

between these two states, but also through footage of the symbolic ritual confrontation played out at one of the border gates in our own day. Here, in a striking Indic version of the *haka*, Indian and Pakistani soldiers with bloated chests and (rather similar) beards strut and goose-step their hostility to each other in the very best of pantomime. A very serious symbolic caricature, this. What better contrast than the images of Pakistani and Indian cricketers comfortably lounging together with arms around shoulders as pals in the same team as they fronted up against the Sri Lankan side as part of their 1996 World Cup diplomacy, a slap in the face of those sides that saw Sri Lanka as a place too dangerous to visit.

And surely one of the best political moments in cricket was that occasion in 1998 when the Pakistani team beat the Indians in a pulsating, roller-coaster game at Chennai (Madras) and was applauded by the appreciative crowd of die-hard opponents as they jogged around on a victory lap. A pregnant moment this, a tale that had cheered me immensely when the news got around and which I now felt privileged to see on the screen. Here, then, was the spirit of cricket extending beyond the immediate protagonists to its wider circle of watchers. Long may that moment live. And may that same spirit circulate, take root and blossom. Out, out sordid betting man, you cheating man. ■

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MURALI'S MATCH: COMMUNALISM AND THE OVAL

Chris Searle

He bowled with one of the strangest actions in living and written memory. His bowling arm bent through a hereditary deformity, his double-jointed wrist putting his delivery hand at right angles to his forearm, a quivering flick of his braceleted wrist as he let go of the ball, a flight that looped and buzzed, the impact of the ball on the turf taking sudden and unconscionable directions at prodigious angles. Thus did Muttiah Muralitharan, a confectioner's son from Kandy, Sri Lanka, confound the England batsmen at London's Oval cricket ground in August 1998. His match figures of sixteen wickets for 220 runs, including nine for sixty-five in England's second innings, provoked a landslide of the home nation's batting and a famous victory in what was only Sri Lanka's second test match on English soil. It set the poetic impulses of the cricket writers racing. David Hopps of the *Guardian* wrote of Muralitharan's 'wrist like a revolving door,'¹ while Peter Roebuck of *The Cricketer* declared that 'he made the ball fall like a shot bird.'²

Although a caption under a *Guardian* photo of the 'destroyer' bowler who 'beat England virtually single-handed and double jointed' was something of an exaggeration, his contribution was unique and immense.³ It was, as the paper reported, sporting achievement of 'sheer genius,' shared by his teammates. There was the patient, classic century by batsman Aravinda de Silva, paired with the explosive double century by opener Sanath Jayasuriya, full of original stroke play and an inventive batting choreography, as Sri Lanka in its character as Rohan Kanhai's innovations had been so effusively Guyanese and Caribbean in the 1960s. The two sixes that Jayasuriya hit in his brief second innings of twenty-four to take his country's score past that of England were shots that were invented in the moments that they were executed. No one watching had seen their like before: an audacious flick to leg off Fraser that soared over the ropes towards Vauxhall Station and a square cut off Hollioake carved out momentarily in mid-air as Jayasuriya took flight on the spot and propelled his bat to meet the

ball with a beautiful but untrammelled force. It was cricket in creative process, an innings as workshop. Here were cricketing moments to last a lifetime, as were the lightning reflexes and speared throw of Upul Chandana that ran out Alec Stewart in England's second innings.

It was a victory of outstanding all-round excellence from an international team the *Guardian* leader writer described as 'the most thrilling' in world cricket. But how had the team been treated by their old imperial rulers and the game of cricket they still controlled? In 1996, the Sri Lankans had become world champions of the one-day game, yet, as the *Guardian* leader continued, in 1998, 'they were only allowed to play in a one-day tournament if the South Africans took part as well, as a sort of chaperon and they were granted just the one measly test yet again.'⁴ And, as the Sri Lankans' performance and result revealed, the really measly element was some of their English hosts' response to their brilliance. 'There is also the vague smell of (probably subconscious) racism,' the *Guardian* went on:

Much safer to ask the (still mainly white) South Africans to play a full series than the little brown men with the unpronounceable names. They are still not pronounced right. For the first time in memory, neither the BBC radio nor television had a commentator from the visiting country. It was a symbol of our attitude towards Sri Lanka. Defeat serves us right.

The writer was referring to the one test match offered to Sri Lanka, tacked on to the full series of five tests that had been given to the post-apartheid, though still predominantly white, South African team. But, in the aftermath of Sri Lanka's victory, other draughts of racism were felt blowing across English cricket. David 'Bumble' Lloyd, England's coach, was quoted in the *Daily Mail* as declaring, 'I have my opinion and will make it known to the authorities. That

is as far as I will go. We have a leg-spinner with an orthodox action. They have an off-spinner with an unorthodox action.⁵ This was roundly interpreted across the cricket world as an innuendo attacking the legitimacy of Muralitharan's bowling action, suggesting that he was 'throwing' the ball against the laws of the game, rather than 'bowling' it. Although these 'splutterings,' as 'Bouncer' in *The Cricketer*⁶ called them, were seen as the response of a defeated and piqued eccentric and Lloyd was reprimanded by the England Cricket Board,⁷ they were both hurtful and offensive to the Sri Lankans. Muralitharan's action had been exhaustively examined by the International Cricket Council, the sport's governing body. He was repeatedly photographed from six different angles at 1,000 frames a second by a study group from the University of Western Australia and was fully cleared. His examiners declared that any resemblance to throwing was an 'optical illusion'⁸ caused by the deformity from birth in both his arms which prevented his elbow being fully straightened. The accusation of being a 'chucker' had temporarily dented his confidence, but had not prevented him from reaching over 200 wickets from a mere forty-two test matches, a remarkable record. (By January 2001, that total stood at more than 300 wickets, as reported in the *Guardian* of 1 January).

Lloyd's underhand suggestions were strongly refuted by the majority of cricket writers, with the exception of Peter Hayter of the *Mail On Sunday*⁹ and dramatically contradicted by the glowing praise for Muralitharan from the England captain, Alec Stewart, who saluted the bowler's achievement. 'They out-played us, and one bloke bowled magnificently,' he told *The Times*.¹⁰ 'He spun the ball more than any spinner I have ever known. He is a special bowler, in a league of his own.'¹¹ Yet even in the overwhelming accolades given to Muralitharan, Jayasuriya and de Silva, a close reading revealed a discomfiting tone; the old, pervasive undercurrents of imperial racism were still flowing, however deep beneath the surface. Despite his acknowledgement of Sri Lanka's 'charming team' and Muralitharan, *The Times'* cricket correspondent Michael Henderson, writing in *The Cricketer*, applauded the 'true craft' of brilliant off-spinners. 'No matter where they come from, they should be applauded,' he declared.¹² But why should 'where they come from' be an issue at all?

Even the official souvenir programme of the Oval Test Match introduced Muralitharan as a 'cricketing freak' – recalling the description given of black New Zealand rugby match-winner Jonah Lomu by 1995 England World Cup captain Will Carling. Lomu, declared Carling, was also a 'freak' who had won the World Cup for New Zealand. And amid the writing about Muralitharan were strange, irrational statements coming from the 'voice of cricket' and the world's best-selling cricket journal, almost as if there were something devilish about him, some dark, primitive power from 'out there' that he was fixing on English batsmen. Here is Peter Roebuck writing in *The Cricketer*, under the title 'Sri Lankan sorcerer':

At any moment one expected a black cat to fly by or a witch to start stirring a brew. This was not the sorcerer's apprentice, it was the sorcerer himself, weaving spells, uttering his odes... At times he might have been working to the beat of jungle drums. And all the while the sorcerer wheeled away, his mischievous grin lightening his face, flinging the ball into the air, hiding it in his hands as he ran into bowl, gripping it with his middle fingers and all the while creating the impression of malevolence.¹³

An extraordinary piece of writing, this. It imbues the bowler and Roebuck goes on to elaborate – with the power of 'mystique' and 'atavistic darkness' which the writer continues to a similar potency that he has detected in the former Pakistani spinner, Abdul Qadir, and an unnamed 'youngster' who is 'emerging in India.' No comparisons are drawn with outstanding white spinners like Laker of England, Warne or Grinnett of Australia or Tayfield of South Africa. It is as if this primal and uncanny power is something of the Orient, evincing a capacity which is beyond our comprehension as English cricketers, combined, of course, with Muralitharan's freakish correction of physical abilities. Similar attributes were projected on to the 'East Indian' Trinidadian spinner K.T. 'Sonny' Ramadhin, after he had whittled through the England batting several times during the West Indies tour of England in 1950. Then, too, cricket workers preferred to describe his prodigious talent in terms of 'magic'¹⁴ or the irrational rather than as sheer talent, innovation and artistry. For example, Clayton Goodwin wrote in *Caribbean Cricketers*, how 'everything about him [Ramadhin] was a mystery.' It took a writer from Ramadhin's own Indo-Caribbean community to recognize what real powers lay behind Ramadhin's apparent 'mystery.'¹⁵ As well as his remarkable ability to spin the ball and disguise his spin, wrote Frank Birbalsingh in the *Indo-West Indian Cricket*, Ramadhin 'on perfectly good wickets could dismiss batsmen through a combination of accurate length, unerring direction and crafty variations of flight.'¹⁶ It was a rational analysis of the craft of spin bowling that could also be applied to Muralitharan in 1998.

Writing in his *Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, the activist and intellectual W.E.B. Dubois, great grandson of an American slave, identified 'the world-old phenomenon of the contact of diverse races' and the consequences of 'war, murder, slavery, extermination and debauchery,' which had characterized racist power relations, as the major social and political dimension of the new century.¹⁷ At the outset of this new century, it is clear that the struggle against racism and the pursuit of racial justice by those directly afflicted by it and their allies will continue to be a dominant theme of life and progress. But it will be accompanied by a parallel struggle that will mark the new century and the new millenium – a contest, in many large and small places of the world, to break the deadly hold of communalism. In Palestine, in Ireland, in the Balkans, in Indonesia, in India, Rwanda, Somalia and other African nations, in the great cities urban conurbations and wastelands of North America and Europe, communal conflicts have raged in the mid

and dying years of the twentieth century – and with no greater ferocity than in the island of Sri Lanka.

The communalist violence has been described and anatomized most acutely and with living knowledge as well as heart-felt insight in the writings of the Sri Lankan political analyst and novelist, A. Sivanandan – like Muralitharan, from the Tamil minority. In his ground-breaking essay *Sri Lanka, a case study*, Sivanandan wrote of the communalism in his country in this way, taking particular care to discriminate between communal violence and the violence of the state:

Communalism implies a parallel relationship between (communal) groups, antagonistic perhaps but not necessarily unequal. Communal violence, therefore, refers to that which occurs between (communal) groups, not to that inflicted on one group by the state, representing another. Hence, the use of the term (communal) ‘riots,’ when what is meant or should be – is state pogroms. This is not just a euphemism but a violent distortion of the truth – which further adds to the pretended innocence of the state. Communalism is an ‘afraid’ word.

Communalism is also a portmanteau word. It takes in all the dirty linen of religion, language, culture, and ‘ethnicity.’ And it is a flat word, one-dimensional – gives no idea of the dynamics of relationships within a community or between communities.¹⁸

To experience the process of that same ‘flatness’ achieving visceral meaning and affective power in the written word through the crucible of the Sri Lankan historical imagination, the reader must turn to Sivanandan’s novel, *When Memory Dies*.¹⁹ In its pages, the shards of people’s lives, broken to pieces by the colonial imposition and directed towards communalist hatred, racism against Tamils as ‘infidels of a degraded race’²⁰ and unremitting state violence are given epic expression. For the world evoked in this novel of imperial oppression, colonial division, the roots of ethnic preference and the power that ordinary people of all communities have within them to struggle and unite through trade unions, anti-colonial resistance and their own human love – all mighty anti-deterministic forces and mechanisms is most movingly and instructively set down.

Out of that history and continuity of Sinhala/Tamil communal conflict and the common struggle of its antidote, Sri Lanka has been born, with all its institutions and cultural manifestations, including its cricket. Muttiah Muralitharan is a Sri Lankan Tamil playing cricket for his country – a national sport dominated and controlled largely by Sinhala power. This has made the scope of his achievement all the greater, and his example all the more extraordinary and compelling. His Sinhala teammates, led by their captain, the veteran Arjuna Ranatunga, continue to marvel at his contribution to Sri Lankan cricket and have been quick to point

out how little he has been appreciated by the industrial and commercial interests which under-write the professional game. Comparing the support from his own country’s cricket sponsors to that coming to the Australian spinner Shane Warren from his own national commercial supporters, Ranatunga exposed the extent to which Muralitharan is being virtually ignored. ‘A local businessman sponsors his bat for a few pounds,’ said Ranatunga, and that was all. ‘It’s very sad,’ he added.²¹

In January 1999, the Sri Lankan captain showed his powerful solidarity with his Tamil teammate when Muralitharan was no-balled for ‘throwing’ by the Australian umpire Darrell Hair at the Adelaide test match. He rallied the entire team and led them to the edge of the field of play in protest at the umpire’s decision which had been taken in the face of the International Cricket Council’s clearance of the bowler’s action. Ranatunga declared to the world’s sporting press ‘I felt I was doing the right thing by a colleague of mine who has been the best bowler Sri Lanka has ever produced.’²² With these words, Ranatunga publicly challenged and defied communalism and separation in his nation’s sporting culture, as Muralitharan himself had done symbolically over 200 times – in every test match wicket he had taken in the company of his Sinhala teammates over the previous four years.

In his own way, and in his own particular theatre of public life, Ranatunga had struck a blow against what Sivanandan had described as the ‘degeneracy of Sinhala society and its rapid descent into barbarism’ against Tamil neighbours and fellow citizens.²³ That this small but emblematic advance in human unity and social progress against communalism took place on a cricket field with all its drama, excellence of sport and, in particular, cricket itself, the imperial game, transformed and reinvented by those whom its original masters intended to subjugate.

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Courtesy, *Race & Class* 42(4)

1. *The Guardian* (1 September 1998)
2. *The Cricketer* (October 1998)
3. *The Guardian*, op. cit.
4. Ibid.
5. *Daily Mail* (1 September 1998)
6. *The Cricketer*, op. cit.
7. *Evening Standard* (1 September 1998).
8. See the feature on Muralitharan in the official *Souvenir Programme of the Oval Test Match* (London, England Cricket Board, 1998).
9. *Mail On Sunday* (6 September 1998).
10. *The Times* (1 September 1998).
11. *The Guardian*, op. cit.
12. *The Cricketer*, op. cit.

13. Ibid.
 14. See David Sheppard, *Parson's Pitch* (London, Hodder Stoughton, 1964).
 15. Clayton Goodwin, *Caribbean Cricketers: from the pioneers to Packer* (London, Harrap, 1980).
 16. Frank Birbalsingh and Clem Shiweharan, *Indo-West Indian Cricket* (London, Hansib, 1980).
 17. W.E.B. Dubois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New York, Fawcett, 1961).

18. A. Sivanandan, 'Sri Lanka: a case study,' in his *Communities of Resistance* (London, Verso, 1990). First published in "Sri Lanka: racism and the authoritarian state," special issue of *Race & Class* (Vol. XXVI, summer 1984), pp. 1-38.
 19. Ibid.
 20. Ibid.
 21. *The Guardian*, op. cit.
 22. *The Guardian* (26 January 1999).
 23. 'Sri Lanka: a case study' op. cit.

BAMIYAN REVISITED

MEMORIES OF FOUR SRI LANKAN TRAVELLERS WHO VISITED BAMIYAN IN 1972

The reported destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in March 2001 is one of the first barbarisms of the 21st century. Its hideous drama shields for a moment our memories of sometimes similar, often more terrifying, in many instances more 'mindful' acts of violence that took place through the unbelievably cruel century that has just ended. Taliban becomes a modern world with a viciousness and mindless determination that shocks us as utterly as Auschwitz and Buchenwald did, just yesterday, in the lands of Bach and Beethoven. In condemning Taliban, deserving condemnation of the highest degree, we are also forced to look into the mirror of history. But how can we ever enter the Talibanized mind. Mesmerized by its total otherness, we can only stare into its eyes as it hits us on the head.

But memory also brings us from night into day. As I read the world's desperate statements and watch sunny pictures on TV of the Bamiyan valley in archive clips, I am taken back to another time, when the eye of the storm was at the other end of Asia and the B52 was doing similar things in Vietnam. "We had to destroy the city to save it," was the cry of an American general, expressing a moral certainty very similar to that of his Taliban avatar 25 years later.

To me, that time, the mid-1970s also brings back vivid personal memories of the peace of the Bamiyan valley, as we drove – three companions, M, F and S, and myself – along the continuous sequence of valleys, streams and villages that lay parallel to the 100-plus miles of road from Kabul to Bamiyan. Unlike the wide and smooth Russian and American-built highways that traversed Afghanistan, connecting Heart, Kandahar, Kabul, Mazar-I-Sharif and the Khyber Pass, the road to Bamiyan was a stone-strewed track meant only for trucks and tractors. To drive at more than 15 mph was to put up with a constant battering of loose stones that hit the car's undercarriage like machine-gun fire. But the fierceness of the road surface was greatly mitigated by the gentle sun-drenched

fertility of the valley, the amplitude of water, and the well-stocked orchards – the prosperity of a traditional, fruit-growing and fruit selling culture.

Elsewhere in the country, we had driven along the almost traffic-less highways at full speed for hours, escorted in a miniature convoy by our Afghani architect friend, Obaidullah, whose car set the pace ahead of us. In contrast, M's diary records our slow progress along the tortuous Bamiyan road:

8.45 a.m. – 7585 – kilometer reading
 9.45 a.m. – 7600
 10.45 a.m. – 7617
 11.42 a.m. – 7632 – we stop at a chai khanna for hot tea

100 miles of stony, dirt road. Stones exploding beneath the car. Despite the heat, windows wound up at the approach of a vehicle to save us from clouds of dust. Sailing, trying to rest in the back, constantly sneezing.

In other parts of Afghanistan we had marvelled at the architecture. The technology of house building epitomized the wealth and confidence of the traditional Afghan economy. Exquisitely crafted, the thick walls were of mud, pressed in between wooden boards, which had left behind a neat and towering appearance, with high projecting balconies and lookout posts – each house a minor chateau, undoubtedly one of the great mud building traditions of the world.

Here we drive through narrow passes, with high, undulating, smooth-faced mountains – narrow paths zig-zag up the mountain face with women carrying goods on their heads, up incredible inclines... Suddenly fertile villages, rice, wheat, yellow expanses of mustard flowers... a boy drives five bulls, four in front and one behind, threshing grain,