



What the IPL spectacle really feeds



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There is something in the human being that cannot sit quietly with itself. Not restlessness in the ordinary sense, not boredom that a good night's sleep would fix, but a structural dissatisfaction, a felt sense of incompleteness that persists regardless of what is acquired or achieved. The person who appears to have everything still reaches for something more. At rest, there is still a low hum of insufficiency beneath the rest, one that cannot quite be named or located.

This dissatisfaction is not a mystery. It is the ego's own structure: a false centre claiming to be the whole, unable to sit with itself because sitting with itself would expose the claim. What the ego will not face, it must run from. And running requires a destination.

To keep that condition below the threshold of conscious discomfort, one reaches for objects: achievement, approval, belief, tribe. And of all the objects available, a borrowed collective identity is among the most efficient: it delivers belonging, definition, and a ready-made opposition in a single transaction, with no inner work required. You simply absorb the group, and the group begins doing what you needed done.

This is what makes IPL cricket, now in its nineteenth season and carrying a total business value that has crossed eighteen billion dollars, something more interesting than just a cricket tournament. The economics have been analysed, the spectacle often criticised, and the cricket endlessly debated. But the real question worth asking is a different one, and it concerns the man watching rather than the men playing. Why does he need it so badly that none of the rest of it seems to matter? What is the franchise actually doing for him? What would he have to sit with if it were not there?

The franchise you never joined

Every season, millions of people across the country develop a fierce, protective attachment to a franchise they do not own, whose players they have never met, and whose victories produce in them a warmth they would struggle to explain. The first thing to notice about this attachment is that it is borrowed, and borrowed from nothing the spectator chose with any real attention. The team was absorbed, usually through geography, peer pressure, or proximity to a single player whose face appeared on enough billboards. And yet the resulting loyalty behaves in every way like something earned: fierce, tribal, capable of genuine aggression

towards those who hold the rival affiliation.

Outside a home stadium after a closely contested match, one often sees the winning side's supporters turning on those who came for the other team. People with no personal history with each other, no competing interests, no actual grievance, treating each other as opponents because of the colours on someone else's shirt. This is not fan enthusiasm exceeding itself but a precise illustration of what borrowed identity does to a person when it operates without examination.

The ego, by its nature, requires objects to feel real. It cannot sustain itself on nothing; it must attach, claim, identify. And the franchise is a remarkably convenient object for this purpose. It is stable, highly visible, emotionally intense, and, crucially, it requires no inner work whatsoever. You do not need to understand anything, question anything, or risk anything to absorb a franchise as your own. You simply take on the identity, and it begins immediately doing what all borrowed identities do: sorting the world into those who share it and those who threaten it.

What should disturb a thoughtful person is not that this mechanism exists, but that it is so transparent in this context and yet so invisible to those inside it. A man who would bristle at being called communally tribal will spend two months a year in an emotional state psychologically closer to tribalism than he would like to admit, organised around the batting average of a paid athlete who lives in a different country and would not even recognise him on the street.

The formula of inner poverty

There is a principle worth stating as plainly as possible, because it is the key to everything else. The poorer the inner life, the cheaper the entertainment will need to be. When the actual life fails to provide genuine engagement, genuine love, work of any real depth, the evening's match ceases to be a pleasure and

becomes an anaesthetic, something the person takes not to feel good but to feel less. The kind of entertainment one repeatedly reaches for can reveal more about inner condition than income, education, or stated aspiration ever will.

There is a quality of watching that does not leave the person where it found him. Not excitement, for excitement passes without depositing anything. Something that went deeper than excitement, an inner movement that left a residue, so that the person who attended carefully to a passage of real beauty walked out of the ground carrying something he did not have when he walked in.

What has replaced that deeper inner movement is something that asks nothing of the watcher and leaves nothing behind. One kind of engagement left the person altered; the other leaves only the demand for another unit of the same, because nothing has been satisfied, only temporarily suppressed. This is why the dose must keep rising. A six was once sufficient. Then the six needed the fireworks burst to register as real. Then

it needed the cheerleaders. Then came the fantasy sports apps that allowed the viewer to carry a financial stake in every delivery. The deeper enjoyment has left; agitation has filled its place; and these are not equivalent conditions, whatever the roar of the crowd might suggest.

The economy of distraction

That redistribution did not happen passively. The ego chose it, every evening, every weekend, over several seasons compounding into years. The franchise received that time instead. And here the irony deserves to be looked at plainly: the theft is the spectator's own, committed against his own life, and the proceeds are collected by someone else entirely.

The player whose jersey the spectator wears does not know his name. He does not know whether his child is unwell, whether his savings are stretched, whether the month has been hard or easy. The spectator's loyalty, his evenings, his emotional energy, his willingness to defend a stranger online against other strangers: all of this flows in one direction, and nothing of comparable weight returns. Yet when someone criticises the player, it is the spectator who reaches for his phone, as though an insult to the franchise were an insult to his own family. This is the furthest reach of borrowed identity: a person spending his real life protecting the reputation of someone who does not know he exists.

Political theatre, religious spectacle, franchise cricket: the products differ but the mechanism is identical in every case, each offering the ego a ready-made emotional world to inhabit so that it need not examine the actual world it lives in. The spectacle has not grown because the human capacity for joy has grown; it has grown because the ego's willingness to bear reality has declined, and the ego must administer a progressively larger dose to itself to maintain the numbness.

The match ends every night. The emptiness that sent the spectator to the screen is exactly where he left it when he sat down. Sometimes the result has gone badly and there is the additional weight of frustration; sometimes it has gone well and there is a warmth that persists for an hour. But the franchise cannot replace a self, and a borrowed loyalty cannot substitute for the loyalty a person owes to his own life, his own questions, the things in himself that have been accumulating, season after season, while the matches played on. These do not disappear because the IPL is live; they compound.

What the crowd is running from was there before the first ball of this season was bowled, and it will be there after the last wicket falls. That, not the scoreboard, is the fact that has been waiting, patiently, without fanfare, for someone to sit with it.



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