

The culture and cricket media essay



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Sports play an important role in the life of millions across the globe. Not only are the social and political identities shaped through them, but it also mobilizes the emotions and channels the conflicts rooted in the society. Just like the soccer world cup can unite a divided Spanish society, a cricket match can rouse the passions of the thousands of Indian fans thus uniting them across religions. Sports form a part of the worldwide entertainment industry. The corporates have millions riding on the different tournaments and cups in the games and to increase their marketability they hire sports stars to be the brand ambassadors of their products, investing in the saleability of the game and its icon. Distinct social meanings can be constructed and deconstructed through the sports and their interplay with the society.

A few sports have now developed into social forces of unprecedented importance. Andrei Markovits has talked about the evolution of the “hegemonic sports culture” in which only a few sports become a part of the popular culture. It is “defined by watching, following, worrying, debating, living, and speaking a sport rather than merely playing it.” This is demonstrated in the following that the sports nowadays have huge following, fans live, eat and breathe their favourite sports. Cricket is one of the sports that have been elevated to being a part of the popular culture and it influences the cultural and social milieu and the life of people. Cricket has acquired an unimaginable power over the daily habits of people and as a sport has crossed the immediate consumer-producer relationship. The game of cricket has evolved over a period of time and our focus will be on its development from a gentleman’s game to the game of sledging and to the game of gamesmanship behaviour. Cricket has its cultural and historical

roots in Victorian England. The Victorian tradition of the sport defines it as a predominantly male game and its image as a gentleman's game is drawn from it. Cricket was the game associated with aristocracy while soccer has been the game associated with masses. The mark of the game has been the fairplay and the sportsmanship. The values of courtesy and chivalry were sought to be imbibed in the game. Rules were to be followed on-field and decorum was to be maintained both on and off-field. There are not rules in cricket but laws which have to be followed keeping in spirit with the nature of the game. Britain's imperialism and its bourgeoisie capitalistic culture, codified the language of the game and the rules and regulations were universally accepted. As Steve Readhead had put it that it was time to take law and cricket seriously and there is nothing as important as Cricket. A strict application of laws was expected and a spirit of chivalry inundated the game. The 18th century was important in the spread of the game due to English imperialism. The game was transported to the colonies of the British Commonwealth and the tradition of the game was fully adhered to.

Sanskritization was a theory propounded by M. N. Srinivas which postulates that the lower strata of the society seeks upward mobility in the social ladder by emulating the habits and practices of the upper strata. But what followed in cricket was its reverse sanskritization. Initially cricket in the Indian subcontinent was an elitist game patronized by the royalty and played by the upper strata of the society who appreciated the elitist culture of the game. The doyens of cricket included Maharajas of Jamnagar, Maharaja Viji of Vijaynagar, Maharaja of Patiala who belonged to the royal families while the prominent players like Lala Amarnath, Vijay Merchant belonged to the upper

social class. Till the 1930's Cricket remained the gentleman's game and fairplay was of paramount importance. But slowly changes could be observed in the way the game was played.

In the era following the first world war chauvinistic sentiments were on the rise. Feelings of nationalism increased in the people which were visible in every domain of life including the sports culture. To win the game became the number one priority of the sportsperson and this change was visible in the game of cricket too. Now winning involved the nation's prestige. ' Cricket is a game worth taking trouble over and playing well', wrote Douglas Jardine, the former England cricket captain, in *Cricket: How to Succeed* (1936), ' but like all other games there is a right and a wrong way of playing it' (Jardine 1936: 3). The changing times reflected the changing sentiments in the way cricket was played.

In 1930 Australia had scored an easy victory over England with the emergence of the legendary batsman Donald Bradman. His brilliant performance in the test series had made the English fearful. In the 1932 test series between England and Australia, the priority of the English bowlers was to contain Bradman's score. Under captain Douglas Jardine, and employed by the England fast bowlers Harold Larwood and Bill Voce a new technique of bowling was developed whereby a batsman could be contained by limiting the range of his strokes and by encouraging error. This was called the " bodyline" or " fast-leg theory". The bowlers targeted the body of the Australian batsman. The deliveries used to be led provoked the batsman which would then end in a catch to one of the six or more fielders stationed on the leg side. Thus the Australian Board of Cricket lodged a formally

protested against the “ unsportsmanlike” behavior by the English players. This test series was controversial as it engendered ill-feeling between the two countries and it also raised among the English and the Australians, questions about the interpretations that codes of cricket mean and could mean. Questions were also raised about the right and wrong way to play and these included the cultural and social interface and their relation with the game. Systems of meanings were explored in the game by both sides that had previously been left implicit.

Post the “ Bodyline” series “ The Australian journalist and cricketer Arthur Mailey pointed that ‘ something modern’ was happening to cricket. Argus newspaper explained bodyline as a portrayal of a new set of values which was a result of the modern age (Mailey 1933: 12; Stoddart 1979: 136). C. L. R. James also read the series in these terms, though he saw Jardine’s strategy as an escalation of cricketing tendencies already established by Bradman himself. ‘ It was the violence and ferocity of our age expressing itself in cricket’, he writes in *Beyond a Boundary* (James 1963: 186).” The reverse sanskritization of cricket was palpable, the upper strata of society had adopted the social mores of the lower strata. Aggression became a part of the play and victory became the aim of the players which was to be attained at all costs. As Jardine had put it “ the right and the wrong way of playing” described the ambiguity between the moral and the technical semantics, which defined the aftermath of victories in Australia. Jardine resigned as the English captain after the series, but the game lost its sense of fairplay and sportsmanship. The elitist culture was giving way to mass culture. Sportsmanship slowly gave way to gamesmanship. The spirit of the

cricket laws was replaced by the letters. Vinoo Mankad ‘ Mankaded” Bill Brown. It occurred during India’s tour of Australia on 13 December 1947 in the second test match at Sydney. Mankading is a method of dismissal in which the bowler runs a batsman out in his delivery stride. While it is a statistically rare occurrence in cricket in general, and even rarer in Test cricket, it is the clearest and starkest example of the conflict between legal formalism in cricket and an ideal of the game based on higher or more important ‘ ethical’ norms.

Sledging has become a part of contemporary cricket added by the problems of match fixing. The game shifted from being an elitist culture to a game of the masses. The commercialization resulted in the real essence of cricket being lost. Due to commercialization there has been an increase in level of competition between the teams. Though big bucks are being made by people involved yet the quality of the game is being compromised. The gentleman’s game became the game of the masses.

It is evident that there are two dominant trains of thought, one that believes in the higher order of the game, which was practised in the days gone by. Fairplay was the code of the game and the laws which were to be applied to the game reinforced the higher and truer order of the game. The hegemonic sports culture represents “ frozen spaces”. These spaces are like the ones presented by political parties and political systems which are resistant to any innovation in the system. Changes are resisted by the social and cultural forces. Sports spaces create emotional attachments and collective identifications. Tradition defines these spaces at local, national and regional level. Globalization exerts pressures on the localized sports cultures which

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they resist. Sports like politics remains local, the love that people have for their sport and their institutions associated with it like the myths, legends, colours and the pubs and bars. Thus change is always resisted due to the fear of losing these attachments and the sense of identity. But the post industrial globalization is exerting unprecedented pressure on the sports spaces. The cultural and social spaces are being challenged by the globalization. The identities and allegiances which constitute the differences in the landscape of sports and politics began to blur round the edges. Hegemonic sports cultures are becoming prolific across the globe, at pace with the development of media and pop culture which are interdependent. An example here can be given of the IPL 20-20 which in origin is Indian but has a universal following. The foreign and the Indian players are given equal respect and are admired by all. In the present age sports like cricket present a cosmopolitan culture which cannot be found in the society which is deeply divided on basis of borders and religion. Cricket provides attachments and allegiances and a new form of cosmopolitan identity. This cosmopolitan nature of the sport facilitates an acknowledgement of the best talents and it transforms the collective identities.

Like Ronaldinho and Zidane, the greatest and the best known of the soccer players, Sachin Tendulkar too is adored and worshipped by millions of cricket fans across the globe. He too has attained a celebrity status and is a cultural icon. He is a superstar in his own right and is a truly global player. He has a cultural production beyond the playing field. “ Cricket is my religion and Sachin is my God.” Is one of the sayings which can describe the mania associated with Tendulkar. Youth not only adore and worship a Tendulkar or

a Lara, they try to adopt their aggression, composure, warmth into their personality. Cricketers shape and mould the youth behaviour. They follow their slangs, dress, hairstyle and attitude. Players are globally admired and they are representatives of cultural understandings of the world's diverse societies. Often the sports spaces are the first through which migrants gain social acceptance and recognition. Hence cricket in a way is a medium of cultural exchange. Another example that can be given is of the infamous “Monkeygate Scandal” involving the Australian cricketer Andrew Symonds and Indian cricketer Harbhajan Singh. Singh was accused to racially abusing Symonds. This had led to rigorous protests by the Indian fans and there was resentment against Symonds in the Indian cricket followers. But he was accepted and adored by the fans once he joined the IPL as a member of the Mumbai Indians.

Maarten Van Bottenburg and Johan Heilbron have shown in their research on “Ultimate fighting” and other “No Holds Barred Events” that these sports had developed in opposition to the overly cosmopolitan and sportized venues. Men wanted a fight without rules without being overly regulated. They wanted to find out who the best was and who would be the last man standing without being hassled any authority and bureaucratic system. They were not there to find out who the best wrestler or the best boxer was, but they wanted to know who the best fighter was. This transformation was visible in cricket too. Cricket has always had a strong male bias among its followers and the masculine idea of the patriarchal Victorian England formed the opinions about cricket being essentially a male game. The effeminate and technical Test cricket slowly lost its sheen to limited 50 over cricket and

finally to 20-20. The shorter form of game were considered virile, no hold barred power display and excited the masses. From the leisurely gentleman's game cricket became an aggressive sport whose priority was to please the spectators. The contests used to be localized earlier but due to the quick channels of communication, these attained global dimensions by acquiring rules and regulations and television contracts.

When Bill Shankly had been asked to explain the importance of soccer, the Liverpool manager had exclaimed: " Some people think football is a matter of life or death. I don't like that attitude. I can assure them it is much more important than that." Cricket can easily be substituted for soccer in the context of the Indian subcontinent. The games can vary from country to country yet the social and cultural phenomena associated with each game are the same everywhere.