



## SOCCER (ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL) IN URBAN WEST BENGAL WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON SPORTS MARKETING – AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

**Abhijit Das<sup>i</sup>**

Associate Professor, Dr.,  
Department of Anthropology,  
West Bengal State University,  
Barasat, Kolkata-700126,  
West Bengal, India

### **Abstract:**

The pervasiveness of commercialization in sports is responsible for enormous amount of money as oriented through its primary and secondary participants in the urban contexts of West Bengal especially in the city of Kolkata. The degree of seriousness and importance given to it is to make money by the players, trainers, officials, technicians, sponsors, spectators, and mass media and so on. It is now one of the fastest growing industries with a commanding position in the popular cultures of West Bengal under globalization. Thus, soccer has become commercialized, and hence, highly specialized forms of business industry with an increasing appeal of global corporate marketing. The business professionals control, sponsor and promote sports to expand their markets and maximized profits, build positive brand awareness. The transnational corporations use soccer for introducing their products services all around the country on global scale. The present paper analyzes the nature and extent of sports industry with prime emphasis on sports marketing especially in the domain of soccer along with its allied technology mass media and advertising as one of the major commercial sport events in West Bengal.

**Keywords:** sports, soccer, commercialization, marketing, sponsor

### **1. Introduction**

Sports may be defined as organized and competitive games, and it is of interest to anthropologists both with regard to the needs of the human species as well as to specific sociocultural systems. Those sports are found in most if not all known societies and vary in function and form with different social structures and cultural systems

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [romeda.das@gmail.com](mailto:romeda.das@gmail.com)

(Huizinga, 1955; Hunter & Whitten, 1976; Guttman, 1978). Sports reflect the total sociocultural system (Robert, Arth & Bush, 1959; Service, 1962; Malcolm; 2008, Jarvie, 2012). Sports, indeed, constitute a major part of country's economy. It is now generally acknowledged that mediated sports in the contemporary societies are a highly marketable as well as profitable commodity. The increased importance of media in sports is revealed in the scale of finances involved. The increased financial involvement of mediated sports has augmented its influence and power. Some sports scholars including sports anthropologists suggest that this media involvement has resulted in the increased commoditization of sports which has ultimately ruined its recreational appeal.

It is impossible to fully understand contemporary society and culture without acknowledging the place of sports. We inhabit a world in which sports is an international phenomenon. It contributes to the economy, politics, religions, social statuses, levels of wealth, and genders; some of the most visible international spectacles are associated with sporting events; it is part of the social and cultural fabric of different localities, region and nations. The ethnographers in Social-Cultural Anthropology study sports as parts or aspects of society and culture. They look at sports in terms of their patterning and importance in people's lives and their connections to social, economic, political, and religious institutions of a given culture. Researches in the ethnography of sports help us to understand sports as socio-cultural constructions created by people for particular purposes. As sociocultural constructions, sports are related to historical, economic, and political factors (Blanchard, 1989; Nanda, 1994; Coakley, 2003).

This indicates that sports are the most ubiquitous activities of modern contemporary society and culture. The pervasiveness of sports can be seen by the enormous amount of primary and secondary involvement in it by people of all ages and social strata (Sage, 1979). Sports penetrate into and play a significant role in almost all of the social institutions mostly in economy. The involvement in sports either as a participant or in more indirect ways has almost commercialized in modern industrial urban societies. At present, there is no doubt that major sports in West Bengal are big business along with a commanding position and interconnectedness in the recreational life and culture as well as global entertainment industries in the recreational life and culture as well as global entertainment industries.

Although growth in industry is not necessarily a valid economic indicator of increasing profits, the proliferation of professional sports franchises certainly indicates that professional sports like soccer( locally and popularly known as 'Football in West Bengal) is one of the most successful and expanding industries in modern society of West Bengal. The salaries and other incomes through sports and allied activities by the active and passive participants reflect the economic value placed on sports.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The problem per se in the present context is to look into the 'culture trait' that represents soccer as sport in the urban context of West Bengal (Kroeber, 1936; Herskovits, 1955; Bose, 1961). The urban areas of West Bengal are patron of soccer, the modern institutionalized sport as organized by numerous clubs like associations and organizations. Through competitions, training and secondary involvements mostly in the form of spectacular events, training, and academies etc. the urban sports are well-linked with the cities. The variegated trait- elements like their international rules, technologies, training, club houses, concerned officials, and members, spectators, and various other bi-products like sponsors, political platforms, advertisements, media coverage rivalries, violence, law and court interference, etc. are part and parcel of the soccer in the city sports. Football, Cricket, Volleyball, Tennis, Hockey, Table-Tennis, are the important examples of the urban major sports bearing the above features.

The economic as well as commercial milieu with professional make up, corporate sponsorships, and mass media influence – these are the major components that have a long hand in creating a halo around the major sports which form sports trait-complex today, in the cities. These new bi-products have been introduced when sports became a part of the global 'great tradition' (Redfield, 1956) in this regard.

Soccer has imbibed a particular tradition in the history of West Bengal. It is one of the most ubiquitous activities of contemporary society and culture of the state. However, sports never have been as thoroughly commercialized as marketable products as they are today, mainly in urban spots as well as in the city. Never before had economic factors so totally dominated decisions about sports, and never before commercial had organizations and large corporate interests had so much power and control over meaning, organization, and actual purpose and appeal of sports.

The pervasiveness of commercialization in sports like soccer is responsible for the enormous amount of primary and secondary participants in the variegated sports events by people of all age groups and social strata mainly in the urban city context of West Bengal. Thus in addition to providing job opportunities for an increasing number of professional participants, sports also penetrates into and plays a significant role in the mainstream economy. The degree of seriousness and importance given to it is to make money by the players, coaches, officials, technology, training, management, spectators, and mass-media and so on. It is one of the fastest growing industries with a commanding position in the present world of entertainment popular culture in West Bengal, which finally brings the domain of sports marketing.

Sports marketing, being another bi-product of the soccer- world or sports industry in West Bengal is significantly becoming one of the justified and relevant areas of interdisciplinary research in sports including Social-Cultural Anthropology.

Marketing through sports has come into existence in West Bengal on a global scale in which brands use mainstream or alternative sports to connect with both a broad and targeted group of consumers like players, club officials, sports lovers and common

mass. Significant number of business companies and brands with global repute use sports marketing to build positive brand awareness, supported retail and sales promotions and gain an overall advantage in their market in the domain of soccer. The common examples of sports marketing in the city of Kolkata include player's endorsements, sports events marketing through sponsorships and events-stage as constructed or grounds fencing and in- stadium advertising.

Soccer with other sports today, has to evaluate in terms of calculating money as oriented through its marketing during seasons. Sports and events are evaluated in terms of endorsement potential and media personas; their popularity and celebrity often depend on their ties to corporate names and logos. Stadiums, teams, and athletic as well as sports events are named after large corporations rather than historical figures and places with local meaning. Corporate interests influence team colors, uniform designs, the scheduling of events, how the media covers events and even the announcers say during the coverage. In fact, media as well as entertainment companies own a growing number of sports teams; they sponsor and even own events.

Therefore, by itemizing those new trait-elements in the economic or the commercial spheres of sports in the urban city contexts West Bengal with special emphasis on the linkage between sports and marketing along with the changing trends through the rapid impact of globalization can be brought out in the present study. The present researcher has undertaken the problem anthropologically and hopes to arrive at results that may illuminate the study in so far as the sociocultural significance of sports are concerned.

### **3. The Settings: Venues of Observation**

With regard to the above problem, two different contexts comprising of two spatial contexts (town and city) have been taken into consideration. The District (North 24 Parganas of West Bengal) Sub-Divisional Town, namely Barasat has been studied as an area of interaction between town and the city primarily. Similarly, the city, Calcutta (renamed recently as 'Kolkata') has been selected purposely for the present study. It lies on the Hoogly tributaries of the Ganges. Mainly soccer clubs and similar organizations and participants (players, trainers, organizers, club-officials, sponsors, spectators, journalists, business persons in the sports goods markets and finally general people of respective exposures) have been selected and investigated and probed as venues or locales of the present study.

### **4. Aims and Objectives of the Present Study**

The present study offers a new dimension for anthropological understanding of soccer, the major sport, as part of the total sociocultural milieu of West Bengal, which has the proposed objectives and aims in a nutshell to view:

- a) The general pattern of the sport, its origin in the urban contexts of West Bengal as a background of commercialization in sports.
- b) The distinctiveness of traditions of soccer or football in sports, both in urban town and city contexts and their linkage.
- c) The nature of corporate sports marketing with its expanding horizon in the areas of soccer sub-culture of West Bengal under study with regard to the global appeal due to the impact of mass media.
- d) The role of city as a primary agent of commercialization of soccer with special reference to its marketing through with a global appeal.
- e) Finally, the present study highlights a holistic observation with structural-functional analysis of the soccer in the wider gamut of sociocultural milieu of West Bengal under globalization.

## **5. Methodology of the Present Study**

For this study, a longer duration (one year i.e. December, 2010 to November, 2011) of fieldwork has been carried out to reach the proposed aims and objective. After completion of data collection in the Sub-Divisional Town, Barasat, the data were collected from the city of Kolkata. The study is basically ethnographic and qualitative one. Hence, the established method of anthropological ethnography, like Participant Observation along with the Intensive Interviews (structured), Case Studies, Questionnaires, have been used for the collection of empirical data.

Furthermore, for collecting records, the textual data from the printed materials like books, magazines, newspapers, internet sources, etc. were also utilized. All data as collected in this matter are likely to yield results with regard to the main problems of commercialization of sports through as marketable products and also its sociocultural transformations.

## **6. Findings, Discussions and Interpretations**

**A.** The most popular sport 'Football' (Soccer) is a typical culture trait-complex creating its frenzied popularity in present day West Bengal. The trait that once has been introduced in the Bengali core by culture contact with the British has gradually become one of the most popular sports in the state with enormous amount of primary and secondary involvement in and around it. Presently, the football in West Bengal is not only a game, but it also has become a popular sport. Millions of people, irrespective of caste, class, creed as well as ethnic boundaries watch televised soccer. Because, football is of great interest to the people of west Bengal, it has an age old ethno history and presently is a unifying cultural trait-complex that merits attention and interests in Social-Cultural Anthropology. It manages to attract participants of diverse ethnic backgrounds, regions, religions, political parties, professionals, social strata, levels of wealth and genders. The popularity of modern professional football depends directly

on mass media, especially television and newspapers. Many corporate honchos companies looking at football clubs with greater interest because of the footballing standards have been rising in recent years. Their money is spent on training, tournaments, and telecasts, tours, paying of players and trainers and so on.

Finally a well-defined network of institutionalized authority structure, management, sentiments, mass-media influence, spectator unrest, diversified relations as well as specialized divisions of 'labour' and roles are found the sporting event under globalization.

Therefore, soccer, one of the popular sports as culture trait-complex particularly in West Bengal had certain specific elements. One of these is the utilization of leisure which had its origin and growth in the cradle of agrarian economy of the pre-British India. The British came in India with their new form of economic, educational, and cultural norms. In Bengal, the important urban center like Calcutta was purposely selected by them for trade and commerce. The new city Calcutta as introduced by the British in Bengal had its impact on the traditional pattern of recreation including games, sports and allied activities. This may be defined as a new type of induced organized and institutionalized games or sports that altered to a large extent the passive non-induced games and sports of the earlier era. For instance, one of today's popular sports of West Bengal, Soccer (association football), had been brought to India by various groups of Englishmen like civilians, traders, college teachers, military personnel and above all the Navy. The first recorded organized match in this regard in Calcutta was between Civilians and the Gentlemen of Barrackpur. So, these kinds of friendly matches were organized amongst the European clubs within themselves initially. These matches and clubs have given impetus to the elites of Bengalese in the city to establish institutionalized sports clubs as composed of Bengalese in the localities. Henceforth, a new era of entertainment has been introduced, where sports were willingly taken as a regular pastime recreation. By this way, the Calcutta Football Club (1872), Trades' Club (Dalhousie Athletic Club, 1878), Naval Volunteers (1884), Howrah United Armenian Club, etc. had been established. After establishing such sports clubs in Calcutta, Soccer and Cricket matches (friendly and knockout) between such clubs teams began to be played fairly, joyfully in regular session. Its devotees moved from one plot in the Maidan (the large playground and the dominant sports centre in Calcutta) or the Esplanade to the other parts of the city and finally to the suburbs as well as hinterlands. Thus, started a new era of organized and institutionalized major sports in Calcutta and gradually in West Bengal (Sengupta, 1976).

In general, the institutionalized sports of European origin were widely accepted, organized and played by the people of the state. After independence while the National Government as well as Sports Ministry patronized those sports began to spread in the adjacent urban and moffusil towns through the developed system of communications.

Such a story, in brief, of the first encounter of the major sports in West Bengal. Culture is ever changing and transitory. With passage of time it undergoes evolution

and transformation. So, the sports of Bengal have undergone various cultural transactions is very much evident.

**B.** The District Sub-Divisional Town, Barasat is an area of modern sports. It is situated at the Western part of the District, North 24 Parganas. The inhabitants of Barasat are actually more nearer to the city of Calcutta. They always dream to come closure to the daily life and culture of the city as it is well-communicated with it through Eastern Railway and Calcutta-Jessore Road, existing in parallel. This well-developed physical communication system helps to make possible of cultural communications, too.

The modern sports took a new shape in Barasat with various clubs and organizations. The junior boys of (16-25) years and youths of (25-35) years and onwards and also a considerable number of girls engage themselves in popular modern sports like football, cricket, volleyball, badminton, table-tennis, kabaddi, carom, and chess regularly in respective seasons.

The government registered (sports registration) sports clubs in Barasat organize different sporting events. Those clubs also arrange sports for local competitions. The outstanding players of Barasat participate or represented Calcutta clubs in different national leagues and knockout tournaments. The players from outside areas or clubs file their names for other clubs at the time of players' recruitment against money and sports kits. The comparatively upper-income clubs always try to get the opportunity to recruit players from Calcutta and outside areas. Therefore, money around sports is a common feature in Barasat. It has also been observed that numerous prizes as well as awards after post match sessions through cash money are given in most cases in lieu of shields, trophies, cups, and medals. This tendency has entered in Barasat recently.

Marketing through advertising in the form of festoon, posters, loud-speaker announcements, local newspaper, like Barasat Barta are also an essential part of sports in Barasat. The festoons as well as posters are very common, mainly during the final matches in and around the venues. Most of those are given by the business companies, small investment and savings units, local hi-profile shops, with a proposed contract with the organizers to intimate and raise their franchise and brand of products among the spectators and the mass. For this purpose, the organizers receive donations sometimes for prizes, players' uniforms, drinks, Tiffin for the participants and so on.

Therefore, marketing through sports events are found in subtle form but is increasingly found day by day. For instance, the use of logo on the team uniforms (Jersey) a sponsored by the business companies is in vogue. The Yuba Gosthi club has benefitted in condition of using brand as logo of a biscuit company. Similarly, Yubak Sangha from Modern Electronics (seller of electronic goods), Subhas Institute has got sponsorship from a private nursing home. In order to make publicity of their brands or products the organizers of the tournaments announce the names of the sponsors publicly during spectacular final matches. Sometimes, printed hand bills containing the amounts of prizes and the names of the sponsors are distributed among the spectators.

C. The commercial aspects are much more exposed in the sports in Calcutta as it is presently the abodes of commercialized global spectator sports including soccer in West Bengal. Each and every active and passive participant in it always trying to earn money through it. Basically, the clubs as well as organizations give all the financial support to the teams including players, trainers, physicians, technical assistants, or to the sports itself. The large amount of money is accounted for both in income and expenditure of the clubs during sports seasons.

The marketing lineage between sports and products in the sports of Calcutta is also evidenced through the increasing ubiquity of business personalities. Actually, the clubs are not the money making juggernaut. Since financial support is essential for any club to hold its forte, industrialists, rising promoters, business corporate coming forward to extend their helping hands mainly with the super clubs at Maidan, which are getting more supporters or fandom and media coverage around the most popular sports like soccer and cricket. Their money is slated to be spent on training programmes for footballers, cricketers, athletes, better kits and also to enable the hiring of better trainers of international repute. In this way, Panasonic, Coca Cola, ONGC, Hero Honda, UB Group, Kingfisher, Tata Steel, Emami, BPL, Charms, have come into the sports, in order to popularize their brands overnight. During investigation, it has been found that the corporate companies prefer sports for its leaps and bounds nature. The commercialization process started accelerating when the TV rights for the national and international leagues and knockouts. Some business companies are even started their own clubs or teams like, Mahindra and Mahindra, SAIL, ONGC, etc. Sometimes the names of the sponsoring group of company's brands are used before the teams' names (e.g. Prayag United Sports). The companies also recruit specialists as marketing managers in charge and sports coordinators to look after the above linkage or products of various business groups of companies. For instance, few national players of the super clubs of Calcutta and coaches are regularly found to advertize for Hero bicycle, health drinks, cement, biscuits, small scale savings units, group of industries, and many others especially on television channels and daily newspapers. The management policies of the top ranking company's personalities ensure that through the super heroes of sports their brands will have much more consumer appeal.

Thus, sponsorship is a marketing strategy that pursues commercial and/or corporate objectives, exploiting the direct association between the clubs or organizations, brands or products with other organizations' brand or personality. It implies a commercial transaction between the various parties involved. Nevertheless, the following six categories have been identified as the main areas of sport sponsorship in the urban sports of West Bengal.

- a) Event specific, e.g. National Football League, Santosh Trophy, IPL Cricket.
- b) Individual specific, e.g. cricketer Sourav Ganguly, footballer Baichung Bhutia.
- c) Team specific, e.g. Emami and Kingfisher's sponsorship of the East Bengal football team.



- d) Competition specific, e.g. Coca Cola Mir Iqbal Hussain Trophy ( Sub-Junior National Championship).
- e) Ground specific, e.g. Nike, ONGC, etc. in Salt Lake Stadium.
- f) Coaching scheme specific, e.g. Tata Football Academy (TFA), Sports Authority of India (SAI) Khudiram Anushilan Kendra.

The benefits of sponsorship to sports are two-fold. First, sports require financing and even those sports and events that can be considered to be commercial welcome the additional income generated by sponsorship activity. Second, sports seek media exposure and publicity. As this is also, what sponsoring companies seek, they are likely to take steps to improve publicity for the sponsored event and thus increase awareness of both the sports event and the Company.

Therefore, commercialization through sports marketing with global networks is coming of age in the urban city contexts of West Bengal. Hence, it is worth mentioning that, as sponsorships essentially the commercial activity, sponsors expect a commercial return on their investment, often leading to their requiring some control over the sports events and primary participants whom they sponsor.

## **7. Concluding Observation**

Commercialism has been apparent in sports since the expansion of professional sports in the nineteenth century West Bengal. The emergence of sports as business mainly in the urban contexts of West Bengal has been the result of the actions and interactions of a number of factors. Increasing customer (Sports loving mass) expectations of service (players' performance in events) quality, value for money, and advances in technology, has led to a commercial approach to the management of all types of sports organizations – sports managers as well as officials of the organizations have become business-like in their operations. Hence, it is the market with huge amount of money to be made from sports, though, which above all makes it business. Income from sales of sports kits, equipment and merchandising, advertisements through media, prize money make sports a commercial viability in the present day West Bengal. Income from sponsorships and media rights makes sports an attractive business market under global network.

Globalization of football along with other sports in West Bengal involves both an intensification of worldwide sporting relations through time-space compression of the globe, and local sporting transformations involving enhancement of local sporting identities, as well as of local consciousness of the world of sports. So, in the global-local sporting nexus, global forces are generally held to be most powerful and their control more spatially extensive which becomes true in the sporting context of West Bengal in the country like India.

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