Cricket, Colonialism, Politics, and Globalization - The Rise of a Cricketing Nation

Susmit Gulavani, Florida State University
Joshua Newman (Advisor), Florida State University

Socio-Cultural - Other (International Sport) virtual asynchronous
Poster
Abstract 2020-234 Session: Poster Session III

Colonialism creates a new form of structure which transforms the traditional forms of culture in society (Cohen & Scott, 1996). Colonial conquests were accompanied not only by economic, political, and military hegemony but also through the dissemination of cultural and traditional practices (Fischer-Tine, 2004). Particularly, the British colonizers were instrumental in revising the discourse of civil society in India by instituting mechanisms of authority. One such cultural product which would go on to become a symbol of national identity for India was the sport of cricket. Cricket was brought to India by the British and subsequently, it became a central cultural theme of British imperialism in India (Guha, 1997; Sen, 2001). Besides, cricket was used as a business model by the British colonizers to cement the relations with their new colony (Guha, 1997; Majumdar, 2002). Further, this sport found mentions in the annals of global sporting history which transformed the perceptions of contemporary sport in India.

Given the imperialistic lineage of cricket in India, existing literature has focused on recording the origins of Indian cricket through the lens of colonialism. In colonial India, cricket was fostered through the participation of members from the affluent class. On one hand, the affluent classes, especially the ‘maharajas’, viewed cricket as a diplomatic tool to further their ambitions of gaining political prowess over their adversaries (Majumdar, 2005). On the other hand, long-standing social and business rivalry between different affluent communities led to the establishment of cricketing clubs and competitive tournaments that nurtured and proliferated the game of cricket in India (Guha, 1997). The existing literature is replete with accounts of the rise in popularity of cricket in India, but very few studies have analyzed the concoction of colonial prerogative of the British colonizers and internal politics of affluent classes in contributing to the ascent of cricket in India.

Today, cricket has become a global sport and the movement of players across borders to play in financially rewarding leagues, especially the Indian Premier League, has been instrumental in the globalization of sport (Tendulkar, 2014). As a constituent of world cricket, the Board of Control for Cricket in India, the governing body of Indian cricket, commands a hegemonic and powerful position in the world cricket where it contributes sizeably to the total revenue of the International Cricket Council, the global governing body of cricket (Devan, 2012). This has led to the creation of a new order of sovereignty in world cricket. The current study contributes to the existing literature by providing a historical account of the inception, ascent, and the rise to prominence of the game of cricket in post-colonial India. Additionally, a theoretical framework is formulated to explicate the effect of colonialism on the dissemination of sporting cultures and it’s effects on the ensuing globalizing context of contemporary sporting practices. In light of its impact on contemporary sporting culture, a better understanding of the construction and evolution of sporting cultures over time is facilitated through this study.