

Not quite cricket

IPL becomes another casualty of populism over facts

With the BCCI hinting at the possibility of moving the IPL out of India the next time around, India's most successful sports franchise that inspired a host of wannabes in other sports like kabaddi, badminton and hockey has become the latest victim in the battle of propaganda over fact. In this case, with the drought in Maharashtra so bad that people didn't have water to drink, the 6 million litres of water that the IPL needed to water the pitches was enough to make it everyone's favourite whipping boy. As this newspaper pointed out even then, the 6 million litres the IPL was going to use in its matches across Maharashtra was equivalent to the water used up to produce just three tonnes of sugar—each kg of the sugarcane crop in the state requires 2,068 litres of water or double that in a state like Uttar Pradesh—of the 9-10 million tonnes produced in Maharashtra every year. While every drop of water is precious in a drought, the question that needs asking was how many villages would the government be able to give water to, and for how many days, by shifting out the IPL—the answer was very few. And while shifting the IPL out of the state, there was little discussion on how to curb the use of water by the sugarcane crop which, as everyone knows, enjoys the patronage of the state's top politicians.

In the case of Delhi's odd-even scheme, similarly, neither the chief minister nor the courts paid attention to the only scientific study, that by IIT-Kanpur, on the causes of pollution—this showed that while vehicles accounted for 9% of Delhi's PM10 pollution and 20% of the more dangerous PM2.5 pollution, with in this, trucks account for 46% of the pollution, 2-wheelers 33% and 4-wheelers just 10%. In such a situation, apart from it being obvious that restricting the use of cars would cut PM2.5 pollution by just 1%, the Delhi government refused to include 2-wheelers which polluted much more due to their far larger numbers—the obvious inference was the government was reluctant to upset the *aamaadmi* and preferred to go after car owners who are more affluent. In the case of the surge pricing by taxi aggregators like Uber and Ola, similarly, apart from the beneficial impact of surge pricing on supply, no attention was paid to the fact that for non-surge timings, the tariffs paid by customers were much lower than those for other taxi services and even auto-rickshaws—and that's not taking into account the likelihood of the autos/taxis asking customers to pay more than what was on the meter. So, on balance, customers benefitted from having these aggregators but even if they didn't, since their rates were known before a booking was made, no customer could complain about being cheated.

But, as in the case of the IPL, facts are the last thing on anyone's mind. IPL gave birth to a totally different brand of cricket—club cricket with players from across the world being auctioned and companies bidding for franchise rights—and changed the way India looked at entertainment. According to a BCCI-funded study by consulting firm KPMG, the 2015 season generated revenues of ₹2,650 crore by way of advertising and ticket sales from 17 million spectators—a fifth of which were from cities other than the host cities—at 60 matches over 44 days across 12 cities. Even hard cash, it would appear, can't beat well-orchestrated propaganda.