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RESEARCH ARTICLE

KOLKATA DERBY: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSIGHT TO THE MECCA OF INDIAN FOOTBALL

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Abstract

The present article tries to explore the different dimensions of society which are associated with a game of football. This study shows the way through which the match carries the historical and cultural identity of the people of 'City of Joy' (Kolkata) as well as other parts of West Bengal. Besides, there are layers of emotions associated with this match which pushes almost 1 lakh crowd every year to support their team in the heart of the city. This study also tries to explain how various modes of economic practices sustain based on this match and how the nature of survival strategy of these two teams shaped in the era of modern football.

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Introduction:-

Football is one of the most popular sports in Kolkata. Kolkata is known as Mecca of Indian football because of having two most supported football teams of the country and the excitement of people about football. Usually, the games between two rivals of close geographical proximity are called a local derby or simply just derby. This kind of match is played all over the world where football is a popular game. A derby match of football is also played in Kolkata between Mohon Bagan and East Bengal.

The Kolkata Derby is commonly known as 'Boro Match' in Kolkata. It is one of the fiercely contested and best attended derbies in world football. It is one of the greatest football rivalries of Asia. Supporters of these two teams come from the distant places of West Bengal for cheering his or her team on the match day in the stadium. This match creates a good atmosphere among the sports lovers of Bengal (specially Kolkata) and it also has a great importance in different dimensions of the society. After the partition of India, the rivalry between Mohon Bagan and East Bengal goes beyond the ground and enter into the thought, literature, films, politics, songs and so on. So, the study on the derby match means the exclusive understanding of the impact of this type of social phenomena on different dimensions of human society.

Methodology of the Study:-

The present study was conducted among the sports lovers of Kolkata, most of them are youth. Focus group discussions were also conducted among the aged sport loving persons of Kolkata. Observation and interview was the most important methods here to collect data. In this case, my observation was participatory. The interview was unstructured so, there is no such questionnaire. Besides, case studies were also taken to understand how people perceive the Kolkata derby.

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History of the Rivalry:

Kolkata derby is a football match between Mohon Bagan club which was established in 1889 by Bhupendra Nath Bose and East Bengal club which was established in 1920 by Suresh Chandra Chaudhuri. This match is totally different from the other football matches organized in India because of the excitement among supporters, historical and cultural relevance.

Kolkata derby is historically and culturally significant. This rivalry officially continues from last 95 years (from 1925). The first derby took place on 1925 at Mohon Bagan Ground where East Bengal won the match with 1-0 lead in Calcutta Football League. In 1954, when the boots were compulsory in Calcutta Football League, Mohon Bagan beats East Bengal with 3-1 lead. In 1921, these two teams meet in the semi final of Cooch behar cup. Green and Maroon win the replay match with 3-0 lead after a goalless draw. Though, this match is not an official match, yet it has a great importance because this match was the witness of first ever clash of this two teams.

So, this is also a rivalry between ‘Ghoti’ and ‘Bangal’, which is fought in playground from long years back. Generally, today the supporters of East Bengal are ‘Bangal’ and the supporters of Mohon Bagan are ‘Ghoti’. Though, this kind of separation of supporters was not existed before 1920 (the year of establishment of East Bengal Club).

Significance of the Derby:

This derby is significant in various aspects of the society. The football lovers of Bengal get polarized on a derby day and support their team either Green and Maroon (Mohon Bagan) or Red and Gold (East Bengal). The game attracts almost 100,000 audiences on a regular basis.

This particular match of football always has a great impact on the Bengali society mainly of West Bengal. The dimensions of society in which this match has an impact are:

Bridge of Two Cultural Identity:

Derby of Kolkata is the witness of the nature of aggression of two different identities of Bengali over each other. So, that kind of aggression, attitude, desire to win, battle of being superior to other and many other factors turn the focus of almost entire Bengali community towards the match. People who can not come to see the match in stadium, they watched it in television or keep update the score of the match by internet.

This match might be a symbol of the rivalry of this two football teams, but at the end of the day the match is termed as ‘Bangali er Boro Match’ (The Derby of Bengali). That means there is no differentiation between ‘Ghoti’ and ‘Bangal’ in that day, because this match is the asset of Indian football which is kept alive by the Bengalis (‘Ghoti’ and ‘Bangal’ both).

Apart from this, the fighting, teasing, clashes between supporters are not so uncommon in the derby days. Sometimes police has to take charge to control the situation. In that situation, whenever people injured, no one think about his or her team, immediately they give their hand for the help to the injured. Because, most of them believe in humanity and they are rivals in the ground but not outside of it.

Local Economy:

Local economical aspects are highly influenced in these derby days. Various types of stalls (most of them are temporary and given by local people) are given at the place where the match will be held. It includes the stalls of flags, jersey, foods, drinks, which will be served to the audiences in the day of the match. Besides, there are some artists are found who draw flags and symbols of the clubs in the cheeks and forehead of the interested supporters for money.

People hired tempo cars to come in the stadium. The crowds of countless tempo cars are the common scenario in those match days. Every car charged almost 1500-2000 rupees and that amount is depends on the size and the capacity of the car. Besides, the number of vehicles of local route increased in that time.

Reluctant in Professional Football:

There was a time (nearly 30-40 years ago) when mainly Bengali footballers play in these two teams. But now, mainly foreign players are the highlighted players. Few Indian players left who are crucial for these teams.

Besides, it is often found that the Bengali community is so reluctant to send their children in professional football. They love to enjoy football match on television or in a stadium, but there are only few Bengali left who want to see his children as a professional footballer. They don't want to give time to his children for being involved in professional football because of various reasons.

Many of them think that, it will be much more effective if his children give focus on his study more than the game, because the probability of getting a job will increase after having a good academic degree. Parents think that it may be good for the future of their children and most of those parents are belong to the middle class families.

On the other hand, parents are not always reluctant. Now-a-days, there are numbers of teenagers who prefer staying home or to do something else instead of playing outdoor games specially football. They are mostly addicted to different kinds of social networking sites or modern equipments of entertainment.

For these reasons, in the era of modern football, footballers of outside West Bengal and India come with their agent and local teams sign contract with them for the prestige of the club.

Medium of Sharing Messages:

supporters chose stadium as a platform of sharing messages which are related with their history or identity. Some emotional and short messages are also exchanged in this day. Sometimes they also share some messages which are associated with some political issues of recent times.

Nature of Emotions:

Supporters of these two teams are full of emotions in this day. They create different kinds of rhymes to criticize his opponents. They play various musical instruments, play songs of their team, give slogans, and make noise in roads and stadiums. Almost all roads are stuck for huge crowds. In 1975, one of the supporters of Mohon Bagan commits suicide after defeating 5-0 by East Bengal. These kinds of incidents tell us how much the supporters are emotionally attached with this match.

Concluding Observations:-

Kolkata derby is one of the unique rivalries throughout the world because of its association with phenomena which is beyond the formal regulation of the match. Probably, this is the only match which is the witness of the dual of the natives and the people who have a cross border affinity of the Bengali of West Bengal in a football ground.

During the match, supporters of both teams are rivals of each other but their roar and spirit is the oxygen of Kolkata football. Besides, this match has a great historical and cultural value which makes it more significant than the other matches. It is expected that this match will always remains in the heart of football lovers of India and also entertain all Bengalis generations after generation.

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