

CRICKET AS GLOBAL AND HONOURABLE

Michael Roberts

“**C**ricket is more remote from anything sordid, anything dishonourable than any game in the world. To play it ...honourably ... is a moral lesson in itself and the classroom is God's air and sunshine” (Lord Harris, former President of the MCC).

“Cricket creates character” (Hoosain Ayob, ICC African Development Officer).

“Cricket is a liberal education in itself” (Andrew Lang).

These are among the many profound statements by cricketing buffs in the propaganda video entitled *Cricket A Global Game* produced by the International Cricket Council to mark the new millennium at the same time that it spreads the WORD. Presumably commissioned in 1999, narrated by Stephen Tomkinson and produced by Tom Lewis and Graham Fry, this 45 minute exercise was revealed to the world on 'air' in mid-2000. When scheduled for television it could not have been known that the middle months of the year 2000 were going to be singularly inappropriate for its high-flown self-convictions. Hanse Cronje, several household names branded by innuendo and unnamed others have made such claims a joke. In grovelling for the mighty dollar they have been the epitome of the sordid and the dishonourable.

The irony in the timing of this promotion video and the dismay with which one views the circumstances of bookmaking manipulations, however, should not prevent aficionados as well as neophytes to the world of cricket from recognizing the initiative of Dalmiya and the ICC in commissioning Donald Woods to direct this documentary. I applaud this selective survey of the field for its catholicity, its vision and its insights. These achievements render the actions of Cronje and a few cricketers in recent years all the more shameful.

The wide scope of this film is indicated by the fact that it ranges over cricketing scenes in Lesotho, the Pacific Isles and Gibraltar besides better-known venues. It encompasses women's cricket. It has Belinda Clark asserting that cricket “is a thinking game which [therefore] suits women.” And it begins with an incisive delineation of its many art forms by Michael Manley, a former Prime Minister of Jamaica, Oxonian and cricket writer, backed by superbly illustrative visual images of these viewpoints.

The film dwells only briefly on the history of cricket and such figures as Grace, Headley, Bradman and the Bodyline series. Its emphasis is on the modern day and it looks to the future. As one would expect, it embraces many striking moments in the post-1950 cricketing story. The beginning of one-day cricket, the Packer

breakaway in cricket, the West Indies triumphs in the two initial World Cup series, India's victory at the World Cup in 1983, the tied test between the West Indies and Australia at Brisbane in 1961, the 'arrival' of the West Indies at the leading edge of cricket in the 1960s under the aegis of Sir Frank Worrell and India's first victory over England in the early 1960s, all these are touched upon via footage, commentary and interview.

India's emergence at the leading levels serves as point of departure for the ramifications of the Nari Contractor story. Contractor, captain of the Indian side touring the West Indies in the early 1960s, was hit on the head by a wayward ball from Charlie Griffith. He was at death's door from a blood clot. Frank Worrell was among the first to provide blood for the saving operation. This incident is annually celebrated by a blood donation campaign at Eden Gardens Calcutta, a commemoration of Worrell that serves the Indian public. In depicting such a tale the film compounds its thrust by adding footage on Ian Botham's excruciating walks across his land in order to collect donations for leukemia research, Imran Khan's cancer hospital and Steve Waugh's work on behalf of those afflicted with leprosy in India.

To me such stories indicate a directing hand behind the documentary that had the wider society in view. No more so than when the film pans to “gangster territory” in Los Angeles where a remarkable community worker, a tough little Black named Ted Hayes, has inculcated cricket among the homeless roughs and ‘crims’ as a means of discipline and character building. “Far-fetched,” you think? Well, man, one has to see and here Hayes to believe it. I believe it. Hayes has erudition that is on a level with his vision. “[Cricket] having its civilising qualities we felt that it could be transmitted to the homeless populations even if they were living outside the law.” Thus was born a cricketing enterprise in an unlikely setting – and what could be more unlikely than gangland USA! –directed towards assisting toughs who live “in socially incompatible ways” to “find a new way.”

Not surprisingly, then, Lewis and his film team do not avoid politics. Indeed, they embrace an explicit political message. The video begins with Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, proclaiming that “the very essence of cricket is that both sides agree on the rules and that they respect each other, which is what the peoples of the world need to do if their new century is to be more peaceful and civilised than the last one.”

This is neatly underlined by an emphasis on the cricketing friendship and diplomacy between India and Pakistan. This pictorial emphasis is set up not only by referring to the history of wars

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