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That order and peace amidst the seeming chaos



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Why on a cricket field the game becomes the faith, at least during the phase of childhood

Have you ever played cricket on a playground where fifty to sixty kids play all at the same time? You may not have played in one but you must have seen one such playground, for sure.

I've played in one such ground when I was a kid. The number may have crossed 100 today in a similar-size playground. Thanks to fast urban development.

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Instantaneously, reminded my memory and took me back to my childhood days of playing cricket. And interestingly, it made me draw a parallel between childhood and adulthood, though each on a different milieu.

At first glance, an outsider will notice that it's utter chaos on the ground. There will be five to six different groups playing cricket at the same time. An onlooker will have no idea who is playing for which group. On watching closely, he or she'll be awestruck to find total order and peace amidst the chaos. What brings the peace to these kids?

Briefly, let's get back to the anatomy of the chaos. Each group is a mix of eight to 15 kids and everyone is completely aware of who the rest of the members of their team are. Each group needs just three sticks for stumps (three lines drawn on the wall does the job as well), a bat and a ball. The group will democratically decide on the rules that they abide for the game, that is, the boundary, total overs per side, team size, and so on. For example, one group will decide to have a smaller boundary but maintain a 2G, 3G (something that was invented years before the spectrum technology came to exist). For the unfortunate ones who don't know, 2G are basically runs granted. If the ball rolls to the shorter boundary, it's two runs granted.

Some groups may have a larger boundary but may play with 'one bounce catch', that is, the batsman is given out if the batsman hits the ball and the fielder catches the ball on the first bounce. Some groups play only on-side field, where the batsman can get to score runs only on the on-side field. Most groups play with no LBW. Some groups may decide to play 15 overs a side and some other may decide to play eight overs a side. Some groups may shuffle players after a game but others may decide to stick to same side for the day. Some may go with proper bowling and others may just go with throws instead of bowling. It's all the same cricket with different flavours.

Interestingly, every group very well know their boundary limits, though they are not clearly marked, even as the boundary of other groups overlaps like a complex Venn diagram. No group tries to dominate the other by resorting to violence or intimidate others by using sheer strength. No group tries to allure kids from other groups by playing with expensive balls, bats and stumps. No group canvasses others to follow their way of the game. No one group believes their way of the game is the only way to attain the bliss and the rest are not.

More important, no group ever wants or even intends to gather enough strength, drive others out and occupy the entire playground. Every group respects every other group and never interferes. On bigger occasions like holidays, tournaments are conducted on the playground. Every group plays against other and the playground is akin to a festival ground.

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game is their faith and pitch is their sanctuary. It's the sheer bliss of playing cricket within their group. The bliss brings the immense peace amidst chaos. No wonder when people say cricket by itself is a religion in India.

I don't think I need to comment on the parallel that I drew between childhood and adulthood. I do want to mention the fact that we, deep down in our hearts, search for the bliss, which we lost at some point during the transition from childhood to adulthood. Don't we all?

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