



What do IPL 2024 auctions and recent state election results tell us about India's future?

Dec 25, 2023: Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2024!

Well, we can certainly wish each other that, and also wonder if that alone would suffice to make us happy or bring us happiness.

Does it? Or, does a surfeit of cricket bring us happiness? Does excess consumption of political news and views make us all pundits or make any difference ultimately to the state of the nation? Does regular consumption of entertainment, be it movies, TV content, apps, livestreaming, streaming services or online stuff, make us better citizens or a better nation? Do we even know what true "happiness" is?

As if almost non-stop cricket is not enough, we are now fed news and features on off-field events like IPL auctions. Foreign players, we learn, have been bought for unimaginable sums of money. The overall narrative is that an IPL contract is the thing that budding cricketers should aspire to. T20 brand of cricket is what you should strive to excel at. It's best to be adaptable and versatile so as to be able to bend backwards to accommodate ODI and T20 styles into your cricketing repertory, if you are a classical sort of player best suited for long-format cricket like Tests and first-class matches.

If not cricket, pursue some other sport, if you are the sporting kind. So many choices abound these days – badminton, tennis, table tennis, hockey, soccer, basketball, wrestling, athletics, shooting, boxing, golf, chess, what have you. Even kabaddi. All are being sought to be commodified, commercialized, monetized, 'privatized' and made contract-driven.

Never mind if you are the son of an autorickshaw driver, or a pavement snack seller, or an office peon, or a single parent like a widowed mother working as a domestic help. IPL and similar commercial interests are here to make your dreams come true. You can dream big. You can aspire to rub shoulders on the field with iconic players, become a superstar yourself and rake in the big moolah.

If sport is not your cup of tea, consider becoming an actor, stand-up comedian, social media influencer, podcast anchor, startup founder, YouTube content producer, so forth.

India is now the new land of opportunity, equality, egalitarianism, equity. Bharat is future. Already the fifth-largest economy, it is on course to glory. Lost glory will be restored, now

that newly built awesome temples will be inaugurated just in time to coincide with the run-up to the 2024 General Election in May.

Do you like the above narrative? Sounds seductive, doesn't it? Has a feel-good quotient. But is reality really like that?

What happened to all those match-fixing controversies? Is cricket now squeaky clean? Do contracted players really get all that big money deposited into their bank accounts? How do IPL franchises make money? How much money do they make anyway, to be able to pay such big sums to star players? And how much does IPL itself and its parent BCCI make? What about its parent ICC? What are the details of the cricket economy? How are brands being built using sport, especially the live telecasts, webcasts? Is sport really about sport or just a platform for brands to ride where sports and sportspersons are incidental, just carriers of brand logos?

More importantly, what exactly is the purpose of sport in society? Isn't it supposed to be a condensed or compressed metaphor for life, holding lessons for all the spectators, viewers of telecasts, listeners of commentaries and readers of news? Are sportspersons setting any sterling examples for their compatriots to emulate? Are Indians drawing any lessons at all from sports and sportspersons, and implementing them in real life to pursue excellence in their own chosen field of activity?

Monster stadiums are being built all over. Are they really for the purpose of sports, sportspersons and people, or are they just a means to making more money via contracts for this project or that material supplies? Remember the Commonwealth Games scandal? Are spectators served well by the new facilities that are mushrooming in India? Are they getting their money's worth? Or, are they being exploited? Worse, are the spectators at stadiums reduced to zombies and puppets by on-site DJs and TV cameras, tricked into acting like "extra" actors, free of cost, for the large TV and online audiences? Have sports venues been reduced to some sort of cheap, purposeless lifestyle destinations to indulge in crass behaviour, vulgar nationalism or loud jingoism, without a thought spared for enjoying pursuit of excellence against all odds and imbibing lessons for implementation in one's own life?

Now, politics.

What can we, the citizens of India that is Bharat, learn from the results of four state assembly elections in December 2023? Has the template of Indian politics undergone any positive change? Or, do caste, religion, communalism and socioeconomic factors continue to have a vice-like grip on Indian polity? Have elections been rid of money power? Have voters stopped selling their votes? Have voters learned to exercise their franchise objectively, after careful analysis of both performance of incumbents and policies of



Pics of dirty seats at Wankhede during India Women's Test against Australia go viral

Pictures showing dirty seats at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai during India Women's ongoing Test against Australia have gone viral. A fan claimed that Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) forced them to sit in that particular stand. "They have only opened up one stand and they have not bothered to clean it up properly," a fan wrote on X.

contestants? Is polling scientific, devoid of booth-capture, malfunctioning or rigged voting machines? Are hustings free of speeches, promises, slogans and allegations that are divisive, deceiving or full of rancour, contempt, religious fervour? Has post-poll horse-trading become a thing of the past or is it still prevalent? Are people having a direct say in who leads them? Or, are leaders at state level selected/appointed by a select few in closed-door meetings? Are there any mechanisms that evaluate the performance of legislators and governments on a day-to-day basis?

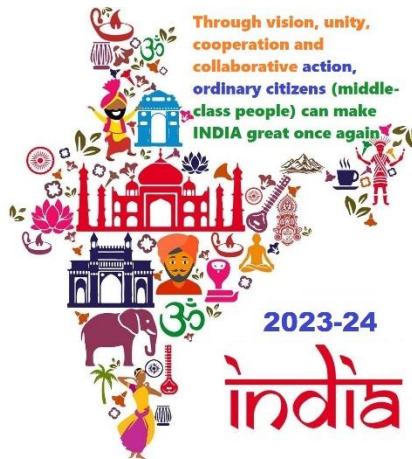
Now, entertainment.

Can anyone really talented walk into the film industries in Mumbai and other major film producing states (like Andhra, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat) and hope to become successful? Do Indians know the truth behind Sushant Singh Rajput's untimely passing through "suicide"? What's the secret behind the long-term grip of certain superstars on leading roles? Why is it that only a handful of heroes remain at the top for decades? Why is it that dynasties run not just in politics, bureaucracy and media but also in the entertainment industry (where talent alone should be the criterion)? Have Indian films evolved to be in tune with the global trends? What is the role that films, TV and other forms of mass communications should play in society? Are other societies in the world using the medium of feature films just for crass entertainment characterized by vulgar or cliched song-dance sequences? What makes movies of Iran, South Korea, Europe, China, Thailand, Japan, so forth, stand out? Is the Oscar award for *Naatu-Naatu* song really something that Indians should be proud of?

Well, the discussion above on India's three enduring obsessions – cricket, politics and entertainment – should help you to discern that the nation is not really doing what needs to be done to get off the beaten tracks and pursue real goals that alone can transform us as a society, nation and economy.

We Indians seem to have gotten ourselves into a deluded state of living, some sort of a rut that cuts us all off from reality, places us deep on the path of misplaced priorities, as if time, and opportunities associated with it, are of no consequence in this age of highly competitive globalization, the era of super digital age where super technologies like AI, big data, robotics and other sci-tech monstrosities are expected to pose existential threats to our very survival.

We seem blissful in our ignorance, and we also seem intent on continuing with our errant, disaster-bound ways, content in forgetting stark reminders of reality that hit us not so long back, during the COVID-19 pandemic period (2020-23). There are already reports of new COVID strains becoming resurgent and potentially wreaking more lethal havoc going forward. Has India built up enough hospitals with beds, doctors, nurses, oxygen cylinders? Do we have the necessary highways, railways, vaccine facilities, drug facilities, power generators? Or, are we wallowing in false pride generated by moon missions and similar "achievements"?



To find out answers to the numerous questions posed in this essay, and to find the right way forward, join us for Sunday online discussions. We, the ordinary citizens, can coalesce into a united force and come up with viable, feasible, 'implementable' solutions ourselves.

There is no point in blaming **the supply side** (politicians, bureaucrats, policymakers, business, industry, employers, content publishers, so forth). The real solutions lie on **the demand side** (ordinary people, voters, consumers, taxpayers, employees, spectators, viewers, listeners, readers).

Let's work on that front together. Let's figure out ways of uniting the demand side and making it the fountainhead of all solutions to our problems.

If you like the idea, if you want to explore it more, join us. Strengthen our team.

You will likely land a role that is to your liking – something that could potentially transform your life, change you as a person inside out, help you actualize your full potential and discover the true purpose (or calling) of your life.

We can't wait to hear from you.

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