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The reasons for the spread of soccer as the world game and the relationships between this sport and issues of nationhood, imperialism, identity, and migration have been exercising scholars for nearly a generation. This contribution breaks new ground in being one of the first European based English language accounts relating to the Indian sub-continent. The book first appeared as an issue of the Cass journal *Soccer and Society* in 2001. Many of the bibliographical references are to works on cricket, demonstrating the relative imbalance in the treatment of the two sports in the available literature. Contributors are a mixed bag of academics, journalists and a coach with an academic background and their essays are also varied, ranging from historical accounts to a plan to reproduce the soccer program of the Australian Institute of Sport, suitably modified (aye, there’s the rub) in India. So the themes of the sub-title are only part of the contents of this volume.

Keith Cooper’s foreword tries to be very diplomatic but still reveals some of FIFA’s exasperation that the countries of South Asia have not done enough to help themselves develop the world game. Cooper is the Director of Communications for the world governing body and in a position to know. As Novy Kapadia points out in his historical introduction to football in India, ‘The AIFF (All India Football Federation) is seen as at best badly organised and at worst inscrutable and unaccountable.’ In 1996 FIFA promoted an Indian national league but by 2002 it appears to be faltering.

A problem with edited collections of this type, particularly those which have their origins in conferences, is that inconsistencies can appear and be left hanging with the reader unable to assess which interpretation is valid. Take the non-appearance of India in the World Cup in Brazil in 1950. According to Cooper, India was invited but turned down the invitation because the team was not allowed to play in bare feet. (p. ix) Mills and Dimeo claim the British presence on the FIFA Committee (which committee?) deliberately obstructed (what does that mean?) the invitation to the Indian Football Association, citing correspondence supplied to them by FIFA Communications. (p. 1) Kapadia says India qualified for the World Cup in 1950 but lack of foreign exchange, the long sea journey and problem of barefooted players forced India to pull out. (p. 24). But although India, Burma and the Philippines were placed in Group 10 of the pre-tournament competitions no team participated according to Orlando Duarte’s *Encyclopaedia of the World Cup*. So if India ‘qualified’ it was only because Burma withdrew, while the position of the third member of the group remains totally obscure. In their conclusion Mills and Dimeo talk of the invitation to the World Cup in 1950 as an ‘unexplored window’ (sic) on the experience of nationhood and national identities and mention that an English coach George Ainsley would have taken India to the World Cup if the AIFF had accepted the invitation. (p. 165). So the puzzle remains and the sequence of events and their causes need to be established before we try to draw too many conclusions about nationhood and national identity.
Mills and Dimeo deserve credit for the pioneering and enthusiastic work they have begun, and some of the questions they have raised, directly or inadvertently. Their larger claim that the game has shaped the history and society of South Asia remains unproven, as they admit in their conclusion which stresses the research which still needs to be done. Even in India, where it is clear that some soccer events resonated widely in society, such as the famous victory by Mohun Bagan over the East Yorkshire Regiment in the final of the IFA Shield in 1911 in Calcutta, an early, though not the first, victory by an Indian team over a British one in a major competition, the long term influence on the movement for independence remains uncertain. Tony Mason thought this result reinforced British hegemony, at least in the short run. Dimeo cites Guha to the effect that the switch of the capital of the Raj from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911 may not have been a coincidence but a plan to sever the link between sporting prowess and militant anti-imperialism. Dimeo distances himself from this claim in a footnote, but this has consequences for his general argument. In a chapter in another book he attributes the transfer of the seat of government to Delhi to nationalist opposition to Curzon’s partition of Bengal in 1905. He concludes by arguing that even when celebrating victories, Indians were implicitly accepting the underlying ethical order which governed the treatment of success in games.

Nevertheless he and Mills draw on Guha’s subaltern studies for the idea that forms of mimicry and transformation of that which the imperial powers and their agents sought to impart represented a form of resistance to colonialism with an agenda of its own. But there were other contradictions. The policy of using sport as means of inculcating virtues of the archetypical British muscular Christian was undermined by those who wanted to keep Indians and British separate. Mills and Dimeo point out that British influence on soccer had been overtaken by indigenous Indian developments from the 1930s. Communal divisions were also reflected in soccer rivalries, particularly in the post-independence period. In Goa, while football was introduced by English missionary priests, the pattern, as Mills describes it, was more like the emergence of Catholic football clubs in Scotland where he suggested they were a means of keeping young Catholics away from unsuitable influences, rather than an exercise in imperial hegemony.

Alex McKay tells a tale of the failure of football to take root in Tibet, despite the best efforts of British and Indian proselytisers, which is a warning against taking the sport to society causal linkage too seriously. Mario Rodriguez outlines the recent clashes between modern corporatised and global soccer teams in India and the inherited largely amateur structures of the game inherited from the British.

The editors admit to the absence of any discussion of women’s soccer, which they blame on lack of research. Since the Indian women’s team has been relatively more successful than the men’s in recent years this is a gap which needs to be filled. Nalinaksha Bhattacharya’s novel Hem and Football tells of a Calcutta schoolgirl selected for a high school football team who then goes for trial with first Bengali professional club for women. For her football was an escape route from family pressures and a sublime neutral ground. So it may be that other concepts of identity apart from the overtly political need to be included on the agenda for research.
The place of football in the colonial and post-colonial past is explored and both British and Portuguese influences on the development of the game are considered. Contemporary issues such as the impact of the professional league in India and the role of UK Asians in the organization of the Indian game are considered. Future scenarios are explored and models for progression and problems facing the sport in south Asia are outlined. Illustrated with some b/w photos. 23 x 17 cms, softback, 186 pages. Introduction: Empire, Nation, Diaspora. Article in Soccer and Society 2(2):1-16 · September 2010 with 7 Reads. How we measure 'reads'. A 'read' is counted each time someone views a publication summary (such as the title, abstract, and list of authors), clicks on a figure, or views or downloads the full-text. Future scenarios are explored and models for progression and problems facing the sport in south Asia are outlined. Do you want to read the rest of this article? Request full-text.