



Sports and Nationalism in Colonial India : A Cultural Weapon of Indians

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ABSTRACT

Sports are integral part of our daily social and cultural life. But Sports never got a deep and glorious place in Cultural practice or historical thought. Play is just a part of leisure, physical exercise or entertainment. But the significance of sports in Today's world is influenced in politics, society economy, culture, spiritually and even aesthetics. Much more significant and interesting than the history based on the method of Play, results or statistics of the in our social life. Different forms of nationalism, sectarianism, economic thought or culture can be clarified through the game. Historian E.J.Habswan calls sport one of the most important social practices of twenty century European life. In colonial and post-colonial South Asia as well as in India. Sport has intimately involved with larger historical processes. A Review of the social history Sports in 19th and 20th century India shows that the variations of Imperialism, nationalism, Communalism ,Colonialism, Decolonization ,Partition, Refugee Problem, Diplomacy, Commercialism, etc have been reflected in the history of the evolution of various sports. This paper has shown that Indian society and politics have shaped the evolution of sports on the one hand and sports have also influenced the socio- politics of the Country.

Introduction: - The tradition of socio- historical research on sports in India is not long. The study of sports history as an important intellectual spirit has long lagged behind in India. While in the western world the importance of play n past and present public life has been included in mainstream social science practice in the past three decades, research on the role of play in Indian society has been very limited in this country. And whatever research or writing has been done, it has mainly been Limited to cricket and Football.

This history of sports in Europe began in the 1970s . In the 1980s, it became particularly rich in the research of sociologists such as J.A.Maughan, Re Vampleu, Tony Meson, Allen Guttman, Richard Hint and others . This attempt to study the history of Sports got a useful organizational form in 1982 with the establishment of the British society of Sports history. Renewed publishers like Frank Cass came forward to Undertake the publication of the research Journal. This research journal of history of sport. This British initiative soon spread to other European countries. Since the late 1980s, sociologists from China, Japan and South Korea have been engaged in this activity. In the early 1990s ,the pioneer of the history of Sports in Europe J.A. mangan’s initiative, the” **International Research center for Sport, socialization and Society “(IRCSS)**, at the University of Strathclyde in Scotland, which has now been transferred to De Montfort University in England, was established. Chronologically, Mangan in collaboration with Frank Cass, Edited three high Quality research Journals- Culture, Sport, Society (Now called Sport in Society); Soccer and Society and European sport history Review- simultaneously began a series called sport in the Global Society, in which more than 50 Monographs and edited volumes have been published in the last six to seven years.

Objectives :- The present paper has been undertaken with following objectives

- i) This article focuses the historical background of the development of modern sports in colonial India.
- ii) This article shows how nationalism was expressed through sports.
- iii) This article shows the relationship between sports and Communalism in colonial India.

Methodology:- The study is supported by primary and secondary data. Given the nature of the current research, secondary sources have to use to gather material of this exploratory and descriptive paper. Secondary data was gathered from academic working papers currently in progress, books, Journals, newspapers, research projects and websites run by the Indian government.

Discussion: - The First historical study by an Indian on the history of the Sports was done in 1988. Jawaharlal Nehru University history student Soumen Mitra received his M.Phil. , selected research topics:- Football, Nationalism, Communalism and Sub- Provincialism in colonial Bengal. Around that time, Several enthusiastic Indian writers (Sociologists and Sports Journalists) such as Ashish Nandy, Ramachandra Guha, Arjun Appapuri or Mihir Bose started writing about Cricket. Among them, the book on the history of Indian cricket written by Ramachandra Guha's has been particularly appreciated. The most recent addition to this genre is political biography of “**cricketer Ranji** “ by Mario Rodriguez. Many non- Indian scholars have also studied the arrival of western sports in India, its European context and evolution. J.A Mashon's “ The games Ethic and Imperialism “ is an invaluable reference book. Also Edward Docker, Richard Cashman, J.Alter, Brain Stewart or Tony Mashon has done several researches on the social history of Sports in Modern India.

The New century has been a remarkable progress in the studies of sports history in India. Efforts to elucidate the role of sports in South Asian societies have been noted in the studies of a new generation of historians. Soccer in South Asia (2001), Edited by Paul Dimeo and James Mills, is a first strong step in this direction. Then in 2004, Sports in South Asian Society Jointly edited by Mangon and Boria Majumdar was published. In the same year, Boria Majumdar's book “Twenty two yards to Freedom” was published in the social history of Indian cricket. Subaltern Sports edited by James Mill fails to elaborate on the subaltern movement or participation in the history of Indian sports but the book highlights some important issues. The latest addition to Indian researchers studies of sports history.

Goalless: The Story of a unique Footballing Nation” by Boria Majumdar and Koushik Banerjee.

Historical background of the development of modern sports in colonial India:-

The spread of modern sports in India can be presented in the context of English colonial culture and entertainment practices. The policy of westernization of Indians began in 1845 with the Minutes of the Radical westernist Tomas **Mecaly in** 1835 under Governor General Lord William Bentinck, its main emphasis was on achieving cultural integration through English Education and creating English educated Indians who would be like Englishmen in behavior, taste and outlook. It was primarily this class of English- educated Indians who gradually integrated European sports in to the mainstream of Indian culture.

After the Great Revolt of 1857, the “elite reaction “to the British rule in India is reflected in the restructuring of the of the British relationship with the Native Nobility. And in this case, the English

consciously began to see and use sports like cricket, polo, horse racing or Snuker as a means of Englishization(The inclusion of sports such as cricket, Football, Hockey or Tennis in the Curriculum in Public schools and Chief Colleges ,especially in various cities of North and East India, had an imperialistic purpose and that was to " Civilize" Indians through sports, a form of “ Cultural Imperialism; can be said. J.A.Magan approaches the Question of the social development of sport in terms of the fundamental yet Complementary relationship between Imperialism and sport. According to him, Moral persuasion also Played an important role in the use of sport as an imperial tool. He emphasizes the role of Christian Missionaries, Public school teachers and civil servants in spreading the “ games Ethic" to this new relationship between games and Imperialism in Colonial Countries. But he also admits, very honestly, that the second phase of the development of traditional sports in English endeavors and projects was to gauge the response of the Indian public to it more complex work. In this second phase of the development of European sports, we can see in the complexities of the Indian process how an apparently insignificant sport begins to actively influence elements such as Nationalism, sectarianism, racism, economic Consciousness or culture.

English bureaucrats, Army officers, Businessman, Missionaries, college, school Teachers, Native princesses, western-educated Indian middle class society played an integral role in the spread of western sports like cricket or Football in India in the India in the late 19th century. The role of native kings deserves mention in the discussion of the expansion of Indian sports. But native kings are different. He sponsored cricket with purpose and interests-

- i). The Maharajas of Patiala and Gwalior saw cricket as a step towards social mobility.
- ii) The manifestation of power and power conflicts of the native kings also took place in many cases under the patronage of cricket. A case in point is the cricket rivalry between the states of Natore and Cooch Behar. Again the Maharajas of Natore felt Nationalist fervor in defeating the English on the cricket field.
- iii). How the political and socio- economic position and power struggle of the royals over cricket affected the development of cricket is a good example of the cricketing conflict between the Maharajas of Patiala and Vizianagram, which led to the repatriation of Lala Amarnath from the Indian cricket team that toward England in 1936 was done.

iv) He can see in Ranjit Singh's cricket career how cricket was used by Local kings to strengthen their personal interests and socio-political status.

V). Bengali's regional rivalry with Bengal peaked in the 1930s over sports such as cricket and Football. This Contestation over the authority of sports organizations demonstrates that sport, like politics, has its own sphere of rivalry. However, the Notion that cricket was largely confined to the upper class elite in Colonial India is not correct because the native kings were the patrons. In the 1980s, the sport had increasingly become a field of representation for various Classes Indians. The emergence of the so-called low-caste Palay Ankar brothers in Indian cricket is an example of this trend.

The social condition for the Introduction and development of Football in India, especially in Bangladesh, was different. From the beginning of British rule, Bengalis were constructed in European perspectives and writings as a weak, "disable", "inferior" Race. This characterization of Bengalis was accompanied by practical terms such as "Uncivilized", "Cowardly". Mecal's contemporary saying: "The physical organization of the Bengalis is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and more hardy breeds. Courage, independence, veracity are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavorable". From the 1850s -60s the Bengali Hindu "Elite" or gentry society largely assimilated this theory of physical weakness and attempted to revive it. Among them are Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's, Sarala Devi Choudhurani, Raj Narayan Bose, Sivachandra Bose and Krishna Kumar Mitra is particularly noteworthy.

However, the Bengalis' lack of physical strength and athleticism were attributed to his weak physique, soft-flexible legs, lack of firmness, lack of bravery and lack of self-confidence in the writings of the English. In order to get rid of the slander of weak Bengali, Bengali physical culture practice and related "Akhara" or organization started from the 1860s. Nava Gopal Mitra's "Hindumela" played an important role in the context. Later in the Swadeshi era, this movement greatly influenced the Youth and provided a direct impetus to the organization and development of revolutionary terrorism. But the impact of the arena-centered body culture was neither deep nor lasting among Bengalis. So Bengalis were looking for a way to show the English a direct example of his physical strength or arm strength. Thus, Football became a new universal expression of Bengali Masculinity and brawn.

In the above socio-historical background, Nagendra Prasad, known as the "Father of Indian Football", brought a Renaissance in the field of sports in Bengali as the organization of "Boy's Club" Friends

Club, Willington Club etc in his teenage years. Development of physical strength of countrymen was the main Mantra of Nagendra's nationalism. Shobhabazar Club, formed under the initiative of Nagendra prasad , was first to play competitively against English teams at the competitive level. Following in the footsteps of Nagendra prasad, Manmath Ganguly, Haridas Shell, and Dukhiram Majumdar tried to popularize the game in Kolkata and its surrounding areas. In addition to Shobhabazar, the royal family like Bhukailas, Banedi Laha family, the established gentleman of Bengali society including the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, Babu Samaj, Zamindar, educated Middle class were established in the second half of 1880s with the patronage and initiative of Town, National Association students union, Ariyan, Mohan Bagan, Khidirpur, Clubs like Chinsura Sporting, Mahamedan Sporting,(then Crescent Club),etc. In this early phase of the spread of football, various levels of English bureaucrats, the Army, Merchants, College- school Teachers and even the clergy took special initiatives. An important step was the establishment of the Indian Football Association or IFA in late 1892, the governing body of Football in Bengal.

Thus by the turn of the 20th century, Football had become a regular practice or expectation in the daily life culture of Bengalis. The game began as a Leisure or Amusement for European soldiers or Staff-traders living in Calcutta or elsewhere, gradually transformed from imitation to competition in the enthusiasm- enterprise – sincerity of the Bengalis. But in the 1880s and 1890s, the game of Football was a cultural medium through which Bengalis physical powers and Masculinity were reasserted and the possibility of a Level playing field of social exchange with the English emerged. In Nagendra prasad's view, however, sports had not yet become a cultural weapon or a field of resistance in the Nationalist sense. Although fighting against Lord British in physical games and there is no denying that an area of strong resistance at a competitive level through overpowering is that they prepare somewhat unsolicited.

Sports and Nationalism in Colonial India:-

The basis or character of Nationalism in colonial India was political or economic movement; it was not only confined to the frontier this fact is now universally accepted in historical circles. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth century, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist Indian Nationalism was manifested through various socio-;Cultural instruments. Language, literature, education, arts, science studies, music- dance, family and women, travel, speech, drama, sports, film- the full or fragmented expansion and reflection of the National consciousness in various forms of culture was seen in this period. A particular form of this “Cultural Nationalism “ is reflected in the practice of

Football in India as well as in Bangladesh. One of the reasons the Football among Indians at the school-College level was probably to keep the Bengali Youth away from any National movement or political activity by keeping them immersed in such recreational sports. The British did not even dream that inspired by the ideals of British Nationalism and Independence would use the royal language to propagate treason. In Football, this anti- British Nationalism took a strong form centered on Mohan Bagan. From the context of the Swadeshi movement, the game centered on Mohan Bagan became a Symbol of Bengalis wounded self- esteem, masculinity and expression of Nationalism. Mohan Bagan's Shield victory over the British team in 1911 carried this message. How the Mohan Bagan victory brought a flood of Nationalism to all of Bangladesh and how the wounded emotions and Smoldering frustration of Bengalis over the event gave rise to an Unprecedented sports- Nationalism- has been well researched in recent times. European writers like Tony Masan or Paul Demeo presented the nationalistic and ethnic significance of the Shield victory largely in the terms of the imperialist project of the " Games Ethic" and saw in this apparent success of an Indian team actually the ultimate Justification of British cultural Imperialism. On the other hand, Indian researchers like Soumen Mitra and Boria Majumdar have seen this victory as an indigenous cultural nationalist protest in the context of the Swadeshi trend of physical strength and masculinity. According to them, Shield victory left a considerable impression not only on nationalist politics but also on society cultural and economy.

Infact, the game of Football in subjugated India presented a cultural weapon to the Bengalis and Indians, through which they could defeat the British under the same principles. This united Bengali Football entity had the potential to become the bearer and bearer of a national spirit beyond caste, creed or Class. For many Football- loving Bengalis, the Football field was a battle ground to respond to the British rule exploration in political economic- social fields. During the era Freedom movement, a section of the Bengalis society was educated, intelligent and well off but hesitated to join the direct political movement. But the majority of them had no deficit nationally. Naturally, by defeating the English on the Football field. They would get an unsavory emotional struggle. This blocked subconscious sense of nationalism of many Bengalis used to be freely expressed spontaneously in the audience of the Football field or in the work of the club organization. And the English- hatred and Nationalist heat of the Bengali was expressed through the daily culture of fields.

It should be remembered, however, that this sports – nationalist entity of the Bengalis was only a reaction to the negative socio- political- economic " oppressive policies " of the British and their racist views in the field of sports. As a result of which, along with the change of nationalistic politics and the

spread of communal politics, the United Bengali sports were gradually divided or divided along communal or other social lines.

The relationship between sports and Communalism in colonial India:-

The association of Communalism with sports in colonial india can be clearly seen in the social history of the two sports of Football and cricket. In the case of Football, in the 1930s and 1940s ,signs of Communalism in Bengali Nationalist sports created an unwanted dividing line, which at times become embroiled in the fractious cycle of communal politics, taking form of social conflict and violence.

Muslim representation in sports began in 1887 centered on the Mahamedan Sporting club in Calcutta. However, it cannot be said the Mahamedan manifested communal character from the very beginning. In 1911, Muslims also enthusiastically and spontaneously participated in the celebration of the Hindu Brothers victory in the Shield victory at Mohan Bagan. But in the context of the growing influence of the Muslim league in the politics of Indian Bengal and the deterioration of Hindu – Muslim reflected on the playing field as well. Mahamedan's five consecutive league victories over English teams in the 1930s heralded the final and permanent rise of Bengal as a domestic power in Football. But it is unfortunate, the Hindu society was not happy with this victory of Mahamedan, rather in two cases the victory of Mahamedan against other Bengali Hindu party was not viewed favorably at all. According many, the club also suffered a lot of discrimination at the hands of the Hindu- dominated IFA. And that is probably why Mahamedan despite showing great achievements has been largely overlooked compared to Mohan Bagan's shield victory.

Mahamedan’s Football success contributed significantly to the rise in popularity of the Muslim league during the “Krishak Praja Party “ and Fazlul Haque rule in Bangladesh in the 1930s. As a result, the initiative to form Muslim sporting Clubs in different districts, Parganas and Rural area of Bangladesh was started. The political power of the “ Muslim league and peasant Praja Party" has made Mahamedan Quite illegal in may respects there is also evidence of government aid. Hindus naturally opposed such Governmental uniformity.

Prof, Suranjan Das, in the context the Calcutta in 1946, indicated the “self-mobilization" centered around the Mahamedan sporting Club, but was not limited to Muslims. Tanaka Sarkar has commented that since the 1920s ,the activism of sports- based Hindu physical education or voluntary organizations created apprehension among Muslims and provoked them to counter- prepare. Thus ,it would be unwise

to deny the role of sports like Football in these organization- based Hindu “ self-Mobilization “ processes in the context of Riots centered around the Football game. Attempts have also been made to trace the influence of Communalism and the problems in the history of cricket in colonial India. There is a prevailing historical perception that this C Communal factor was the main reason behind that organization of the movement against the pentagonal competition held in Bombay in the 1930s -1940s .community based cricket teams have been represented in this competition since the 1980s , initiated by the management of communal gymnasiums in the city of Bombay. The competition, organized into five community- based teams- **European, Parsi, Hilu, Muslim and the “ Rest”**- was not only popular but also extremely lucrative from an economic point of view. A larger movement against the sectarian character of the Pentagonal competition, according to the conventional historical view, eventually led to its discontinuance in 1946. The reason for this is that in the 1930d it was reasonable or possible for the Nationalist leaders and the people to allow this communal competition to continue in the context of the Gandhian secular national movement. Gradually the Indian native kings also turned against this competition as a result. This resulted in a long bitter dispute between the community gym khans and the Bombay Cricket Association with the “**Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI)** throughout the 1930s and 1940s, over the cessation of pentagonal competitions. As a result, pentagonal was eventually shut down.

Boria Majumdar has recently very logically refuted this conventional interpretation of cricket historical circles in the light of new information. According to him, the movement against the so called sectarian organization of the competition was just pretext for ending the pentagonal competition. The real reason is to be found in the political- economic background of the period in Bombay and in the new effects of commercialization, professionalization and Bureaucratization on Indian society. The immense popularity of the pentagonal competition can best be explained by the conscious investment of the professional middle class in leisure entertainment in the city of commercial culture centered around cricket. This is evidence by the fact that the contemporary mass media and newspapers occupy a considerable space in crickets. And in reality, pentagonal competition is community-based with its popularity and financial base both had increased. Boria Majumdar has shown that communal bitterness or violence arising from pentagonal matches was almost an exceptional case. Actually established in 1928s B.C.C.I when the regional **Ranji Trophy** was introduced in 1934, the competition become completely irrelevant due to the immense popularity of the pentagonal. Naturally BCCI and his directors and patrons become intensely Jealous of Pentagonal and realizing that the Ranji Trophy was to be

popularized, ending the competition was necessary, using the argument of nationalist protest against Communalism to launch an anti- pentagular movement. But almost at the same time, when the Congress government of Bombay decided to fix the time of use of the city's baths on communal basis ,there was no protest against it.

Community based- gym khaman, the Bombay cricket Association, All India Radio merchant's , numerous cricketers and even several newspapers advocated for the pentagular competition, but other regional cricket organizations and the Maharajas of Vizianagram and Patiala sided with B.C.C.I, a crusade against pentagular was carried out in order to solve the crisis of its financial existence. Nationalist forces over communalism and regional representation over community and clan based cricket in the name of national interest- the suppression of the popular and financially lucrative penultimate competition- demonstrate that the evolution of Indian cricket since that 1930s -40s was driven by new socio- economic factors such urbanization and commercialization. The forces began to take control.

Sports, Society, Politics and Economy in Post- Colonial India:-

Hockey, not cricket or Football, was recognized as the national sports in Independence India. There has been no significant study of India's dominance in hockey at the world level since the 1920s. Other sports, in which India has enjoyed considerable success since Independence, such as Tennis or Athletics, have also received special historical Research. As a result, naturally, we have to look for the influence and links of society, politics and economy in the history of the evolution of cricket and Football in post-colonial Indian as well as in the colonial period.

In subjugated India, Football first becomes a reflection of nationalism and Later of Communalism. The success of the Indian Football team at the International level in the two decades after Independence had Considerable potential for Football to become the epitome of the Indian nation- state. But regionalism and club- based Loyalties have not allowed the game to become what it is ? As a result, provincial rivalries, especially centered around the Santosh Trophy, become an alternative force to the national team concept in Indian Football gradually revolved around the competition between club teams representing different provinces or regions in Internal Club – based Football competitions. And on the other hand, the decline in the Quality and popularity of the National Football team since the early 1970s has not been Stopped even Today.

In the context of Independence and partition, a new social distinction emerged in Indian and Bengali Football. The emergence of the refugee problem in Bangladesh at the down of 1947 and later resulted in a long- term social conflict between the “Ghati” of west Bengal and the “Bengali” of East Bengal. And this conflict is reflected on the Football field between the two popular teams Mohan Bagan and East Bengal. Struggle between the two chief based on contrasting ethnic Identities, Cultural differences and emotional commonality become an Integral part of Bengali socio- culture In a larger sense. The origin and spread of this Football Conflict was mainly based on social and sub- provincial differences, but it gradually took the form of a fierce club Conflict and supporter conflict. As a result, violent Riots on Football grounds also become a regular feature. In 1980, 16 Fans were trampled to death at the Eden Gardens in Calcutta during an apparently insignificant league match between two teams. In the 1980s, on the one hand, the rise of cricket as an alternative popular sport in Bengal and India and the growing popularity of the game in view of the success of the Indian cricket team at the International Level, and on the other hand, the live world Cup Football show on “Doordarshan” and the show of better Football leagues in Europe- Latin America through satellite TV in 1990s, although the popularity of Football in this country has been greatly reduced. The significance of the Mohan Bagan – East Bengal rivalry cannot be said to have particularly diminished. Rather, the commercialization and professionalization of sports over the past decade seems to have added a new dimension to this conflict.

Conclusion:- while Indian Football as a whole has largely failed to take commercialization and professionalism in the Twenty- first century as a result of the ultimate failure of the **All India Football Association**. Indian cricket has been able to successfully commercialize and professionalize cricket since the late 1980s under the able leadership of the cricket Board. However, in the three decades after Independence, cricket become a game for the Elite and privileged class. There were several important reasons behind the transformation of this “Elitist” character of cricket in to a completely “ Mass spectator Sports “ since the 1980s . India won the world cup in 1983, jointly organized the world cup between India and Pakistan in 1987, recovered the TV rights of the board from Doordarshan in the 1990s and made a lot of money, the final successful commercialization of cricket in the subcontinent under the leadership of the Indian cricket Board in that decade. The emergence of International cricket “ icons” like Sunil Gavaskar, Kapil Dev, Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid, in Indian cricket in the last three decades above all the Shifting of the economic- political- Cultural center of cricket from the west to South Asia, led by India in the era of commercial and professional cricket- these factors. The last two decades have become a national sensation in Indian society. On international

cricket held in India over the last two decades, we have seen this emotion manifest in the Riots of the spectators on the field. On the other hand, with the successful commercialization of cricket people from all sections of the society have not only become its spectators or in indirect consumers, but cricket players from all walks of life have become successful.

The rise of Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Harbhajan sing, Zahir Khan, Virendra Sehwag, Rahul Dravid or Yuvraj Sing in Indian cricket is a reflection of this trend. Infact, if a game like cricket starts to be seen as a career option, how a society, especially a middle class society can have a silent transformation in professional and economic outlook or Character, Indian cricket is an ideal example. And if cricket or Football can be treated as an “**Industry**” and expanded, the Indian economy can be prosperous as well. But even in the 21st century, the government’s failure to consider sports in India beyond leisure and economic importance in many cases and unwanted political Interference in the organization of sports have prevented our country from remaining at the very back of world sports (Olympics or World Cup Football).

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