

Communalism's Intrusion into the Realm of Calcutta Football

The infiltration of communalism within the realm of Calcutta football marks a disquieting chapter in the city's sporting history. Once celebrated as a platform that transcended religious and ethnic boundaries, football in Calcutta bore witness to a lamentable shift as communal tensions seeped into the fabric of the sport.

The era of communal harmony, which characterized the early decades of the 20th century, inexorably reached its denouement in the 1930s. The very individuals who had vociferously championed Mohun Bagan's resounding victory against the British now found themselves gradually assuming the mantle of adversaries. While the members of the Mohammedan Sporting Club had once joined their Hindu counterparts in a reverent procession to a sacred Hindu temple to celebrate their triumph in the 1911 shield, the same degree of fervor and jubilation was conspicuously absent when fortune smiled upon the Mohammedan Sporting Club in the 1930s. Instead, it becomes evident, without much difficulty, that the club's achievements were repeatedly undermined on multiple occasions, as the Indian Football Association (hereafter referred to as the IFA) placed the club in precarious predicaments during that very decade, often on grounds that were dubious at best. The sense of fraternity that had thrived in the 1900s had withered away, making room for divisive tendencies within the footballing arena, mirroring the communal tensions that pervaded Bengal's political landscape. In this discourse, we intend to scrutinize how the political disparities between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal permeated the football field, successfully sowing discord based on communal lines. It is intriguing to observe that, akin to earlier decades when the political milieu had fostered a shared animosity of Hindus and Muslims towards the British, the 1930s, marked by heightened communalism, witnessed a replication of projecting enmity towards adversaries when the Mohammedan Sporting Club outshone its Indian counterparts. Consequently, we aspire to explore how one can discern a recurring pattern wherein the roles of primary rivals on the football field align or correspond with the primary rivalries in the political arena.

During the third decade of the 20th century, a significant transformation occurred, shifting the locus of influence from the Bengali Bhadrolok elite in Calcutta proper to an emerging popular platform in the suburban regions, commonly referred to as the mofussil in Bengal. It was during this period that the Mohammedan Sporting Club had firmly established itself as an institution, providing solace and sanctuary for the Muslim populace of Bengal. Soumen Mitra contends that a victory by Mohammedan SC held profound implications, carrying nearly equal weight for both the Ashraf and Atrap Muslims in their quest for a sense of identity. In this process, the club triumphed in bridging the divide that separated these two segments of the Muslim community. Mitra says –

“Amongst the Muslims, the upper classes utilized the mass implications of the fame to engender a sense of cohesiveness that would lend credence and muscle power to its political furtherance. The lower classes found in the game an instant legitimization of long-standing grievances. Thus, for both the classes it was a symbolic avenue of asserting a form of social relevance.”

Under the auspices of the Mohammedan Sporting Club, a distinctive Muslim identity took shape, coinciding with the club's remarkable streak of successful seasons, which unfolded in tandem with the burgeoning politicization along communal lines, particularly following the enactment of the 1935 Government Act. The ascendance of the Muslim League in Bengal and the establishment of the New Muslim Majlis, among other political factors, contributed to the prevailing notion that the Mohammedan Sporting Club was intimately intertwined with the growing significance of Muslims in Indian politics. Notably, the New Muslim Majlis played a crucial role in endorsing this assumption, as its members openly expressed their intention to assimilate the club and propel it to the forefront of the nation's sporting landscape. The club's status as a symbol of social identity becomes glaringly apparent when they clinch the championship in the first division of the Calcutta Football League. The fervor surrounding this iconic victory reverberated with various degrees of impact, transcending mere resistance against British dominance and calling for unity among Muslims from diverse social strata, particularly those residing in the outskirts of the city.

However, the unifying power of a collective based on the triumphs of a local team was not a sudden, dazzling phenomenon. It had already been observed during the exuberant festivities that accompanied Mohun Bagan's historic shield victory against the British. However, the nature of celebrating the success of the Mohammedan Sporting Club can be discerned as distinct from that of Mohun Bagan. In the case of Mohun Bagan's victory, for instance, every report radiated an inclusive tone, explicitly highlighting the participation and elation of all communities. The joyous celebrations of Muslims for their "Hindu brothers" were specifically emphasized, as noted in The Mussalman's report. Yet, when documenting the accomplishments of the Mohammedan Sporting Club, the discerning use of the term "Muslims" in these reports does not escape notice. These reports do not depict a joint celebration where both Hindus and Muslims take to the streets, but rather underscore the involvement of "Muslims" from all walks of life. A notable instance can be found in the club's souvenir reports, specifically when recounting their inaugural League championship, which reports –

“With their progress in the League, there was unbounded enthusiasm among the Muslim public of Calcutta.”

Even in their subsequent championship victories, the prevailing tone persists, emphasizing the profound impact of these triumphs in invigorating the Muslim spirit. In the case of Mohun Bagan, the discourse surrounding the native populace employed the terms "Indian" and "Bengali" interchangeably, reflecting a sense of collective identity. However, a conspicuous absence is observed in recognizing the Mohammedan Sporting Club with the same degree of unity. The scenes of jubilation described in the club souvenirs depict the team bus being "escorted in a triumphant procession by thousands of Mohammedans wild with joy." This portrayal of exultation and pride predominantly attributed to Muslims, rather than Bengalis or Indians, recurs on numerous occasions.

This disparity underscores the differential treatment of Muslim activities and affiliations compared to those of Hindus. During the celebration of Mohun Bagan's victory, its Hindu identity was not foregrounded, and the terms Bengal and India were employed almost interchangeably. However, in the context of Mohammedan SC, the Muslim identity takes precedence. This aligns with Gyanendra Pandey's contention regarding Hindu and Muslim nationalism, wherein he observes that politically aware Hindus and their nationalist agenda often emphasized a broader sense of collective identity,

“Whether they were Hindu nationalists or secular nationalists was a subsidiary question. All Muslims, however, were Muslims”

Similarly, in this context, there is a discernible sentiment that permeates, emphasizing the significance of a Muslim team's triumph as primarily a Muslim victory.

However, despite the emphasis placed on the Muslim element in the aforementioned situations, they do not explicitly portray the Mohammedans as a primary rival. However, the antagonism witnessed on the football field soon mirrored the simmering tensions in Bengal's political landscape during the 1930s.

In the broader context, the diminishing influence of the Hindu Bhadrolok class and the ascendance of Muslims in the suburban areas of Bengal had a detrimental impact on society, stemming from a sense of insecurity and apprehension over potential displacement from a position of supremacy. This emergence of mass politics, as astutely described by Joya Chatterji, engendered a more inward-focused, parochial, and narrowly defensive approach among Bhadrolok politicians in safeguarding their established privileges.

During this period, following the enactment of the 1935 Government Act, the legislature allocated a mere twelve seats for the urban general or Hindu constituencies, while allotting a significant sixty-six seats to the rural areas. This imbalance was particularly unfavorable for Hindus, as out of the 117 seats reserved for Muslims, a substantial 111 were assigned to rural constituencies. The opportunistic climate for aspiring Muslim politicians, led by figures like Fazlul Haq, resulted in their ascendance in provincial politics and the formation of parties such as the Krishak Praja Party. The very name of this party signifies its primary focus on the welfare of peasants and rural life, and their proclaimed objective to abolish the zamindari system further unsettled the Hindu Zamindars and Bhadrolok classes. Consequently, the pervasive undercurrent of hostility, often rooted in communal divisions, began to manifest itself in various forms, some of which found expression in the literary works of the time.

An illustrative example is found in the writings of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, who unreservedly highlighted the myriad ways in which he found the expectation of long-term harmony between Hindus and Muslims to be unnatural and irrational. In his essays, the author repeatedly emphasizes not only the impossibility of a presumed friendship between the two communities, but also the inherent cultural differences he perceives among Muslims. While acknowledging that Muslims possess basic abilities such as reading and writing, he remarks on the cultural disparities, suggesting that

“If the essence of learning is width of mind and culture of heart, then there is no comparison between the two communities...Many may hope to establish a parity of learning [between them] but I do not. A thousand years has not been enough time [to achieve this]-nor will another millennium suffice.”

Sarat Chandra vehemently contests the notion that the responsibility of liberating India from foreign domination should be evenly shared between the two communities. He says –

“Hindustan is the land of Hindus. Therefore, the duty to free this country from the chains of colonialism lies with the Hindu alone...The Muslim

has his gaze only on the Turks and they Arabs- they do not have their souls in this country.”

Advancing this line of discourse, Sarat Chandra further expounded on the alleged barbaric and bestial inclinations attributed to Muslims, positing that such traits were inherently uncontrollable. These opinions, widely held by the Hindu intelligentsia, contributed to a growing sense of alienation evident not only in literary works but also across various domains, including the football field. To comprehend the implications of this viewpoint concerning Muslim barbarism, it becomes imperative to closely examine the overall treatment meted out to the Mohammedan Sporting Club, ultimately culminating in their decision to withdraw from league competitions entirely.

Prominent scholars such as Paul Dimeo, Kausik Bandyopadhyay, and Boria Majumdar have frequently highlighted the significant undermining of Mohammedan Sporting Club's accomplishments. Within the narrative of Indian football history, the initial landmark often cited is Mohun Bagan's triumph in the shield victory, which leads to a gross oversight of Mohammedan Sporting Club's successes in earlier tournaments like the Coochbehar Cup. These accomplishments, including their triumphs in 1902, 1906, and 1909, are seldom discussed in the annals of Indian football. Curiously, despite the considerable number of victories attained by Mohammedan Sporting Club during this period, they failed to generate even half the level of impact on the Indian populace as Mohun Bagan's did, despite the prevailing state of communal harmony at its most ideal equilibrium during this decade.

Even if one disregards the argument that tournaments like the Cooch Behar Cup had limited appeal to the urban populace, the glaring absence of recognition for Mohammedan Sporting Club in the annals of Indian football cannot be overlooked. While the adoration bestowed upon Mohun Bagan for their defiance against British supremacy may find a logical explanation, the lack of celebration surrounding Mohammedan Sporting Club's numerous victories in the shield during the 1930s, despite their opposition to the British, raises pertinent questions. Not only did the club secure the League championship consecutively from 1934 to 1938, but they also became the first Indian team to qualify for the first division league. Adding to their accomplishments, they claimed the title as champions in their inaugural season and, a few years later in 1938, became the sole Indian team to triumph in both the Shield and League in the same year. Therefore, it becomes evident that the qualification of Mohammedan Sporting Club into the League, their victorious debut season, and their consecutive title defenses hold greater significance when compared to the singular, albeit noteworthy, victory of Mohun Bagan over the British.

The disregard and downplaying of Mohammedan Sporting Club's triumphs by the IFA and the Hindu Bhadrolok class were not the sole causes of discontentment among the Muslim community. It didn't take long for conflicts to arise between the IFA and Mohammedan Sporting Club regarding the former's treatment of the latter in the aftermath of altercations on the football field with other teams. The actions and conditions imposed by the governing authority as a gesture of reconciliation eventually led Mohammedan Sporting Club to withdraw from the League entirely.

To delve into specifics, the animosity harbored by the IFA towards Mohammedan Sporting Club reached its climax in 1937 following a physical altercation during a League match between players of East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting Club. In this incident, a member of the Mohammedan Sporting Club team lost his composure and physically assaulted an East

Bengal player, resulting in his immediate dismissal and further consequences to be determined. However, a problem arose when the IFA took matters into its own hands: the player known to be the instigator, Sattar, was not the one subjected to suspension. Instead, Habib, a key player for the team, was unjustly singled out for suspension. The situation worsened when K. Nooruddin, the secretary of Mohammedan Sporting Club, appealed for a reconsideration of the IFA's decision, only to face a three-year ban himself.

Consequently, it comes as no surprise that Muslims attributed such treatment involving severe penalties and humiliation to the deep-seated animosity of a Hindu-dominated governing body towards a club that held significant cultural significance for the Muslim community. This sense of indignation finds resonance in the Star of India, where the IFA is explicitly accused of depriving Mohammedan Sporting Club of its dignity due to the rapid ascent it achieved on the football field. The publication states,

“They had driven out of the picture the ‘Premier’ Indian teams and all teams, in fact, which had held supremacy before the advent of the all-conquering Mohammedans. They had taken the glory out of Hindu football, which had fought their way to a glory never before achieved by Indians...The very idea of so much glory to the Mohammedans seemed to have destroyed appetites and stolen sleep from the eyes of the thousands of the only loving children of Mother India.”

This extract from the editorial piece aptly illustrates how the treatment of Mohammedan Sporting Club players and officials reflected the prevailing nationalist and anti-Muslim sentiment within the broader societal context. When a complaint was lodged with the Maharaja of Santoshpur, who served as the president of the IFA at that time, certain terms of negotiation were proposed to the authorities of Mohammedan Sporting Club. However, these terms only served to exacerbate the already escalating sense of condescension. The proposed solution to prevent further conflicts on the football field involved deploying volunteers to patrol the crowds supporting Mohammedan Sporting Club, insinuating that Muslims were more likely to instigate fights compared to Hindus. This proposition, understandably, was deemed unacceptable by any respectable member of the Muslim community, as it amounted to a direct insult to the entire club and, by extension, the Muslim population in Bengal. To quote the suggested terms and conditions, the IFA proposed that the club should...

“form a volunteer corps from amongst your carefully selected members to sit among the spectators of your community with a view to use their influence in keeping order during the game and to prevent violence and lawlessness at its conclusion and also to collaborate with the police to protect the players and members of the opposing club against molestation.”

It is intriguing to observe that this preconceived notion of Muslims as having animalistic tendencies and being unruly if left unchecked aligns with the portrayal of Muslims described by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay in his aforementioned essay, "Bartaman Hindu Mussalman Samasya" (The Present Hindu-Muslim Problem). Sarat Chandra, an eminent author of 20th-century Bengal belonging to the Bengali Hindu Bhadrolok class, presents a rather bleak depiction of the Muslim nature, drawing references from instances such as temple desecration and assaults on women. He opines...

“Once upon a time, the Muslims had entered India with only the intention of looting, not to consolidate an empire here. However, their desires were

not satiated simply by robbing and plundering the people of their wealth. Instead they felt the need to desecrate temples, smash into pieces idols, rob women of their dignity and chastity; practically they have humiliated the religion and humanity of the Other to its utmost possibility without any hesitation.”

In both instances, one can discern an underlying perception of savagery inherent in the attitude of the Hindu intelligentsia towards the Muslims.

Mohammedan Sporting Club's exceptional performance continued to fuel the resentment of the IFA, intensifying their vindictiveness. Despite the IFA's efforts to sideline the club's prominent player, Habib, Mohammedan Sporting Club persevered and triumphed in the 1938 edition of the Calcutta Football League. The club's official souvenirs chronicle numerous instances of biased refereeing, denied penalties, and arbitrary changes in venues without prior consultation with club officials. While many of these grievances, such as poor refereeing or denied penalties, are commonplace in football matches worldwide, when examined within this context, each unfair or unnatural action targeting Mohammedan Sporting Club cannot escape scrutiny through the lens of communalism. Consequently, the decisions made by the IFA, following the rise of Mohammedan Sporting Club and the decline of Hindu dominance, ultimately led to the club's withdrawal from the Calcutta Football League in the 1939 season. Lastly, it is imperative to shed light on an area where the deliberate marginalization of a Muslim achievement is so evident that no explanation other than religious insecurity can suffice. This pertains to the career of Mohammed Salim, one of Mohammedan Sporting Club's finest footballers, who carved a niche for himself not only in India but also abroad through his remarkable success with the renowned Scottish club, Celtic FC. However, until the late 1990s and early 2000s, Mohammed Salim's name had failed to garner recognition as a national football hero. His success story was on the verge of fading into obscurity, until a few journalists such as Kausik Bandyopadhyay, Boria Majumdar, and Debayan Sen, among others, published his tale following an interview with his son. It is ironic to note that an Indian footballer, amidst the turbulent decade of the 1930s, achieved remarkable success in British football, only to be forgotten in his homeland, while his name remains revered in Celtic's history. Furthermore, the spectacle of Mohammed Salim's skillful play even inspired various references in popular culture.

Hence, we would like to commence by accentuating the manner in which Salim's prodigious talent was revered in the Western world during his tenure with Celtic FC, and subsequently juxtapose it with the stark reality of his accomplishments remaining largely unreported until recent times, thus only now receiving the recognition befitting an overlooked national hero.

Prior to joining Mohammedan Sporting Club's indomitable roster, Salim's exceptional abilities had already been recognized, as he had previously played for East Bengal and Aryans. Salim's tenure with Mohammedan Sporting Club from 1934 to 1936 coincided with the club's most triumphant period, and his remarkable footballing prowess earned him a place in the All India IX squad that would face off against the visiting Chinese Olympic squad in 1936. With the assistance of his cousin, Salim embarked on a journey to Scotland, where he underwent trials after receiving authorization from the Scottish Football Federation to play barefoot. The trial took place in the presence of one thousand club members and three coaches. Salim's impressive performance secured him a spot in Celtic FC's starting eleven for a match against Hamilton, where he displayed his skills by scoring two goals, including one from a penalty, contributing to the team's resounding 5-1 victory. Soon, his game became the

talk of Scotland, earning him the moniker of the "barefoot Indian Juggler." Match reports duly hailed the emergence of this new talent from Asia, with lavish praises and accolades. A notable example can be found in the Scottish Daily Express, excerpts of which have been provided by Rashid Ahmed, the son of Mohammed Salim. These accolades came in the wake of a match against Gaston, in which Celtic FC emerged victorious with a commanding 7-1 scoreline, with Salim purportedly contributing to three of the goals. The excerpt reads,

“Ten twinkling toes of Salim, Celtic FC's player from India hypnotised the crowd at Parkhead last night in an Alliance game with Galston. He balances the ball on his big toe, lets it run down the scale to his little toe, twirls it, hops on one foot around the defender, then flicks the ball to the center who has only to send it into goal. Three of Celtic's seven goals last night came from his moves. Was asked to take a penalty, he refused. Said he was shy. Salim does not speak English, his brother translates for him. Brother Hasheem thinks Salim is wonderful – so did the crowd last night.”

Another report, in the Glasgow Observer, described Salim as,

“Salim, Celtic's Indian International trialist, tickled the crowd at Celtic Park on Friday with his magnificent ball manipulation. In his bare feet he was a conspicuous figure but this was further emphasised by his dark skin against the white and green of the Celtic strip. His play was top class. Every ball he touched went exactly to the place he wanted it to. Not one inch was it out. His crosses into goal were simply shrieking to be nodded into the net. I wouldn't like to have calculated the score had McGrory been playing..... [Danny]Dawson missed a penalty kick which Salim, despite the invitation of Alex Millar, refused to take.”

Salim, despite being offered the opportunity to continue his footballing journey with Celtic for the subsequent season, chose to return home due to an overwhelming sense of longing for his homeland. Nevertheless, the lasting impact Salim left on the annals of Scottish football history is evident in the response received from Celtic FC when Rashid Ahmed, Salim's son, sent a letter to the club during a time when Salim was gravely ill several years later. In an interview conducted by Boria Majumdar and Kausik Bandyopadhyay, Rashid Ahmed divulges that the intention behind sending the letter was not solely to seek financial assistance for his father's treatment, but rather to test the recollection of the Celtic FC management regarding the Indian footballer who mesmerized audiences with his barefoot ball-juggling prowess decades ago.

“It was just a ploy to find out if Mohammed Salim was still alive in their memory. To my amazement, I received a letter from the club. Inside was a bank draft for one hundred pounds.”

However, upon Salim's demise in Kolkata in 1989, there was a glaring omission of his noteworthy tenure as a key member of the first team at Celtic FC, a prestigious club that continues to participate in the esteemed European Champions League. His obituary, in Amrita Bazar Patrika read:

“Mohammed Salim (Sr) a member of the legendary Mohammedan Sporting club side that claimed five successive Calcutta senior football league titles in the 30s died in Calcutta on Wednesday morning. He was seventy six. A right winger in his playing days, he was intimately connected with many sports clubs and took active interest in

training youngsters. He is survived by his wife, four sons and three daughters.”

Among the myriad publications dedicated to the ardent enthusiasts of the beautiful game across the globe, Mohammed Salim's name stands immortalized, transcending the confines of weathered Scottish newspapers. Even as recent as 2006, one can witness fervent adoration for Salim within the verses of poetry crafted by Irish football aficionados. This exquisite composition, aptly titled "The Indian Juggler," masterfully chronicles the trajectory of Salim's illustrious journey, spanning from his illustrious exploits in India to his ventures on foreign soil, notably his esteemed tenure at Celtic FC, and ultimately, his revered return to the cherished fold of Mohammedan Sporting Club. The initial stanzas artfully introduce both Celtic FC as an institution and the enigmatic persona of Salim himself:

***“Players from all nations
Have represented Celtic on the pitch,
Where their culture is glorified
In wearing a Celtic strip,
And a man from India,
Where traditions are steep,
Stepped onto Parkhead’s hallowed turf
Wearing only bandages on his feet.
Mohammed Salim, to Calcutta,
He was born,
At a time when Nationalist,
Fought the British Crown,
Independence was the cry
Against “The Colonial Rule”,
Where matters could have been settled
With a game of football.”***

Subsequent verses eloquently elucidate Salim's distinguished tenure at Mohammedan Sporting Club, delineating the triumphs he attained while adorning their revered crest. Furthermore, it gracefully captures the narrative of his transformative journey, traversing through the lands of Egypt, before ultimately arriving at the illustrious shores of Scotland. Within this captivating ode, the poet deftly weaves the tale of Salim's mesmerizing exploits on the hallowed grounds of Celtic FC, illuminating the indomitable spirit and unwavering prowess that propelled him to ascend the echelons of footballing glory:

***“Mohammed’s career started with the
Mohammedan Sporting Club,
Where his skills on the wing
Helped them to 5 consecutive championships,
Then he headed for Europe,
Where days were dark and cold
As he set sail on the ocean liner,
“The City Of Cairo.”***

***“Life in London,
Didn’t warm to his soul,
As he took to the sights
Of industrial Glasgow,***

*Where his gifted skills
Would be put on display,
As he was offered a trial by
Celtic's Willie Maley."*

Within the verses of the poem, a poignant moment is captured, shedding light upon Salim's benevolent nature and compassionate disposition. It portrays a charity match that was orchestrated with the intention of persuading him to prolong his stay at Celtic FC. Remarkably, despite being entitled to a share of the funds amassed, Salim selflessly elected to bestow the entirety of his earnings upon underprivileged children who graced the spectacle as spectators. Thus, this selfless act becomes an enduring testament to his philanthropic character. The subsequent stanzas pay homage to his enduring legacy, eloquently exalting his nimble footwork, which seemed to shimmer with a celestial radiance. It reverently acknowledges how his name is indelibly inscribed in the annals of Celtic's storied history, forever immortalized as a revered figure of unmatched distinction.

*"Then, he wore for the first time,
The famous green & white hoops,
But his feet were strapped with bandages,
Not, leather football boots,
He shone like a diamond*

*In his few Celtic games,
Where headlines and praise
Offered him a little piece of fame."*

*"Homesick for India,
Overshadowed his play,
As his career with Celtic*

*Was just a short stay,
But a charity match
Was played in his honour,
And he donated the gate receipts,*

To Glasgow's needy orphans."

*"The Indian Juggler
With the twinkling toes"
Took his skill and trickery
Away from Glasgow's shores,
He's still remembered in
Celtic's history books,
As his son still possesses,*

Mohammed Salim's old green & white hoops."

Amidst the eloquent verses dedicated to extolling the talents of Mohammed Salim in the aforementioned poem, it becomes intriguing to discern potential political undercurrents that may have permeated the sentiments of the British. Notably, the reverence bestowed upon Salim predominantly emanates from Scottish and Irish writers, while English newspapers seem inclined to adhere to the prevailing Indian journalistic trend that hailed Bhaichung Bhutia as the first Indian to venture into the realm of European clubs. A striking example of

this lies within the report published by the English newspaper, Bury Times, which documented Bhutia's accomplishments in Bury FC, proclaiming him as *"the first player from that country to score in a professional game over here."*

Such deliberate omission by an English newspaper, wherein the triumphs of an Indian luminary from bygone decades, representing a celebrated Scottish team, are dismissed, cannot be easily disregarded. Thus, it becomes evident that political tensions manifesting on the football field were not exclusive to the Western hemisphere alone.

This prevailing trend is mirrored within India itself. While Scottish newspapers resonated with praise for Salim throughout his tenure at Celtic FC, and even beyond, his name remained a mere whisper devoid of any noteworthy recognition in India until the turn of the millennium when Boria Majumdar's interview with Rashid Ahmed shed light upon his illustrious legacy. Curiously, for a majority of Indians, it was the name of Bhaichung Bhutia that evoked a sense of pride as the first Indian to grace a British football team, despite Bhutia's placement in the second division and his prolonged periods on the sidelines. Even esteemed scholars like Paul Dimeo perpetuated this narrative, highlighting Bhutia's groundbreaking international venture among South Asian footballers. Regrettably, the mention of Salim as the pioneering Indian to embark on a foreign footballing odyssey is glaringly absent in the works such as "Soccer in South Asia: Empire, nation, Diaspora," edited by Paul Dimeo and James Mill. This omission is poignantly lamented by Rashid Ahmed, who shares,

"My father went to play abroad in 1936. He was the only Indian to play in England but he was never recognised by people here. People here say it is Bhaichung Bhutia who was the first Indian to play in England....I spoke to the press to say if you are writing about Bhaichung and about Independence, write something about my father. He played in the first division, before Independence and Bhaichung only played in the second division and that also he played only two or three matches, and my father was a regular player for Celtic FC which was a first division club of Scotland. What I need is for my father to be recognised as the first Indian who has played abroad."

He goes on to talk about the difference between the respect that Salim received from the Scottish team and how starkly different it is from the manner his name was forgotten in India, when he sent his friend to find out if anyone remembers him in Scotland:

"I asked him to just find out if my father's name is there. So, he went and he found out that a big portrait of my father is still there. That means they still remember my father but people here do not want to recognise that my father was the first Indian footballer to play in England."

Only in recent times, following Rashid Ahmed's vocal advocacy and the support of scholars like Majumdar, Badhyopadhyay, and Sen, has there been a resounding demand to accord due recognition to his father's accomplishments. It is only after unearthing and documenting the narrative surrounding Mohammed Salim that every subsequent piece exploring his journey to England assumes a uniform tone. Numerous newspapers that have shed light on Salim's story have emphasized the act of "rediscovering the lost treasure" or resurrecting the memory of a forgotten hero. Remarkably, even in the midst of continued adoration by Scottish football enthusiasts, reports as recent as 2008 in The Scotsman underscore the relative obscurity of Salim within his own homeland, depicting him as *"lost episode."*

The conspicuous absence of comprehensive coverage regarding Salim's triumphs abroad resonates with the muted fanfare surrounding Mohammedan Sporting Club's achievements on the domestic front. Such a dearth of recognition can only be attributed to the inhibitions of the Hindu Bhadrolok classes, who exhibit reluctance in showcasing the talents of a predominantly Muslim club, let alone celebrating the individual success of a solitary Muslim figure on a distant continent.

The case of Mohammedan Sporting Club and Mohammed Salim serves as a glaring example of the pervasive practice of downplaying and undermining the achievements of marginalized groups in the realm of sports. This pattern finds parallels in contemporary instances, such as the inadequate coverage of women's football in countries like England and the overlooked dismantling of the women's league in the United States. The argument often put forth to justify this lack of coverage is the perceived lower demand or popularity of women's sports. However, in the case of England, where women's football is considered the third most popular sport in the country, such an argument loses its validity.

Similarly, in the UK, incidents of sexism and unequal treatment within women's football often go unreported. For instance, female players from Arsenal carrying lunch boxes for their male counterparts or being compelled to take additional jobs in the club's laundry rooms to make ends meet, while their male counterparts earn significantly more in a week than they do in a year. These injustices, along with other significant events, are often left unaddressed due to a discomfort in reporting matters that may challenge the established order or provoke feelings of insecurity. Whether these insecurities stem from religious sentiments or patriarchal attitudes, the underlying problem remains the same. This issue persists not only in the context of 1930s Colonial India but also in the present-day first-world countries of Britain and the USA.

In conclusion, the continuous undervaluing and underreporting of achievements and injustices within sports, particularly those involving marginalized groups, highlights the need for greater recognition, representation, and equality in the sporting world. Efforts must be made to challenge and overcome the deep-rooted societal prejudices and systemic biases that perpetuate these disparities, fostering an environment where every individual, regardless of their background, has an equal opportunity to thrive and be acknowledged for their contributions.

Writh Barua
Prima Sanyal