

Cricket & Suicides

By IRFAN AHMAD

THE incidents of suicide that followed Pakistan's and India's defeats in the cricket World Cup recently are by no way just individual acts committed amidst high frustration and inane passion. Neither are they due to psychological or genetic factors. According to Durkheim, the French sociologist, the aetiological explanation of suicides lies in the social structure and its ramifying functions. Suicide thus reflects the deep rooted emotions, collective memories, fears, social ties, histories and values which are far beyond our personal choice. He offers three basic types of suicide — egoistic, anomic and altruistic. The aforesaid cases of suicide fall under the last category. It occurs when a person is intimately associated with and over-integrated into his social group. This makes him sacrifice his personal life for the realisation of higher ideals. Individual aspirations give way to the values and sentiments of collectivity.

And in today's context, the collectivity of the social group is the nation-state of South Asia. Consequently, a Pakistani or Indian feels he would be serving the great cause of his group — the motherland — by committing suicide. He is not ready to tolerate any humiliation to his group. So also the demands in both India and Pakistan to set up inquiry committees to probe into the causes of defeat. The rising passion of nationalism and the suicides should be seen in this backdrop.

In this context it is interesting to

recall the defeat of the British football team by Mohan Bagan of Calcutta in 1911, during the colonial regime. The Calcuttans then celebrated it with unprecedented joy and exuberance. Perhaps the main factors behind it were socio-political. Football had then become the symbol of Indian identity in a colonial milieu. A colonised psyche had for the first time been able to vanquish its master. Today, the scenario is not very different. Now it is cricket which is an important symbol of assertion and expression of identity. Between the near disillusionment with the political system at large and the painful consequences of structural adjustment, cricket probably operates as a medium of articulating identity.

The identification with a social group or any collectivity is always negotiated and renegotiated in a context and vis-a-vis the 'other'. And if there is no 'other', it has to be invented. Because the 'other' is a figure on to whom the blame of frustrations and failure could easily be projected. In South Asia, with the societies of both India and Pakistan communalised, Indian identity is asserted against the nemesis called Pakistan and Pakistani identity is asserted against India, the other. Such communal rubric could be gauged from the reactions that followed the concerned matches. Cricket in South Asia is no longer a mere game, it reflects the dynamics of socio-political forces on both sides of the Indo-Pak border.

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