runner friends, he said "you should do at least one 200-kilometre brevet". He wanted to do, i got interested, I thought "maybe even I should try because I have seen

what half marathon feels like, so let me see what 200-kilometre brevet feels like". Then, I bought the cycle I started doing 20 kilometres. And first weekend I was introduced to ride planner group in Hyderabad by KM. Today happens to be his birthday. So, 50 kilometres was my first long ride with the group. And after that slowly, I wanted to do more and more. And I met P who's been of the group members in ride planner and he used to organize rides for 200 kilometres brevet I did 100 plus, 150 plus and 190 kilometres also on seven consecutive weekends before 200 brevet '2015 heaven and hell' that happens in July I completed very comfortably then I wanted to do 300. I did 300 but I was not aware of salts. So, because of that I had terrible cramps, my knees bloated I could not walk after 300 but even 300 I completed I was the first woman in Hyderabad to have completed 300km in 2015 and then 400 kilometres was a DNF. I started and then after 30 kilometres because of knee pain. I gave up at 30 kilometres. Again, after that next season I started again, it was difficult I had knee pain but by then Prd one of the very good riders in Hyderabad introduced me to run capsule. And after that, I have never had cramps for all these years. I was very excited to participate in 200km brevet. But then probably they (running friends) thought that would give me kick. So, and maybe, I am capable of doing. So, they thought I should explore. - [I-18]

Another hard-core runner expresses his way into randonneuring

When I came to Hyderabad also 3 years I did not cycle. I became extremely fat and all. So that point of time once I am done with my C. A. my mom and dad were like "ok, enough is enough, you gained too much, join a gym and they forced me join F-45. Exactly when I joined the F-45, there used to be a head trainer called Al. He used to cycle a lot; he has a Fixie. He used to take us to HBC and all and we used to rent cycle and all. So, first time we went we started from HBC and went on to the Sankarpalli road. Not even to Sankarpalli, that too I was scared of riding a geared cycle because I was like if I do it

wrong the chain will come off. So, I took a fixed geared cycle. I think we went to Sankarpalli and came back to HBC. That might have been what 40kms and that felt like biggest achievement of my life. That's how I started.

This was 2015. Around the same time The Bike Affair opened up at this place (second store at Banjara Hills). So, I started meeting Go, he was telling me how cycling and all. So, I wanted to buy a cycle. I liked a cycle there was Bergamont hybrid cycle called sweep 5.0 something. So, I used to rent it out. They started organising 'Gymathons'. Like triathlons, what they used to do was, first was F-45 session, and then 3 loops of KBR and then running. So that's how I got into cycling.

Another funny story, I used to run with Van a lot. One fine day she was like this weekend there is a 200 km ride. I did not even know what is Randonneuring. this was in 2015 October or so, if I am not wrong. 200km night brevet time. It was 2016 March. So, she said we will take speakers and ride and come. So, I did not even know what it is. I texted Go, can I come and meet you? Oh yeah. I asked him what is this night ride? he sat with me for half an hour. He explained me, there is something called as 'Brevet', there is something called 'Randonneuring'. this is completely a self-supported thing; you have to go through and come back. I asked him 'can I do it?' He was like 'yes you can.' And I did not have cycle with me. So, they did not have any cycles for rent. Thankfully, I had one friend who is of my height and he had a Schwinn Hybrid bike. I was like I am doing this 200 km ride; can you give it me? So, he gave me the bike on Thursday. I went for 40km night ride. That time TBA used to organise night rides. then I bought one reflective vest, one tail lamp and one helmet. And that's how I went to the 200 brevet. – [I-02]

Similar to the researchers' fitness journey, over time, many of these individuals discovered the benefits of cross-training, recognizing that incorporating

diverse forms of physical activity can enhance overall fitness levels while reducing the risk of overuse injuries associated with repetitive running. As a result, they began to explore cycling as an alternative form of exercise, drawn by its low-impact nature and potential to complement their running workouts.

Cycling's low-impact characteristics make it an appealing choice for individuals seeking to give their joints and muscles a break from the repetitive impact experienced during running. By incorporating cycling into their fitness routine, Super Randonneurs found a balanced approach to maintaining their fitness levels while reducing the strain on their bodies, especially their lower extremities.

The transition to cycling also introduced Super Randonneurs to new challenges and opportunities. They gradually discovered the joy of long-distance cycling and the sense of accomplishment that comes with completing challenging randonneuring events. The sport offered a unique and exhilarating experience that complemented their running achievements, motivating them to embrace cycling as a significant aspect of their fitness journey.

Continuity and contrast in randonneuring over the years:

Heike Bunte (2015) presents how randonneuring can be perceived as both continuity and contrast with other familiar forms of leisure cycling, touring and racing. He distinguishes between two specific subcultures of cycling - randonneuring events and 'amateur leisure (racing) events' or 'sportive riding'. These are different from professional racing and have become an international phenomenon. Some of the Super Randonneurs of Hyderabad continue the activity at the same time participate in other forms of cycling. Few of them even venture into other endurance sporting activities such as marathons, iron man and the same. They are testing themselves, challenging themselves on various fronts.

Some of the key distinguishing features of randonneuring over other forms are: randonneuring is done through experiential knowledge and riding long distances takes more than just pedalling. Experience is a privilege of age and the time spent on the bike. Long distance riding requires wisdom which is different from the knowledge of cycling. Knowledge is about the knowing what and how questions but wisdom is application of that knowledge in the context. The knowledge is tacit. The skills and

understanding necessary for long-distance riding are gained experientially. It only comes with practice and time. One requires adaptability. The ability to adapt physically and manage mental hurdles, sleep deficits, weather conditions such as cold, wet and heat, and hundreds and thousands of meters of climbing. Heike Bunte rightly points that “reliable action comes before short-term experimentation. Only the experienced randonneur knows how to successfully pass the testing of the self” (Bunte, 2015).

One of the significant aspects in randonneuring is the value system that is self-driven and not diluted from the ever-changing business of leisure-sport and professional sport. Even after so many decades, the relatively stable value system can be attributed to rules that stress keeping it away from becoming competitive in nature and commercialisation of randonneuring. The brevets insist on a degree of self-sufficiency on the roads. The paradoxical nature of sport can be understood as there is emphasis on independency and yet the camaraderie is quite visible.

Suffering, Pain and pleasure.

A significant theme running through almost all the randonneuring narratives is the “suffering” in the journey undertaken. Janice Chernekoff points that those writers and readers of these narratives find sustenance and inspiration in them. As mentioned earlier, randonneuring is an undoubtingly an endurance sport. One of the critical aspects of every rider story is how a rider faces physical challenges. Pointing to the idea of “corporeal testing – putting the body through its paces – may be explicitly valorised” (John Urry in Chernekoff, 2012). The bigger the challenge, the more attention to the details and management of the pain, therefore the more significant the rider story and the lessons and meaning attributed to it.

The narratives validate how a specific “attitude adopted toward suffering contributes to the transformative value of a ride as well as the informative and inspirational value of a ride report for readers” (Chernekoff, 2012). Physical suffering is expected, the rider narratives demonstrate that it is possible to face the challenges with proper planning, awareness, tenacity, humour, and quick decision-making. One of the riders talk about it very casually.

Pain in shoulder blades. And sometimes I have chaffing and sometimes I have saddle sore. It was quite rare but saddle sore

maybe because of rain in 600 Trichy I had saddle sore because of two nights rain and during the daytime it was hot. Because of continuous riding in rain, I had saddle sore but otherwise I don't remember when I had saddle sore. initially I used to have palm pain and numbness but when I started changing my position the pain went away but I started getting shoulder pain but even that it's not much these days because of again the position I keep changing but other than this I get toe pain sometimes and for that I keep exercising my toes when I'm riding. - [I-18]

Another rider narrates his experience during a 600km brevet,

In 600km brevet, after 430 kms I was completely gone. My body started shivering and my right ITB (Iliotibial Band) was completely inflamed like this. I was still riding with Geo and Hem when my body started shivering. They slowed down a lot because of me. And then we met Raj and Sun also because they stopped somewhere. As soon as they saw me shivering R gave me his jacket and he gave some medicine. And those two went ahead. I was riding slowly. It started aching and it was burning. Geo and Hem were not letting me ride alone, after 20, 30 kms I was literally like “we rode 450kms, it doesn't make sense for 2 people to slow down just for one person” I was persistent and they left. And after a point of time this became so bad. I was literally pedalling with one leg and all the up hills; I was walking with the bike. It was 9:30 and I finally came to one village. I stopped there I bought chips, coke and all. I was eating. As usual, all the locals gathered around me. They were like what happened and all. First, I thought I will call someone but it was already 10, 10:30 in the night and that place was 3 hrs by road from Hyderabad. So, I was like even if I call someone, they will take 2, 3 hrs to come. So, I was asking them will I get any auto or something. Those villagers arranged an auto for me. So, when we split, I told Hem and Geo to call me when they stopped for dinner. I was about to call Rajeev and DNF (Did not finish) and about to get into auto. Suddenly Hem calls

me and says that they are having dinner at this place and I asked the villagers and that place was 5 mins away from where I was. So, I was like these people were also struggling and I was also struggling. So, I just walked off to that place. They ordered food for me. R and S are done with their food. So, they asked me what's wrong. By that time my shivering and all reduced but I was unable to pedal. So, Sun garu calls one of his cyclist friends, who is a doctor. As soon as they told them about the IT band, he suggested to reduce the saddle height. So, they reduced my saddle height and they had some painkillers. I was very apprehensive of taking painkillers because I will unnecessarily push and I might injure it a lot. Sun garu had that tape. I took a tablet and tapped of the leg. We were all done with the food and they were checking the air pressure. So, they checked my sir pressure first and asked me to start off, because anyways I was riding slow, they will catch up to me. I was still feeling low like "why am I riding" but I started. one good thing that happened was, Sun garu crossed me and went off but Raj had a flat. So, Geo and Hem stopped to help Raj. And I was riding at 10-15 km/hr and I was wondering why are these people not coming? Am I going on right route? I stopped and I was checking the directions and all. Then one car comes and there are three engineering kids. They were happily partying and driving. They knew what a brevet and all was. They started talking to me. Usually, you get irritated but this was like I was already so lonely and I wanted someone. So, I asked them where are these people and they said they had a puncture. Those people rode at 10-15km/hr speed for half an hour with me, just talking to me because they realised, I was struggling and all. Eventually I became fine and these three came up to me. – [I-02]

Robert Sands in his book *Sport Ethnography* explains "how sports behaviour is partially shaped by how pain is perceived and managed by athletes" (Sands, 2002). Adding that the access to that state is possible through reflexive narrative available to the insider, the participant. It is often observed during the fieldwork and in the narratives of the riders, which indicate that suffering is faced optimistically and

humour attached. The saddle sores are an example of it. Sitting on the saddle for ten to thirty plus hours (in approx. for 200 km to 600km respectively) is not easy to do, but the riders well expect it. In a funny tone, some of the experienced Super Randonneurs suggest to the newcomers when asked ‘how to reduce saddle sores?’ by giving answers such as by spending less time on the saddle, i.e., to increase the speed and finishing the ride as fast as possible. The narratives indicate that the physical and mental suffering endured is well worth it. The riders find meaning and value due to the suffering and challenges they endured and overcame during the ride.

The journey and the state of flow

The experiential ethnography validates specific arguments put forward by travel scholars where they identify features within travel narratives that indicate the journeys, not as a mere recreational activity but “engaged in journeys with spiritual and lasting effects” (Chernekov, 2012). During the long riding hours, the riders experience different states of mind in some phases where all kinds of thoughts start coming into play and in some, they cease to exist especially during the night riding, when riding alone and when the riding becomes monotonous. Most of the randonneurs expressed that they enjoy the meditative states which they experience during the riding and that is what brings them back to participating in brevets.

Pointing to the fact that all human beings seek happiness, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the author of a very widely acknowledged book titled “Flow: the psychology of optimal experience”, decodes our understanding what happiness is all about. From his decades long research on happiness points that “Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 2). Even though there are many forces outside our control that shape our perceptions of our human experience, in some rare occasions it feels like we are in control of our actions and that becomes the landmark in memory for what life should be like. The term “optimal experience” is used to describe those occasions. The author explains the underlying factors which lead to the state of “optimal experience”. Randonneuring fits the bill as it presents a number of moments described by the author as “the best moments usually occur when a person’s body or

mind is stretched to its limits in voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we make happen” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 3). Randonneurs consistently push themselves both physically and mentally to complete the brevets ranging from 200 kms to 1200 kms under various conditions.

There are so many activities which are repetitive in nature, in terms of repeating the same action over and again. The monotonous rhythm of the activity i.e., riding, running etc. helps in reaching to the meditative state of experience. We often slip into that state where nothing else matters. The efficiency of the activity increases many folds utilising minimum resources from the body just to focus on the present activity.

when I was running, I used to find it meditative but more than running when I paint, I try to understand myself, but more than anything it is cycling that has taken me to the peak where I got engrossed and understanding myself. - [I-18]

Peak experiences often correlate with the concept of flow, a state of deep engagement and focus. Riders experiencing peak moments during randonneuring may enter a flow state, which can enhance their performance. Investigating the relationship between peak experiences, flow, and performance can provide insights into optimal conditions for achieving peak physical and mental states during endurance activities. The researcher himself has experienced similar kind of states and stated the same in the autoethnography chapters. The riders set themselves apart from the other means of transport because riding a bicycle can provide an intense, sometimes dangerous but always an absorbing means of travel. The experience they seek cannot be replaced by any other means of transportation.

The challenge or the goal of becoming a super randonneur seems worthy for the riders after listening and seeing the other super randonneurs accomplishing the challenge they voluntarily chose. It is often expressed by the randonneurs on how they initially associated the riding or participating in such long-distance rides as ‘crazy’, but end up trying for themselves and eventually get surprised by what they accomplish. It is understandable that reaching the goal has a social reward of attaining the most coveted ‘Super Randonneur’ title which will stay for the rest of the riders’

life but the pursuit of the goal in itself is much more rewarding. Recognising that every human experience has a neurochemical basis would help build a broader understanding of the experience. At a neurochemical level, Andrew Huberman, a neuroscientist, explains how there is a correlation between the two reward systems of the brain to the pursuit of action, the first being the release of ‘Serotonin’ and ‘Oxytocin’ which helps in enjoying the ride, the present ‘here and now’, and having gratitude. The second is ‘Dopamine’ commonly known as the “feel-good” or “pleasure hormone”, which plays a key role in keeping one motivated through long periods even when there is uncertainty (Bilyeu, 2020).

The narratives provide evidence to the notion that ‘human beings underestimate the capabilities of being human’. The riders’ attitudes towards the brevets clearly shows this. The study focuses on brevet riders, individuals who engage in long-distance cycling events that range from 200 to 1,200 kilometers. These endurance challenges provide a unique setting to investigate the extent to which individuals may underestimate their own physical and mental capacities.

Many participants expressed moments of self-doubt at the outset of their brevet journey. They often questioned their ability to complete the demanding distances and terrain.

The narratives revealed instances where participants surprised themselves by exceeding their initial expectations. Participants described pushing through physical and mental barriers they had previously considered insurmountable. They expressed a newfound confidence in their capacity to endure and overcome challenges.

Personality type and Randonneuring

Susan Cain, in her widely acknowledged book “Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking” (Cain, 2012) explains how personalities profoundly shape the lives of human beings and how their place on the introvert-extrovert spectrum influences the decisions and the choices we make. These are one of the most exhaustively researched subjects, and the researchers make exciting discoveries through the latest technology mapping our brain pathways and neurotransmitters. Susan Cain reminds that Carl Jung popularized the terms introvert and extrovert with publishing a book in 1921 titled “*Psychological types*”. Jung said, “Introverts are drawn to the inner world of thought and feeling, extroverts to the

external life of people and activities. Introverts focus on the meaning they make of the events swirling around them; extroverts plunge into the events themselves. Introverts recharge their batteries by being alone; extroverts need to recharge when they don't socialize enough" (Cain, 2012, p. 10). Acknowledging that individuals are complex and it is impossible to predict behaviour across all circumstances, Cain presents several important traits on which introverts and extroverts differ; level of outside stimulation, work differently, and on preferred social styles. Randonneuring at the outset may seem suitable for an extroverted personality type but it is observed in my experience and other randonneurs stories that introverted personality type riders are more attracted to and participate in these ultra-cycling endurance events.

Having experienced and "lived through" the stages of becoming a super randonneur I would say that the entire journey of randonneuring has been a massive learning experience not in one but in multiple ways. Some periods are more physical, while some worked at mental level and while some on the social level. Even though it was quite overwhelming at times, as Paul Fournel famously said "the mounted cyclist is a different person" (Vivanco, 2013, p. 127) rings true. Being an introvert, I never ever expected or imagined that I could interact with so many people. It almost felt like I was a different person when riding a bicycle. Randonneuring made me move or shift in the spectrum from the introvert extreme and towards an ambivert if not an extrovert. It made me wonder whether it is a similar case with other super randonneurs.

Most respondents who have completed super randonneur series consider themselves introverts. A few answered that they "do not know" (upon some enquiry they seemed to be ambiverts), and quite a few turned out to be extroverts. Even though some more data could establish the fact in this line of enquiry, it would be safe to state that most of the super randonneurs are not extroverted. The qualities of the introverts mentioned by researchers certainly aligns with qualities required for randonneuring. For example, psychologists found that introvert's function well without sleep (Cain, 2012) and super randonneurs need to do well with sleep management in order finish the rides which go beyond 24 hours and are strictly time bound. It is observed that some of the super randonneurs even complete some of the rides without sleeping.

Knowing self and deep questions

Randonneuring provides a unique platform for individuals to go on introspective, life-changing adventures. Randonneuring pushes riders to explore their own consciousness and raise existential issues about identity, purpose, and the essence of the human experience, in addition to the physical challenges and exhilaration of discovery. This can be often observed in the narratives of the riders when they express their randonneuring stories. Here is one such example,

The more and more I started riding I started realizing myself, I started talking to myself, I started understanding what I am? what I need from life? where I want to be? So more than being with friends like probably others think that they can spend some time with friends and so on. I wanted to be alone immersed in my own thoughts. So, I used to write many blogs on how I felt going to the rural areas, villages, landscape and then look at the moon, stars, the sky. So, I used to enjoy all these so much.

It is my nature because I'm kind of philosophical. So, it is my nature and by nature I'm quite a deep thinker and going by cycle has given me the scope because I can spend time for myself while I'm in the group I can also be alone. I will not talk to anyone I can just keep riding and riding and definitely being with nature irrespective of whether it is sun, rain. I'm a person that loves nature. So, probably because of these reasons, I started enjoying this sport more. It is giving me an opportunity to explore myself further and further and further. - [I-18]

This section tries to explore the relationship between these long endurance rides and the deep questions that arise during these activities. It also seeks to throw some light on the transformative potential of randonneuring as a means of personal growth and self-discovery. One of the unique characteristics of randonneuring is the solitude experienced during long distance rides serves as a catalyst for introspection and self-realization.

Randonneurs Identity: As a world community

Another most significant aspect of the thesis I am concerned with is the uses and reifications of forming an identity. In the field of endurance cycling, randonneuring is a distinctive and alluring sport that has attracted a devoted fan base all over the world. The long-distance, non-competitive riders known as randonneurs have developed a distinct subculture within the larger cycling community. These cyclists take risks, push their bodies and minds to the limit, and frequently cover hundreds of kilometres in a single ride while navigating a complicated web of paradoxes, complexities, and traditions.

Randonneurs see themselves as part of the larger community of long-distance cycling enthusiasts. It is moving towards a global identity. Randonneuring helps to build new identities. This tremendously affects the perception of who they are and opens unimaginable possibilities of who they can become.

In one of the studies, Social Psychologists found that the travel experiences increase generalized trust especially the breadth of the experiences, those who travelled to more places tended to become more trusting (Dolan, 2013). Super Randonneurs travel quite extensively in a unique way covering large domains, meeting countless people throughout their journey. The feelings of trust are an important aspect of any kind of relationship and randonneuring community thrives on trusting on the fellow randonneurs which form life-long associations. The kind of deeper randonneur experiences and having passed through the similar stages to reach where they are makes a rider more humble and also more empathetic towards the fellow riders. They naturally become more understanding, which builds trust, strengthening the relationships between the riders and the randonneuring community.

Going through such intense randonneuring experience and finishing the rides can give one a lot of self-confidence and self-awareness. It is often observed that the best solution to a problem or a challenge comes from self-awareness. It certainly accelerates the journey without wandering and wasting time and energy for things out of the scope of the self.

Randonneurs, their influence and inspirational role

Randonneuring like most of the sports has been playing an inspirational role. Even in my case, at various moments in the randonneuring journey I was inspired by the experienced riders, especially aged riders and woman riders. I can say with certainty that those moments decisively helped me in finishing the Super Randonneur series and attain the Super Randonneur title. Having investigated this aspect in the interviews every respondent openly admitted that were inspired by other randonneurs and co-riders at various points in their journey.

Some of the famous lines from a sports movie titled “Coach Carter” (2005), which is based on a true story, resonates well in this particular context on how the randonneuring is growing season by season as the riders becoming Randonneurs and Super Randonneurs. A young sportsman says the following lines after a revelation “we were all meant to shine as children do. It’s not just in some of us, it’s in everyone. And, as we let our own light shine, we consciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

The below is an extract from one of the randonneurs narrative, which exemplifies how Randonneurs influence others surrounding them to taking cycling and then randonneuring.

The first experience of riding a geared bicycle even though I'm a software engineer, made me realise I don't know much about cycle. One or two persons educated me on that day. So, I thought 'I have to learn these gearing combinations.' Whenever there is an opportunity, I used to go to the NGO on Saturdays or Sundays, pay some nominal price, get a bicycle to ride. That time I met many persons, advisers, seniors. Though, they don't know me very well, they gave me proper advice. Then I thought, 'okay, there's something here, if I come here, I can learn many things not just about the cycling but other things also these guys are discussing.' So, I started cycling regularly, every Saturday and Sunday. I rode 20 kilometers in a ride which was sponsored by Times of India. That's around November or December 2014. Then in January, I did 50 kilometers. At that time only people who were talking and I got interest in cycling, and I was asking few

things and others are giving other inputs also. Because in the two to three months only I got good relationship with the persons. I have taken their numbers and I was talking to them. So, they said, there are events like Randonneuring and long rides. when I don't know what is randonneuring at the time, but they said, 'don't think much about anything. You've just cycle. And you have some limited time. In that we have to complete. If you complete. You will be called has Randonneur, and you will get a medal from France.' So, I said, 'Okay, medal from France, sounds fancy' and they have shown their pictures and their medals. Those are very beautiful. Very beautiful. That finishing was very smooth, by looking at it, everyone and a person like me will definitely get tempted. So, I said yes, 'I wanted to do it'. They said 'no, it's very short time for you.' It's a very short time because it is January and the next brevet we have in February, there is one month of time, but by that time, I can do 50km with normal bicycle, like basic, gear bicycle I could be able to do 50km. And they said 'yes, you can do 200 but try to at least do 100, 150km in one or two weeks because you had to habituate to the saddle.' So, that is important and what to eat, how to eat. And I got one senior person contact number. So, I talked to him regularly. And he said 'don't worry much. Just come with the bicycle, come with some snacks, readily available snacks and just keep on riding. Nothing to worry, you might be losing some money, that's it, but you will be gaining a lot of experience. Fail to get more experience.' In that one-month span, I got to know about cycling. I don't know the rules of randonneuring at that point. I wanted to participate in that because physically I'm strong, active and I wanted to perform better.

It was in February, 2016. Maybe around five to six days before the brevet myself another person went for a short ride like 50-kilometer ride, just wanted to see. So, I purchased a bicycle in February. That is just 20 days before the brevet. I purchased that bicycle only for the brevets. It was a Shivaratri day. We were going for a short ride. Unfortunately, I fell down from the bicycle and some injuries. So,

doctor suggested to take two weeks of rest. So that brevet I could not able to do but on behalf of me, couple of seniors went for a ride only to dedicate that to me. So, I thought like a person who doesn't know much about me. Like when he met me in a hospital, I was talking to him saying that 'I purchased this bicycle to do this brevet. Unfortunately, this happened.' He said 'don't worry, I'll do it for you.' And after his brevet, in a prize distribution ceremony, he has given his randonneuring t-shirt to me, what he got from the brevet, he has given it to me. So, it's like moments that moments I can't express in words like. I thought 'there is something, people are giving it, people are giving it back. Like what they learn, what they are doing, like not for themselves. They want to show something to others. They want to be an example to you.' Cycling is not just for Randonneuring, it is just a part. But it changes you entirely: the way you think, the way you dress, the way you take food, the way you sleep, all the patterns will be changed by Randonneuring. Particularly, to me, Randonneuring changed me a lot, but I missed that February one brevet. And next brevet is in July. That is Heaven & Hell, which is very tough as everyone know. So, I got very less time because to recover from that incident. And so, it took almost three months even with the pain on my hand due to fracture. Still, I went for that brevet.

– [I-19]

The randonneurs represent a possibility. A possibility which most people wonder, question and fear. As we have seen in the above narrative, they were being examples to others and create moments which are remembered by the others and take on their own new journey in the world.

Randonneuring impact and lessons for Life

It is interesting to hear the comparison of randonneuring to life itself or an analogy to life. Almost all the Super Randonneurs I have interviewed and interacted agree that it is as unpredictable as life itself with all the ups and downs, highs and lows in the emotions, thoughts and energy. Similar to life, there are no guarantees in sport, and that too in Randonneuring events that go beyond a day. It is impossible to

predict what is going to happen. Every ride gives a different experience however short or long, however familiar with course or not. It is with a vague intuition based on the previous experiences of our own and our fellow riders' experiences the riders participate in the brevets. This is one of the reasons why randonneuring is and challenging to be neatly categorised. It is as complex as life itself.

One of the famous quotes of Mark Twain from his book *Innocents Abroad* sounds true in this context, and he stated, "travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime" (Mark twain quoted in Dolan, 2013). There are now countless research articles and blogs confirming Mark Twain's statement, which shows the relevance and presents it as a fact.

It is common knowledge now that traveling is one of the biggest eye openers to the incredible and mysterious world. These kinds of traveling related events can be argued to be one of the best ways to experience the life.

Divya Tate narrates how certain events have affected her perceptions.

"PBP 2011 was a big eye opener for me, because it is a great way to peer into another country. Then I saw Race Across America (RAAM) and I was blown away by the whole scale of that thing. Because, you are literally starting from one coast (ocean) and riding across to the other shore, to another ocean. You look at that kind of race and your perspective is that as though you are looking down on the earth, that's the sort of scale of operations."

These events clearly inspired her and further led to taking a big role in empowering brevets and establishing 'Inspire India', which is a Sports Management Company, providing a flat form for Indian ultra-distance riders to step up their game and participate in international races. The races act as qualifiers for the RAAM. RAAM is one of the toughest endurance events in the world of cycling. It is almost 5000 km, crosses 12 States and has over 51000 meters of vertical ascent. Inspire India started with an annual 640 km race known as 'The Deccan Cliffhanger' which starts from Pune and ends at Goa. The second race is the 1750 km 'Ultra Spice Race' which is considered as India's longest ultra-cycle race. The race starts and ends at Goa with

a U-turn at Ooty. These are big challenges not only in terms of distances but with the amount of climbing involved in them. And while commenting on the feedback from the racers she says that “the racers actually enjoy that route, it is a huge motivation for them because route is so beautiful, which keeps them going”. The third race is the Great Himalayan race, the world’s highest cycling ultra-race. Divya Tate talking about the race mentions how vulnerable the racers and crew felt. She says, “it is really tough compared to any of the other races. For the simple reason that the Himalayas just challenge you and ... the scale of the mountain just shakes who you are as a person”.

These races are different from randonneuring events as the riders are allowed to have a support crew and are competitive by nature with podium finishers. she mentions that managing finances and the participants' safety are the major challenges. The ultra-races worldwide are expensive because of the support crew, support vehicles, accommodation, food, travel and so on. The most important and biggest challenge is “the understanding and addressing sleep deprivation for racer and the crew and ensuring their safety”

Divya Tate says “Cycling raises your sense of awareness of your surroundings. Because to stay safe on your cycle, you have to become far more aware of what’s going on”

Randonneuring expects to take complete responsibility for the actions during the ride, which is a game-changer. This further makes the rider realise the importance of everything around and develop a sense of gratitude. This is not only restricted to randonneuring but percolates into others facets of life. Randonneuring expects one to be self-sufficient and independent. Therefore, any form of support however small would be acknowledged and especially, if the support comes at cusp of challenging situation, it would mean a lot and becomes an unforgettable memory to the rider. Many instances noted in the field made it evident, for example, while fighting the sleep in the middle of the night, somewhere in the remotest villages or a forest patch seeing the volunteers with a hot coffee is indescribable. That small boost is enough to reach the next check point or not let the riders give up the ride. Similarly, selflessly offering a spare tube, some electrolites or any other tool or even giving company to the riders without giving up in the harsh weather conditions all add up to building a sense of gratitude and camaraderie towards the fellow riders, volunteers or any other support.

It is often observed super randonneurs and other experienced riders exude certain calmness and control in the ever-changing weather and unforeseen circumstances. They help other novice and amateur riders during the start points and control points on how to handle the situations as they rise and finish the challenge. More importantly, they lead by example. Almost all of the narratives of experienced riders point out that how patience, perseverance, understanding their own body, mind and energy build during the ride saw slowly translating into all the other aspects of their life. Cyclists that participate in randonneuring frequently have to stretch their physical and mental boundaries. Peak moments throughout these difficulties can strengthen psychological resilience and make it easier for people to handle stress and hardship. This feature is important from the standpoint of psychological well-being since it shows the advantages of pushing oneself in a safe and encouraging setting.

Risk and Vulnerability

The cultural construction of the risk involved in the activities is a significant theme. The emergence of the new adventure class or extreme sports provides a substantial chance of injury or even death. Danger is a constant companion for all the road users but significantly higher in the case of a bicyclist. Although one cannot eliminate all the risk in life, it is mitigated through various approaches. Catherine Palmer elaborates on how there is a narrative shift in the cultural construction of risk within the contemporary sporting context and its links to the increasing commodification of the activities categorised in the popular discourse as lifestyle sports, adventure sports, extreme sports or alternate sports (Palmer, 2004).

The perception of risk is subjective in nature. The narratives of the practitioners are very diverse. For most super randonneurs risk taking is appropriated into particular set of lifestyle experiences which form a part of their annual calendars. Risk taking behaviour is seemingly unquestionable and is a routine. Albert camus, writes “Danger makes men classical, and all greatness, after all, is rooted in risk”. For the novice riders the subjective sense of risk is mitigated at one level through the commodification i.e., wearing a helmet, gloves, glasses, cycling shorts (with protective padding), reflective vests, attaching front and back lights which gives more visibility to the rider as well as the other users of the road. At another level with the

narratives offered by the experienced riders lead to a shift in their own perception of risk involved in the activity.

The description of the activities by the popular media are more focused on the certain few accomplished riders who are portrayed as brave, fearless adventurers capable of taking extreme challenges while on the other hand presents the idea that ‘anyone can do it’. This may be true to an extent but with the proper understanding of the risk involved in the activity.

Taking lead from how rock climbers recognize danger, the dangers of randonneuring can be divided into two sets: “objective” and “subjective” ones (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 60). The objective ones are the unpredictable events that might confront a rider during the activity. For example, one of the riders expresses the risk involved in randonneuring. He speaks

“People might attack you in the middle of the night or any time for that matter. They try to ask for money. A couple of times, they hit the riders from the behind and went off on the motor bikes. It happened inside the town even in Hyderabad. ‘I was almost finishing the night brevet. I was on the necklace road, they hit me from the back and ran away. Luckily, I balanced the bike.’ When we are riding fast if someone hits, rather than getting hurt by the hitting, unable to balance the bike and getting hurt is a bigger danger.”- [I-16]

It makes absolute sense when Divya Tate says “The most vulnerable on the road are actually cyclists, more vulnerable than pedestrians and runners ... because (cyclists) are moving.” That too on typical Indian roads which are known for dangerous path ways and irresponsible driving. One rider narrates his experience of how dangerous can riding a cycle can be in an Indian National Highway. He says,

“On Hyderabad-Vijayawada National Highway I fell while doing a 600 brevet but luckily did not get major injury. Sometimes it’s very risky. All the travels drive very fast. They cross the highway border and they keep racing. I even stopped riding for some time. Even the volunteer suggested the same thing, that is to stop for half an hour or

so while the bus travels cross. Those kinds of times are very risky.” - [I-09]

He narrates another incident while doing a 600km brevet, where he and two other co-riders narrowly missed getting hit by a motor bike in the Hyderabad-Vijayawada National Highway and escaped death. In his words

“the biker went and hit the divider by himself. The biker fell far away and the bike broke into pieces. I didn’t even understand, it all happened very fast. The bike itself came and stopped right in front my co-rider. If it had hit the rider, could not imagine what would have happened. My co-rider took lot of time to come out of that. It was really scary.” - [I-09]

In another incident he shares where one of his woman co-riders, who was apparently riding one of her initial brevets and fell unconscious in the middle of the road because of improper intake of food. That incident has led her to stop randonneuring entirely.

There are incidents narrated by riders whose friends stopped randonneuring at night completely because of the bad personal experiences which made their family not support randonneuring. Here is a case,

it’s risky because of external factors, most of the rides go through highways and highways are not safe for riding. Even people don’t know the sport will say that its very risky to ride cycle on these highways, people are rash and anything can happen. That’s what I don’t like about it. My friend go robbed also. What happened was he was the last rider he was going to Tooparan. He wanted to finish the ride 300km at night time around 10-11pm and finish time 2pm...he was riding slow, two people on motor cycle realised that this guy is the last guy. So, they stopped him, asked for his phone to call their mom and ran away with the phone. From that time onwards Ans never did a brevet. maybe he did 200 with me ...and there was no night ride. he wanted to do but his wife is scared and ...won’t allow him. – [I-05]

Risk is always present in unexpected and unimaginable ways. These are the kind which are out of anybody's control. For example, one of the riders, who is over 50 years of age and have done multiple Super Randonneur series events and has participated in more than 25 brevets narrates about an accident occurred in one of his first attempts to become Super Randonneur went to Vijayawada to ride the 600km brevet as he fell ill on the 600km brevet conducted in the Hyderabad. Because of the bad road conditions, he had injured himself badly and it was his second 600km DNF (Did Not Finish). In his words,

"I met with an accident. I fell badly. I injured my face, hand and myself badly. Suddenly the road condition was not good. I was in the 'bum' (pot hole) and it was not level. I was at quite a bit of speed may be around 25-30km/hr speed...one of the riders was riding behind me. The moment I fell down, and since he was immediately behind me, he rode over me and he also fell down. But he was not injured much. I told him to continue the ride and he continued. Firstly, I checked myself personally whether I was really injured. I didn't break my leg but the finger on the hand were badly off. I didn't know whether it was fractured or not but there was lot of damage to face, right eye and I broke my glasses also and chin also. The right side portion. Immediately people coming behind me helped me. I informed the organizer and they came and picked me up. I gave the cycle to the volunteers. In fact, an ambulance was following as a backup vehicle/volunteer vehicle. They gave me the aid and then little bit of stitches. Overnight I was there and next day I rented a car and drove back with two other riders." - [I-16]

The subjective dangers are related to the skills associated with cycling. From the basic one such as balancing the bike, handling the bike with single hand while using the other to take the bottle to sip the water while riding or giving indications and cautioning the other riders following them, tackling steep climbs and riding down hills. Improving physical ability through training is a major factor which helps in increasing power and speed.

There are several instances where the cyclists have voiced similar concerns. These narratives clearly indicate the severity of the risk involved in randonneuring.

Women Super Randonneurs

Randonneuring like most other sports has very high male participation but it is observed that there is growing interest among women riders who are slowly venturing into cycling and randonneuring events in the Hyderabad. The woman cyclists are a rare sight in the city and woman randonneurs and woman super randonneurs are even rarer.

The sample consisted of twenty-three male and three female Super Randonneurs. I got the opportunity to interview three women Super Randonneurs and it should be noted that there were only four female SRs in Hyderabad Randonneurs Club by the end of 2017-18 season. That constitutes to less than three percentage of total super randonneurs from Hyderabad. The first half of the 2015-16 season saw the first female Super Randonneur and later in the same season one more female rider qualified the title. In the next season one more female rider added to the list. All three of them are seasoned randonneurs. In the season 2017-18, one of them has completed three SR events in a single season. The female Super Randonneurs gained some local media attention and there were several news articles published on their achievements.

Divya Tate, the first woman super randonneur in the country and representative of AIR for a decade, from her vast experience and observation in endurance cycling in a podcast delineates why there is such a little participation of woman in cycling. She notes that is the case not only in India but across the world. The maintenance aspect of cycling is one of the factors which requires an extra time and effort and is not only to the case of woman but to everyone comparing to running.

The other factor is traffic which is affecting the participation of cycling in general. The male dominant presence in the traffic, adds as an additional barrier which is stopping more woman to take up cycling. The roads are not female friendly as the majority are male drivers and can turn into a “hostile male environment.” Which refers to a circumstance or setting in which males, usually men or boys, foster an environment that is hostile, unwelcoming, or even destructive towards others, particularly women or individuals who do not conform to traditional male stereotypes.

People may experience harassment, bullying, sexism, or other forms of discrimination in this setting, which makes it difficult for them to feel safe or respected or valued or included.

Another most important factor according to Divya Tate is that “woman work far more than men, woman have far less leisure time than men” pointing that cycling needs that leisure time to take up the activity. She urges men to give women a helping hand, so they have more leisure time to pursue other activities. One of women Super Randonneurs expresses a similar observation,

The point number one is ability to spend more time away from family that was the fundamental criteria, which most women find it difficult to spend. supposing they have time, there should also be clarity in their mind that they want to do something for themselves. For example, it may not be I mean, we are talking about randonneuring. But women find it difficult even to spend 30 to 45 minutes for their fitness every day. The reason being, they do not have or they do not know how to start or where to stop all the while, they have been spending time for their family for their in-laws, for their parents, for their kids, for their husband, but not for themselves. 30 minutes or 45 minutes, they feel guilty that they are not with their family for 30 or 45 minutes. But this is a very big mindset which women have to come out randonneuring is on the other extreme, because the minimum is 13 and half hours. But the practice time again, is at least eight hours, nine hours on saddle as a practice. now to be able to find this time, there needs to be absolute clarity and passion, otherwise, they will not be able to go ahead and do it. It's not that they cannot do it. - [I-18]

The other considerations which could see a hike in the number of woman participants are: male participants encouraging woman in their circle to tag along to the events as spectators, volunteers there by creating an awareness and first-hand experience and friendly environments, woman centric events and offering discounts on the event fees and so on.

Reasons for the growth

The following are the major reasons for the growth of randonneuring.

The structure of the activity

One of the most significant reasons for the growth in participation is the structuring of the activity. The activity is broken into very small segments. It is clearly marked with check points which act as mile stones which indicate the rider's progress. They are pretty obvious and builds confidence slowly to move or push further and further closer to goals which in turn boosts a sense of accomplishment at each and every check point. They help in knowing how far they have come and how much is still left. It greatly helps the riders to finishing each of the randonneuring events as well as to move from Randonneur to Super Randonneur status.

Environment or eco system for cycling

Proliferation of meet-up groups for participating in a shared interest or activity such as running, cycling etc are ballooning. For the exponential growth of running culture in Hyderabad, Hyderabad Runners Club contributed significantly. Similarly, for cycling culture to grow in Hyderabad it was Hyderabad Bicycling Club, The Bike Affair (TBA), Yellow Jersey etc. took initiatives through their consistent engagement with participants by providing the facilities and commodities.

Positive peer group is another significant reason as co-riders and randonneurs help in building a positive environment. It is well known that we have mirror neurons and if we are empathetic to the feeling of the people during interactions, they are active. It is famously said “who you spend time with is who you become”, because we tend to imitate people, their habits, behaviours, actions etc. In the same line of thought, Jim Rohn, a motivational speaker said, “you are the average of the five people, you spend the most time with”. The number may not be taken literally but the essence is individuals are influenced by the people they surround with. This is especially true when the group has a shared goal to achieve and individuals who have already accomplished the goal. Randonneurs exactly fits to this kind of group.

One of the significant studies on social influence was carried by Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler. While examining the data from the Framingham Heart

Study, which covered not only medical conditions but other demographic questions. The major findings were “if a friend of yours becomes obese, you yourself are 45 percent more likely than chance to gain weight over the next two to four years. More surprisingly, however, Christakis and Fowler found that if a friend of your friend becomes obese, your likelihood of gaining weight increases by about 20 percent — even if you don’t know that friend of a friend. The effect continues one more person out. If a friend of the friend of your friend develops obesity, you are still 10 percent more likely than random chance to gain weight as well.” (Burkus, 2018)

“While the researchers looked for a variety of explanations, the most likely one appears to be norms. If your friend is obese or a friend of a friend is obese, that changes your perception of what is an acceptable body size and your behavior changes accordingly.” (Burkus, 2018)

“And it doesn’t stop at obesity. In a follow-up study, Christakis and Fowler found something similar with smoking rates. Using the same social network data they borrowed from the Framingham Heart Study, they found that if your friend smokes, you are 61 percent more likely to be a smoker. If a friend of your friend smokes, you are still 29 percent more likely to smoke. And for a friend of a friend, the likelihood is 11 percent. Perhaps the most telling study was of happiness. The two researchers found that happy friends make you happier — no surprise there. But if your friend of a friend of a friend is happy with their life, then you have a 6 percent greater likelihood of being happy yourself. Now six percent might not seem like much, but consider that other studies suggest that if I gave you a \$10,000 raise, that would only trigger about a 2 percent increase in your happiness.” (Burkus, 2018) The observations from the study completely correlates with the above research as we as seen in number of narratives as being in a group of cyclists have led to taking cycling and randonneuring and eventually into various lifestyle choices.

The Ethic of Reciprocity

The ethic of reciprocity can influence how randonneurs behave and interact in the context of brevets. As the long-distance cycling sport places, a strong emphasis on self-sufficiency, perseverance, and camaraderie.

Randonneurs frequently bike through difficult situations including inclement weather, mechanical problems, or tiredness. Applying the morality of reciprocity

entails being prepared to assist other participants who are in need. This could be lending a hand with a mechanical issue, offering supplies, or providing encouragement. Riders foster a sense of belonging and support within the randonneuring community by treating people the way they want to be treated.

In randonneuring, it's crucial to respect other riders' right to ride at their own pace and employ their own tactics. The reciprocity ethic supports treating people with respect and refraining from actions that can impede their ability to advance or enjoy the event. This involves giving others room on the road, not drafting off them without their permission, and not acting aggressively or unsportsmanlike behavior.

The success of randonneuring events frequently depends on the efforts of volunteers who offer assistance at checkpoints, control stations, and the start/finish locations. Putting the reciprocity principle into practice, riders show gratitude and appreciation for the contributions made by these volunteers.

Although the randonneuring code of conduct may not expressly specify the ethic of reciprocity, it is consistent with the community's principles of respect, gratitude, and mutual support. This is the deep ethic displayed by the randonneurs, this shows the character which may turn some of the super randonneurs to be role models. This is why may be the ethic of reciprocity is sometimes known as the Golden rule.

Randonneuring as performance

As we can understand from the discussion randonneuring is hard to categorise, it goes as broad as life itself. It is among other things, a way to know one self, to know one's limitations/boundaries, where one explores both the worlds their inner one and as well as the outer one. The narratives of the Super Randonneurs reveal that their participation is not just for the medals or the title of the Super Randonneur but a holistic experience which most of them find hard to describe and articulate. It is going beyond what they thought could do. It is about building resilience in the face of adversity. It is venturing into an unknown territory. Randonneuring is inspiring to the people around to become better and to redefine who they are. For some it helps to find the purpose and the meaning of life. Randonneuring is many things put together.

The study on randonneuring provides some evidence for transgressive sporting cultural practices and identities which are different from the many traditional pre-

modern and modern sporting cultures. The identities such as randonneur, super randonneur, are formed as free floating and self-selected by the participants.

It further adds strength to the arguments made by Kay and Laberge regarding the performance in the randonneuring context: “Performance is paradoxical – imbued with individualism and collectivism, the ludic and the prosaic, aesthetics and kitch. What emerges are tenets that contradict and co-exist; participation and competition, amateurism and professionalism. Urban play and wilderness adventure, the authentic and the constructed, the youthful and the nostalgic, the self-determined and the regulated, the resistant and the compliant” (quoted in Wheaton, 2004, p. 21). The above quote discusses the complex nature of randonneuring. The deconstruction of the ideas is essential. When it comes to randonneuring, performance is full with inconsistencies and conflicting components. It's not simple, but rather a combination of factors. Randonneuring has both individual and group components. On the one hand, it is about personal achievement (individualism), but it also incorporates group features, such as riding with others or being a part of a broader cycling community (collectivism). Ludic relates to amusement and enjoyment, whereas prosaic alludes to the practical and every day. Randonneuring involves both the joy and the more repetitive parts of long-distance cycling. The words aesthetics and kitch implies that randonneuring embraces both respect for the sport's grace and beauty and occasionally incorporates features that could be viewed as ridiculous. Randonneuring can be done with a light-hearted attitude in cities which is noted as urban play, but it can also entail adventurous rides through wilderness or difficult terrains. This aspect exemplified as one of the 600km rides in Hyderabad Randonneurs club is named as “Into the Wild”. Some features of randonneuring may be regarded as authentic and faithful to its origins, whereas others may be regarded as created or adapted to present requirements and preferences, therefore termed as constructed. While some people may embrace randonneuring with a youthful zeal, others may do so out of a desire to reflect on the past. Randonneurs have the ability to choose their own objectives and routes (self-determined) i.e., in discussion with the ride responsible and sending prior details to the organisers, but there are also guidelines and rules they must abide by (controlled).

In conclusion, from a scholarly standpoint, the quotation offered provides a solid framework for critical investigation into the complex character of randonneuring

as a sport and cultural practise. It incites scientists to investigate these contradictions and coexisting components, ultimately leading to a deeper comprehension of the dynamics and complexity of randonneuring.

CHAPTER VI: Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the thesis documents the origin and growth of randonneuring in India and Hyderabad. The experiential aspect of randonneuring is examined. Some of the key questions the ethnography tries to address are: what exactly made the activity of randonneuring so compelling to the participants? What does the randonneuring mean to the riders? What are the key elements or characteristics that are learnt from randonneuring are applied to other aspects of life?

The sport ethnography presents the cultural reality of the randonneuring to the readers by giving a detailed step-by-step process involved in moving from one stage to another. The ethnographers' lived experience brings true insider perspective and builds authenticity to the narrative, especially one informed through self-reflexivity. This research centers on the active stages encountered during a typical Randonneurs journey, providing an immersive and firsthand experiential account of the expedition. In addition to the experiential narrative, the study supplements its qualitative data with relevant quantitative information, topographical maps, and graphical representations.

The experiential ethnography is more revealing to the ethnographer, especially when studying sport. The narrative and reflexivity add to the cultural experience, making it more sensible, real and revealing to the ethnographer. The lived experience of the ethnographer is more than a useful tool in understanding the sub-culture of cycling i.e., randonneuring.

Primarily started as an urban trend, randonneuring is now slowly moving into semi-urban and rural areas. The riders participating in randonneuring events are neither professional athletes nor have relevant sports careers. Contrary to what is generally understood. They are people from everyday life, most of them having regular jobs. These people can accomplish such physically and mentally demanding efforts, i.e., riding 200 km, 300 km, 400 km, 600 km, 1000 km, and 1200 km within the set time limits with grit, self-awareness and perseverance.

Moreover, the study takes a comprehensive approach to data presentation by incorporating both qualitative and quantitative elements. Alongside the narrative, carefully curated quantitative data is introduced, enabling a more objective assessment of key aspects of the journey, such as distances covered, average speeds,

and elevation gains. This integration of numerical data not only adds rigor to the study but also enhances the reader's comprehension of the randonneurs journey, the physical demands and accomplishments.

These narratives delve into the numerous concepts of human experience, human endurance, embodiment, human suffering, motivation, risk perceptions of riders, sport identities, etc. The randonneurs stories demonstrate an incredible depth in understanding the human being's potential to achieve what may at the surface seem extraordinary and impossible activities.

Despite the challenges such as complexity of organising a brevet, time commitment requirement, deeper experiential knowledge, coordinating the volunteers, few dedicated individuals who are passionate about randonneuring are willing to take on the role of organizers. They often play a crucial role in fostering the growth and success of the randonneuring community, providing opportunities for cyclists to challenge themselves and explore new routes. Additionally, experienced organizers often offer valuable mentorship and support to those interested in taking on this role in the future.

Overall, the growth of randonneuring in cities and towns can contribute to a more diverse and widespread cycling culture in India, providing enthusiasts with a wider range of options for pursuing their passion for long-distance cycling. Desire for nature and scenic routes, reduced traffic and pollution, seeking a better work-life balance while pursuing cycling interests are some of the significant factors.

Randonneuring helps to realise the hidden potential of the riders progressively. The riders participate in it to know themselves better, to test themselves, to compete with themselves. They take complete responsibility for their actions and the freedom to define one's progress and accomplishments. They are mostly internally motivated and seek little help from outside but when they reach a vulnerable state, every small help is remembered and reciprocated with gratitude.

A positive first cycling experience that emphasizes comfort, safety, enjoyment, and a sense of achievement is more likely to lead to habit formation and a positive perception towards cycling events. As in the researcher's case and many others who continues to use cycle, the lasting first impressions of the cycling experiences. Moreover, this is the reason the cycling shops, clubs spend a great amount of time from selecting a suitable bike, with a right frame, bike fit to the initial riding experiences with great support and care. Conversely, a negative experience

characterized by discomfort, fear, or frustration may discourage future participation. There are few cases observed in the passive stages of the study where the riders who experienced theft, accidents, without necessary information and support have moved away from the cycling. Providing a supportive and enjoyable first experience is crucial for fostering a long-lasting love for cycling.

Randonneuring plays an inspirational role in the society especially in the cycling groups. Super Randonneurs get inspired by other riders, such as professional riders, and through their personal stories and conversations inspire others. They help in teaching what psychologists call a “growth mindset”. They assist in understanding certain aspects of the human body and mind. They continue to push the boundaries and redefine what is normal and extraordinary to themselves and to everyone around them. Therefore, being an example while negotiating what is possible and impossible and breaking barriers between what is ordinary and extraordinary. Randonneuring makes one realize the limitations are self-imposed and they are stretchable.

Each of these randonneurs and super randonneurs understands something more about themselves in the journey or the process of becoming a randonneur and super randonneur. They learn to face the unforeseen challenges and overcome the obstacles in their path, which helps in their life. Randonneurs find and attach meaning from the experience of participating in the randonneuring to their life.

Randonneuring like many other sports have a characteristic nature of detaching from the previous identities for the amount of time they are involved in the activity. This detaching can be understood as a relief or an escape from routine and ordinary life. While detaching they are also at the same time creating a newer identity of becoming a randonneur. For a few cyclists, it is an end goal in itself; for few, it becomes a stepping stone to add and achieve more identities. One way of looking at these is accumulation of more identities while another is getting rid of the existing older identities.

The structure of organised leisure cycling in the present scenario offers more choices than ever before to the participants. The sportive events put more emphasis on personal achievement. The sense of competitiveness of the sport is present in the randonneuring events but very different from that of the mainstream sport. The participants in these kinds of events try to compete with one's limits and focus on improving their personal best timings, and not in comparison with other participants.

It is observed from the study that Super Randonneurs most likely possess the following traits: adventurous, able to make independent decisions, self-sufficient, self-aware, more focused on themselves yet showing camaraderie, most of them hover between introvert and ambivert personality type, focus on long term goals, have patience and unfathomable endurance.

The findings of this research shed light on the financial profile and technological preferences of randonneurs in Hyderabad. The majority of the surveyed cyclists exhibit a favourable financial condition, with a significant proportion earning above six lakh rupees per annum. These individuals are inclined to invest in imported cycles priced above thirty thousand rupees, emphasizing the relatively expensive nature of long-distance cycling. The popularity of fitness gadgets and applications among respondents, particularly Garmin products and Strava, showcases the community's embrace of technological advancements for recording and sharing physical activities. Additionally, the study provides insights into the self-perceived social class of the participants, highlighting the diverse backgrounds within the randonneuring community. These findings contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the demographic and technological landscape of randonneurs in Hyderabad and may inform future studies in the realm of cycling culture and sports-related technology adoption.

The study reveals the importance of social networks, such as friends and colleagues, in driving interest and participation in randonneuring. Cycling associations like TBA and HBC have also played a substantial role in disseminating information about the sport in Hyderabad. The internet search platforms and cycling-related blogs have contributed minimally to participants' awareness, traditional channels of communication but remain as the secondary sources through which individuals learn about randonneuring.

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence for the notion that human beings tend to underestimate their own capabilities. Randonneurs' attitudes towards the challenges they face demonstrate a pattern of initial self-doubt followed by the realization of untapped potential.

By examining randonneuring we can now differentiate between other forms of cycling that may seem the same from the outside. The closer examination reveals how demanding the sport of randonneuring can be and what sort of effort one must put to attempt these events. If one is looking for larger implications, considering the multi-

disciplinary nature of sport on the personality, the inspirational role it takes, redefining the meanings attributed by the participants, its multiplicity of meanings, the changing lifestyle practices and the policy changes are all significant. Further it can reveal more about sport behaviour in different contexts, how the participants perceive pain, their attitude towards suffering and risk management. All these add to an understanding of the human behaviour in a broader environment. The ethnography of randonneuring makes it even more evident to establish randonneuring as a distinguished sport like no other. Even after a century from its inception, it remains a profound experience.

In fact, randonneuring reveals much more to the experienced than what is put in words or expressed by riders and scholars. Viewed from the outside, riding such long-distance seem extreme and uncommon even to regular cyclists. Randonneuring with its own rules and expectations, appears to be relatively unchanging even after a hundred years after its origin and spread to more than 65 countries.

Exploring cycling culture, comprehending the value of long-distance cycling, promoting healthy lives, and investigating alternate leisure pursuits are just a few of the implications of studying randonneuring in India. It is possible to classify randonneuring as a lifestyle sport. It places a strong emphasis on independence and self-reliance. It places a focus on cultivating personal fulfilment and joy through long-distance riding. Identifying and harnessing the human potential can have implications for performance and personal development across various domains of life. Further research may delve into strategies to adopt an accurate assessment of human capabilities, human independency and promote self-efficacy.

A cyclist may want to pursue becoming a Super Randonneur for a number of reasons. Here are some potential explanations: personal challenge, sense of achievement, exploration and adventure, community and camaraderie.

This sport ethnography as pointed out by Robert Sands (2002), Catherine Palmer (1996), follows a changing trend in writing ethnographies which differ from the traditional or classical monographs and formulate ethnographic strategies that confront the flow of objects and people in these post-modern times in order to adequately reflect the complexity of the increasingly fluid and cosmopolitan sites. The perceptions of cultures as individual cultures are being replaced by treating the local cultures embedded in a larger regional and world nexus. Doing fieldwork in the urbanised spaces and focused on contemporary research interests.

Randonneuring as part of global popular culture offers unique points of entry for an ethnographer or an anthropologist. Drawing from the works of Turner, Bruner and Geertz (1986) especially from the Anthropology of experience, the ‘randonneuring experience’ is considered as “an experience” different from “mere experience”, which stands out from the evenness of the other activities in the life. It further categorizes into a standard format of “a typical experience” which can be recollected to ourselves or recount it others giving a structure to such experiences.

The thesis contributes to growing literature on the sport studies in the eastern world, particularly the changing lifestyle practices of urban residents in sports and its consumption, creating multiple identities and differences from other forms of cycling. The work is in congruence with Belinda Wheaton’s (2004) work about lifestyle sports, as through this study of a sub culture or an alternative provide a knowledge also about the mainstream or the dominant sporting cultures. Importantly understanding randonneuring as an emergent, alternative sub cultural practice provides insight into relations of power between existing sports embodying different meanings and values.

Overall, in India long distance cycling is growing in popularity. India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world, with increasing purchasing power especially in the urban centres as indicated by the rise in the per capita income over the years. In addition to that with the rise of the urban population and lifestyle-related changes in terms of healthy choices, one can almost certainly see the ballooning of physical activities such as cycling which will most likely increase randonneurs and the events associated with it in the coming years.

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Appendix 1 – Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

This informed consent form is for the members who are affiliated to the randonneuring in India and whom I am inviting to participate in the Ph. D. research, titled "An Ethnography of Randonneuring: A Study of Hyderabad Randonneurs".

[Name of Research Scholar]	B. Vinod Kumar
[Course/Department]	Ph. D./Anthropology
[Name of the Institution]	University of Hyderabad

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:

- **Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)**
- **Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)**

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Part I: Information Sheet

Introduction

I am B. Vinod Kumar, a doctoral student in the University of Hyderabad. I am doing research on the randonneuring. I am going to give you information and invite you to be part of this research. You do not have to decide today whether or not you will participate in the research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask me.

Purpose of the research

Randonneuring is a fast-growing phenomenon in India in the recent years. I want to understand the event, the motivations and the experiences of the members who are taking part in the randonneuring events. I believe that you can help me by telling what you know about randonneuring and share your experiences. I want to learn how the practice has come in to practice and how is it being experienced by the members. I also want to know more about cycling practices because this knowledge might help us to learn to better understand the community and society at large.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in Questionnaire and an in-depth interview/discussion that may take about two hours. Any other follow up interactions with regarding to the research.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because I feel that your experience as a randonneur (or as a member affiliated to the randonneuring community) can contribute much to our understanding and knowledge of randonneuring practices.

Voluntary Participation

The choice that you make will have no bearing on your job or on any work-related evaluations or reports. You may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier.

Procedures

I am asking you to help me learn more about randonneuring. I am inviting you to take part in this research work. If you accept, you will have to participate in an in-depth interview with myself and fill a questionnaire.

During the interview, I will sit down with you in a comfortable place of your choice. If it is better for you, the interview can take place in your home or a friend's home. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, you may say so and the interviewer will move on to the next question. No one else but the interviewer will be present unless you would like someone else to be there. The entire interview will be voice-recorded. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except [myself and my supervisor] will access to the information documented during your interview. The recording will be kept in private.

Duration

The research takes place over a year in total. During that time, I may ask or interact with you for clarification or understanding any part of the ongoing research.

Risks

There is a risk that you may share some personal or confidential information by chance, or that you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. However, I do not wish for this to happen. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion/interview if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation is likely to help us find out more about the randonneuring culture in India.

Confidentiality

The research being done in the community may draw attention and if you participate you may be asked questions by other people in the community. I will not be sharing any personal information about you to anyone outside. The information that I collect from this research project will be kept private. It will not be shared with or given to anyone except [my Supervisor].

Sharing the Results

Nothing that you tell me today will be shared with anybody outside, and nothing will be attributed to you by name. The knowledge that I get from this research will be shared with the community and will be submitted to the University of Hyderabad to fulfill my requirement to get the degree. There might also be small meetings in the community and these will be announced. Following the meetings, I will publish the results so that other interested people may learn from the research.

Whom to Contact

*If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact any of the following:
[B. Vinod Kumar, +919441859603 / vinod.luffy@gmail.com / iambvinodk@gmail.com].
This proposal has been reviewed and approved by Prof. Dr. Romesh Singh, Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad.*

Part II: Certificate of Consent

Statement by the Participant

I have been invited to participate in research about randonneuring. I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Statement by the researcher taking consent

I have read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands the research procedure.

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Name of Researcher taking the consent B. Vinod Kumar

Signature of Researcher taking the consent _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire and Checklist

File no: _____

Personal Details

☐ Name (optional):

☐ Date of Birth:

☐ Gender: Male/Female/Other

☐ Marital status: Single/Married

☐ Region: Place of birth:

Place of work/stay:

☐ Religion:

☐ Please state your category: Gen/OBC/SC/ST

☐ Education Qualification:

☐ Occupation:

of spouse:

☐ Income (in lakhs p/a): **Not earning** **<=6** **<=12** **<=18** **<=24** **>24**

Family's: **<=6** **<=12** **<=18** **<=24** **>24**

In general, I consider my family falls under **Lower/Middle/Upper** class group.

On what basis (factors) do you consider the class

☐ Consumption (Cycling related)

Cycle(s) you own:

Details: bike (name/type)

year of purchase

Price

Bike accessories

Rider accessories

Maintenance (rough estimate per month)

Nutrition supplementation (if any)

Any gadgets/fitness trackers/Apps:

☐ In general, what percentage of your income goes into Randonneuring (a rough estimate):

Into fitness (a rough estimate):

☐ Do you watch/follow any sports, details?

CHECKLIST (for the researcher)

Any, Sports background in the past?

Can you share your first experience on bicycle? When? How? Why?

Identity:

Are you part of any clubs/organisations?

What all identities can you identify yourself with? Runner/Cyclist/Tri-athlete/

Randonneur/SR/Other_____

How do you recognise/see yourself? What_____? Why_____?

How do others recognise you? Why_____?

Family? ____ Friends? ____ Colleagues? ____

Others? ____

Introvert/ an extrovert? (20 Q's from Quiet pg-13)

How did you come to know about Randonneuring and Hyderabad Randonneurs?

☐ Family ☐ Friends ☐ Colleagues ☐ Social media ☐ Others:

Please elaborate: _____

Affiliation with Randonneur clubs

☐ Years of affiliation/participation with the HR:

☐ any other Randonneur club

How many Brevets did you participate?

☐ With HR, details: **in total: 200's/300's/400's/600's/any others/DNF's**

☐ Outstation Brevets: if yes, details _____

how is it different from HR

☐ Abroad: if yes, details _____

how is it different from HR/AIR

What were your thoughts on Randonneuring when you heard of it for the first time?

How long did it take to participate in one? and how did that happen?

Was there a change in those initial thoughts after getting into randonneuring?

☐ What was your typical week before and how did that change taking up Randonneuring?

☐ weekly cycling mileage?

What are the challenges you faced in taking up randonneuring? and how did or do tackle them?

☐ Physical ☐ Financial ☐ Mental (toughest/easiest brevet)

Did you learn the required technical skills? How important do you think it is to learn?

What motivated you to participate in Randonneuring?

☐ Preventive health measure ☐ To follow a training plan ☐ Others

Please elaborate: _____

Experiences of Randonneuring (any particular memory) your mental picture?

☐ how do you manage food/sleep/ washroom? Any particular strategies?

Thoughts on night riding experiences?

How Risky / Painful/ Fearsome is Randonneuring? Any experiences?

Best season to ride/ do randonneuring?

Thoughts about woman randonneurs?

Thoughts about the usage of types of cycles in Randonneuring? how much does it matter?

What are the most talked about aspects of randonneuring?

☐ Weather ☐ Elevation profile ☐ Mountain/hills

Thoughts on the people you meet during the brevet? What are the most common questions you encounter during the ride?

Do you plan to continue randonneuring? how long?

How do you categorize Randonneuring? (What is Randonneuring for you?)

- ☐ An endurance Sport ☐ Leisure and Recreational activity
- ☐ Fitness activity ☐ Adventure sport ☐ extreme sport ☐ lifestyle sport

What do you think are the characteristics of Randonneuring?

How is Randonneuring different from other sports? specific to Cycling?

- ☐ Long distance without support (solo rides) ☐ Cycling tours

Did you take part in any such kind of activities? Details please _____

Advantages attributed to Randonneuring. And Disadvantages.

- ☐ Health benefits ☐ Psychological benefits
- ☐ Social networking ☐ Others:

Please elaborate: _____

How did Randonneuring effect your health?

Please elaborate: _____

- ☐ Loss of weight ☐ Stress management ☐ Boosts energy
- ☐ Improve your ability to do daily activities ☐ Others:

Do you think being a part of HR has helped in building social relations?

Please elaborate: _____

Did you volunteer for any brevet's? YES or NO (if yes, please go to next Q)

If No, your thoughts.

Please elaborate: _____

What motivated you to be a volunteer?

Please elaborate: _____

- ☐ Passionate about Randonneuring.

- ☐ To give something back to the Randonneuring community
- ☐ To feel valued ☐ To gain experience and new skills ☐ To meet new people
- ☐ Free from Ego and competitive spirit ☐ Working towards common good ☐ Others
- ☐ Others

Whether Randonneuring has created an active lifestyle for you? How? Yes or No

Please elaborate: _____

- ☐ Getting up early ☐ Improve health and fitness ☐ Building social networks ☐ Others

Do you think or see any significant impact in your relationships because of randonneuring?

- ☐ within Family ☐ Friends circle ☐ At work ☐ Others

Do you think Randonneuring in Hyderabad is growing? Yes or No why? What do you think are the factors effecting the Randonneuring in Hyderabad and in India in general?

- ☐ Organizational skills ☐ Everyone treated equally
- ☐ Helping and motivating each other to stay committed to fitness:
- ☐ Others

In general, how did randonneuring affect your life? Any major changes in perceptions?

- ☐ Distance ☐ your physical capabilities ☐ others

Do you think Randonneuring inspires others (to challenge themselves? Did anyone spoke to (or see) you as inspiring? how did that affect you?

In general, how do you feel about your job? Your family?

Mode of Commute?

Do you commute using your bicycle? Yes, or No, why?

If yes, how often? If no, reasons?

What do you think are the benefits of bicycling?

- ☐ Environment friendly ☐ Health benefits ☐ Money savings ☐ greater level happiness
- ☐ Stress relief ☐ More free time ☐ Independence

Do you think Cycling is expensive compared to other sports?

☐ according to you what are the inexpensive sports/expensive/ really expensive sport.

☐ Where does Cycling and randonneuring fall? Expensive Scale 1to 10 (cheap to expensive)

Are you on the social media?

☐ How active (hrs/week)

☐ what platforms

Reflexivity / validity / replicability

Anything else do you think I am missing or you want to talk about regarding the Randonneuring in Hyderabad or India?

Appendix 3 (300km Brevet)

AUDAX INDIA RANDONNEURS - Route Card

		BREVET DE RANDONNEURS MONDIAUX APPROVAL APPLICATION FORM RANDONNEURS FRANÇAIS 1921 RANDONNEURS EUROPEENS 1976 RANDONNEURS MONDIAUX 1983
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Route Name: Hyd300 - Tour of Neelagiri	Homologation Route #: N/A
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Organizing Club: Hyderabad Randonneurs	Org. ACP Code: 601023
Organizer: Rajeev Kalva / 9948997798 / rajeevkalva@gmail.com	League / State: Hyderabad
Club Address: Hyderabad Randonneurs, C/o The Bike Affair, Plot No. 107 & 108, Sri Lakshmi Venkateshwara Nilayam, Raja Rajeshwari Nagar, Kondapur, Hyderabad-500084 TELANGANA	Distance: 302.90 Km (300 Km)
Map: http://ridewithgps.com/routes/10976391	Date: 25-Nov-2017
Starting Point Location: GVR Convention Centre - Maneguda	Starting Hour: 1600

#	C	LOCATION	ROAD MAP		ROAD NUMBER	PARTIAL KM	TOTAL	FORMATTED	
			REF No.	Co.Ord.				OPEN	CLOSE
1	C	GVR Convention Centre		RHS		0.00	0.00	D1 16:00	D1 17:00
2		At the ORR roundabout take right onto service road		Take Right		0.90	0.90		
3	C	Kongara Kalan Rd Junction underpass		Take Left		7.50	8.40	D1 16:15	D1 17:25
4		Back to service road on other side of ORR		Take Left		0.20	8.60		
5		Continue straight crossing the sagar road		Straight		6.90	15.50		
6		Join Vijayawada Highway and continue on it		Take Right		12.80	28.30		
7		Ramoji Film City		RHS		2.70	31.00		
8		Mount Opera		LHS		4.10	35.10		
9		Panthangi Toll plaza		Straight		27.50	62.60		
10		Hotel Vivera		RHS		22.90	85.50		
11	C	Kamineni Hospital		U Turn		5.30	90.80	D1 18:40	D1 22:03

AUDAX INDIA RANDONNEURS - Route Card

#	C	LOCATION	ROAD MAP		ROAD NUMBER	PARTIAL KM	TOTAL	FORMATTED	
			REF No.	CoOrd.				OPEN	CLOSE
12		Take left towards Nalgonda		Take Left		1.40	92.20		
13		Keep left and bypass Nalgonda		Keep Left		12.80	105.00		
14		Tipparthi Village		Straight		21.50	126.50		
15		Gill Punjabi Dhaba Hotel		LHS		8.00	134.50		
16		Vemulapally Police Station		LHS		8.20	142.70		
17		Miryalguda Bypass Road		Take Right		5.60	148.30		
18	C	Miryalguda Bypass Road & Sagar Rd Jn		Take Right		4.50	152.80	D1 20:30	D2 02:11
19		Haliya Police Station		RHS		30.00	182.80		
20	C	Peddavura		LHS		13.40	196.20	D1 21:46	D2 05:05
21		Hyderabad Metro Water Supply		RHS		9.10	205.30		
22		Geeha Restaurant		LHS		15.10	220.40		
23		Mallepalli		Straight		2.30	222.70		
24		Chintapally Saibaba Temple		RHS		19.50	242.20		
25	C	Mall		Straight		21.60	263.80	D1 23:53	D2 09:35
26		Yacharam Police Station		RHS		11.10	274.90		
27		Gurunak Institute of Technology		LHS		14.30	289.20		
28		Ibrahimpattam		Straight		3.30	292.50		
29		Sri Indu College of Engineering & Pharmacy		LHS		5.00	297.50		
30		ORR Jn		Straight		4.00	301.50		
31	C	GVR Convention Centre		LHS		1.40	302.90	D2 01:00	D2 12:00

Appendix 4 (400km Brevet)

AUDAX INDIA RANDONNEURS - Route Card

		BREVET DE RANDONNEURS MONDIAUX APPROVAL APPLICATION FORM RANDONNEURS FRANÇAIS 1921 RANDONNEURS EUROPEENS 1976 RANDONNEURS MONDIAUX 1983
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Route Name: Hyd400_Nizamabad_Armoor	Homologation Route #: 23040002
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Organizing Club: Hyderabad Randonneurs	Org. ACP Code: 601023
Organizer: Rajeev Kalva / 9948997798 / rajeevkalva@gmail.com	League / State: Hyderabad
Club Address: Hyderabad Randonneurs, C/o The Bike Affair, Plot No. 107 & 108, Sri Lakshmi Venkateshwara Nilayam, Raja Rajeshwari Nagar, Kondapur, Hyderabad-500084 TELANGANA	Distance: 403.90 Km (400 Km)
Map: http://ridewithgps.com/routes/9555955	Date: 16-Dec-2017
Starting Point Location: St. Martin's Engineering College	Starting Hour: 1800

#	C	LOCATION	ROAD MAP		ROAD NUMBER	PARTIAL KM	TOTAL	FORMATTED	
			REF No.	Co.Ord.				OPEN	CLOSE
1	C	St Martin's Engineering College	START			0.00	0.00	D1 16:00	D1 17:00
2		Take left onto NH7 towards Nagpur		Take Left		1.60	1.60		
3		Medchal Bus Depot	[H]			10.60	12.20		
4		Toll Gate				19.30	31.50		
5		Cafe Coffee Day	[RR]			8.70	40.20		
6		Sher-e-Punjab Dhaba	Food / Water			4.00	44.20		
7		Take exit towards Chegunta Village		Take Left		2.80	47.00		
8		Continue onto NH7 again				5.00	52.00		
9		Ramayampet Junction		On Highway		15.00	67.00		
10		ZYKA Restaurant	Food / Water	on LHS		8.00	75.00		
11		Haritha Restaurant	[RR]			14.80	89.80		
12	C	Kamareddy Junction		Take Left		0.70	90.50	D1 18:40	D1 22:02
13		Kamareddy Town	CONTROL - AUTO			5.70	96.20		

AUDAX INDIA RANDONNEURS - Route Card

#	C	LOCATION	ROAD MAP		ROAD NUMBER	PARTIAL KM	TOTAL	FORMATTED	
			REF No.	CoOrd.				OPEN	CLOSE
14		Back to NH7		Take Left		3.60	99.80		
15		Toll Gate				27.20	127.00		
16		Dichpally Police Station		On LHS		7.00	134.00		
17		Ride towards Nizamabad		Take Left		1.90	135.90		
18		Ride towards Nizamabad	Dhaba & Washrooms	Take Right		0.20	136.10		
19		Dichpally Railway station	[RR]	On LHS		1.50	137.60		
20	C	House after Ajantha Rice mill	CONTROL - MANUAL	On RHS		5.10	142.70	D1 20:12	D2 01:31
21		Railway Crossing				3.20	145.90		
22		Ambedkar statue take Right		Take Right		4.40	150.30		
23		At Signal go towards Armoor		Take Right		1.20	151.50		
24		Go Straight from NTR statue				0.20	151.70		
25		After crossing Rail under pass take right at Babu		Take Right		0.50	152.20		
26		At Ambedkar Statue		Take Right		24.80	177.00		
27	C	Mahipal Reddy Statue	CONTROL - AUTO	Take Left		1.60	178.60	D1 21:15	D2 03:54
28		Join NH7		Take Left		2.60	181.20		
29	C	SBH ATM near Pochampadu (Soanpet Village)	CONTROL - AUTO	On LHS		21.80	203.00	D1 21:59	D2 05:32
30		Take the service road and make a U turn from under		U Turn		0.40	203.40		
31		Ghar Dhaba		LHS		6.20	209.60		
32		Argul Village				25.70	235.30		
33		Jakrampally Village				1.50	236.80		
34		Sri Sai Dhaba	[RR]	LHS		12.50	249.30		
35		Take exit towards Dichpally and go to Check point		Take Left		2.60	251.90		
36	C	House before Ajantha Rice mill	CONTROL - MANUAL	On RHS		8.30	260.20	D1 23:46	D2 09:21

AUDAX INDIA RANDONNEURS - Route Card

#	C	LOCATION	ROAD MAP		ROAD NUMBER	PARTIAL KM	TOTAL	FORMATTED	
			REF No.	CoOrd.				OPEN	CLOSE
37		Return to NH7				7.70	267.90		
38		Toll Gate				2.10	270.00		
39		Country Family Dhaba				15.20	285.20		
40		Take Right into Kamareddy Town				18.80	304.00		
41	C	HDFC Bank		On LHS		3.00	307.00	D2 01:14	D2 12:28
42		Go Straight from Town & join NH7 Highway				6.00	313.00		
43		ZYKA Restaurant	Food / Water	On RHS		15.50	328.50		
44		Jeet Punjabi Dhaba				19.30	347.80		
45		Hamsa Restaurant				9.70	357.50		
46		Toopran Tool Gate				14.90	372.40		
47		Dulapally X Road		Take Right		29.90	402.30		
48	C	St Martin's Engineering College	FINISH			1.60	403.90	D2 04:08	D2 19:00

Appendix 5 (600km Brevet)

AUDAX INDIA RANDONNEURS - Route Card

		BREVET DE RANDONNEURS MONDIAUX APPROVAL APPLICATION FORM RANDONNEURS FRANÇAIS 1921 RANDONNEURS EUROPEENS 1976 RANDONNEURS MONDIAUX 1983
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Route Name: Hyd600 BRM - The Two States	Homologation Route #: N/A
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Organizing Club: Hyderabad Randonneurs	Org. ACP Code: 601023
Organizer: Rajeev Kalva / 9948997798 / rajeev.kalva@gmail.com	League / State: Hyderabad
Club Address: Hyderabad Randonneurs, C/o The Bike Affair, Plot No. 107 & 108, Sri Lakshmi Venkateshwara Nilayam, Raja Rajeshwari Nagar, Kondapur, Hyderabad-500084 TELANGANA	Distance: 601.30 Km (600 Km)
Map: http://ridewithgps.com/routes/11857395	Date: 06-Jan-2018
Starting Point Location: Decathlon	Starting Hour: 1600

#	C	LOCATION	ROAD MAP		ROAD NUMBER	PARTIAL KM	TOTAL	FORMATTED	
			REF No.	Co.Ord.				OPEN	CLOSE
1	C	Decathlon Shamshabad	START	START		0.00	0.00	D1 16:00	D1 17:00
2		Take a 'U' turn towards Shamshabad		U TURN		0.60	0.60		
3		Turn left towards Bangalore		TAKE LEFT		7.40	8.00		
4		Hill Park & Coffee Day	[F], [RR]	LHS		41.60	49.60		
5		M Food Court	[F], [RR]	LHS		6.20	55.80		
6	C	Jadcherla ATM	CP01	LHS		14.70	70.50	D1 18:04	D1 20:42
7	C	Kothakota Bypass road (National Dhaba)	CP02	LHS		53.10	123.60	D1 19:38	D2 00:14
8	C	Kurnool Toll Gate (just after crossing)	CP03	LHS		67.00	190.60	D1 21:36	D2 04:42
9		Bharat Dhaba	[F], [RR]	LHS		57.40	248.00		
10		Manjo Dhaba	[F], [RR]	LHS		38.00	286.00		

AUDAX INDIA RANDONNEURS - Route Card

#	C	LOCATION	ROAD MAP		ROAD NUMBER	PARTIAL KM	TOTAL	FORMATTED	
			REF No.	CoOrd.				OPEN	CLOSE
11	C	Gooty - RaviTheja Hotel	CP04	LHS		14.50	300.50	D2 01:01	D2 12:02
12		Take a 'U' turn towards Hyderabad		U TURN		0.20	300.70		
13	C	Kurnool Town - SBH ATM	CP05	LHS		99.70	400.40	D2 04:09	D2 18:42
14		Ghar Dhaba	[F], [RR]	LHS		20.10	420.50		
15		Pyramid Food Court	[F], [RR]	LHS		63.80	484.30		
16		Bharathi 97 Food n Fuel	[F], [RR]	LHS		30.70	515.00		
17	C	Jadcherla ATM	CP06	RHS		16.00	531.00	D2 08:30	D3 03:24
18		Take left for Shamshabad Airport		TAKE LEFT		62.50	593.50		
19	C	Decathlon Shamshabad	END	END		7.80	601.30	D2 10:48	D3 08:00

Appendix 6 (200km Brevet)

AUDAX INDIA RANDONNEURS - Route Card

		BREVET DE RANDONNEURS MONDIAUX APPROVAL APPLICATION FORM RANDONNEURS FRANÇAIS 1921 RANDONNEURS EUROPEENS 1976 RANDONNEURS MONDIAUX 1983
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Route Name: Myriad Monkeys & Pocharam 200 BRM - Summer edition	Homologation Route #: N/A
---	----------------------------------

Organizing Club: Hyderabad Randonneurs	Org. ACP Code: 601023
Organizer: Rajeev Kalva / 9948997798 / rajeev.kalva@gmail.com	League / State: Hyderabad
Club Address: Hyderabad Randonneurs, C/o The Bike Affair, Plot No. 107 & 108, Sri Lakshmi Venkateshwara Nilayam, Raja Rajeshwari Nagar, Kondapur, Hyderabad-500084 TELANGANA	Distance: 203.10 Km (200 Km)
Map: https://ridewithgps.com/routes/26825844	Date: 18-Feb-2018
Starting Point Location: St Martins Engineering College	Starting Hour: 0600

#	C	LOCATION	ROAD MAP		ROAD NUMBER	PARTIAL KM	TOTAL	FORMATTED	
			REF No.	CoOrd.				OPEN	CLOSE
1	C	St Martins Engineering College	[RR]	START		0.00	0.00	D1 06:00	D1 07:00
2		Turn right		TURN LEFT		0.50	0.50		
3		Take left at Dhulapally junction		TURN LEFT		1.70	2.20		
4		Continue straight from Medchal		CONTINUE STRAIGHT		10.20	12.40		
5	C	Zyka Restaurant	MANUAL	TURN AROUND		63.80	76.20	D1 08:14	D1 11:05
6		Get down the highway		GO LEFT		3.70	79.90		
7		Turn right onto Medak-Ramayampet Road		TURN RIGHT		0.30	80.20		
8		Take right towards Pocharam wildlife sanctuary		TAKE RIGHT		18.90	99.10		
9	C	Pocharam wildlife sanctuary	MANUAL	TURN AROUND		12.60	111.70	D1 09:17	D1 13:27
10		Turn Right onto Medak-Chegunta road		TURN RIGHT		12.60	124.30		
11		Turn Right onto Medak-Hyderabad Road		TAKE RIGHT		3.80	128.10		

AUDAX INDIA RANDONNEURS - Route Card

#	C	LOCATION	ROAD MAP		ROAD NUMBER	PARTIAL KM	TOTAL	FORMATTED	
			REF No.	CoOrd.				OPEN	CLOSE
12	C	Narsapur	AUTOMATIC	Go straight		40.60	168.70	D1 10:58	D1 17:15
13		Continue straight at Roundabout		Go straight		23.70	192.40		
14		Continue straight at Roundabout		Go straight		0.70	193.10		
15		Go straight at Gnadimaisamma crossroads		Go straight		2.50	195.60		
16		Take left onto Dhulapally Road		TAKE LEFT		1.90	197.50		
17		Take Right into St.Martins Engineering college		TURN RIGHT		5.30	202.80		
18	C	St Martins Engineering College		FINISH		0.30	203.10	D1 11:53	D1 19:30



INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY CONGRESS 2019

Anthropology for Developing India

Pathways to Policy Planning and Implementation

21-23 February 2019

This is to certify that **Mr. Vinod B** participated in the Indian Anthropology Congress – 2019 and presented the following papers

1. An Emerging Sub-culture of Randonneuring in India: A Preliminary Study of Hyderabad Randonneurs

Abstracts of the papers along with other session information was published in the Abstract book that was distributed to all the participants.

Mr. B's participation in the congress is much appreciated.

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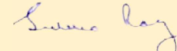
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This is to certify that Prof./Dr./Mr./Ms. **B. Vinod Kumar** has participated in the **Indian Anthropology Congress -2022**. He/ She has presented a paper **Adapting to the Urban Lifestyle through running and cycling – A Biocultural Perspective** in the *Technical Session: Covid-19 Pandemic –Challenges and Responses* at the Congress.



Prof. B.V. Sharma
Convenor, IAC-2022



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Autoethnography Of Bicycling: Reflections From The Field Experiences Of Cycling And Randonneuring In Hyderabad, India

B. Vinod Kumar

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, Email <iambvinodk@gmail.com>

KEYWORDS

Sport autoethnography, Reflectivity, field experience, Cycling culture, Randonneuring in India

ABSTRACT

The essay utilises autoethnography while adopting an explorative research strategy. The PhD thesis project on randonneuring served as the inspiration for the paper. The article details the complete process in a chronological way. It is a reflection on the fieldwork experiences. The fieldwork was carried out between August 2015 and October 2018 in Hyderabad, India. It is divided into three stages. The paper presents a detailed descriptive account of how the researcher was moving through different stages of the study. In stage 1, I describe how I stepped into the cycling world. This stage is marked by learning about the cycle and getting acquainted with the city's cycling community. This includes more of commuting and leisure riding. In stage 2, I participate in local races and venture into longer rides and eventually become a randonneur, i.e., further improving my skills, training and gauging my fitness level. In Stage 3, I have participated in the randonneuring events as a randonneur completing the Super Randonneur series (i.e., 200, 300, 400 and 600kms rides). The article provides specific anecdotes to build a better context for understanding the subjective experience of the cycling culture.

Introduction

The essay is a section of a doctoral thesis that addresses one of the main goals in comprehending India's expanding long-distance riding culture. The auto ethnography method was used to achieve the goal, which was to comprehend cycling at several levels and highlight intricate circumstances. An autoethnographic narrative of cycling and randonneuring in Hyderabad, India, is presented in the essay. The paper demonstrates how using an autoethnographic narrative as a qualitative tool to supplement other ethnographic resources, particularly when studying sporting activities, can be beneficial. Before getting to the autoethnographic account, the next part discusses the experience's conceptual application.

Anthropology and Experience

The concept of experience has been discussed by Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner through the well-known edited work titled "*The Anthropology of Experience*", published in 1986. Victor W. Turner attempts an etymology of the term "experience" in his book *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982) and presents that it has derived from the Indo-European base **per-*, which means "to, attempt, venture, risk". The Greek *perao* relates the experience to "I pass through," with implications of rites of passage. In Greek and Latin, experience is linked with *peril*, *pirate*, and *ex-per-iment*." (Victor and Edward 1986:35).

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An Experiential Ethnography of Randonneuring: A Study of Hyderabad Randonneurs.

by B Vinod Kumar B

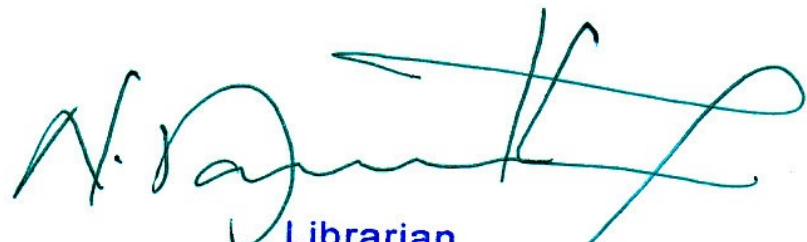
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