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The Five-Day War



P. Anil Kumar

India-Pakistan cricket fed a chauvinist imperative for decades. The liberal wind in the willows changed all that.



M.S. Gill

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A small-time cricketer, but a passionate observer, I have watched Indo-Pak cricket since 1947. I have seen many India-Pakistan matches, from the one in Amritsar under Imran, to the

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1996 World Cup Bangalore ODI, and the amazing Chennai Test match.

Both authors have relied on other books for their material, with a few observations and opinions of their own. It is true that the first forty years of the Indo-Pak encounter offered the dreariest cricket you saw. A large degree of nationalistic pride was involved, accompanied by a morbid fear of losing. Pitches were stone dead; unfortunately they continue to be so. Umpires strained every spectator's belief, Shakoor Rana being the most notorious. We were not blameless, but perhaps more subtle. Playing safe meant interminable plodding, resulting in monumentally boring Test centuries. My vivid memory of Bapu Nadkarni's bowling: his analysis would invariably read 45 overs, 35 maidens, 29 runs, and maybe a wicket, largely because the batsman's brain had been dulled by the on-field somnolence. The T-20 *tullebaazi* has at least put an end to this farce.

Both authors have talked of the Pentangular Tournaments in Bombay, based on Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, and Christian teams. Gandhiji rightly attacked the idea of religion-based teams. Shaharyar has weakly defended it, and Shashi has correctly criticised it. Religious identity in sports could only exacerbate differences. The tournaments did produce strong rivalries and exciting cricket, but had obvious negative effects. I have heard of pre-Partition hockey matches between Khalsa College, Amritsar, and Islamia College, Lahore, where chauvinism could not be avoided. I admired Vijay Hazare. All I knew was that he scored a century in each innings at Adelaide, with cotton gloves, and a cloth cap, against Lindwall and Miller. This book tells me he was also a Christian! Shaharyar may soften it, but lately the Pakistan team does project religion, which is not what it should be. I met the team in Delhi. It included Kaneria, and I could sense his isolation. The Yousuf Youhana case also makes me uncomfortable.

Both writers point to the great responses of crowds in India and Pakistan in recent times. The Chennai crowd's applause for the winning Pakistani team was stunning. There were, of course, times in the past when a stony silence greeted a great batting performance of an outstanding rival. The truth is, people in both countries are ahead of their governments. Each opportunity to fraternise with and welcome neighbours has been eagerly seized.

But it is difficult for sports in the subcontinent to be unaffected by political cross-currents.

I am fascinated by Shaharyar's comments on Pakistan's most successful captains, Hafeez Kardar, Imran Khan, and Inzamam-ul-Haq: "Hafeez Kardar and Imran Khan were superb leaders of men...Kardar and Imran were nationalists who wore their patriotism on their sleeves.... Kardar tended to glorify the role of Muslim rulers of the past...this aggressively nationalist attitude was not conducive to producing a mellow atmosphere, in public and in political circles of India". Further, "I found Inzamam to be wise, dignified and perceptive.... Inzamam's leadership was a mixture of cricket captain, and a prayer leader of the team...he was astute in handling diverse personalities, and visiting cricket captains with great sensitivity.... Over time, I developed a high regard for Inzamam." I would agree with Shaharyar.

Recent changes have transformed the game and its ethical code. T-20 is controlled by TV and advertising. Players are now owned and traded, as in football. The myth of the gentleman's game has faded. In Rudi Koertzen's words: "The players will stand there, nick the ball, and wait for the umpire to make the decision. For me, that is cheating". I agree. Lara and Gilchrist are a rarity.

Besides, cricketers have to play through the year, ignoring weather, injuries, and needs of family life. The book mentions neutral umpires introduced by Imran's efforts. I have a proposal. It is time we had neutral pitch masters, appointed by the icc, to give both bowler and batsman a fair chance. Test matches can still be exciting if they are played in the manner in which the recent Lord's Test between Australia and England was.

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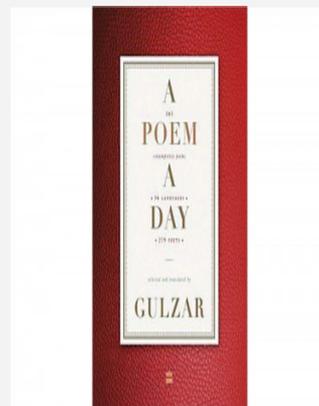
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