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CRICKET AND POLITICS IN COLONIAL INDIA*

I

NATIVE CRICKET VERSUS EUROPEAN POLO

In October 1881, four years before the Indian National Congress was formed to advance the political rights of a subject population, a petition addressed to the Governor of Bombay defended the sporting rights of the Indians of the city. The sportsmen appealed (as the Congressmen would) to the principles of fair play and justice so often forgotten in the colonies. The petitioners began by recalling:

That ever since the introduction of the noble game of cricket among the natives of Bombay nearly twenty years ago, they have been uninterruptedly in the habit of playing the game on the Esplanade known as the Parade ground.

That there are more than five hundred young men of all ages and of all castes who pursue this healthful sport on the Parade ground where alone they are permitted to play and which is the only ground suitable for cricket.

The prospects for native cricket had, however, recently been threatened by a two-pronged attack by European sportsmen. On the one side, the all-white Bombay Gymkhana had stealthily cordoned off one-third of the Esplanade to better protect and maintain its cricket grounds; on the other, the Gymkhana's polo-playing members were in the habit of colonizing the unenclosed open space every Tuesday and Friday, pushing the cricketers off the terrain. The displaced Indians thought it 'a little unfair':

that the comforts and convenience of the half-a-dozen gentlemen, who generally play polo, should be preferred to the necessary healthful recreation of over five hundred native youths, still for the sake of the respect due to the ruling race and to high officials and rather than trespass upon your Excellency's valuable time, your Petitioners would cheerfully forego their games for two evenings in the week, were it not for the fact that the polo ponies completely ruin the turf and render the ground unsuited to cricket. Your Petitioners need scarcely remind your Excellency in

*This essay is based on work done while I was a Fellow, successively, of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi and the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. I would also like to thank Hans Medick for his comments on earlier drafts.

Council how much good cricket depends upon the state of the turf, and if any proof of the fact were wanted it would be furnished by the circumstance that the [Bombay] Gymkhana carefully preserves its own cricket field from being trampled upon by the ponies and even by passers by.

A technical complaint was thus added to a straightforward racial one. The petitioners asked:

under the circumstances above narrated and in consideration of the necessity for healthful exercise and recreation such as cricket affords to the young men of this over-crowded city, your Excellency in Council will be pleased to request the Bombay Gymkhana to play polo on some other spot, or to allow your Petitioners to play along with themselves on the ground at present reserved for the exclusive use of the Gymkhana cricketers and which is much too large for their requirements.¹

In the end, the tone of deference cast away, the petitioners made a daring claim for the cricket facilities of the Bombay Gymkhana. Six months later, and after several supplementary petitions, the Governor acceded to the lesser of their demands. Instructions were issued 'to permit the Native Cricketers to use the Esplanade Parade Ground when not required by Government for military or other purposes', haughtily conceding that native cricket might take precedence over European polo. The polo players struck back a year later, when a Government Order passed at their urging explicitly allowed polo on the disputed ground two days a week — this a victory of 'the most powerful European gentlemen', 'all hot-burning with the fire of prestige', over 'the weak and pigmy [native] cricketers with absolutely no influence or importance'. But when a new Governor, Lord Harris, arrived from England in 1891, the pigmies rose again. Over a thousand cricketers — Hindus, Muslims and Parsis — sent him a letter, which after outlining the history of the controversy, asked pointedly if this transgression would be allowed in cricket's original home. They knew Harris to be a famous cricketer, a former captain of England and a pillar of London's Marylebone Cricket

¹ Petition dated 27 Oct. 1881, addressed to Sir James Ferguson, Governor of Bombay, reproduced in Shapoorjee Sorabjee, *The Struggle: Polo versus Cricket* (Bombay, 1897). Polo itself is of Indo-Iranian origin, at some distant remove an 'indigenous' sport of the Parsis and the Hindus, while cricket is, in its origins and culture, very much an English game. However, in nineteenth-century Bombay, ponies were beyond reach of the average Indian, while cricket represented a ready, sociable and relatively cheap form of recreation for the residents of a growing and crowded city. But the historical irony is worthy of notice, viz. that the Asian game (played by Europeans) became the emblem of colonial power, the English sport (indulged in by natives) the mark of subaltern resistance.

Club.² The cricketers of Bombay, noted the petition, ‘*fully* believe that your Excellency is *fully* aware that even in England there are vast grounds reserved for cricket alone and the very idea of the turf being spoilt by the polo ponies would not be for a moment tolerated by the authorities’ (or indeed, by the cricketers).³

Harris, cricketer and authority, deftly defused the situation by diverting land newly reclaimed from the sea for the exclusive use of native cricketers. This was divided up into three plots, one apiece for the Parsi, Hindu and Islam Gymkhanas, placating the major religious groupings of the city. The struggle between (European) polo and (Indian) cricket thus resolved, the historian of the conflict drew this sombre conclusion: ‘No Government, and no governing class in the world, ever gave to the governed voluntarily, readily, or cheerfully any rights or privileges which in fairness belonged to them. These are always, as history teaches us, obtained after struggles of more or less persistency’.⁴

To this political lesson (true for all times) we might append a more humdrum academic one — that sporting practices cannot be viewed separately from the wider social context in which they find themselves. There are, at present, two approaches to the history of sport. The first is to focus sharply (or narrowly) on its practice, the background of its patrons and players, the evolution of its associations and tournaments, and on how it pays or does not pay for itself. The second approach, favoured here, takes sport as an illustrative example to point out themes of wider interest and relevance. It views sport as a *relational idiom*, a sphere of activity which expresses, in concentrated form, the values, prejudices, divisions and unifying symbols of a society. This essay, on the history of cricket in colonial Bombay, studies the sport as a microcosm of the fissures and tensions of a deeply divided society: fissures that it both reflected and played upon, mitigated as well as intensified. The game of cricket, I suggest, can provide valuable insights into the history of modern India, in particular to the three overarching themes of that history: those of race, caste, and religion.⁵

² Cf. J. D. Coldham, *Lord Harris* (London, 1982).

³ Sorabjee, *Struggle: Polo versus Cricket*, 109–10, emphases added.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵ Some recent works have studied how quintessentially British pastimes, when transplanted in the colonies, generate unanticipated social conflicts: for example, J. A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism* (New York, 1986); Gordon T. Stewart,

(cont. on p. 158)

In terms of its rules, rituals and vocabulary, cricket is the most complex game in the world. However, the subsequent discussion relates to the sociology and politics of cricket: it presumes no technical knowledge of the game itself. The reader unfamiliar with the sport needs only to know that a batsman attempts to hit, as far and as hard as possible, a projectile hurled by the bowler; secondly, that competitive cricket, in its classical form, extends over four or five full days, with six or seven hours of play each day; and thirdly, that although invented in England, cricket has become a hugely popular sport in the Indian subcontinent. Nowhere else has the game excited so much passionate interest: indeed, during big matches normal life comes to a standstill, with hundreds of millions of Indians glued to their radios and television sets.

II

ORIGINS AND ORGANIZATION

Cricket was brought to India in the middle of the eighteenth century by British soldiers and sailors. They played the game among themselves, in their bungalows and in their cantonments. Early matches were between different regiments or different suburbs of the colonial towns. The first Indians to take to the game were the Parsis of Bombay, an educated, prosperous and Westernized community, in origins and culture somewhat at odds with the land they lived in after exile from Persia. In the 1830s, Parsi boys began imitating white soldiers, improvising the implements of cricket by using hats as wickets, umbrellas as bats, and old leather, stuffed with rags and sewn up, as balls. In 1848, these boys (now men) established the Oriental Cricket Club. At least thirty Parsi clubs were formed in the 1850s and 1860s. They were named for British viceroys and statesmen and for Roman gods: Gladstone, Elgin, Ripon, Jupiter and Mars, for example. The emerging Parsi bourgeoisie supported cricket as a means of strengthening ties with the overlord, while intellectuals welcomed

(*n. 5 cont.*)

'Tenzing's Two Wrist-Watches: The Conquest of Everest and Late Imperial Culture in Britain, 1921–1953', *Past and Present*, no. 149 (Nov. 1995). This essay follows those works in viewing sport through the prism of race; where it departs from them is in investigating, more closely, the effects of sport on social and cultural cleavages *within* the colonized society.

it as a renewal of the physical vitality of the race, sapped by centuries in the tropical sun.⁶

The Hindus started playing cricket partly in a spirit of competitive communalism, for in Bombay they had a long-standing social and business rivalry with the Parsis. The first known Hindu cricketer was Ramchandra Vishnu Navlekar (in 1861), while the first Hindu club, Bombay Union, was formed in 1866 by youths of the Prabhu caste. Where Parsi clubs were generally demarcated by locality, Hindu cricketers sorted themselves on the lines of caste and region of origin. Consider the names of some of the clubs established in the latter decades of the nineteenth century: Gowd Saraswat Cricket Club, Kshatriya Cricket Club, Gujarati Union Cricket Club, Maratha Cricket Club, Telugu Young Cricketers.

Muslim cricket in Bombay was pioneered by the Luxmani and Tyebjee families, known for their work in establishing schools and for their presence in the law courts. The Tyebjees helped establish a Muslim cricket club in 1883. The smaller communities also formed their distinct cricketing entities, including, for example, the Mangalorian Catholic Cricket Club (for émigrés from the southern port city of Mangalore), the Instituto Luso Indian Cricket Club (for those coming from Portuguese-ruled Goa), and the Bombay Jewish Cricket Club.⁷

By the late nineteenth century the game had acquired a genuine popular appeal in Bombay. Dozens of cricket matches were played every weekend on the Maidan, the expanse of green ground adjoining the sea in the northern part of the city. 'There is no more agreeable sight to me', remarked the mayor of Bombay in 1886, 'than of the whole Maidan overspread by a lot of enthusiastic Parsi and Hindu cricketers, keenly and eagerly engaged in this manly game'.⁸

At first, the British thought little of the attempts by their subjects to take to their national game. They sneered at the Indians' clothes and their technique, a Bombay journalist remarking of some Hindu players, in the 1870s, that 'their kiltsed garments interfered [when batting] with running, and

⁶ Cf. Manekji Kavasji Patel, *A History of Parsi Cricket* (Bombay, 1892).

⁷ M. E. Pavri, *Parsi Cricket* (Bombay, 1901); J. M. Framjee Patel, *Stray Thoughts on Indian Cricket* (Bombay, 1905); F. S. Ashley-Cooper, 'Some Notes on Early Cricket Abroad', *Cricketer Annual* (London, 1922–3).

⁸ Pheroze Shah Mehta, quoted in H. D. Darukhanawala, *Parsis and Sport* (Bombay, 1934), 61.

they threw the ball when fielding in the same fashion as boarding school girls'. At this time the gulf, admittedly, was huge, so much that some early matches were billed as 'Natives with Bats versus Officers with Umbrellas'. Slowly the Indians began acquiring proficiency, helped by their decision to discard the cumbersome *dhota* for the cricketer's flannel trousers. In the 1880s, the Parsis engaged a well-known Surrey player, Robert Henderson, to come out and coach them. Henderson's services were warmly appreciated: 'On his departure from Bombay he was decorated with wreaths of flowers and provided with a painted cocoanut to throw into the sea to ensure calm in the event of rough weather — an exceptional mark of Parsi respect'.⁹ Parsi cricket had now advanced sufficiently for the community to sponsor two touring teams to England (in 1886 and 1888), where the fast-developing novices were matched against an array of local and county teams.¹⁰

In 1877, the Parsis were invited to play a match against the Bombay Gymkhana, the association which represented the Europeans of the city. This became an annual event, although it was ten years before the Parsis won. Meanwhile, from 1886, the Hindus had also begun playing a yearly match with the Europeans. The organization of the sport was boosted by the formation of Parsi, Hindu and Muslim Gymkhanas. These were given land by Lord Harris and charged with supervising and developing the numerous smaller clubs which came under their jurisdiction.

The Parsis played the Europeans; so too, from 1886, did the Hindus. The Triangular Tournament, started in 1907, brought the three together in an annual competition. The Muslims joined five years later to make it a four-cornered contest. This still left out several of the communities that make up the cultural mosaic of the subcontinent. And so in 1937 the competition finally became the Pentangular, with the addition of a fifth catch-all category simply called 'The Rest'.

This tournament, which ran until 1946, was through its various guises to play a formative role in the development of cricket in India. The respective Gymkhanas recruited players from all over the country, trained their teams, collectively framed the rules

⁹ F. S. Ashley-Cooper, 'Some Notes on Cricket in India', *Cricketer* (Spring Annual, 1927).

¹⁰ Vasant Raiji, *India's Hambleton Men* (Bombay, 1986).

and, in the end, were handed out a share of the not-inconsiderable profits. The Islam Gymkhana relied heavily on students of the Muslim University in Aligarh, in northern India, where a succession of British professors had encouraged the sport as a means of fostering teamwork and community solidarity.¹¹ Hindu princes from as far afield as Baroda and Indore employed promising young cricketers with the Quadrangular and Pentangular in mind. The Parsis were restricted (for the most part) to Bombay; so too were the Europeans, except when a string of defeats prompted the ruling race to call for reinforcements, in the shape of old Oxbridge Blues now resident in the Darjeeling tea estates or posted to a regiment on the frontier.

Performance in the Quadrangular quickly became an index of a community's strength and social cohesion. The Parsi, Muslim and Hindu teams each had a large following, with fans quick to offer advice and critical comment. After the Parsis lost unexpectedly to the Muslims one year, the main speaker at the annual meeting of the Parsi Gymkhana blamed the defeat on carelessness in diet. The cricketers, he said, 'must particularly beware of taking the rich Parsi food [before the match], as the effects of diet on nerves and senses cannot be too often drawn attention to'.¹² Hindu fans urged for 'more permanent interest in Hindu cricket in place of the spasmodic outbursts of frenzy which agitate the lovers of cricket'. Other cricket centres blamed the predominance of Bombay for the fact that Hindus did not always field their best eleven. In October 1913, a public meeting in Poona concluded with a plea addressed to the Bombay-based Hindu Gymkhana to 'co-operate for the elevation of Hindu cricket to a higher level and rid ourselves of all local feelings and parochial prejudices'.¹³ Selectors were often made scapegoats for team failure. When the Muslims suffered a series of humbling defeats in the 1920s, an irate follower complained in the *Bombay Chronicle* that the selectors stayed away from trial matches on the Maidan; nor would they actively canvass players from Aligarh and other 'upcountry' locations. 'When will the Mussalmans learn to send their best talents to the Quadrangular?', he asked: 'It was far

¹¹ Cf. David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton, 1978), 255–61, 292–3, *passim*.

¹² *Bombay Chron.*, 11 May 1914.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7 July 1914, 28 Nov. 1913.

better not to have played at all than to have sent in a team without much stuff'.¹⁴

In 1913, in only its second year, the Quadrangular was being described as a 'sort of a Roman forum', showcasing the cricketers and their communities.¹⁵ Colourful tents and marquees adorned the playing field, where tens of thousands of spectators congregated to cheer their teams. News travelled quickly from the ground, by radio and by bush telegraph, to the rest of the city and, more slowly, to the rest of the country. The two weeks of the tournament were the climax of the cricket (and social) season, when the finest talents of India battled one another on the Maidan. As the competition approached, remarked an observer in 1929, the city was 'swept by a furious epidemic. For nothing moves the placidity of Bombay as the premier sporting event of India. In London you have Poppy Day, New Year's Eve, the Varsity Boat Race, Epsom, the Test Matches. But in Bombay you go on working and clogging and grubbing the whole year round — except in this week'.¹⁶

The interest in the cricket was manifest in a flourishing black-market trade in tickets. The matches were played in the Bombay Gymkhana's portion of the Esplanade, where 'every inch of available space was occupied and the crowd at the tree end was at least ten deep. Every pavilion was full and hundreds more were watching the game from house-tops while some were planted on trees'.¹⁷ Nor was this frenzy of activity confined to those who played or watched the game: '[tailors were] busy with the necessary apparel for their clients; clerks, business-men, odd-jobbers pounce upon every opportunity of making a little money either by betting [on the cricket] or having a finger in the pie; [carriage-drivers] and school-boys shout themselves hoarse; grandmothers die; offices are empty on account of illness; college rolls are never taken; briefless barristers rush up and down Waudby Road'.¹⁸

By the early 1930s radio had arrived, taking the news of the cricket and the noise of the crowd into the streets and lanes and seaside bungalows of Bombay. Office-goers, eager for news, 'thronged hotels and other public places where receivers have

¹⁴ Letter to the editor by 'Z. A. B.' (possibly Z. A. Bukhari, later the first Director-General of Radio Pakistan), *ibid.*, 7 Dec. 1929.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5 Sept. 1913.

¹⁶ 'Short-stop' (pseud.), 'Cricket Fever', *ibid.*, 28 Nov. 1929.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13 Dec. 1923.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28 Nov. 1929.

been installed'.¹⁹ But even before the days of radio, recalled one writer, 'you could hear reactions of the spectators in the corridors of Hornby Road, you could feel that great things were happening, that offices were denuded of clerks, especially in the afternoon, and in rickety old rooms, whose access is through dark staircases amidst ancient files and briefs, there came the muffled voices of ten thousand spectators, a call from afar, which made work impossible, and narrowed Bombay to that sunny green spot, where our heroes were making hearts beat pit-a-pat'.²⁰

The Quadrangular cricket tournament was what Indians call a *tamasha*, a carnival which brought city life to a standstill. When in 1926 the tournament was held for once in Bombay's rival city of Poona, a journalist sardonically remarked: 'perhaps the offices will have cause to be satisfied as illness will not be as prevalent as usual in the period embracing this feast, and grandmothers will not require burial'.²¹

The Bombay cricket carnival spawned a series of tournaments on similar lines. The Sind Quadrangular, established in 1916 at Karachi (and to become a Pentangular as early as 1923), attracted upwards of ten thousand spectators. A Central Provinces Quadrangular, played annually in Nagpur, was instituted in the 1920s. A Triangular was started in Delhi in 1937, with the Hindus, Muslims and the Rest participating. Lahore also had its three-cornered competition, between teams drawn from the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. In the South, the cricketing event of the year was the Madras Presidency match, played between the Indians and the Englishmen of the province.

These regional variations on the Bombay pattern were influenced by local demography as well as power relations. The Parsis were a full-fledged side in Karachi (their second city), but could not form teams in Delhi and Lahore, where their numbers were small and their economic presence inconsequential. Definitions of 'community' could be fluid: the Sikhs were willing to be clubbed with the Hindus in Bombay and Delhi, but insisted upon a separate identity in their native Punjab (especially in Lahore, which had been, as recently as 1840, the capital of a Sikh kingdom). The Europeans admitted talented Eurasians and the odd Indian Christian in Nagpur, a town tucked away deep in the

¹⁹ *Bombay Sentinel*, 23 Nov. 1937.

²⁰ Rustom Vakeel, 'The Joys of Cricket', *Bombay Chron.*, 2 Dec. 1934.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13 Sept. 1926.

interior, and in Madras, which since the time of the legendary Sir Thomas Munro (Governor in the 1820s) had been known for its progressive style of governance.

In Bombay, however, racial boundaries were more sharply drawn. In the 1930s, for example, when a number of promising Indian Catholic cricketers were unable to find a place anywhere, the Hindu Gymkhana asked for the Europeans to reconstitute themselves as a 'Christian' eleven, retaining the convenient quadrangular format. The Bombay Gymkhana was adamant; although it had chosen Australians in the past, it would not even consider the famous black Trinidadian cricketer, Learie Constantine (who toured India in 1934), let alone Christians of Indian origin. This was a clearly a question of status: 'the "white" Brahmins of the Bombay Gymkhana [were] afraid of losing their caste by enlisting non-Europeans in the European ranks'.²² In the event, continuing pressure from the Catholic Gymkhana of Bombay led, in 1937, to the formation of the 'Rest' and the conversion of the tournament into a Pentangular. As a residual category, the Rest could afford to be inclusive; its cricket eleven included, at different times, Indian Roman Catholics, Protestants and Syrian Christians, as well as Eurasians, Sinhalese Buddhists and Jews.

All over British India, then, competitive cricket was organized on 'communal' lines,²³ with teams composed on the basis of caste, ethnic group, race or religion. A distinguished Indian cricketer, writing just after Independence, claimed:

the communal form, in topmost Indian cricket, came into existence only because the Burra Sahibs in India, in the earlier days, had an undisguised superiority complex in all their dealings with the Indians. The British officers who came to India to protect the British Empire were encouraged by higher authorities to maintain very little contact with the "Natives" as they sneeringly called the Indians. The British, therefore, opened their separate exclusive clubs in the three Presidency towns of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, followed closely by establishment of other [such] clubs in other cities such as Poona and Bangalore. The Parsees who picked up the game also picked up the separatist tendency of the British along with it. On the one hand, the British did not admit the Parsees to their "sanctified fortresses". The Parsees, therefore, had perforce to have separate clubs. But in those clubs they could have allowed other Indians. Unfortunately that was not done. Consequently the Hindus also had to follow the same path. Muslims, last in the field, were compelled to follow suit.²⁴

²² *Ibid.*, 13 Nov. 1934.

²³ The words 'communal' and 'communalism' refer, in the Indian context, to relations of hostility between different religions or ethnic groups (most commonly Hindus and Muslims); thus also 'communal riots' and 'communal feelings'.

²⁴ D. B. Deodhar, *The March of Indian Cricket* (Calcutta, 1948), 42-3.

But, of course, Hindu society was scarcely less exclusive, with its own meticulous detailing of ritual boundaries between castes and sub-castes. Through much of the nineteenth century, Hindu cricket clubs in Bombay were themselves organized on caste lines. Social intercourse was even more restricted across religions: it does not come as a surprise that Parsis and Muslims also took to making up teams of their own. That Hindus were victims rather than willing participants in communal cricket is a retrospective reading, informed by the inclusive nationalism, transcending divisions of caste and religion, promoted after the 1920s by men such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The element of compulsion was not really a factor in the origins of the Quadrangular tournament, which was moulded as much by Hindu caste prejudice, by Parsi social snobbery and by Muslim cultural insularity, as by British racial superiority. None the less, sown into this segmentary system were the seeds of social conflict.

III

RACE MATTERS

Some British cricketers saw the sport as a way of feeling less out of place in a hostile climate; others, more positively, as a vehicle for cementing relations between them and their subjects. In the latter category fell Lord Harris who, as Governor of Bombay between 1890 and 1895, had helped lay the foundations of what later became the Quadrangular tournament. A Parsi admirer believed that the Governor was 'a sage statesman [who] at once saw that much of the friction between the Europeans and the Natives of India could be got rid off by bringing the ruler and the ruled together by means of sport'.²⁵ Or as the statesman himself put it: 'East will always be East, and West, West, but the [batting] crease is not a very broad line of demarcation — so narrow, indeed, that it ought to help bring about friendly relations'.²⁶ This required men with the motives (and motivation) of Harris himself. What India needs, remarked one colonial, 'is a few more Governors like Lord Harris in Bombay and Lord Wenlock in Madras, a cricketing Commander-in-Chief [of the Indian Army], a cricketing Colonel in every cantonment and none

²⁵ Pavri, *Parsi Cricket*, 31.

²⁶ Harris, *A Few Short Runs* (London, 1921), 241–2.

but cricketing blues appointed as Collectors and Inspectors' General of Police'.²⁷

The links between cricket and the colonizing mission are made most explicit in a fascinating account of a cricket tour of India in the winter of 1902–3, by a side travelling under the name of 'Oxford Authentics', but liberal enough to accommodate a few Cambridge men. The team travelled ten thousand miles through India and Burma, shooting tigers in Rajasthan, fishing trout in Kashmir and playing cricket wherever they went. The tour had been timed to coincide with the Coronation Durbar, a splendid ceremony in New Delhi organized by Lord Curzon to honour the new monarch, King Edward VII, a ceremony that was also intended to signal, to the sceptics, the British will to rule. The cricket they played and the ceremonies they witnessed are described in a book by one of the tourists, Cecil Headlam. Headlam was himself a historian (of medieval European towns) and placed cricket in its proper historical context, as among the last and most benign influences of imperial rule:

First the hunter, the missionary, and the merchant, next the soldier and the politician, and then the cricketer — that is the history of British colonisation. And of these civilizing influences the last may, perhaps, be said to do least harm.

The hunter may exterminate deserving species, the missionary may cause quarrels, the soldier may hector, the politician blunder — but cricket unites, as in India, the rulers and the ruled. It also provides a moral training, an education in pluck, and nerve, and self-restraint, far more valuable to the character of the ordinary native than the mere learning by heart of a play by Shakespeare or an essay of Macaulay.²⁸

This recalls the remark of the Cambridge historian, G. M. Trevelyan, that if the French nobles had been in the habit of playing cricket with their peasants, their chateaux would not have been burnt in 1789.²⁹ In colonial India, however, cricket served as often to divide as to unite ruler and ruled. For one thing, when native cricket clashed with imperial prestige, the latter usually took precedence. There was the struggle of polo versus cricket already alluded to, and on an earlier occasion, Parsi cricketers had been banned from the Bombay Oval after a ball struck (not

²⁷ E. H. D. Sewell, quoted in *Bombay Chron.*, 11 Dec. 1913.

²⁸ Cecil Headlam, *Ten Thousand Miles through India and Burma: An Account of the Oxford University Cricket Tour with Mr K. J. Kay in the Year of the Coronation Durbar* (London, 1903), 168–9.

²⁹ G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (London, 1945), 405.

fatally or even severely) the wife of a British police constable on her evening walk.

That the spread of cricket was productive of conflict was exemplified by British relations with the Hindus, the dominant religious grouping in numerical terms and, unlike the Parsis and Muslims, more militantly opposed to the continuation of colonial rule. In February 1906, the Hindus played the Europeans in a representative match, which, for the first time, drew in players from the Presidency as a whole (comprising the present-day Indian states of Gujarat and Maharashtra, as well as the province of Sind in present-day Pakistan). Against all odds, the Hindus won. The match was played in Bombay, and the news of this epic victory travelled slowly, by train and telegraph, up country. When it reached distant Punjab, the *Tribune* of Lahore, a leading nationalist newspaper, was exultant. Searching for a suitable comparison, it settled upon another recent victory of Asia over Europe, that of Japan against Russia on the battlefield. The Hindu cricketers had apparently been as dignified in victory as their Japanese military counterparts; they had behaved 'with the noble self-restraint which characterized the Japanese over the fall of Port Arthur and all the subsequent victories which attended their arms, victories the like of which history has never recorded'. But were the result to have been reversed, suggested the *Tribune*, then the English cricketers would have been vulgar and ostentatious in victory, mimicking 'the perfect pandemonium into which hoary England had been converted by modern Britons over the relief of Mafeking' (a reference to the patriotic hysteria which had overtaken Britain during the Boer war).³⁰

On the cricket field, indeed, the Hindus lost little opportunity in highlighting the gap between British precept and British practice. In 1916, when the Hindus played the Europeans in the Quadrangular, a famous English cricketer, an army major to boot, quarrelled with the umpire and refused to accept his verdict. The umpire, a Hindu named M. D. Pai, was braver than many modern soccer referees, and crisply ordered the cricketer off the field. When the major wrote an intemperate letter to the Hindu

³⁰ *Tribune*, 23 Feb. 1906. The next year, when the Hindus won again, the *Mahratta* of Poona (mouthpiece of the radical nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak) sarcastically thanked 'the sportsmanly instincts of the Englishmen who have these two years allowed the Hindus to stand on the same level as their rulers and sometimes to defeat [them], if nowhere else, at least on the cricket ground': *Mahratta*, 8 Mar. 1907.

Gymkhana calling the umpire's character into question, he was answered with a homily on sportsmanship, that quintessentially British characteristic so absent in this case. The Gymkhana wrote icily that it did 'not agree that Mr Pai with his well-known credentials could with any propriety be called a "Bad Umpire"'. The major's imputations with regard to Pai's character were, it said, 'entirely opposed to the interests of sport and are calculated to create general unpleasantness'. And, in any event, the cricketer had 'no right to challenge the decision for an umpire's decision must in all cases be held to be final'.³¹

These challenges were made possible by the achievement of parity in a technical cricketing sense, and through the growing assertiveness of the nationalist movement. In its early years, the Quadrangular had been assimilated to the exercise of colonial power, part of its ritual being the visit to the matches of the Governor of Bombay. During the First World War, the Governor, Lord Willingdon (a former Cambridge Cricket Blue and arch-imperialist), would come every afternoon to the ground accompanied by his wife, watch the play, and then, in the tea interval, be escorted by the President of the Bombay Gymkhana through the tents, stopping to shake hands with the notables of each community, graciously accepting their garlands. By the end of the war, however, such an exercise was fraught with tension. When in 1921 the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VIII) toured India, his programme included a visit to the Quadrangular. Mahatma Gandhi had issued a call for Indians to boycott the Prince, and feelings were in any case running high, with many leaders in jail. The nationalists among the cricket-lovers claimed that the dates of the tournament had cleverly been made to coincide with the Prince's visit, for 'where else can those Loyalists get an Indian crowd twenty thousand strong to cheer the Prince, and make a show that he is enthusiastically received'. They asked cricket fans to send the money they would otherwise spend on tickets to the Relief Fund set up by the Congress for the victims of riots in Malabar, thereby 'killing two birds with one stone'.

³¹ *Bombay Chron.*, 9, 11, 23 Sept. 1916. Until this incident each side had nominated an umpire of its own but, as a result of the controversy, the Hindus were able to force upon the British the idea of 'neutral' umpires, so that, for example, a Parsi and a Muslim officiated when Hindus played the British. The Quadrangular thus predated by some seventy-five years the coming of neutral umpires in international cricket.

On the night of the arrival of the Prince of Wales in Bombay, large parts of the city were in darkness, street lamps having been smashed by an angry crowd of demonstrators. The boycott of the cricket (which commenced days later) was moderately successful. The prince was seen at the ground for a brief while on one day of the final. That it was a Parsi-European match must certainly have influenced things; had it been the Hindus playing the Europeans, the prince (or his hosts) might have found it more prudent to call off the visit.³²

IV

CASTE AND CONFLICT

Ten years later, Mahatma Gandhi found himself pitted in another political battle, his adversary this time not a British prince but a spokesman of India's Untouchable castes. Following the Round Table Conference of 1931, the colonial government had decided to award separate electorates to the Untouchables. This was welcomed by Dr B. R. Ambedkar, the rising leader of the low castes, but opposed by the Mahatma, who felt it would undermine his own attempts to persuade upper-caste Hindus to reform from within, to make reparation for the 'sin' of untouchability. Confined in Poona's Yeravada Jail, in September 1932 Gandhi undertook a controversial fast-unto-death against separate electorates. The fast extended over several weeks, and Gandhi's life was saved only by a compromise pact signed between him and three representatives of the Untouchables.³³

These spokesmen were Ambedkar himself, M. C. Rajah and P. Baloo. Now, Ambedkar and Rajah are names known to any student of modern Indian history: the first as the foremost Untouchable leader in this century and architect of free India's constitution; the second as a South Indian social worker whose record of public work goes back even further. But who was this third member of their delegation, Baloo? The historians who have written on the controversy do not generally bother to identify him, quite possibly because they cannot.³⁴ Neither politician nor social worker, Baloo was in fact a famous cricketer, who made

³² *Ibid.*, 28 Oct.–22 Nov. 1921.

³³ Pyarelal, *The Epic Fast* (Ahmedabad, 1932), provides a contemporary account of the fast and its aftermath.

³⁴ Cf. Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution* (New Delhi, 1994).

his name bowling the Hindus to victory against the Parsis and the Europeans.

In western India, at least, Palwankar Baloo was the first public figure to emerge from the ranks of the Untouchables, commanding enormous respect inside and outside of his community. As a student, Ambedkar himself had 'looked at the solid fame of the Untouchable bowler with pride'. As a little-known lecturer in Bombay's Sydenham College, Ambedkar organized functions to felicitate Baloo and worked for his elevation to the Bombay Municipal Corporation. Later, in 1927 and 1928, the man who was to emerge as the most outstanding of Untouchable leaders would tell village audiences of his early attempts at promoting the proper recognition of Baloo's achievements.³⁵

Baloo was a *Chamaar*, a member of the leather-working caste which ranks close to the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy. He was born in 1875 in Dharwad, but the family moved soon afterwards to Poona, the old Maratha city hundred miles south-east of Bombay. His father found work cleaning guns and cartridges in a government munitions depot, a job regarded as polluting by caste Hindus. Ironically, Baloo's skills with the cricket ball (also made from leather) were first discovered by the British members of the Poona Gymkhana, where he worked as a servant. He bowled to the English cricketers while they practised and word of his skill then spread to the rival Deccan Gymkhana, run for and by caste Hindus. The Brahmins of the Deccan Gymkhana wished desperately to beat the British-only Poona Gymkhana, and recruited Baloo into their fold. The Brahmins played with Baloo on the cricket field, but would not dine with him off it. In fact, during the game's ritual 'tea interval' he was made to stand outside the pavilion, at a distance from his team-mates, and served tea in a disposable cup. What the high castes did respect was his bowling prowess, and Baloo's services were soon canvassed by the Hindu Gymkhana of Bombay, which, after 'pacifying a few Gujerathi members', recruited him to their cricket side. In time, Baloo was followed by his younger brothers, Shivram, Ganpat and Vithal, all prodigiously gifted cricketers.³⁶

Baloo and Shivram both played a vital part in the victory of

³⁵ Dhananjay Keer, *Dr Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, 3rd edn (Bombay, 1971), 39–40, 86.

³⁶ Personal interview with K. V. Palwankar (Baloo's nephew and Vithal's son), Bombay, 3 Nov. 1996.

February 1906 over the Europeans.³⁷ Soon afterwards, the *Indian Social Reformer*, a respected voice of Hindu liberalism, commented on the admittance of the low-caste cricketers:

[It is] a landmark in the nation's emancipation from the old disuniting and denationalizing customs. This is a conscious voluntary change, a manly moral regulated liberty, not, as in [the] railways [where members of different castes had willy-nilly to sit with each other], a compulsory change . . . Hindu sportsmen of Poona and Bombay have shown in different degrees that, where national interest required, equal opportunity must be given to all of any caste, even though the offer of such opportunity involved the trampling of some old prejudices . . . Let the lesson learnt in sport be repeated in political, social and educational walks of life. Let all disuniting and denationalizing customs in all high, low or lowest Hindus disappear and let India cease to be the laughing-stock of the whole world.³⁸

This was stirring stuff, but there was one prejudice still to be trampled upon. For caste Hindus could play cricket with Untouchables but not, as yet, under their leadership. In cricket, unlike other team sports such as baseball or soccer, the captain's role is a vital one, for his tactical moves regarding the order of batting, bowling and fielding can win or lose a game. Baloo was the greatest Hindu cricketer, quite possibly too the most intelligent one, but he was never made captain of his team. Equal opportunity in team selection some Hindus could stomach, but not the appointment of an Untouchable as the captain on the field of play of an all-caste cricket team, an appointment which would symbolically represent the upturning of the caste hierarchy. Between 1910 and 1920, there was every year a campaign to make Baloo captain of the Hindus for the annual tournament. This was a movement in which the press and even some of the cricketers joined. In 1913, for example, M. D. Pai was appointed captain. Felicitated at a public function for achieving 'the highest honour to which a cricketer can aspire', Pai replied, 'the honour of captainship should have been given to his friend Mr Baloo, he being the senior and experienced player in the team'.³⁹

This generosity of spirit, alas, was not shared by the lawyers and merchants of the Hindu Gymkhana, who would much

³⁷ Hindus 242 and 160 beat Europeans 194 and 102 by a margin of 106 runs. In this low-scoring match, Baloo took eight wickets in the two innings, and scored 25 and 11 (Shivram's scores were 34 and 16 not out). Baloo's skill as a bowler is analysed in Ramachandra Guha, *Spin and Other Turns: Indian Cricket's Coming of Age* (New Delhi, 1994), ch. 3.

³⁸ 'Hindu Cricket', *Indian Social Reformer*, 18 Feb. 1906. I am grateful to Sanjay Joshi for this reference.

³⁹ *Bombay Chron.*, 1 Oct. 1913.

rather that Pai, a Brahmin, lead their team than a low-caste Chamaar. Baloo, who was by all accounts a reluctant rebel, never advanced his claims openly, but in 1920, tired by years of patient waiting, told a sympathetic journalist that the captaincy, even for one year only, would be just reward for his services to Hindu cricket.⁴⁰ M. D. Pai remained captain that year, but when he was indisposed for the first match of the tournament, the Hindu selectors appointed a young Brahmin from Poona, D. B. Deodhar, in his stead. To compound the injustice, Baloo was dropped from the team altogether. His brothers, Vithal and Shivram, who had been selected to play, withdrew in protest, arguing that one of them should have been made captain. They released a public statement which eloquently brought to the fore years of suppressed agony:

It need hardly be said that the claims of one of us are superior to those of Mr Deodhar, and the [Hindu Selection] Committee's decision can only be characterised as unsportsmanlike in the extreme, inasmuch as they have apparently been influenced by the caste and social and educational status of their selection rather than his achievements or seniority in the field of cricket, and as such the Committee's decision can only be taken as partial with a bias in favour of caste. Social or educational status has no place in sport, when the claims of a cricketer of lesser social status are admittedly superior . . . In arriving at this decision [not to play] we feel very strongly the covert or overt insult levelled at us as belonging to the so-called depressed class as it amounts to a nullification of our claims for recognition for all time. That such matters as caste should be the determining factor in Cricket is more than we can quietly bow down to, hence our decision to stand down from the Hindu Team this year. The impartial cricket-loving public, we feel sure, will at once understand our position and exonerate us from all blame for the step we have thus deliberately taken as it was on a question of principle and self-respect.⁴¹

As their statement testifies, Vithal and Shivram, unlike their brother Baloo, dared to rebel openly. The times had changed too. By 1920, Mahatma Gandhi was the unchallenged leader of Indian nationalism and, for Gandhi, the abolition of untouchability was as high a priority as the movement for *Swaraj*, or freedom. Now, the movement for making one of the Baloo brothers captain of the Hindu cricket team had the implicit moral sanction of the most influential Hindu and Indian. When Vithal and Shivram raised the banner of revolt, most Hindu fans believed that as 'self respecting men [they] could not have acted otherwise under the circumstances'. A public subscription for the rebels raised several

⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, 15 Nov. 1920.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4 Dec. 1920.

thousand rupees. Meanwhile, the Hindus entered the final and, bowing to pressure, the Gymkhana appointed Baloo vice-captain, deputy to the now-fit Pai. Vithal and Shivram also returned, and in what was evidently a planned move, Pai left the field for long periods, handing over the team to the veteran bowler. When the Hindus had the better of a drawn match, Baloo's journalist friend could praise his 'excellent leadership', his 'fine judgement in the management of his side's bowling'.⁴²

Three years later, Baloo's younger brother, Vithal, then in the prime of his cricketing form, was officially appointed captain. Under his leadership, the Hindus won the Quadrangular tournament for the first time in years. At the end of the final game against the Europeans, a seething mass of humanity invaded the field and carried the Hindu captain in triumph to the pavilion. Vithal's supporters were quick to draw a larger conclusion from the victory. That year's contest, they said, had 'a special interest attached to it from the Indian National Point of view'. 'The moral that can be safely drawn from the victory', wrote one correspondent, 'is that the removal of Untouchability would lead to Swaraj — which is the prophecy of the Mahatma'. 'The happiest event', wrote another, 'the most agreeable upshot of the set of matches was the carrying of Captain Vithal on the shoulders of Hindus belonging to the so-called higher castes. Hurrah! Captain Vithal! Hurrah! Hindus who forget caste prejudice! Mahatma Gandhi Maharaj ki jai!' [Glory to our Great Leader Mahatma Gandhi!].⁴³

When Vithal's career finally ended in 1929, a Bombay writer wrote a moving requiem to the end of an unbroken connection, extending over thirty years, of the Baloo brothers with Hindu cricket: 'Nowhere else does the history of cricket supply such a glorious page. Thirty years [and] a single family. One brother after another raising the Hindu cricket edifice higher and yet higher, spreading its brilliance, along with their own, all over India and beyond'. And then, the sharp question: 'Could a Hindu lover of cricket having the least culture within him ever dream of breathing against such pillars of Hindu cricket any ignoble reference to their caste? Could a Hindu cricketer think of [them] with anything but respect?'⁴⁴

⁴² *Ibid.*, 4–10 Dec. 1920.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 14, 15, 18 Dec. 1923.

⁴⁴ R. V. M., 'Hindu Cricket and Baloo Brothers', *ibid.*, 30 Nov. 1929.

The story of the Baloo brothers is a heroic one, but historians of modern India, even historians of the movement for the abolition of untouchability, have ignored it altogether. I am reminded here of some words of the Trinidadian writer and revolutionary, C. L. R. James. In *Beyond a Boundary*, his great book on the history and culture of cricket, James remarks: 'A famous Liberal historian can write the social history of England in the nineteenth century, and two famous Socialists can write what they declared to be the history of the common people of England, and between them never once mention the man who was the best-known Englishman of his time'. The historians James was referring to were G. M. Trevelyan, in the first instance, and Raymond Postgate and G. D. H. Cole, in the second; the 'best known Englishman of his time' unmentioned in their books was the cricketer W. G. Grace. Grace, whose play 'enriched the depleted lives of two generations' was so greatly venerated by the common people of England that, when he died of a heart attack in July 1915 aged sixty-seven, the Germans, hoping to deliver a knock-out blow to the British will to fight, were quick to claim that the cricketer was a victim of a Zeppelin raid.⁴⁵

In cricketing terms P. Baloo was W. G. Grace's equivalent, as the first truly great cricketer produced in India. But of course his contributions extended far beyond the boundary; with his brothers, he played a vital part in the movement for self-respect among the depressed castes. In social terms Baloo's achievement can be likened to that of Jackie Robinson in American baseball, the first black to break through an previously impenetrable social barrier by playing in the major leagues (this as late as 1947).

When Baloo died in 1955, ripe in years and honours, India was independent and the prejudices against caste, at least in Bombay, had largely vanished. Although his death was widely reported in the national press, not one obituarist chose to recall his role in the Poona Pact or (more surprisingly) the struggle over the Hindu captaincy. In public tributes to Baloo, the cricketer V. M. Merchant, a high-caste Hindu, and the sportswriter, A. F. S. Talyarkhan, a Parsi, spoke only of his extraordinary prowess as a bowler. But there were some who had not forgotten the other side of Baloo's achievement — the Untouchable Members of the National Parliament and of the Provincial Assembly, who formed

⁴⁵ C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London, 1963), 157–8, and *passim*.

part of the huge crowd that assembled at the Santa Cruz Crematorium when the cricketer's remains were consigned to the flames.⁴⁶

V

ONE NATION OR TWO?

In December 1926, the Marylebone Cricket Club, the London institution that is reckoned to be the centre of world cricket, sent out a team to tour India. Hosting a dinner for the visitors, the president of the Hindu Gymkhana boasted that through sport they 'had been able to bring about considerable social reform among Hindus'. The doors of the Gymkhana, he said, 'were open to every Hindu including an Untouchable and the Gymkhana had thus been able, through cricket, to remove the barriers of caste'.⁴⁷ The intent of this statement was clear — that since high-caste Hindus had given Untouchables a square deal, it was time for the British to start playing on equal terms with the Indians, in cricket and in politics as well.

The self-congratulation was premature. The war of caste might have been won on the cricket field, but the Hindus were up against a more formidable hurdle still. This concerned their relations with the Muslims, the other great religious community in the subcontinent. The cricket field in Bombay increasingly became a battleground for the resolution of what was to become the most intractable question of Indian politics: whether India was a nation or merely an assemblage of different communities given an artificial unity by the fact of British rule.

The Congress Party, of course, held steadfastly to the position that India was indeed a nation, and that it was the proper guardian of the nation's interests. While the Congress had always drawn into its fold some Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs and Christians, from the late 1920s it was increasingly seen as a party dominated by the Hindus. Through the 1930s and 1940s, the Congress lost much of its Muslim constituency to the rival Muslim League. Hindu-Muslim relations degenerated rapidly, with a wave of religious riots sweeping northern and western India. With each riot, the claim of the Congress to represent the nation became

⁴⁶ *Hindustan Times* [Delhi], 6 July 1955.

⁴⁷ *Bombay Chron.*, 7 Dec. 1926.

more fragile and, with each riot, the argument that India was not one nation but at least two — one Hindu and the other Muslim — was strengthened.⁴⁸

In this political climate, the existence of a major cricket tournament organized on the lines of community undermined the claims of a unified nationalism. For if the Muslims had a separate cricket team, what then was to stop them from demanding a separate nation? (The Parsis, Sikhs and Christians were reckoned to be too small and weak to pose this kind of threat).⁴⁹ From the mid-1930s, nationalist opposition to the Quadrangular intensified. This drew support from the inception, in 1934, of a rival all-India cricket tournament, the Ranji Trophy, played between provinces and hence not 'communal' in character. This tournament was finalized when the Quadrangular itself was in abeyance between 1930 and 1933, a victim of the turmoil caused by the civil disobedience movement of those years. Eighteen teams took part in the first year of the Ranji Trophy, with another dozen joining in before the end of the decade, all competing for a magnificent gold cup donated by the Maharaja of Patiala. The Ranji Trophy helped encourage the development of cricket in numerous cities and towns across the land. With teams promoted by different provinces, princes and government departments, it also generated alternate centres of power and patronage, thus challenging Bombay's paramountcy in Indian cricket.⁵⁰

When the Quadrangular resumed after a four-year break, a range of forces were arrayed against it, all given voice by the *Bombay Chronicle*. Closely identified with the Congress, the *Chronicle* was a 'deliberate participant in the work of nation-building'.⁵¹ Having played its part in overcoming caste prejudice by its campaign on behalf of the Baloo brothers, the newspaper now viewed with suspicion anything that marked Hindus and Muslims as separate and distinct. In November 1935, the *Chronicle* remarked: 'Communal tournaments were, perhaps,

⁴⁸ The role of the Congress and the shifting political terrain of the interwar period is discussed in Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885–1947* (London, 1985).

⁴⁹ In 1941, the respective all-India populations were as follows: Hindus, 275m.; Muslims, 91m.; Indian Christians, 7m.; Sikhs, 5m.; Parsis, 100,000.

⁵⁰ Edward Docker, *A History of Indian Cricket* (Delhi, 1976); A. S. D'Mello, *Portrait of Indian Sport* (London, 1959).

⁵¹ Milton Israel, *Communication and Power: Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1921–1947* (Cambridge, 1994), 216. Chapter 6 provides a useful overview of the ideology and political orientation of the *Bombay Chronicle* without (unsurprisingly) mentioning cricket or the Quadrangular.

necessary at a certain stage in the history of Indian cricket'. Scarcely 'conducive to the growth of [a] healthy nationalism', it was 'time they were given a decent burial'.⁵² The journal's sports editor, J. C. Maitra, wrote consistently in support of the Ranji Trophy and against the continuation of the Quadrangular. A radical socialist jailed during the civil disobedience movement, Maitra supported the interprovincial tournament on cricketing grounds — it drew on a wider pool of talent — but especially for the political reason that it would help 'break through the bond of communalism and welcome the free and healthy atmosphere of nationalism'. While acknowledging the popular support for the Quadrangular, he saw it as little more than a 'medieval method of rousing enthusiasm for sport through communal rivalry'. Unhappily, there was not 'the least doubt that the communal aspect of the Tournament has a greater attraction for the public than mere class and colour of play'.⁵³

When war broke out in September 1939, the tournament was not immediately affected. But the next summer, the Congress ministries in the provinces resigned *en masse*. (These had come to power as a consequence of the Government of India Act of 1935, which allowed for a limited franchise and limited representative government, but left the British in effective control). Congress had asked for, and not received, an assurance that India would be given independence after the conflict, in return for which they would have pledged support for the war effort. Gandhi now ordered his followers to offer *satyagraha*, with hundreds of volunteers (including many former ministers) courting arrest one by one. Political injustice thus joined communal harmony as a basis for opposing the Pentangular. On the eve of the 1940 tournament, the leading Bombay Congressman and former Home Minister, K. M. Munshi, called upon cricket-lovers not to 'indulge in the pastimes of fortunate times'. When 'India is denied the right to be a comrade of Britain in war', he thundered, 'when

⁵² *Bombay Chron.*, 27 Nov. 1935.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18 Dec. 1937, 19 Nov. 1938, 28 Nov. 1939, and *passim*. Other promoters of the Ranji Trophy were also distressed by the low turn-out when compared with the throngs at the Bombay carnival, at a time when the players and quality of cricket were much the same. 'It is a sad reflection on the vast body of cricket fans in this country', wrote one critic, 'that they would rather watch communal cricket than the best talent of different provinces in friendly rivalry': see 'Future of Indian Cricket', in *Official Souvenir of the Opening of the Brabourne Stadium* (Bombay, 1937), copy in British Library, London, Oriental and India Office Collections, Lord Brabourne Papers, MS Eur. F.97/78.

1,500 elected representatives of your country have preferred to be locked up in British jails rather than acquiesce in the present policies of Government', attendance at the carnival would only send a signal that 'the people are so happy and reconciled to their unfortunate lot that they have time to go and enjoy cricket matches'.⁵⁴

In December 1940, the President and Secretary of the Hindu Gymkhana went to seek Gandhi's advice. The Gymkhana had garnered prestige as well as profit from communal cricket and it hoped to obtain the Mahatma's blessing for the continuation of the tournament. To their shock, he told them that his 'sympathies [were] wholly with those who would like to see these matches stopped'. Gandhi asked the 'sporting public of Bombay to revise their sporting code and to erase from it communal matches'. 'I can understand matches between Colleges and Institutions', remarked Gandhi, 'but I have never understood the reason for having Hindu, Parsi, Muslim and other communal Elevens. I should have thought that such unsportsmanlike divisions would be considered taboos in sporting language and sporting manners'.⁵⁵

Gandhi's intervention strengthened the hands of the *Chronicle* and its long-time editor, Syed Abdullah Brelvi. It was said of Brelvi that he 'was monogamous in his loyalties and it was always the Congress for him'.⁵⁶ The editor was a so-called 'nationalist Muslim', that is, a Muslim intellectual who worked for a united India. Perhaps, for this reason, he was especially vigorous in the campaign for the abolition of the Pentangular. His editorials repeatedly attacked the tournament for 'insidiously keeping alive [the] undesirable communal spirit which it should be the endeavour of every patriotic Indian to eradicate from every field of public activity, especially sports'. The *Bombay Chronicle* helped to convene dozens of public meetings where Brelvi and other nationalists urged the public to boycott the tournament and send the money they would have spent on tickets to more worthy causes, such as famine relief or the promotion of peace between Hindus and Muslims. In a speech in November 1941, Brelvi made

⁵⁴ *Bombay Chron.*, 3 Dec. 1940.

⁵⁵ I have relied here on the statement and related reports in *Bombay Chron.*, 7 Dec. 1940. A slightly different version is to be found in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. K. Swaminathan, (New Delhi, 1978), lxxiii, 213–14.

⁵⁶ G. N. Acharya, 'Syed Abdullah Brelvi', in *Some Eminent Indian Editors* (New Delhi, 1981), 50.

a moving call to remove the 'communal canker' from all spheres of public life. 'As in many other fields of public activity', he argued:

we followed the line of least resistance in stimulating the love of cricket among various communities. We seek to spread education in our country by starting denominational schools and universities. We encourage sport and club life in our country by establishing communal sports institutions and clubs. We cater to the physical needs of the people by establishing Muslim restaurants and Hindu restaurants . . . We cannot carry on the administration of our home towns or of the country except through communal electorates. How far this line of least resistance has gone will be apparent from the fact that in what was hitherto the only swimming bath for Indians in our city you cannot have a swim except with your coreligionists, there being different times for Parsis, Hindus, Muslims.⁵⁷

In 1941 a Citizens Anti-Pentangular Committee was formed in Bombay, which urged the public to boycott the cricket. 'The Pentangular has outlived its usefulness', said one of its leaders, adding, 'when the greatest living Indian has condemned communal sports, if we cannot keep away from the Pentangular for one fortnight, we are fit for nothing'.⁵⁸ In the vanguard of the movement were left-wing students, who targeted the players as much as the paying public. A month before the 1941 Pentangular, the Fort Students' Union mailed the same letter to prominent cricketers of different communities: 'We, the students of Bombay', read the letter, 'consider these matches played on communal basis [to be] a slow poison given to the rising Indian generation and blockading the path to independence. We hope you will surely give us your opinion about the matter'. There is no record of any reply, but the players' opinions were made clear when they came to Bombay for the matches. Student radicals picketed outside the grounds, displaying placards with Gandhi's verdict on the Pentangular, and jeering those who bought tickets and went inside the stadium.⁵⁹

As it happens, the campaign to abolish the Pentangular was met by an equally strong movement for its continuation. The Parsis liked the tournament because it placed them, a community numbering in the thousands, on parity with groupings numbering in the hundreds of millions. The rulers, for their part, were not above exploiting divisions within Indian society; even as the opposition to the cricket carnival gathered force, the British in

⁵⁷ *Bombay Chron.*, 1 Dec. 1941.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Times of India* [Bombay], 1 Nov. 1941.

Bombay had promoted a Pentangular Football Tournament and a Pentangular Swimming Competition. And many Muslims saw the tournament as confirmation of their separate status as a nation of their own, a prelude to the partition of India on grounds of religion. The Muslim League newspaper, *Dawn*, claimed that the anti-Pentangular campaign 'really has nothing to do with Hindu-Muslim differences that await settlement in political terms if Hindus and Muslims wish to be free; but this trumpety protest is foisted on the situation to divert attention from the main problem' (that is, of a political settlement between the two communities). It went on: 'The habit of swallowing camels and then straining at gnats is part of the spirit of political exhibitionship which appeals to some of our Hindu friends as the acme of wisdom and progress. American teams play against British teams without "widening the gulf" and at the world Olympics different countries enter their champions without prejudicing the ideal of the League of Nations'. In this interpretation Muslims were already a distinct nation, even if it would take a formal territorial separation (as with America and Britain) to make this an established political and sporting fact.⁶⁰

A small group with a special interest in communal cricket were the All India Radio Merchants Association. When the Pentangular Committee decided one year to disallow radio commentary, the Association led a successful campaign to have it restored, on the grounds that these were 'the most looked forward to radio events of the year, [listened to] by every class, community and creed'.⁶¹ The most emphatic support for the tournament, however, came from people with no political or commercial axe to grind: the spectators. They voted with their feet and with their purses against the Citizens Anti-Pentangular Committee, despite whose efforts the matches were always packed to capacity. Where intellectuals were writing into the *Bombay Chronicle* asking for an end to communal sport, other readers were using the same columns

⁶⁰ 'Cricket and Unity', *Dawn*, 16 Dec. 1943. Support for this position, that separate cricket teams stood in for separate *nations* (real or prospective), comes from the early days of the Quadrangular, when the coming in of the Muslims was described as the 'entry of the Muhammedans into international cricket', and the tournament was habitually referred to as the 'great international contest between the four leading cricket communities': see *Bombay Chron.*, 13 Apr. 1914, 19 Aug. 1915, and *passim*. This characterization was quietly dropped by the early 1920s, no doubt as a consequence of Gandhi's rise to prominence and the insistent claims of the Congress that it represented the 'nation as a whole'.

⁶¹ *Bombay Chron.*, 16 Dec. 1940.

to urge the Bombay Municipality to build more toilets in the cricket grounds. Some cricket-lovers even claimed that the tournament helped transcend the barriers of class and community. The game, wrote one correspondent, had captured 'the fancy of all classes of society in Bombay. Right from the 20 rupee *hamal* [vendor], nay, even sometimes the one pie beggar, to the big-bellied *Shethia* [merchant] or the *topied* bureaucrat, all follow the fortunes of the different teams with zeal and enthusiasm: and what is more, although the tournament is run on communal lines, in cricket there is little or nothing of the communal spirit, and you see a Muslim applauding the hefty hit of Nayudu with the same enthusiasm as any Hindu'.⁶²

Caught in the crossfire was the Hindu Gymkhana, which had to balance popular support for communal cricket against the opposition of Congress nationalists. In December 1940, after the most prominent Congressman had indicated his disapproval, a stormy general body meeting decided (by 280 votes to 242) to pull the Hindus out of the tournament. This precipitated a revolt by the affiliated clubs, who (encouraged by the other Gymkhanas) tried hard, but in the event unsuccessfully, to put up a scratch team.⁶³ Without the Hindus the tournament was a 'colourless' affair, lacking the crowds and the competitive edge of previous years.⁶⁴ In triumph, the *Chronicle's* popular columnist, 'Dim' (D. F. Karaka), composed an 'Unusual obituary notice: Indian Cricket does not regret to announce the glad and expected death of the Bombay Pentangular . . . May it never rise from the grave!'⁶⁵ It did: within the twelvemonth. True, there was by now the new Citizens' Committee, and even the British-owned and establishment-orientated *Times of India* had opened its columns to anti-Pentangular polemic.⁶⁶ But with Gandhi's warning placed (from a cricket-lover's point of view) in a safely distant past, the Hindu Gymkhana decided to sponsor a team, emboldened no doubt by the keenness of the cricketers to play, of its members to go watch and cheer, by the claims of its balance sheet and, not least perhaps, by the fact that the 1940 championship had been won by the Muslims.

⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, 28 Nov. 1935.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14, 20 Dec. 1940.

⁶⁴ See S. K. Ray, *Bombay Pentangular* (Calcutta, 1945), 33, 37.

⁶⁵ *Bombay Chron.*, 30 Dec. 1940. Karaka seems to have taken as his model a famous *Sporting Times* obituary of 1882, mourning the death of English cricket.

⁶⁶ Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, 'Communalism in Sport: Cricket and the Larger Issues', *Times of India*, 20 Nov. 1941.

The crowds came (and the Hindus won) in 1941, but the next year the countrywide Quit India movement made it impossible to hold the tournament at all. In 1943, those Congressmen not in prison renewed their opposition; they were joined by princes anxious to make an early peace with the likely rulers of a free India. The Maharajahs of Holkar, Patiala and Baroda all ordered their players not to take part. But the Hindu Gymkhana, determined to participate, cleverly announced that it would donate part of its profits to the Bengal Famine Relief Fund. 'Dim' now hoped that 'there will not be another Bengal famine next year to justify another Pentangular'.⁶⁷ However, there were fresh calamities to ally the cricket with and in 1944 the Gymkhana donated all its earnings to the Gujarat and Khandesh Flood Relief Funds. When the other Gymkhanas followed suit, an erstwhile opponent conceded that 'communal cricket is not desirable but if communal cricket can bring some relief to suffering humanity let communal cricket live and prosper'.⁶⁸

Through the 1940s the Pentangular had to contend with opposition from nationalist politicians, intellectuals and businessmen, from powerful patrons (the princes), and from the press: all this against a backdrop of war and privation. Defying their leaders, reaching deep into their pockets, the crowds came back year after year, prompting the *Bombay Chronicle* to compare them to alcoholics who would not kick the habit: 'Truly speaking, they have been so much used to it during the last forty years or so, that they are now drawn to it as a drunkard is drawn to a pub'.⁶⁹ The pub stayed open until 1946, by which time the creation of Pakistan was a certainty, and the tournament a source of embarrassment to all but its most die-hard supporters.

VI

COMMUNAL CRICKET AND 'COMMUNALISM'

For the opponents of the Bombay carnival, the affirmation of communal identity, on the cricket field and off, violated the idea of a shared citizenship — that 'we are all Indians before we are anything else'. Some critics even claimed that the Quadrangular led to the crystallization of religious hatred. One such was

⁶⁷ *Bombay Chron.*, 10 Dec. 1943.

⁶⁸ Berry Sarbhadikary, writing in the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* [Calcutta], 3 Oct. 1944.

⁶⁹ *Bombay Chron.*, 15 Nov. 1944.

A. F. S. Talyarkhan, the writer and broadcaster who, in the 1930s, had done as much as anyone else to make the tournament better-known, through his non-stop, ball-by-ball commentaries relayed live by All India Radio. By the early 1940s, however, he had emerged as one of its most strident opponents, writing and speaking out against it. 'It was a truism', remarked Talyarkhan at a public meeting of the Citizens Committee held on Chowpatti beach, 'that no individual was born with the belief that he could show enthusiasm in sport only when it was marked "Hindu", "Muslim", or "Parsi"'. It was only in later life that they had been led into these water-tight compartments. It was not a matter of politics. It was not taught in schools. Students did not learn it from their parents. The conception had come into their minds only by the Pentangular which was being deliberately played on a communal basis'.⁷⁰

In this interpretation, the antecedents of the tournament lay in British divide-and-rule policy; to this, would be added, after 1947, that its consequence was merely to consolidate and legitimate the demand for Pakistan. But did the Bombay Quadrangular and Pentangular, played between 1912 and 1945, by teams chosen on the basis of religion, have anything at all to do with the Partition of India, brought about on the basis of religion in 1947?

Going by the testimony of the cricketers, themselves in the thick of things, one would conclude that it did not. Two Sind sportsmen, one Hindu the other English, asked those who thought that communal cricket 'breeds bad feeling' to 'come to Karachi and see the sporting rivalry and good fellowship which exists amongst both players and spectators', adding, 'they will go away with a greatly altered opinion'.⁷¹ This was written in 1928, in something of a cricketing backwater; but a decade later other people made much the same claim with regard to the Pentangular in Bombay, where (and when) the sporting as well as political stakes were visibly higher. Thus, in November 1940 the captain of the Muslim team, Syed Wazir Ali, issued a press statement claiming that 'the tournament is not in the least anti-national and will and must go on in the interests of Indian cricket'. The next year, when the fate of the Pentangular hung in the balance, the Hindu captain, C. K. Nayudu, wrote that if the tournament was

⁷⁰ Speech by A. F. S. Talyarkhan, *ibid.*, 23 Nov. 1941.

⁷¹ C. B. Rubie and B. D. Shanker, *A History of the Sind Cricket Tournament and Karachi Cricket in General* (Karachi, 1928), 3.

stopped it would mean the 'funeral of Indian cricket'. Nayudu believed that the tournament had not encouraged 'any communal differences'. Instead, it had 'fostered healthy rivalry and promoted communal unity. It has brought the communities together and not divided them'. For the Muslim cricketer, Mushtaq Ali, the tournament had 'always promoted a very healthy spirit of rivalry and inculcated [a] sporting spirit among players and the public'. In his experience, 'ripples and roars of applause, from all the stands around, have greeted good performances without distinction, whether it was for [the Hindu] Nayudu's sixes, [the Muslim] Nissar's ball-taking fizzers or the [Parsi] Bhaya's smart pieces of fielding'.⁷²

The cricketers' statements have the ring of sincerity, but was this really the case? Did sporting battles between Hindus and Muslims heighten appreciation of each other's skills and achievements, or did they instead serve as a prelude to more deadly battles elsewhere? There is of course a long-running debate on this subject. One thinks, for example, of George Orwell's characterization of international sport as 'warfare minus the shooting'. In November 1939, when the Pentangular controversy was beginning to hot up, another British writer put it this way: 'Optimistic theorists', commented Aldous Huxley, 'count upon sport as a bond between nations. In the present state of nationalistic feeling, it is only another cause of international misunderstanding. The battles waged on the football field and the race-track are merely preliminaries to, and even contributory causes of, more serious contests'.⁷³ Completing this picture of unanimity among British novelists is Alan Sillitoe, who thinks that sport is 'a means of keeping the national spirit alive during a time of so-called peace. It prepares the national spirit for the eventuality of war'.⁷⁴

Sportsmen have generally argued otherwise. In 1968, when the International Olympic Committee was contemplating the readmission of South Africa, black athletes in America threatened a

⁷² *Bombay Chron.*, 26 Nov. 1940; *Times of India*, 14 Nov. 1941. Mushtaq Ali himself often practised with the rival team, and his mentor was the Hindu stalwart, C. K. Nayudu. On one famous occasion, Nayudu ordered Mushtaq to disregard an injured hand and go out and help the Muslims to victory over the Hindus, saying that 'the team must always come before the cricketer'. See S. Mushtaq Ali, *Cricket Delightful* (1967; repr. New Delhi, 1981), 147–8.

⁷³ Aldous Huxley, quoted in *Bombay Chron.*, 8 Dec. 1939.

⁷⁴ Alan Sillitoe, 'Sport and Nationalism', in his *Mountains and Caverns* (London, 1975), 84–5.

boycott of the Mexico Olympics. Jesse Owens opposed the boycott: 'We have been able to bridge the gap of [racial] misunderstanding more in athletics than anywhere else'.⁷⁵ Owens very likely had in mind his own experience in the Berlin Olympics thirty-two years previously. In those Games, Owens beat the blond, blue-eyed German, Luz Long, in the prestigious long jump. Long ran to Owens to envelop him in a hug of congratulation, but the black man's victory was seen (apparently by Hitler himself) as a blow to the myth of Aryan invincibility.⁷⁶

Sport has tended to bring together *sportsmen* of otherwise hostile groups, whether black and white, Brahmin and low caste, or Muslim and Hindu. But does it also bring together the larger communities to which the sportsmen belong, or does it rather reinforce ancient hatreds and rivalries? The evidence from the Quadrangular is not wholly conclusive. A former Governor of Sind was convinced that 'communal matches bind communities together and foster harmony on and off the field, not only in cricket but in other games'.⁷⁷ Likewise, Lord Harris thought that the tournament would 'do something to get over any racial antipathy, for instance, it must, I think, bring the several races together in a spirit of harmony that should be the spirit in which cricket is played'.⁷⁸ But while cricket might temporarily bring together the communities, Harris was clear that it was 'scarcely possible to describe the people of India as a nation'. To the charge that the British in India followed a policy of *Divide et impera*, he responded: 'There is no need for the British Raj to try to divide; the natives of India do that most effectively of their own motion in matters of far more serious moment than cricket'.⁷⁹

For the Indian nationalist, then and now, these remarks merely mask the British desire to keep the land divided, to deny that there was a real, tangible, *national* unity being forged by Gandhi and the Congress. The historian would rather suspect the claims of colonial officials for their timelessness, as what fostered harmony in the 1920s might, in the 1940s, generate

⁷⁵ Quoted in Donald Spivey, 'Black Consciousness and Olympic Protest Movement, 1964–1980', in Donald Spivey (ed.), *Sport in America: New Historical Perspectives* (Westport, Conn., 1985), 246.

⁷⁶ Duff Hart-Davis, *The Berlin Olympics* (London, 1986).

⁷⁷ Sir Lancelot Graham, quoted in Berry Sarbhadikary, *Indian Cricket Uncovered* (Calcutta, 1945), 63.

⁷⁸ Harris, *A Few Short Runs*, 241–2.

⁷⁹ Lord Harris, 'Introduction', in Patel, *Stray Thoughts on Indian Cricket*.

fresh hatreds or revive old ones. As it was, through the first decade of the Quadrangular, the Hindu cricketers had wanted most of all to defeat the Parsis who had taken to the game first, who competed with them in the Bombay bazaar and who were suspected for the ties, cultural and economic, that bound them to the Raj. In December 1919, for example, the Hindu team achieved its first Quadrangular win over the Parsis. The celebrations, at the ground and afterwards, were wild and prolonged, for the Hindus had 'at last broken the legend of Parsi invincibility and their supporters were into transports of joy at the glorious victory'. A huge party was hosted by the Hindu Gymkhana, although the final of the tournament was yet to be played. Individual players were then honoured by their respective caste associations. But when the Hindus met the Muslims in the final, on the second day of the match, a dinner was arranged for both teams at the Taj Mahal hotel with the legal expert, Sir Ibrahim Rahimutullah, presiding. An eventual Hindu victory gave rise to little exultation.⁸⁰

In 1919, the Parsi was the real adversary for the Hindu, cricket-wise and business-wise.⁸¹ Politically too, the Khilafat movement (for the restoration of the powers of the Caliphate, emasculated by the British after World War I and eventually abolished altogether by the West-orientated Kemal Attatürk) had, with Gandhi's lead, encouraged a feeling of brotherliness among Hindus and Muslims unprecedented in living memory. Even the rapidly improving team of the Islam Gymkhana was treated with indulgence. When the Muslims won their first Quadrangular in 1924, the Hindu players trooped off to the rival Gymkhana. The chief speaker was Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who had at this time no inkling of the nation he was to help create twenty-three years later. The future founder of Pakistan was known in fact as a leading spokesman for Hindu-Muslim amity. Cricket could bring the two groups closer together, Jinnah argued:

even their Hindu brethren would rejoice in the Mahommedans' success in a spirit of true sportsmanship. The cricket field has many lessons to teach in other walks of life. The brotherly feeling that prevailed throughout the play was no less remarkable and he hoped their Hindu brethren

⁸⁰ *Bombay Chron.*, 4, 9 Dec. 1919.

⁸¹ Cf. G. A. Canser, *My Cricket* (Karachi, 1941), an account which foregrounds Hindu-Parsi conflict on the cricket fields and schools of Karachi.

as sportsmen would no less be pleased, but also rejoice at the Mahomedans' winning the championship.⁸²

The turn in Hindu–Muslim relations on and off the field was signalled by the civil disobedience movement of 1930–4, when Gandhi and the Congress conspicuously failed to generate the inter-community co-operation of the Khilafat period. After the Quadrangular resumed in 1934, both European and Parsi cricket entered into terminal decline, and the Hindu and Muslim teams fought it out for top honours. Meanwhile, the growing influence of the Muslim League — with a now-truculent Jinnah at its head — constituted a political challenge the like of which the Congress had never faced in the half-century of its existence.

The career of the Quadrangular now became part of a wider religious and political conflict. The competition became more fierce; the results accepted with less grace. The fans became more partisan, heckling and booing players from the other side. To the claim that communal cricket brought the communities closer to one another, the Maharajkumar of Vizianagaram offered this answer from personal experience: 'If one were to visit the stands during the Pentangulars at which the Hindus and Muslims face each other, one could see for oneself with what vengeance each community wishes the other the worst and the language used is "Down with the Mussalmans" or "Down with the Hindus"'.⁸³ The cricketers were not always so charitable either. D. B. Deodhar, writing about his going out to bat in the Hindu–Muslim semi-final of 1936, recalled:

At such critical moments, the spectators [would] shout and upset the incoming batsman. On the Bombay Gymkhana, where the Quadrangular was played till then, the boundary was very short, and the batsman could hear the damaging and discouraging remarks hurled at him. I will never forget the hell of noise and the attempts of Wazir's team to disturb my concentration.⁸⁴

In towns hundreds of miles from Bombay, college students would divide up between classes into Hindu groups and Muslim groups, each following the radio commentary from their distinctive points of view.⁸⁵ A city-specific rivalry between Parsis and Hindus had been replaced by a country-wide rivalry between Hindus and

⁸² *Bombay Chron.*, 12 Dec. 1924.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 27 Nov. 1941.

⁸⁴ D. B. Deodhar, *I Look Back: An Autobiography* (Madras, 1966), 88–9.

⁸⁵ As reported to me by P. V. Varadarajan, a student in the 1940s in Central College, Bangalore.

Muslims. To complicate matters, the Muslims — once the underdogs on the field as well as outside it — won the tournament five times between 1934 and 1940. One historian remarked on how sporting fortunes matched political ones: ‘The growing tide in Muslim nationalism found in the cricketing prowess of the team, a field for asserting itself’.⁸⁶ Now, cricketers would no longer be welcome or willing to attend victory celebrations at the ‘other’ Gymkhana. When the Hindus lost, the recriminations — conducted in, among other places, the columns of the *Bombay Chronicle* — were loud and long, with critics baying for the blood of the players, the captain, the selectors, the management. When they won, as in 1939, ‘besides the usual rush of garlands, crackers were fired in abundance’, a ‘new feature of this year’s Pentangular’, as J. C. Maitra noted, without adding that the bursting of crackers was a traditional way of expressing political or military victory. At parties afterwards, trophies and cheques were presented to the players, but the celebrations concluded with a singing of *Bande Maatram*, the nationalist hymn with a distinctly Hindu flavour.⁸⁷

These shifts in sensibility were noticed at the time by those who made it their business to study and write about the cricket. In 1936, the Bombay columnist, Rustom Vakeel, suggested that while the admiration of cricketers remained generous and catholic, the identification with teams always followed communal affiliation: ‘Somehow justice is done to the player, whoever he maybe, of whatever caste or creed or colour. The beauty of stroke or delivery is always appreciated’. But there was the ‘serious drawback which mars the good effects of these unique carnivals’, that is, ‘their communal character’. For ‘as long as there is emphasis on community in the tournament the man who says let the best side win is either uttering a fiction or is a Mahatma’.⁸⁸

Where Vakeel distinguished love of the cricketer (both ‘theirs’ and ‘ours’) from hostility to the community (were it the wrong one, that is), the Calcutta critic, J. M. Ganguly, writing two years later, distinguished between two phases of the Quadrangular, one

⁸⁶ ARBI [R. Bhattacharya], *Indian Cricket Cavalcade* (Calcutta, 1957), 105.

⁸⁷ See *Bombay Chron.*, 2 Dec. 1939.

⁸⁸ ‘Crowds are Cosmopolitan in Outlook on Quadrangular Cricket’, *Bombay Sentinel*, 3 Dec. 1936. ‘Mahatma’ in this context refers not to Gandhi but invokes the term’s generic meaning, i.e., ‘saint’.

pure and pristine, the other tainted by the communal virus. When the tournament was conceived and started times were different:

the sports atmosphere was clear and unclouded by communal and sectarian feelings. On the open green field and under the bright blue sky players forgot their communities and only thought of playing the game, while those who cheered them from the sides only applauded real merit and fine performance irrespective of the caste, creed or the community of players. Everybody revelled in the game, the victor and the vanquished, and the supporters of either. Victory in the Quadrangular was not taken as a communal victory, but merely as the result of better performance by the winning side, and which did not leave behind any rancour or mean jealousy, but only fired the ambition of others to do better next time. The Quadrangular tournament, thus, in those days did not harm, but rather engendered healthy rivalry and gave added keenness to cricket.

Those happy days are now gone, thanks to those self-seeking leaders who want to gain their ends by raking up communal fanaticism, and who would not rest on their oars after doing all the mischief they could in the political sphere, but would go out in search of new fields and pastures green. Even the sacred field of sport they would not leave unmolested. That is why things have become what they are on the cricket field today. That is why Quadrangular cricket has degenerated into communal cricket and communal rivalry.⁸⁹

This was, of course, written with only Hindus and Muslims in mind. In truth, there was no unclouded past when results had not been interpreted in ethnic or religious terms. Rancour and jealousy, triumph and exultation, had marked the competition from its origins. Certainly, as the case of the Baloo brothers showed, cricket could help to erode social distinctions *within* the community; but, at the same time, the game could also serve to consolidate one community against another. On the cricket field and elsewhere, Hindus found themselves opposed to Europeans on the grounds of race; to the Parsis on account of economics; and, finally and most consequentially, to the Muslims with regard to the question of whether free India would be one nation or two. 'Communal' cricket thus always had within it elements of 'communal' conflict. No one understood this better than the first historian of Indian cricket — who was also Indian cricket's first rebel, the instigator of the anti-polo petition of 1881. To those who would believe that the crease was so narrow as to allow white to become black, to those who saw communal cricket as a Khilafat movement in perpetuity, consolidating rather than working against harmony between Hindus and Muslims,

⁸⁹ 'Quadrangular Cricket: A Plea for its Abolition', *Indian Cricket* [Bombay] (Jan. 1938), 188.

Shapoorjee Sorabjee offered this early caution: 'To expect all political difference to disappear or all available self-interests to be foregone on the institution of cricket relations is to live in a fool's paradise'.⁹⁰

Ramachandra Guha

⁹⁰ Sorabjee, *Struggle: Polo versus Cricket*, 123.