

Media in the game of cricket in india



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This essay intends to argue that cricket in India has forged an uneasy juxtaposition of national, regional and global identities. By looking at the pre and post independence periods in India and contemporary time, the essay will show that these identities have differed or developed according to national or, regional global developments of the time.

2. 0 Cricket during British India

Cricket was first introduced by the British in 1721 when they were playing on a western Indian beach (Bose 1990, p. 16). The early days of cricket was a platform for communal identities following the British divide and rule policy which also involved many cacophonous inducing constitutional reforms and legislations (Stern 2003, p. 19). For instance, communalism between the Indians and Muslims found expression in the Pentagular cricket tournament in 1937 that had teams pitted against each other along their religious backgrounds (Bose 1990, p. 33.) These tensions persisted beyond the Partition in 1947 which resulted in the creation of Pakistan, as cricket in India acquired nationalistic overtones above and over the existing communal identities.

One might expect that any colonial legacy would be strongly resisted by the colonized. On the contrary, cricket was embraced in India as a national game and this should largely be attributed to Gandhi's nationalist movement which was principally focussed on non violence and love. He had urged people to accept the British for their good deeds and ignore their evils (Bose 1990, p. 17). This simply meant that cricket would generally be accepted by the Indians as one of the benign effects of the imperial rule after independence. Hence, despite deepening communalism, cricket at this stage served as a

consolation to many Indians who had been subjected to years of systemic oppression.

3.0 Post- independence : Economic developments and cricket

The end of British occupation in India marked the beginning of cricket as a vehicle for entertainment as well as the appropriation of nationalism and consumerism.

Under President Nehru, cricket became a “ tamasha spectacle” as he was an active promoter of the game. Unlike the British, the game could not be played politely before an elite crowd in India. Instead, due to the exuberant nature of the masses, cricket in India had to be celebrated like a festival with popular Indian celebrities like Dilip Kumar attending the games (Bose 1900, p. 37, 165, 218). One can attribute the festivity nature of the game to the economic development in India. Since India adopted economic socialism, a hybrid model between socialism and capitalism, masses from villages started coming to the cities to look for job opportunities (The Parliament of Commonwealth of Australia 1998, p. 3). As a result, the value of entertainment took precedence over nationalistic sentiments as cricket became a source of escapism that allowed these masses to overcome the drudgery and hardships of their daily lives. Furthermore, in the absence of one day test matches during this period, cricket was played over five days and hence became a definite source of entertainment.

Conversely, the appropriation of cricket primarily as an identity for entertainment has resulted in critics belonging to the higher strata of the

Indian society to argue that India has failed to generate a body of cricket literature beyond journalism (Sen 2005, p. 95). These critics believe that owing to the rich tradition and history of the game in India, cricket should not be confined within the spheres of entertainment but instead be used to document the progress and development of the nation. Hence, this criticism exposes the possibility of existing tensions between various classes in India regarding the general appropriation of cricket as a source of entertainment.

3. 1 The intervention of media in the game of cricket in India

3. 2 Assertion of Global/ National Identities

It would be unjust to affirm that the value of entertainment has wholly displaced the nationalistic overtones associated with cricket in India. With membership of the state being a crucial source of national identity, the Indian media has played an integral role in fostering a strong connection between citizens and the nation through the televising of cricket matches involving the Indian national team (Mahajan 2005, p. 120). The increasing commercialization of the game ignited nationalism as Indians looked towards cricket to assert their global identity. With the screening of one day test matches on television, many Indians could now bask in glory by watching their nation frequently defeat financial powerhouses and developed nations, like its former colonizer, England, at the game of cricket. Cricket therefore transformed into a barometer of a nation's self worth and a tool for global and regional dominance. For instance, in 2001, the controversial dismissal of Sachin Tendulkar for cheating in a game umpired by Mike Dennes resulted in a massive uproar in India as effigies of Dennes were burnt and the Board of Control for Cricket in India threatened to withdraw itself from the

International Cricket Council. This exemplifies the interlink between cricket and global identity as Indians regard the accusations of cheating as an insult on their nation (Crick 2007, p. 5).

The media has also been instrumental in spreading the game to the remote villages in India. As a result, smaller towns started to produce players who made it into the national team. For instance, the rural village of Jalandher is the birth place of famous Indian cricketer, Harbajhan Singh, while Mohammed Kaif hails from Allahabad (Ugra 2005, p. 88). Since the national team is made up of players belonging to various regions and religions, it may seemingly reflect the collective identity and nationalistic spirit of India. However, this collective identity seems artificial and uneasily juxtaposed between communal identities. For instance, Muslims in India are still being accused of supporting Pakistan during India- Pakistan matches (Crick 2007, p. 5). Although Guttman(2003, p. 369) argues that sports can allow ethnic or religious minorities to be part of the collective identity without forgoing their individual identities, the Indian case proves to be of contrary and suggests that it is difficult to forge a singular hegemonic national identity.

In addition, with Indian Diaspora scattered throughout the world due to globalization, the Indian media has been highly influential in helping these communities to cling on to their Indian identities through the televising of cricket matches (Majumdar 2008, p. 129). However, this has led to the questioning of the allegiance of these immigrants to their newly adopted countries. For instance, the British Conservative Minister, Norman Tebbit once proclaimed that Indian immigrants in the United Kingdom should display their loyalty to their new home by supporting the English cricket

team instead of the Indian team (BBC News 2006). This essentially puts the Indian immigrants in a predicament as they are presented with two conflicting global or national identities: India will consider them as traitors if they were to support any other country apart from India while, the countries that they live in would label them as sojourners if they elected to support India during the matches.

3.3 Consumerism and cricket in India

Next, the close intertwine of cricket with consumerism has led to the creation of many alternative identities within the nation. Firstly, the liberalization of the Indian economy and the widespread effects of the media, meant that cricket had infiltrated the lives of the marginalised middle classes belonging to many of the rural areas in India (Sen 2005, p. 103). This has resulted in the creation of a new consumerist society. These groups often do not know the nuances and technicalities of the game but adopt cricket as a reflection of their metropolitan life style and identity. For instance, these groups idolize cricketers as national celebrities and as a symbol of their metropolitan self. On the flip side, the appropriation of cricket merely as an identity for modernity might be resented by the puritans of the game who vehemently insist that the passion for the game can only be developed through the thorough understandings of its technicalities.

Secondly, consumerism is also said to have liberated Indian women's role in cricket although, the game largely continues to have masculine connotations. Women have started to religiously follow cricket due to players like Rahul Dravid and Dhoni who are adored for their good looks. This marks a move away from the ideal notion of an Indian woman who is supposed to

be traditional and domesticated. Furthermore, these women are not merely passive followers of the game. They play active roles in cricket as well. For instance, there is a female Indian national cricket team and Bollywood actresses like Priety Zinta own local cricket teams. These women signal the arrival of the new modern yet feminine Indian woman who shares like interests of the game with her husband or male acquaintances (Sen 2005, p. 105). However, there is a tendency by traditionalists to equate the modern Indian woman with westernization, therefore creating a possibility of a struggle between the values of the East and the West.

Despite the apparent liberalization of women through cricket, ideas of masculinity associated with the game still force themselves through. The female national team does not get the due recognition or exposure unlike its male counterpart. Furthermore, the presence of women in a game played and dominantly viewed by men means that these women would still be objectified and may be treated as sexual fantasies. This certainly exposes the tension between the masculine identity and the identity of the liberated Indian woman within the nation.

Last but not least, the heavy monetizing of cricket in India also marked the beginning of match fixing and gambling scandals. During the period of 2000-2001, India was embroiled in match fixing scandals following the arrest of South African cricket captain Hansie Cronjje (Majumdar 2004, p. 310). As a consequence, the national identity fostered by the game suffered a major blow as masses began to lose their romanticisation with cricket and started to doubt the performances of the national team. This illustrates that global

developments can have significant impact in the shaping of a national identity.

4. 0 Cricket in contemporary time

4. 1 Fervent nationalism (Jingoism)

During recent times, Indian nationalistic aspirations associated with cricket has transcended beyond patriotism and developed into jingoism. The nature of one day test cricket matches mean that the final outcome of the games is of the utmost importance to an Indian cricket fan. Since cricket victories have become the platform to the Indian nation's assertion in the global and regional arena, there has been immense pressure on the national team to churn out victories. Whenever the team lost, Indian cricket fans would behave in an extreme and appalling manner. For example, when India lost to Australia during a World Cup match in 2003, fans burnt the effigies of the Indian players and carried out mock funeral processions of the players outside their homes. This is ironical because it was the same fans who celebrated the success of their team which defeated Pakistan in the tournament by placing players like Sachin Tendulkar and Saurav Ganguly on a pedestal and worshipping them as gods during the Hindu festival of Shivarathiri (Majumdar 2004, p. 346). Moreover, fans have become more vocal in expressing their dissatisfaction with the Indian national team's affairs, signalling their increasing stake in the game. For instance, following crowd favourite Ganguly's exclusion from a test match, widespread protests erupted in Kolkata as fans set up road blockades and carried out mock hangings of the team coach(Express India 2005).

4. 2 India- Pakistan rivalry continues in Cricket

The political tensions within the South Asian region continue to exist since the Partition in 1947. Cricket therefore remains a battleground and a reflection of India- Pakistan's hostile sentiments with one another. Mahajan (2005, p. 117) argues that history continues to underpin the politics of friends and foes and the relationship between India and Pakistan is of no exception. The history starting from the hostility between the National Indian Congress and the Muslim League before independence, the bloodshed during the Partition and the continuing struggle over the control of Kashmir carries on to reinforce enmity between both nations (McLeod 2008, p. 1). As such, cricket cannot be played as a normal and friendly game between both teams.

Furthermore, the matches do not symbolize a competition between two sporting nations. Instead, the anathema of communalism kicks in as India-Pakistan matches become a faceoff between the Hindus and Muslims. Muslims in India are also viewed suspiciously whenever these two teams clash. Hence, this supports the view that the collective national identity forged by cricket in ethnically diverse India has struggled to transcend beyond the considerations of religion.

Besides, Indian politicians and the media have continued to exacerbate the relationship between the nations in the name of nationalism. For instance in 2003, following India ' s victory over Pakistan in a quarter final match, the ruling party at the time, Bharata Janata Party (BJP), announced that the national players need not pay income tax for their payments arising from the match (Crick 2007, p. 10). The BJP thus appropriated the win to reinforce

their communalistic sentiments and quest for a dominant Hindu ideology in India. The Indian media on the other hand, fuels nationalistic sentiments by dramatizing the matches between the nations. Newspapers often represent India- Pakistan matches with imagery of war (Chatterjee 2004, p. 625; Dasgupta 2004, p. 577).

However, attempts at mending the ties between both the nations need to be acknowledged. For instance, the India Pakistan Goodwill cricket series in 2004 was a diplomatic plan to forge a stronger relationship between both nations (Hutton 2008, p. 146). Whether cricket will propagate peace within the South Asian region or will be continued to use as a declaration for fervent nationalistic and communalist sentiments, ultimately lies in the hands of the politicians.

4. 3 Cricket continues to represent the Indian Demographic

Despite the uneasy union of various identities, it needs to be conceded that cricket continues to represent the demographic in India. To illustrate this view, the Oscar nominated Bollywood film, Laagan, will be used as an example because films play a large role in Indians' lives. Laagan was based on a real life incident that occurred in 1911. A group of bare footed Indian players from Mohun Bagun had defeated an English team in a game of soccer (Ugra 2005, p. 91). However, with certain modifications to the screen play, the filmmakers' decided to adapt the incident using the popular Indian game of cricket instead of soccer. This shows us the extent that cricket has become a modern symbol of the Indian national identity as the movie goers were able to identify themselves with the popular sport. It is highly doubtful

that the movie would have been well received by the masses if it was based on any other game apart from cricket.

5. 0 Conclusion

Cashman (1980, p. 111) argues that a cricket crowd is the reflection of the homogeneity of a nation's population. However, this must be viewed with reservations in the case of India because cricket has been a vehicle for the expression of various alternative identities. Despite dominantly representing the aspirations of a third world Asian country on the international stage, Indian cricket has also created contradicting identities within the nation itself. It is further contended that these differing identities have gone on to aggravate political tensions within the South Asian region as demonstrated by the India- Pakistan matches. It is hence concluded that India will only be able to foster a singular Indian identity through cricket if it is able to reflect each and every community's diversity in the universal (Carens 2000, p. 166-73).