

The World Cup fever has died in Sri Lanka. We are reproducing this article, first published in the SRI LANKAN of August 1990, as we think it appropriate to remind our readers of a subterranean discourse within international cricket. This 'unease' between 'Asian' and 'Western' cricketing nations was manifested in the 1992 World Cup, in Sri Lankans and Indians delighting in the fact that at least one of 'us' won the World Cup.

THE BAT, THE BALL AND THE FOUL MOUTH

by Michael Roberts

The Sri Lankan cricket tour of Australia in 1989-90 has highlighted the degree to which Australian cricketers go into important matches against cricketers from the Asian world with one distinct advantage: in addition to the Bat and Ball, their armoury includes the foul mouth.

The manifest inequality and Machiavellian instrumentalism which such abuse introduces into the game of cricket has been successfully obscured by Border and others. Those, such as Arjuna Ranatunga, who protest against such behaviour on grounds of sporting ethic and gentlemanliness are represented as wimps and/or dandies from a world that is now past.

The weaponry of abuse is wrapped up in clothes of tough professionalism. Australian instrumentalism (and its inequalities) masquerades as the sturdy Australian male, a male who insists that the (little) foreigner should show the world that he can be another Australian male who can give (bat, bowl, abuse) as much as he takes. Inequality and domination are thereby legitimated.

Prof Michael Roberts teaches Anthropology at the University of Adelaide

The fact remains that the majority of Indian, Sri Lankan and Pakistani cricketers are no match for the Australian (or Briton or West Indian) in the game of verbal abuse the more so when the latter is complemented by physical obstruction (clothed as accident) by big fast bowlers.

A few Asian cricketers can cope with it all the time. Most can cope with it some of the time. But somewhere, sometime, an Asian batsman will lose his cool.

The result, not always but sometimes, is the loss of his wicket (there is *prima facie* evidence that there were at least two such cases on the Sri Lankan tour; and that is from my limited viewing experience). This, of course, encourages the Australians to reproduce these calculated tactics whenever a stand begins to obstruct this progress.

One cannot review the incidents that develop out of such tactics in isolation, as the media personnel are wont to do (witness their handling of the Aravinda-Tucker incident).¹

From the touring team's point of view, these incidents are part of their lived experience, part of their regular or intermittent victimisation by a range of Australians at both test and other levels.

From the perceptive observer's point of view, each incident is part of a pattern.

An investigative reporter would be able to discern when precisely such abuse (and obstruction) is called into play. It is when a batsman is getting on top of the bowling or when an adventurous or streaky shot has been played.

This pattern is revealing. It shows up the Machiavellian character of these acts of abuse. They are as slimy as they are cunning. They are out of the drawer of gamesmanship devised by Cardew the Cad. The honest and sturdy Australian man from the bush has, now on the cricket field, degenerated into a scheming being. The macho cult and bristling moustaches should not be allowed to cover up this fact.

Much attention has been focused on racial abuse. That is a misplaced emphasis. Some taunts are obviously racial. But black British cricketers also wield the Abusive Mouth! The racial side of the abuse has the same Machiavellian intent as the other abuse.

Indeed, it is arguable that the most effective abuse is not the racial taunt, but that which brings the Asian batsman's mother's genitalia, quite earthily, into the

→

THE BAT...

picture. The mother is a central figure in Asian culture. Such taunts have the capacity, at times, to penetrate the soul of the victim. The victimised batsman can lose his cool.

The popular Australian expectation (and defense) is that "these guys" must become tough, learn how to keep their cool. A simple solution? This simplicity is misleading. Behind this simplicity is a massive imperialism and a searing demand. It is a demand for Arjuna and his lads to totally transform themselves, to de-Ceylonise themselves.

It asks the Asians to give up their cultural values. It asks them to give up their identity. This is form of imperialist bigotry, no less powerful because it is parochial and seemingly simple.

It is for this reason that the Sri Lankan and other Asians should not meet abuse with abuse.² Apart from the fact that such retaliatory abuse is contrary to the sportsperson's ethic, the point is that it renders one into an Australian (or British) clone.

One is being turned into yet another western male, losing one's being as a Sri Lankan, Indian, Pakistani. That being is far more important than cricket. To resist such pressure towards standardisation is a greater act of resistance than scoring a century in the face of abuse. Stand as Self, Stand as Batsman.

Yet other solutions have been suggested. Ian Chappel on Channel Nine publicly

suggested that a batsman who is obstructed by a bowler should tap him on the ankle with his bat: bat against ankle rather than bat against ball. This is to answer one Machiavellian act with another. But, then, where does it stop? Somewhere in the past someone unilaterally introduced sledging (the Bradmans, Harvey, Benauds did not, after all, resort to it). That innovation became generalised into standard practice. But what is there to prevent an unilateral escalation of the contest? With T-56 or Kalashnikov as a "higher" stage of weaponry (and here the Sri Lankans and Pathans would have the advantage)?

It is time for intervention emanating from the highest levels. For some time, Imran Khan and others have been bravely pressing the ICC to introduce neutral umpires - an expensive but absolutely essential requirement.

Another item must be placed on the ICC calendar, and placed there pronto: the banishment (for a period) of players and captains who indulge in or condone sledging.

This will not be an easy step to take, inexpensive though it is. It calls for great resolve. Such resolve is essential if one is to preserve both the egalitarian principles and sporting ethic on which the game of cricket is constructed.

If the higher authorities do not intervene, there is a case for a symbolic act of liberation from a brave Asian cricketer: an emulation of a Tilak, a Dharmapala or a Ned Kelly on the cricket field in a manner which will make the authorities

wake up to the injustices that are being perpetrated and condoned by the cricketing world and its media (Jeff Wells being a notable exception).

The possibilities for symbolic violence as act of Eureka are not difficult to envisage. A wicket or a bat can be a lethal weapon. An Asia batsman could easily maim an offending cricketer permanently if he puts his mind to it. This memorandum is not presented in order to encourage such extreme steps. It is an attempt to prevent such a possibility in the future by requesting judicious intervention by the ICC so as to restore the scales of justice in cricket. It is an anti-colonial protest with the pen rather than the sword. The sword must always be a last resort.

Notes

1. Rod Tucker, medium pace bowler, was knocked for a couple of fours in one over by Aravinda de Silva. This led to his abusing de Silva who then deliberately ran into Tucker while taking a run.

2. One of the notorious stories in the cricket grapevine in Sri Lanka is about the abuse heaped on Hashan Tillekeratne by David Lawrence of the England B team when Hashan compiled a century at Galle in one of his first international games. During the game, Hashan approached Duleep Mendis, addressing him as *aiyya* (elder brother) and in a puzzled manner inquired why Lawrence et al were pouring humiliation on him. I introduce this story here to underline the different cultural idiom in which the Sri Lankans operate and to emphasise the fact that it is not solely a black/white divide.

frontier

A Weekly Journal of Opinions

Frontier criticises the critics, investigates the investigators, edits and editors, publishes the publisher's shortcomings.

Frontier is committed to honest and courageous journalism.

Among its readers are students, teachers, academics, legislators, business executives and white-collar employees; people who form opinion and often act.

Subscription Rates:
52 issues

Overseas air mail:
USA, Europe, Australia, Canada,
Japan and Hong Kong - US \$ 50.00
Asia and Africa - US \$ 45.00

Overseas surface mail:
All countries - US \$ 25

Subscription Order Form

Mail this form with payment to
FRONTIER, 61, Mott Lane, Calcutta 700 013, India

Please enter an introductory subscription
for the next 52 issues for me.
I am sending by bank draft/money order/
cheque (overseas only).

Name:.....

Address:.....
.....
.....

Signature.....

All payments to be made in favour of FRONTIER

April is the Carnival Month ... Fake Primordial Rites of Spring in a Changing Society

For 350 days in the year, Sri Lankans follow the Lunar calendar (January - December) in conformity with the rest of the world (and we think of January 1st as the beginning of the New Year), but in mid-April Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus of Sri Lanka (pretend to) revert to a primordial New Year ritual, based on the solar calendar, which is an occasion for revelry, eating, drinking, gambling and exchanging gifts. The conflict between modernity and tradition and the desire to have the best of both worlds continue. We want to modernise, to develop, to generate employment, to export our goods and to give our people a better standard of living. But we also want the Carnival. We continue to be the country with the highest number of public holidays in the world, where all work ceases in the month of April, which this year has given us opportunities not only for an endless binge during the New Year, but has also given us splendid excuses to disrupt work for Ramazan, Bak Poya and Easter.

Year in and year out, it is the media that sustains, invents and reinvents so-called tradition - tells us what to do, wear and eat, and advises us on lucky times and scolds the modern woman for not making (the labour intensive) kavun. Encouraged by the State, it whips up national fervour, with appeals to tradition and religion, making believe that the 'New Year' has a Buddhist connotation, when actually it is a simply a spring festival - common in mid-April to Southern India and Sri Lanka but not to other parts of India.

Rites of the Spring Equinox have always been observed by agricultural communities to whom the changing seasons were important. But in today's context, how meaningful are the traditions?

To the urban population the extended New Year holidays means closed shops, high

prices and many inconveniences. Not even a loaf of bread was available for nearly 10 days. Urban dwellers cannot light a real fire if they live in conditions which make a mockery (not to mention a fire hazard) of such a ritual. Only Rosy Senanayake can still pretend (in the adverts) that she makes kavun and bibikkan instead of buying a cake like the rest of us. The opening of banks on April 14th for *ganudenu* (give and take) is a joke; after which they revert back to the regular January to December procedures. This year, some columnists in the national newspapers have critically commented on and satirised the extended carnival in April. We reproduce below 'A Point of View' from the Business Page of the *Island*. (16.4.1992).

Despite slogans, rituals go on

Festivities are good and nice. Culturally and socially. They also help to keep the human camaraderie going.

Of course we are a great nation noted for festivals, rituals, carousals come what may. As the Leader writer in the *Island* aptly remarked the other day "Neva Gilunath Baan Choon..."

We do not, as a rule, miss a single festival in the calendar. And only the Guinness Book has failed to record the highest number of holidays we enjoy to celebrate this, that or the other.

When festivities begin, especially the traditional Sinhala and Hindu New Year, shops, bakeries that produce our daily bread and every other establishment, remain closed for more than a week. That has been a traditional ritual too.

The open market syndrome, competitive trade and our own concern to increase commercial activity, the government's ear-bashing slogans to export or perish, all

trade, come to a standstill during the festive season.

One wonders to what extent this modern concept of commerce and trade is consistent with the old traditional festivities that drag on for more than a week.

The dictum is, to develop, the wheels of industry must move. And they must move all the time. There can be no respite just because old tradition and custom demand a rest to celebrate - rather a long rest. Some wheels turn rusty when they return to the machines after an absurdly extended holiday.

Gone are the days when trade was a monopoly of the southern Matara man. He had his roots and family in the South but did lucrative business in the metropolis, because, as the saying went, the Matara businessman was born with native cunning and shrewd business acumen and knew all the games in the trade.

So all the Matara Kades remained closed until they daubed the holy oil on their enterprising heads at the auspicious hour, set out to resume business at the auspicious time, and until then, the urban consumer twiddled his thumbs with an empty larder.

But the scenario has changed. The Matara entrepreneur no longer controls the economy and the business. Yet, the age-old traditions, customs and rituals, continue. Good, the nationalist and the chauvinist would say. Pretty bad, the consumer would lament. Bad for business but good for culture, you could almost hear the man in between utter.

So, let us have more festivities, close shops as long as we want and to hell with business and economy!

Captive, Are You Awake?

Between dark heaven and earth, a cry heaves
Through silent night:
“Captive, are you awake?”
Can he sleep or is wakefulness his prison?
Something burns in his head.
Every moment, in each instant of his life’s term
He hears the ring of shackles, his solitude.
Into the blind hold
 Of his cell
 The sun like a dream
Comes to assert his presence. What cruelty it is
 To ask the eternally sleepless,
“Captive, are you awake!”

Wakeful through time, his fierce hard face
Through the bars directs its gaze.
Below his brows
Burn two arrows of questions.
Removed entirely from Nature, his eyes scorch the dark.
At private arts of love, of commerce, thirst, greed,
 And at the deep somnolence of humanity’s playhouse
He flings his echoing question:
“Are *you* free? Free?”

Sunil Gangopadhyay
from *CITY OF MEMORIES*

translated from the Bengali by
Kalyan Ray and Bonnie MacDougall