

From Colosseum to Champion's Trophy, the True Opium of the People

News:

Following Pakistan's defeat against India in the Champions Trophy, intense criticism erupted across Pakistan—from fans, former players, and cricket analysts alike. ([Source](#))

Comment:

The sport called cricket has somehow become a symbol of strength and honour for the people of the Subcontinent and all the countries directly ruled by the British. For the people of South Asia, tensions skyrocket when the match is between India and Pakistan. Both teams may play in a ground but are supposed to carry the spirit of the battlefield, as the spectators from both countries are pumped up with hatred for each other, planted by the originator of the sport more than 150 years ago. This game actually provides a unique lens to understand the history, development, exigencies and contradictions of a capitalist political economy. India has always served as a major rival for Pakistan but with the changing political dynamics we have seen Pakistan's performance decreasing while India's rise in cricket, becoming a regional economic power as well. Meanwhile the Afghan Cricket team has surfaced as a substitute to India and is serving the colonial purposes of creating hatred among Muslims.

India and Pakistan are nuclear powers and have fought 3 wars with unresolved conflicts or more appropriately is to say that conflicts have to be kept unresolved to serve the systems nationalistic ideologies. Neither team has travelled to the other's country for a bilateral series since more than a decade.

The people of Pakistan have been sticking to some glorious victories from our history but these times of glory and triumph did not last long and were followed by times of defeat and humiliation because of the international scene due to the sports intertwinement with politics. Cricket was the gentlemanly vanguard of British Colonial rule and it introduced the first version of international capitalism based on commercial partnership between rulers and the ruled and for that it first created nation states. It embodied some fundamental aspects of Victorian society such as sportsmanship and temperament, and was very much a gentleman's game. The game evolved and it became about spreading these civilised values to those considered uncivilised. In the end it was India's super elite, its princes, that helped the sport to transcend class lines. After all they were the rulers carrying the same British rules.

Islam encourages healthy individuals as a Muslim's wellbeing is required to achieve excellence in his/her worship of his/her Creator. From a healthy society to an active battlefield everything demands mental and physical wellbeing of people. Allah (swt) has sent our Prophet Muhammad (saw) as a role model and he (saw) lived his life to set examples and make our path easier for us. In Islam, sports have a purpose and can play an important role in physical and mental fitness of people, but modern capitalist sports actually follow the pattern of old pagan activities that were planned to

make people busy in matters that would only provide diversion from actual issues. Masses will stay busy and rulers will keep ruling. This practice of using sport as distraction can be dated as far back to 58 C.E, when the Roman Emperor sent a ship loaded with gold to Egypt to bring sand to fill the Colosseum where the gladiatorial games are held. While these ships were at sea, protests started because Rome was going through a great famine. When the ships arrived in Egypt, the chief officer in charge of the convoy knew what had happened, the Roman ruler of Egypt asked him what he had to do, would he buy wheat with money to save Rome or to go back with sand. The governor advised him to return with the sand, this advice turned out to be fruitful as once the games began again, the rebellion ended. The gladiator games were intended to incite fervour amongst the people for their state, and we see the very same take place in modern days. Instead of enjoying sport as just a recreational activity or something that keeps us fit, the game, celebrations and heralding are tools used to draw viewers in by playing on the human desire for connection and community. Winning is a point of collective pride and losing one of collective shame. This emotional investment is what capitalists take advantage of and in response we witness an eerie silence of media on mob lynching of Muslims in India and mosque demolitions. William Reich (Austrian doctor of medicine and psychoanalyst) says “If the psychic energies of the average mass of people, watching a football game or a musical comedy could be diverted into the rational channels of a freedom movement, they would be invincible”.

This is the rational channel that the capitalist propaganda has been trying to avoid by keeping people busy in futile activities. Under an Islamic State humans are not just mere sources of material progress and productivity. They have a role to lead an exemplary life that will attract the world to Islam. A sincere ruler as the Caliph Muslims will be responsible to protect the Muslims from these vile and temporary pleasures which carry a huge harm behind a veil. In result the sincere Ummah will know that the purpose of a Muslim’s life is not to achieve a momentary dopamine surge after wasting hours and days over a sport. Sports under the Khilafah (Caliphate) State will redefine the purpose of the activity and the strength of Muslims will have a moving effect on the hearts inshaAllah.

﴿لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا﴾

“There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often.” [Al-Ahzab:21]

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Ikhlāq Jehan**