

20 **FREEDOM FROM ECONOMICS**

# When love turned gray

Every human ball being kicked around has to be stopped. A new show by artist Riyas Komu in Mumbai's Gallery Maskara tells us how we cannot move any goalpost because we are turning grass into concrete, says **Manoj Nair**



*Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,  
Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds*

**A**s you know we are about to enter a state of apoplexy. We will soon be mouthing nationalist slogans though we don't belong to any of the nations we will be shouting hoarse for. We will be screaming profane anthems, though most of us would not know the meaning of any of the syllables we pronounce. We would nearly pretend that the world is at stake. And the ball is not at our feet. Our feet would rather be hanging from our safe perches in our drawing rooms and our dreams drinking the latte of the sporting spectrum.

Don't you think then we should be inviting attention of those glued to the universal spectacle to our own backyard where some forlorn feet are kicking up dusts of despair as they push an iron ball

around? As we hear a spate of eggheadery from the lips of wonks, don't you think we should be looking at the ground beneath our feet? Where we are and where were we. Is there any difference, you may ask. That is precisely why we should look at this game that is as close as we can come to a metaphor for our nation that is at the threshold of globalization — not looking in but looking outside — waiting to welcome the trotting visitor who is bringing soccer to the smart set.

This is why we should ask what a football fan says about the self. Does it mean looking for a hero elsewhere while there are possibilities of having a homegrown one? It is true that our infectious interest is a reflection of our faux-cosmopolitanism as the game itself is so international. Ironically, we do that at the expense of our own local flavour. Anglophilia if we have an Arsenal in us; Catalonia if we have a Barcelona in us; Italia if we have an Inter inside... But

then our own clubs are cloud-capped constellations and our players are the ones who came to our last party and we chose to ignore.

Most of our children within these geographical boundaries play football. At the age of 4, 5, 6, ... they kick around a ball like thing ... till the age of 10 when destiny decides for them that there are no more throw-ins. 'It is time to move from the flat green goals to a wicket to wicket swing or perhaps a net practice.'

Have you ever wondered to what we can attribute the total orphaning of our oldest sport? Perhaps it is difficult to point fingers as those fingers are more functional changing channels and spending 90 minutes before the telly. The one and half hour that defines our identity. An identity that is shared among a universal group of faceless people. Franklin Foer says that it is scary that soccer allows you to be no longer just born into who you are. You choose it, which in turn can become a commercial property that can be

exploited by corporations. But, according to him, when slipping into an identity becomes easier then slipping out of it becomes equally easier.

So, shouldn't a beginning be made by slipping into an identity that squeals more about our immediate surroundings? The guys kicking a ball around the nearby corner shop or the ones springing from a community culture.

Have you noticed how football is a very obvious platform for political, social and ethnic conflicts to play out? Every religion it seems begins from the centerline and moves in the direction the better team takes it to. And the goalkeeper on either side has one task. To keep the ball out.

Between Subrata and Cesar lies the chasm of several seas (or Cs). In the alphabetical order C comes before S even as the C in Cesar and the S in Subrata make the same sounds. The difference, sadly, is that Cesar sounds more familiar than Subrata until he is your cousin, classmate or colleague.

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This report could have sounded like a legal document devoid of emotion or any decorative effect. But then like a free kick it took its own curve and is airborne even as the local lad struggles to liberate himself from his isolation and open the penultimate phase of his inner and outer 'homecoming' with a characteristic interplay of dream and reality. The World Cup is a dream. The banal bylanes back home is the reality.

The human tragedy is taking a spiral down the vortex of cultural amnesia. If only he was part of that team that had to give the World Cup a go by because of the team members' bare feet. Beneath those the feet the grass might have turned into thorns.

And thorns is what he can expect nearly half a century later as he is a member of the discounted population battling a stifling denial and comfortable forgetfulness that pervade his country's cultural landscape. May be there is respite or some solace in art which could

examine a post ideological aesthetics of football. It could perhaps remove his anxiety at the penalty kick.

But that isn't just enough. He is dreading those thousand odd balls rushing towards him that may take him with them behind the goal line. Subrata has a long and lonely walk back to fetch the ball back from the net.

And as he returns we can once again recall those words from Julius Ceasar:

*How many ages hence  
Shall this our lofty scene be acted o'er  
In states unborn, and accents yet  
unknown!*