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The Postcolonial Study of the Portrayal of Sports in Chakmak, Baal Vigyan Patrika.

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Abstract: This research paper focuses on the postcolonial portrayal of sports in Chakmak, Baal Vigyan Patrika, a literary piece for young readers published in Hindi by the Eklavya Foundation since 1985. Over the past three decades, numerous sporting events have been organised across the globe, including in India. Therefore, following major sporting events such as the Cricket World Cup, the Olympics, the Commonwealth Games, and the Asian Games, this paper will focus on the respective monthly editions during which these events took place. The paper uses a diachronic approach to trace changes in these portrayals over the three decades. The research applies concepts of mimicry and hybridity propounded by Homi K. Bhabha to examine how colonial legacies manifest or are subverted in visual and narrative portrayals of sports. Also, Stuart Hall's theory of representation is employed to interrogate the ideological function of images and language used in the magazine. Special attention is given to whether indigenous games and athletes are foregrounded or marginalised in relation to global sports spectacles, and how these editorial choices shape young readers' perceptions of physical culture, competition, and national identity. The paper will critically examine how indigenous and global sports are represented, and how these representations reflect, resist, or reimagine colonial legacies. The study will also consider the implications of language, illustrations, and editorial choices in shaping children's perceptions of athleticism, competition, and cultural identity.

Keywords – Children's Magazine, Sports, Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Children's Literature.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the intersection of sports and educational media, which were once repressive due to their colonial motives. Sports in colonised India were employed in Army schools with the sheer objective of colonising native bodies and minds. 'Sport' is a complex term and cannot be described in a single sentence. Both the sportsperson and the spectator take pleasure in the activity. Although this term primarily aims at physical fitness and entertainment, its subjectivity cannot be overlooked. During Raj, in a speech, Sir James Peile said that Sport was infused into educational institutions for Indians as part of the programme to "discipline their bodies in the manliness and hardihood of English public schoolboy" (Mangan 133).

In academics, the intersection of sports and literature is a fertile field of research. Research such as Sports and Postcolonialism (2003) by John Bale and Mike Cronin discusses the history, influence, and impact of sports in postcolonial countries. Whereas More Than a Game (2004) by Chris Crowe endeavours to explore the nexus of the two discourses for young adult literature. But a critical gap remains in research on the postcolonial portrayal of sports in children's magazines.

The paper is primarily focused on Chakmak; Baal Vigyan Patrika. The magazine was started in July 1985 by Eklavya Foundation, a non-profit organisation. The preamble of the magazine reads -

> Chakmak challenges the notion of confining children to tales of fairies and kings written in palatable language. With the same warmth that it welcomes imaginative literature, Chakmak steadily acquaints its young readers with reality as well (translated by me).

The magazine is in print, but this study examines selected issues focused on major sporting events between 1985 and 2020. The paper analyses the issues through a close lens of Homi K Bhabha's postcolonial concept of Mimicry and Hybridity. Using these theories, the paper highlights the changes the magazine goes through over the period. The paper also examines how colonial legacies manifest or are subverted in visual and narrative portrayals of sports. Stuart Hall's theory of representation is also used to interrogate the ideological function of images and language used in the magazine. Specific focus is given on whether indigenous games and athletes are foregrounded or marginalised in relation to global sports spectacles, and how these editorial choices shape young readers' perceptions of physical culture, competition, and national identity.

Chakmak is an educational science magazine aimed at young readers up to high school age. The magazine, on the surface, seems to introduce sports to readers in an educational manner. However, on closer inspection, a specific pattern emerges in its content that changes over time. To ease the process of understanding and tracing the diachronic variability, the paper is structured into a modernised categorial method. The paper reads the magazine in four phases –

1. Phase One (July 1985 – September 1999): Colonial Hangover
2. Phase Two (October 1999 – August 2001): Hybridity
3. Phase Three (October 2001–December 2003): Representation and Re-presentation
4. Phase Four (Scattered issues 2004–2020): Fragmentation

The Phase One – Colonial Hangover

Chakmak: Baal Vigyan Patrika, an initiative of the Hoshangabad School Teaching programme, started in July 1985. In the first phase, which spans almost fifteen years, the magazine offers strong glimpses of struggle and resistance against the colonial-style of teaching. 'Science' in the subtitle of the magazine is for practical reasoning and challenging the forceful and manipulative style of injecting knowledge. It is in this phase, with segments like Mera Panna (My Page), that it resists orthodoxy and subverts, with readers becoming the authors, painters, and illustrators themselves. In phase one, no relevant samples are visible for the study of sports portrayals. The absence of discussions on sports may suggest a colonial hangover in the educational medium, which continued the disciplined and forceful manipulative pedagogy into independent India. But sports were sacrificed for the sake of school textbooks. Although there is a dearth of distinctive portrayals, the postcolonial resistance to epistemology is clearly articulated, laying the foundation for further resistance in future phases.

The Phase Two – Hybridity

This phase comprises around two complete years, and a striking fact is that it witnessed the Sydney Olympics, held in September 2000. The Olympics became a significant reason for Chakmak to introduce readers to sports for the first time, starting with the October 1999 issues under the title "Khel Duniya Bhar Ke" (Games across the world). Therefore, to make its readers aware of different types of sports, Chakmak introduces this segment in a blend of historical and imaginative manner. The nostalgic narration of one's own childhood experiences with the disciplined sport is indeed a counter-pedagogy to the colonial-style historicization, in which the self's experiences are sacrificed to the subject matter, and thus objectivity prevails.

The narrative technique in the segment motivates readers to imagine and create a reality of their own, distinct from the disciplined and polished illustration. Thus, the colonial injection of sports into students in earlier times is challenged by Komal Sharma, a reader of Chakmak, who in the January 2000 edition, tries to create a sporting world of her own in which Hockey players can also be represented disfigured. (see fig. 1).

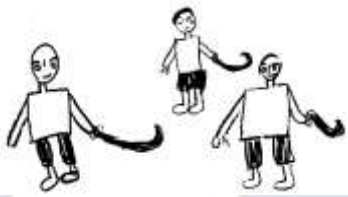

Fig. 1. A reader's imaginative drawing of a disfigured hockey player, challenging the structured form of sports. (January 2000).

Interestingly, the section titled Khel Duniya Bhar Ke (Games across the world) begins with Football, which was "implicated in strategies of colonialism both as a discourse and as a technology of power" (Mills and Dimeo 119). But in this October 1999 Football segment, the article mocks the colonial structural body of rules for any sport by accepting and promoting 'rooftop football' (see Fig. 2). Therefore, Chakmak embraces 'hybridity' – mixing indigenous and colonial influences to create new, localised forms.



Fig. 2. An illustration of rooftop football, exploring hybridity. (Chakmak Oct 1999).

Chakmak repeatedly uses the phrase Gaon se Antar-rashtriya Star Tak (from villages to international) to highlight the popularity of several global sports, such as Athletics (December 2000), Cycling (January 2001), and Race Walk (August 2001). The magazine is reiterating the phrase to motivate young sportspersons by drawing a connection between their villages and the international stage that readers' sporting minds dream of. But, on the other hand, while describing some indigenous sports like Kho-Kho (March 2000), Sushil Shukla, the author of the article, says that "although Kho-Kho is not famous on the international platform, it is played in every village in our country" (translated by me). The discussion on a non-recognised indigenous sport by the authorities administered by the West is a clear sign of the post-colonial attitude that the magazine continues to exhibit.

The Phase Three – Representation and Re-presentation

In phase three, Chakmak breaks the shackles of colonisation and brings forth indigenous sports under the more outspoken title "Khel Gali Mohalle Ke" (Games of Streets). Its base was laid on in editions of Kabaddi and Kho-Kho. The term 'Sport' cannot be restricted to a particular sport for its definition; hence, in a general understanding, any game can be considered a sport that includes "athletic activities that involve face-to-face competition (i.e., an athletic game or contest) between athletes and if the success of that competition depended primarily on the competitors' athletic and physical skills" (Crowe XV). The October and November 2001 editions focus on Ghupani and Langdi , respectively. Chakmak, through this segment, attempts to 'decolonise' the mind of its readers who stereotypically degrade indigenous sports. Although this segment features only two editions, the narrator in the (October) discussion asserts that there are many indigenous sports, such as Nadi-Pahad and Gulli-Danda, that are yet unrecognised and stereotypically considered uncultured.

Another interesting title in this segment is "Khel Samachar", which runs for a longer period than "Khel Gali Mohalle Ke". Under this title, the magazine attempts to neutralise the cultural and political power of sports like Football and Cricket, which have continued since colonial days. Khel Samachar does not provide a biased word count for any specific sport; rather, it features news from all sports. Also, there is no prioritised serialising. This strategy aligns with Stuart Hall's notion of re-presentation: media do not simply mirror reality; they actively construct it.

The Phase Four – Fragmentation

Phase four features fewer sports titles than earlier phases. There are informative articles on the Olympics (August 2008) and an illustration on the cover page (September 2008).

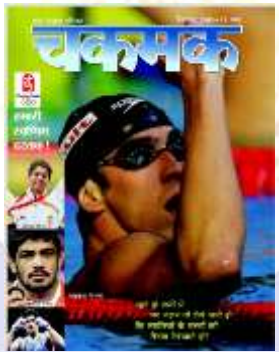

Fig. 3. The picture focuses on a white sportsperson, whereas the Indian winners are confined to a narrow space. (September 2008).

The smaller space allocated to the gold celebration (Abhinav Bindra, topmost in the left corner) on the cover page may suggest both success in resistance and an affirmation of inferiority. However, Chakmak's re-presentation of the Olympics 2010, with visual pictures of Cricket in the index of the October issue of 2010, again poses the question of inconsistency or rather, a market-driven strategy. But even this argument seems invalid when there is no major coverage of the 2011 Cricket World Cup win. The May 2011 issue explains the physics of bowling, which is essentially a scientific explanation. After no serious discussion of the 2012 Olympics, a satire on India's performance in the Olympics is featured in the April 2013 issue. This presents the editorial team's result-oriented point of view, which is just one of the other portrayals in this phase and does not symbolise any postcolonial features.

Conclusion

The paper observed and analysed the portrayal of sports in Chakmak across more than three decades through the postcolonial lens. In this research, the paper discusses how the children's magazine deals with Sports, once a colonial tool and later a pedagogical hindrance in independent India. The magazine shows gradual progress in resistance across the three phases, but it seems to have fragmented in recent years. This may be due to editorial changes and market-

driven strategies. But overall, an attempt to decolonise the stigma surrounding indigenous sports like Langdi marks the postcolonial resistance and representation that Chakmak embodies. These attempts are more significant now, as Kabaddi has become a globally acclaimed sport and the Langdi Federation of India is conducting the National Langdi Championship nationwide. Thus, academic research on the process of decolonisation of sports simultaneously uplifts the essence of indigenous games, helping to credit the efforts.

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