

Exploring Football as a Site for Discursive Construction and Disciplinary Power in Colonial India

Subhasish Guha

Abstract

This paper will use the body as an analytical tool in approaching the early history of football in India. It will demonstrate that football here acted as a means for the colonizers to construct and transform the Indian body. However and perhaps more importantly, it will show that the game also became implicated in Indian attempts to resist these colonial corporeal politics. The paper uses the twin themes of discourse and power from Said and Foucault respectively in an attempt to place the body at the centre of analysis in colonial politics with respect to football. The game provided the British an idiom for the discursive construction of the inferiority of the Indian body and the superiority of the European body that was so important to legitimizing colonial rule. The paper also points to football as an idiom in which local resistance to colonial discourses and interventions took place. The ironic evocation of the 'beef-eating John Bull' and the 'rice-eating Bengali' in the wake of the 1911 Mohun Bagan cup final victory demonstrates that Indians thought of colonialism in corporeal terms and used football at certain moments to challenge British representations of them as inferior.

Key words: construct, corporeal, interventions, legitimizing, resistance.