

Tribhuvan University

Portrayal of Indian Cricket Nationalism in Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan*

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By

SubodhGhimire

Roll No. 247/65-66

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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Tribhuvan University
Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences
Central Department of English

Letter of Recommendation

SubodhGhimire has completed his thesis entitled “Portrayal of Indian Cricket Nationalism in Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from February 2014 to September 2015 A.D. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

Mahesh Paudyal

September, 2015

Tribhuvan University
Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences
Central Department of English

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Portrayal of Indian Cricket Nationalism in Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Subodh Ghimire has been approved by the undersigned member of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date: _____

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Abstract

This research work is based on Ashutosh Gowariker's movie *Lagaan* which depicts the picture of the colonized indigenous of Champaner Village of India, a tormented peasant and entire villagers are struggling against the oppression of British Raj for existence. All villagers including protagonist Bhuvan challenges Veteran British cricket players to a game of cricket. If their village team beats a British team in a game of cricket, their Lagaan for three years will be cancelled otherwise they will take triple Lagaan from villagers. But villagers have not Lagaan to pay due to poor agriculture production. The villagers think Bhuvan is insane, since a triple tax would destroy them. But he points out that they cannot pay the current tax, they have nothing to lose. Finally they win the match and Britishers leave this place. Gowariker's *Lagaan* reinforces colonial resistance. This research excels a better understanding of the relationship between sports and nationalism which is projected in the *Lagaan*, because the mode of resistance it chooses to depict cricket, as the ultimate signifier of the civilization mission whose rules are turned against the purveyors for the liberation of colonized. Drawing upon the notion of Partha Chatterjee's, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Anthony Smith's *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* and Benedict Anderson's influential book, *Imagined Communities*, the present thesis proves the hypothesis.

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I. Introduction on patriotic themes in Gowariker's Movie *Lagaan*

This thesis focuses on Ashutosh Gowariker's movie *Lagaan*, a tale of a team of Villagers who play cricket against an oppressive colonial regime in the Champaner Village of India to save their lives, families and land. The arrogant British army officer is outraged that a young, brave, peasant boy Bhuvan. Bhuvan describes cricket as 'gilli-danda' which he has played since he was a child. British Captain, Russell challenges Bhuvan in front of the Rajha of Champaner, when English team beat the team of villagers in a cricket match, the entire province would be charged three times their share of the annual tax. Drawing upon the notion of nationalism this study explores the issues of Indian nationalism and colonial resistance of Indian people. Thus, Gowariker's *Lagaan* is a story of the victory of the human will. The story is also about the freedom of Indian people from the British Raj in a remote village called Champaner somewhere in UP, where the villagers are as ordinary as they can be. They give a portion of their agricultural harvest as tax to the British for a long time.

Indians were treated as second-class citizens who were often paid less than the British workers for performing the same task and who were also made to work for the British building railways, roads and setting up telegraph lines, but were denied the privilege of using such services. The film is set in 1893 when India was under British rule, a relationship that brought many changes, many unfavorable to the indigenous population. A system of Subsidiary Alliance was established that divided the country into Princely States ruled by native Rajas who answered to England's monarch and, therefore, created a system of indirect British governance which was called British Raj.

The Hindi film industry's adoption of patriotic themes happened at its very beginning, when India was engaged in a struggle for freedom from the British

colonial rule. The patriotic films, during the decade of 40's were *Bandhan* (1940) and *Kismet* (1943). These melodramatic film lyrics infused the elixir of patriotism into the Indian psyche. Similarly, during 2000, when we cast our eyes on the film, *Swadesh* (2004) and *Mangal Pandey* (2005), where the first, shows the film's protagonist Mohan Bhargava has lived in the US for 12 years. When he revisits India, his journey reaches him to a fictional village, Charanpur. It is governed by the panchayat, which attempts to solve the problems of the village but is orthodox in its approach. Mohan is confronted with several social ailments: caste system, illiteracy, child labour. He decides to be proactive and better the lives of the villagers. The latter, end up as new martyrs who sacrifice to help build a new corruption-free India. This is what made for a somewhat distanced empathy with the nation in these period films. Thus few can contest Indian cinema's particularly Hindi cinema's unmatched contribution to strengthening the bonds of national integration countering divisive feeling, educating the people about shared national history and through all this re-enforcing in the pride and love for motherland. For Bollywood, nationalism seems to be losing out as a selling formula, and impart the sense of patriotic touch.

Lagaan is in fact, a formulaic sports movie. Nevertheless, though it may be predictable, it is also genuinely entertaining. The film's central narrative is in itself simple but is complicated by the inclusion of various often melodramatic elements. The director has, for example, incorporated into the movie communal conflicts, a traitor on the Indian side, and a love triangle between Bhuvan, his local sweetheart, and Captain Russell's sister. In addition to such plot details, *Lagaan* contains the usual supportive relatives, especially elderly women, and the standard comic character, who, as always seems to be the case, is a chubby, balding man. Some of these elements are well handled, but others are frankly grating.

The film is further burdened by frequent and sometimes questionable didactic intrusions. *Lagaan* is extremely nationalistic in tone. The foreign British are villains, and all the Indians unite against them, forgetting, as they do so, any tensions that exist among themselves. *Lagaan* is a fictional story set in nineteenth century India, when the country was still under the rule of British Empire. A group of villagers from a remote village in the infertile central India take up a British officer's challenge to play cricket in order to get a reprieve from a crippling tax imposed by the colonial government. If the villagers beat their colonial rulers, their taxes are give up for three subsequent years. In the eventuality they lose they will be compelled to pay thrice the usual taxes. Grant Farred posits:

The fact that the villagers have never played cricket and do not know the first thing about the game establishes the foundation of the film's narrative and dramatic structure. The British officer's sister takes pity on the villagers and secretly teaches them the game so that they have a fighting chance. The cricket match takes up the final hour of this nearly four-hour long film and is marked by moments of comedy, drama, and suspense. (31)

Lagaan has proven to be a watershed event in mainstream Indian film industry. This view is supported by the fact that in the years since its release, no other movie has attained such overwhelming popular and critical acclaim. At the time when *Lagaan* was released, most films released by the film studios of Mumbai were failing badly at the box-office. There were multiple reasons behind this decline, but the foremost among them is the lack of creativity and novelty in the scripts. Even regular movie-goers got fed up with the bland, repetitive and unimaginative story lines of a

majority of films at the time. It is in this context that *Lagaan* should be studied and evaluated, for it then lucidly illustrates the uniqueness of *Lagaan* by Dave Kehr:

Lagaan is set during British rule in India, but the film has none of the nostalgia for the lost empire that typically informs both English and American films on the subject. Ashutosh Gowariker wrote a story and directed the film, portrays the British Army as conscienceless oppressors, who cynically play the local rajahs against one another while collecting protection money from them all. That money, called *Lagaan*, is ostensibly a land tax, but effectively a tribute paid by the local farmers to their local chief, who in turn pays off the English. (47)

Gowariker is one of the best known Indian movie directors of the past two decades. Despite having only five films in his filmography, the director gained worldwide fame in 2001 with the release of his film *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India*. In 2004 his fourth film, *Swades: We the People* was released. These two films of Ashutosh Gowariker are quite significant in the history of Indian popular cinema not only for the excellent cinematography, but also for the director's contribution to exploring such complex topics as national identity, anti-colonialism, nationalism, and patriotism, all set in the attractive song-dance format of the Bollywood popular film genre.

Most of all the movies of Gowariker are made by the use of traditional aspects Indian village to show the cultural uniqueness. The typical cultural dress, language and rural life style of Gowariker's movies also give the sense of nationalism. So such use of cultural feature functions as a useful tool for the director to transfer ideas related to national identity, nationalism, and anti-colonialism to the viewer effectively. Cultural features also serve as a background for the director to express his

personal political and social critique of contemporary India and to construct images of idealized Indian identity in response. The demonstration of cultural is always a part of Indian cinematic history, beginning from the first Indian silent movie, *Raja Harischandra*. Throughout the course of development of popular Indian film, we can see a very intimate relationship between the mythological and the social genres, namely their capability to incorporate in their narratives elements of both of them. For example, the super hit of the 1970s, *Jai SantoshiMaa*, a devotional story of the local female deity and its manifestation in human world together with the screened local *Varat Katha* also incorporated distinctive inter-textual elements corresponding to the social position and satisfaction of lower middle-class women..

In *Lagaan* the director used some symbols related to the *Vedas* and the *Mahabharata* in order to draw parallels to colonial philosophy and to condemn colonialism as a chaotic state in India, approving the anti-colonial discourse and India's fight for independence. Nationalism in his film works as a legitimizing and justifying tool of anti-colonial perspectives. Through use of nationalistic ethos, the director also revealed his concern about postcolonial present-day India and the situation with religious segregation. Through the representation of religious practices, Gowariker expressed his idea of the ideal India, where the major religions of India can live together. However, Indian Nationalism could be interpreted as a universal and independent mode of instruction, readily accessible to any Indian and in this manner inseparable from the Indian national identity.

Popular Indian cinema which has crossed the borders of India and reached the most distant corners of the world plays an enormous role in contemporary Indian society. Indeed, popular Indian cinema is not considered worthy of the attention of many Western viewers and academics, has now proved to be one of the most

influential producers of films, annually releasing more films than any other cinema industry in the world. The uniqueness of Indian popular film is its enormously wide cultural and structural background.

In this context, the film *Lagaan* made by director Gowariker provide us with some different pattern of representation of the idealized Indian national identity and the concept of nationalism. Furthermore, in this film, here, try to relate the widely used nationalistic structures and symbols to the interpretation of the pictured concept of idealized national identity. Patriotism plays an enormous role in the director's films in enriching and legitimizing the director's ideas related to anti-colonialism, postcolonial India and the present realities of nationalism and the future of ideal India. Gowariker also expresses a social critique of Indian society. In a very similar way, the films *Lagaan* by Gowariker, despite dealing with contemporary social topics and exploring the concepts of nationalism and patriotism, not only base their narratives on structures, but also incorporate a number of clearly pronounced religious symbols and motifs in the narratives as well.

The history of cricket in India shows that it has fostered both nationalism, and communalism; therefore it is relevant to outline a short history of the development of cricket in some regions of India. It is important to note that the sport developed differently at different times in and in different parts of the Indian subcontinent. The links between cricket and independent 'Indian' consciousness can first be seen in the late 19th century many social historians of Indian cricket have concentrated on the Quadrangular and the pentangular tournaments in Bombay which started in the early 20th century. Parsi merchants were the first to take up cricket in the late 19th century with Hindus and Muslims participating soon after the turn of the century. Quadrangular tournaments in Bombay consisted of English, Hindu, Parsi, and Muslim

teams. Later, they developed into the Pentangular the fifth team being known as 'All the Rest,' comprising Indian Christians, Buddhists and Jews. By the 1920s and 1930s the tournaments had become very popular about 20,000 fans would attend a match.¹⁰ Some academics suggest that this was in part because they were communal, no other tournament was as popular and the organizers recognized their commercial potential early on.

After Independence, cricket was equated with patriotic virtue being a good cricketer meant that one was a 'good' Indian, Pakistani or Sri Lankan. As cricket lost its associations with colonialism, it became a means for developing national and masculine identities. It has been argued that early Indian players like the Nawab M Pataudi and K S Ranjitsinhji, for example, were such key figures in Indian cricket that they could be described as nationalists even if not in the way that nationalism is understood today. They were seen as role models in a newly developing national consciousness because they were able to stand on the international stage as Indians and compete equally with representatives from more developed nations. Ramchandra Guha notes:

India will never be a tiger in terms of economic power to match the other Asian tigers e.g. South Korea, Malaysia. India ranks about 150 in the World Development Report, just below Namibia and above Haiti. It is the cricketers and they alone, who are asked to redeem these failures, to make one forget, at least temporarily, the harsh realities of endemic poverty and corrupt and brutal politicians. (350)

India is seen as a cricket crazy nation; cricket has become a way of expressing national pride and consciousness. Cricket and Indian national consciousness are inextricably linked. Cricket is tied to identity politics to be Indian is to like cricket.

This linkage at the time brought about some of the more unpleasant aspects of sport and nationalism such as Indian Muslims being accused of supporting Pakistan in India-Pakistan matches and the association between ‘hyper nationalism,’ ‘war’ and ‘entertainment’.

Cricket, like Bollywood, is able to transcend class and religious boundaries throughout the Indian subcontinent. Bollywood exploited the links between nationalism and cricket with the movie *Lagaan* story of a group of plucky Indian villagers who beat their British rulers at cricket to rid themselves of the cruel colonizers. While Bollywood has made a number of movies that focus on the game of cricket, for example *Iqbal*, *Hattrick*, *Say Salaam India* to name but a few, *Lagaan* has been by far the most commercially successful. It is possible that this is in part because it is the only movie that explicitly links cricket with anti-colonialism and Indian nationalism.

Cricket and popular Hindi cinema converged in a marvelous manner with the release of Ashutosh Gowariker's film *Lagaan*. Anand commented “for a subcontinent that so obsessively watches cricket and Hindi cinema, *Lagaan* offered cinema as cricket and cricket as cinema” (17). As with imposed language, the colonial symbolic system gets bent out of shape to accommodate the local culture; and cricket is no different. As Majumdar comments in his appraisal of the extended coverage of the cricket match in *Lagaan*:

The 100-minute match becomes the site of an assertion of racial superiority. As Guran, the village godman, plays an impossible shot hitting the ball over the wicketkeeper, the audience erupts with joy. This shot can easily be perceived as that ‘moment of departure’ when an indigenous brand of Indian nationalism takes off the colonial

mission of importing sport as a civilizing tool, is successfully turned on its head. A non-violent arena of assertion, cricket is successfully transformed into a tool to subvert colonial rule. (33)

At the heart of *Lagaan*'s late 19th Century narrative is a cricketing challenge; the British colonial against the small village of Champaner; and the prize for the local is an exemption from the punishing taxes *Lagaan* imposed by the colonial authorities. The team assembled by the village is a motley one, but one that nevertheless hints at the ethnic diversity and the collaborative practices evident in India, something not always apparent in Hindi blockbuster films.

Beside its widespread and entrenched popularity, Hindi cinema shares another attribute with cricket and that is duration. The film *Lagaan* runs a standard three and half an hour journey, replete with copious song and dance routines. Local audiences feel they have been short-changed if their entertainment is any shorter. Cricket has an uncanny medieval temporality; it is wonderful that, in the 21st Century, a test match can still go for five days and end in a draw. It perverts modern productive time, which is part of its enigma and, for some at least, part of its appeal.

Lagaan also consciously attempts to reverse the colonial gaze of Euro-imperialism by racialising the white characters an issue not discussed in earlier published articles on *Lagaan*. References to the British officials using the color of their skin abound. Filtered through the lens of race, the love triangle in the film between Bhuvan, Gauri and Elizabeth is replaced with the tensions of racial difference. It is highlighted in the next few pages the film's depiction of the unique position of the white female in the colonies. An analysis of the ambiguity of the white female character in *Lagaan* allows us to see how the 'other' gender ruptures colonial masculinity and disrupts the simple binary of the British versus the 'Indians' that

Mannathukkaren identifies in *Lagaan*. It is indeed ironical that Mannathukkaren does not see the possibility of restoring presence without essentialism. The Manichean categories of ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’ that he reads in *Lagaan*, dichotomize the tense and complex relationships involving subjects that are situated very differently in terms of power within those categories. His profound silence about the white female character in the film helps one to locate another kind of silencing and the politics of ‘speaking’ that Mannathukkaren participates in while expressly attempting to foreground.

The film’s narrative contains seeds of alternative readings, contested cultural assumptions, and thereby subversive political possibilities. The socio-historical interrogation of cricket in *Lagaan* with its appeal to ‘the people’ itself becomes an act of critical intervention and will go a long way to hijack cricket from its colonial origins. It is an important contribution for it demonstrates how popular cinema can unconsciously enable the subaltern subjects of postcolonial India to participate in debates on colonialism and modernity, which has been raging in academia and elite circles in India. It reveals that for postcolonial nations the struggle for history is about much more than establishing “what actually happened”. It involves destabilizing official discourses to illustrate the interpellation of the subaltern into the colonial/ elite episteme as primarily responsible for their continued subjection and objectification, and for enabling those who have so far been excluded or silenced, to recognize themselves not as passive victims but as agents who had a role in the past.

Lagaan is a significant contribution to popular culture for its ability to convincingly portray how cultural improvisations of subaltern groups can co-operate and critique master forms and tropes of the west. In the film, the indigenous, non-official village game of ‘gilli-danda’ is placed in the same trajectory of the ‘official’

colonial game, of supposedly Victorian origins, when Bhuvan makes the game of cricket familiar to the Champaner masses by comparing it to 'gilli-danda'. This desecrates the 'purity' of cricket's roots since the sacrosanct space of imperial performance, the cricket pitch, and the cricket paraphernalia that are kept rigidly 'pure,' free from native contamination are now alleged to have links to indigenous sports. The English subject's originality or cricket's 'purity' as an Englishman's game is destabilized through the assertion that the peasants of Champaner, for instance, the natives, have been playing the game for centuries in the villages of 'barbaric' India. It gestures to the possibility that the English subject, the assumed original is perhaps merely a sophisticated copy. The implication of cricket being born outside the logic of Englishness or Victorianism shows the appropriation of cricket at the margins of Englishness, for instance, outside the legitimated culture and British nationality.

Nationalism means loyalty or devotion to one's country; patriotism. In a preliminary definition nationalism can be considered either a "devotion to one's nation or a policy of national independence" (6). Here, nationalism is preceded by the very existence of a "nation" but also by a sentiment or belief that produces devotion to the nation. Nationalism can be understood as an evolutionary outgrowth of our natural tribal passions and rationalities which were imprinted in our psyche over millions of years. Being a social animal he comes interaction with various people forms the group with like mindedness and shows loyalty to it. One of the basic challenges in human species is to ensure cooperation within the group and sacrifice on behalf the group. According to Anthony D smith nationalism is "a process of formation or growth, of nations: a sentiment or consciousness of belongings to the nation; a language and symbolism of the nation; a social and political movement on

behalf of the nation; a doctrine and /or ideology of the nation , both general and particular" (18).

The term “nationalism” is generally used to describe two phenomenons: First, the attitude that members of a nation have when they care about their national identity and second, the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve (or sustain) self- determination. The first question about the concept of nation which is often defined in terms of common origin, ethnicity, or cultural ties, and while an individual’s membership in-a nation is often regarded as involuntary, it is sometimes regarded as voluntary.

The Indian nationalist movement and the evolution of cricket in South Asia were closely linked. The paradox lies in Indians enthusiastically embracing England’s national sport, while simultaneously trying to rescue them from British colonial rule, provides a fascinating epoch of independence and fostering the game of cricket. Mihir Bose wrote that, “If everything about India were to be destroyed, a history of Indian cricket would serve as an outline of the history of the nation and give important clues to national character”(64). Numerous occasions in which cricket either served as a catalyst, reflection, or as an expression of India’s struggle against colonialist rule. The historical narrative is further supported by quantitative evidence showing the transition from communal based to regionally organized teams.

The ideology of nationalism places the nation at the center of its concerns and seeks to promote its well-being. Nationalism points the three things in general they are national autonomy, national unity and national identity and for the nationalists, a nation cannot survive without a sufficient degree of all three.

American Indian activists have also called for an American Indian nationalism given especially that many of their tribes are sovereign nations themselves. So the

term nationalism is pretty elusive, one of the reasons nationalism is so difficult to define is that any discussion involving the subject necessarily talk over into identical subjects such as race and racism, fascism, language development, international law, genocide, and immigration. Nationalism can also take many different forms. In other words, the central factor upon which the movement is based can be, for instance, religious, political, ethnic, or cultural. So the nationalism is the social construct as the very word nationalism comes into force during some social or political purpose these contemporary theories, brought forth by people such as Benedict Anderson argues that nationalism is a “socially constructed” phenomenon. In other words, they believe that it is an artificial designation, imposed on the denizens of a country for social or political purposes. This belief does not reduce the power of the concept, but merely suggests that it is not a real, organic phenomenon arising from the true feelings and motives of the people of the country. Minority groups, dominant religions and ethnicities, and political entities, both new and long-established may all embrace the ideology of nationalism. Literature, with its many layers of meaning, can express this ideology in the service of all these different groups. Allowing for state-provided goods and services which cater to the distinctive preferences of its different cultural groups, it may be that there will be a lower demand for sovereignty by such groups. But there are countervailing forces: economic and military globalization can still encourage demands for sovereignty ‘by reducing the net benefits of attachment to multinational states’ while institutionalizing a state’s peripheral culture can result in a belief that there will be ‘greater net private benefits of sovereignty to people who owe their jobs and social standing to maintenance of this culture. Anthony Smith, in *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*, provides a useful definition of nationalism, when he writes:

As an ideology, nationalism can take root only if it strikes a popular chord, and is taken up by, and inspires, particular social groups and strata. But nationalism is much more than ideology. Unlike other modern belief-systems, it depends for its power not just on the general idea of the nation, but on the presence and character of this or that specific nation which it turns into an absolute. Its success ... depends on specific cultural and historical contexts, and this means the nations it helps to create are in turn derived from pre-existing and highly particularized cultural heritages and ethnic formation. (8)

A number of key points emerge from this: first, that nationalism is an ideology, that is to say it interpolates individuals as subjects of the nation in relation to the ideas of the dominant class and/or culture; second, that nationalism is more than ideology because it has the capacity to turn a contingent idea, the nation, into an absolute, with fixed parameters. In other words, it has the capacity to produce a non-negotiable, fixed, and universal idea of a nation.

Benedict Anderson's influential book, *Imagined Communities* (1991), originally published in 1983, stated that the nation is imagined in three ways. One is that it is imagined as limited because even the largest of them have boundaries beyond which lie other nations. Secondly, a nation is imagined as sovereign as a result of Enlightenment ideals that undermined the legitimacy of divinely-ordained monarchy. Finally, the nation is imagined as community. Regardless of inequality that may exist, essentially there is a horizontal relationship among the masses who will never actually know each other on a personal basis. Anderson's book is based on the emergence of the European nation. It was the countries of that continent that engaged in the exploitive political-economic system of colonialism whereby the European countries

would use the countries of the Americas, Africa, and Asia as a source of raw materials to be processed in the center (Europe) and shipped back to the periphery (colonies). This system essentially produced a dependency by the colonies on the European countries for finished goods.

Such a core-periphery colonial relationship existed between Great Britain and India. India first came into contact with Europe after the establishment of trading outposts by Holland and England in the early seventeenth century. After an initial period of Dutch dominance, the British East India Company came to control trade, and eventually established control over India. After a failed mutiny against the British East India Company, India came under direct rule of the British monarchy in 1858. Ironically, it was colonialism that introduced the idea of a nation to a part of the world which, arguably, had never had such a concept. It was this idea of a nation that would be mobilized by Indian independence fighters, including Gandhi.

Another theorist working in the area of the emergence of nationalism is Partha Chatterjee, particularly in his work *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993). Chatterjee raises the question that if outside of Europe and the Americas, all nations are based on modules that arose in those two areas, what is left to be imagined in the rest of the world? In other words, the peoples outside of Europe and the New World are forced to develop along established patterns of nationness according to Anderson's work. Chatterjee does not reject the idea of "imagined community" *per se*, but he does reject the idea that the only way they can be imagined is in the form taken by European and American nations. Chatterjee's central argument is that we have mistakenly come to think of nationalism exclusively as a political movement in which the nation is coeval with the state. Chatterjee rejects this view. Instead, he sees the development of two domains in

colonial India, one material and the other spiritual. The material domain encompasses the outside world of “the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology” (6), while the spiritual domain is that of cultural identity. Chatterjee outlines several examples as evidence of the development of this cultural national consciousness. In the world of art, he cites Bengali drama, which drew on classical drama in Sanskrit but reflected a new national consciousness in the nineteenth century. Anderson found to be an expression of the European model of the nation; Chatterjee finds traces of nationalism different from that of Europe.

Though, the different critics have seen the movie from different point of view. The research focuses on researching the issues of nationalism and colonial resistance. To stress the effectiveness of the theoretical tool an intensive analysis of the text will be the core point of this research. This study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with an introductory aspect of the story and deals with general synopsis of the text, writer, and the subject matter. It incorporates the thesis title, clarification, hypothesis elaboration, introduction to the playwright’s background, works themes, technique etc. The second chapter of the thesis presents analysis of movie, *Lagaan*, The third chapter concludes the research work. Nationalism is a theory applied to prove the hypothesis.

II. Portrayal of Indian Cricket Nationalism in Ashutosh Gowariker's *Lagaan*

The present research is to delve the major issue, colonial resistance of Indian people from the viewpoint of nationalism. It is based on Gowariker's movie *Lagaan* which demonstrates the issues of nationalism, ethos of patriotism and colonial resistance through the famous game cricket in small village of India. *Lagaan* shows the situation of Indians who are under the British rule. Indians are taxed to bone by the British and their cronies. Set in the historical background of colonial India, Gowariker directed Hindi film '*Lagaan*' captures the national imagination not only through its anti-colonial narrative, but also through the projection of an almost Gandhian vision of all-inclusive social unity. While this film uses a pseudo-historical narrative to portray the exploitations of the farmers in the colonial India, the conflict and crisis is curiously translated into a cricket match, finally ending with a resolution that marks the triumph of the natives. Given the imperial origins of the game, the cricket match goes beyond the process of mimicking the colonial masters, and turns into indigenizing the game and beating the masters

Gowariker's *Lagaan*, tells the story of colonial conflict of Indian people through the England's national game cricket as well as the story takes a place at the height of the 'British Raj', England's government of occupation in India. In the rural village, the captain Russell wants a lagan from all villagers. Lagan is the annual tax, farmers must pay to their Maharaja, and Maharaja to the British. In the time of draught and hunger, and the farmers cannot pay *Lagaan*. But Jack Russell announces that he will take the double *Lagaan* from all villagers. They decide to oppose it. the leader of villagers, the young handsome man named Bhuvan, who challenges them to a game of cricket, a game that is to be played by veteran British cricket players, versus villagers, including Bhuvan himself, who have never played this game before.

Britisher accept the challenge of Bhuvan. Led by Bhuvan, the villagers attempt to persuade the British officers to reduce the taxes because of poor agricultural production. Instead, a wager is offered: if their village team beats a British team in a game of cricket, their taxes for three years will be exempted. Bhuvan, a leader among his people, who confront Russell and find his weak point: The captain is obsessed by cricket, and believes it's a game that can never be mastered by Indians. Bhuvan says it is much like an ancient Indian game, and that Indians could excel at it. Russell makes Bhuvan a bet: The Britishers and a village team will play a cricket match. If the Indians win, there will be no *Lagaan* for three years. If the Brits win, *Lagaan* will be tripled. The villagers think Bhuvan is insane, since a triple tax would destroy them, but he points out that since they cannot pay the current tax, they have nothing to lose. Gowariker's movie reinforces colonial resistance.





Fig 1. Story teller of village Champaner 'Guran'

The movie *Lagaan* opens with the activities of colonial resistance. As a Sadhu character, Guran shows the anger against Britisher. He says "Scumbags! Sons of jackals! Strutting around in the beat! You are all going back to that little Island... whimpering. May the mighty hands of fate ruin you?"(9 Minutes)

The setting of the film is most important because it is set in nineteenth century which is the colonial period or high raj period of British Empire. *Lagaan* is an allegory of India's past and concurrently, a vision of where it could and may be heading. Dressed in stick pads and using bats they carved by hand, they appear at first no match for the pristinely decked out colonials. However, cricket is a funny game; and, in true cinematic form, this game meanders to a thrilling last-ball climax. The Champaner Village People embodies a sort of Gandhian ideal of inter-communal cooperation. This then is forwarded as the best means, not only to beat the British at their own game which thereafter would become almost an article of faith for Indians when they engaged the Brits Australians know all about that but, to establish an

inclusive, postcolonial Indian nation. When it considers the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, which is anything but inclusive of other ethnicities, *Lagaan* makes quite a bold statement about contemporary Indian politics. The starving native farmers had to pay an imposed tax to the British soldiers for the protection of their lands, delivering most of their harvest to the British Queen. Claudio Carvalho claims:

In those years, the lands were very dry due to the lack of rain, and the inhabitants of Champaner decide to request to their Kulbhushan Kharbanda to waive the taxes. While waiting for the Rajah, Bhuvan, the beloved friend of Gauri, comments that the silly game of cricket was a stupid game, comparable to the Indian child game 'gilli-danda'. Captain Russell, who had had a previous discussion with Bhuvan, listens to his comment and challenges Bhuvan to play a match against the British team, imposing the following condition: if the natives win the game, they would not need to pay *Lagaan* for the next three years. Otherwise, they would triplicate their payment in that year. Bhuvan accepts the bet despite of the opinion of his people. The sister of, finds the competition unfair to the Indians and decides to help Bhuvan and his friends, teaching them how to play cricket. (14)

Gowariker's *Lagaan*, another aspect of the cricket match in this film is the combination of the team, a selection that attempts to break the caste and communal boundaries to create a somewhat utopian vision of an India is Gandhi's vision. However, this mass entertainment oriented film with its anti-imperialist and anti-communalism rhetoric seems to have many caveats beneath the surface layer. While the film earned massive accolades for presenting a liberal nationalist vision of India, it could be argued that this liberalism itself is shaped within the nationalistic ethos.

Moreover, a historical depiction of cricket also over-shadows the communalism accompanying the integration of cricket with nationalistic aspirations and, thus, inducing a sense of historical amnesia towards the issue of religion and caste in the colonial India. The colonial functionaries coming from Britain, brought cricket to India as a part of their sports culture. Commenting upon this particular aspect of the spread of cricket, Rowland Bowen writes:

When people go in large numbers to other countries, and establish colonies there...so far from abandoning their social habits and customs, they do their best to maintain them and; not only that, to maintain them in the state they knew when the first substantial number of them arrived in their new homeland. Despite of the massive popularity and a quasi-religious stature of the game, cricket still remains a legacy of the colonial era. (1)

Thus, this movie raises the issues of cast system in Indian traditional culture but they are united to challenge foreign team in the game of cricket which signifies the resistance of Indian people upon British Raj. Thus, cricket was primarily a cultural element that the colonizers carried in order to make themselves feel at home in the colonies.



Fig. 2 dejected arrogant Captain Russell, and unified Champaner women rooting.



Fig. 3 after winning the match, Bhuvan is celebrating Victory

Villagers not only win the match but also defeat the colonial British regime. The story of *Lagaan* revolves principally around a game of cricket played at the end of the 19th century between a team of British imperialists and a ragtag team of Indian villagers. The film is set in Champaner, a village adjacent to a British military cantonment. This fictional settlement, described in the subtitles as “a small village in the heart of India,” can stand for any village anywhere in British-administered India. The time is the hot season of (1893) and the monsoon rains have not arrived. The ensuing drought has made the fields around the village barren. The Champaner villagers depend upon a healthy crop harvest not only to feed themselves but also to pay *Lagaan* to the local raja, who himself must pass this on as a ‘protection’ tribute to the British. In vain, the distraught villagers beg the raja to act as mediator for them with the British in order to have the tax cancelled in this rainless year. The commanding officer at the cantonment, the sadistic and arrogant Captain Russell, saviors their predicament and taunts them by capriciously offering them a way out of

paying the tax in the form of a wager: if the villagers can beat the British cantonment side at a game of cricket, he will waive the tax for three years; but if they lose, the villagers will have to pay the British a triple levy. The match will take place after three months. Russell gives Bhuvan the unenviable task of accepting or declining the wager on behalf of the village. The villagers, knowing Bhuvan to be impetuous and proud, wait anxiously in silence for his response. When he finally accepts the challenge, they are devastated, feeling sure the situation is hopeless.



Fig. 4 Kachra and Bhuvan, they have only one ball left now; they are in the situation of do or die.

It is the fiction based movie, but it raises the issues of colonial India where Indians are challenging Britisher to their own national game cricket. The movie captures the real issues of India too. This capacity to lead the Indian cricket team to victory whilst at the same time becoming a voice of unity and identity for his country was in evidence most recently on the occasion of Victory, "Tendulkar's latest century, an innings that secured a victory for India over England"(3). Tendulkar, who was born in Mumbai, said:

I don't think India winning and I scoring a hundred will help those who lost their lives, but if we can help by contributing in some small way then we will do whatever we can to do that. It is a terrible loss and our hearts are with them. From my point of view I see it as an attack on India, not just Mumbai, and I'd like to dedicate this hundred to all those who have gone through such terrible things. (12)

In this way it is possible to see that Tendulkar transcends the role of mere sportsman to become the 'voice' of India and the 'healer' of its wounded spirit as perhaps no other individual could. It seems to examine the significance of the cricket match in *Lagaan* by taking a brief sweeping excursion through the history of cricket in the subcontinent as it was first played by the British imperialists and subsequently taken up by the Indians. When we turn to how the film attempts to project the Bhuvan as an inter-communal unifier in the manner both of assassinated Indian Congress leader Mahatma Gandhi and the former Indian cricket captain Sachin Tendulkar, as a leader both icon figure of India, everyone in the village is deeply resentful towards Bhuvan, since nobody there, Bhuvan included, has ever played cricket or even knows the rules. Yet following his semi-convincing explanation that cricket is nothing more than a sophisticated version of *gilli-danda*, a bat-and-ball game they all played as children, some of the Hindu men side with him. Unfortunately, these men, especially Bagha the mute temple guardian and Guran the fortune-teller, are driven more by a great passion to defeat the British rather than any skill at cricket.

Bhuvan, in the film who represents a kind of reincarnation of Gandhi merged with the little master Sachin Tendulkar; and Elizabeth, the sister of the British Officer Captain Russell; and her 'going beyond the pale' in siding with the other. Her actions are a race betrayal to some, and a significant moment of cross cultural ethos and

collaboration to others. Bhuvan's character draws on enormous reserves of integrity, allure and iconicity. Bhuvan is played cricket as main as a main player which projects the iconic cricket 'god' Sachin Tendulkar. Bhuvan also invokes the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi – the greatest Indian icon of the 20th century; thus steering the films' ideological concerns with anti-colonialism, nationalism, inter-communal cooperation. The brew of sub-continental symbolism manifested in the incorporation of the ideals and attributes of Gandhi and Tendulkar is a palpably potent one. The heady alchemy of cricket, celebrity and popular narrative formulas, is central to the way *Lagaan* has captivated domestic and international imaginations. Arjun Appadurai explains:

The image, the imagined, the imaginary - these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is somewhere else), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people) ... The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order. (31)

Cricket and cinema have come together in a very potent blend in *Lagaan*. Box-office success, and the currency the film has inspired in important public discourses around nationalism, identity and postcolonial politics, demonstrates the way that regional and local cultural dynamics can, and do, resist homogenizing forces and add their own inflections to global media flows.



Fig. 5 main protagonist Bhuvan says his mother about British colonizer. “We plough the earth but why we should give *Lagaan* to Britisher?” It seems colonial resistance.

The final forty-five minutes or so of the film are taken up by the drama of the cricket match itself. The game takes place over three days. The first day’s play ends with the British having achieved a comfortable score in their innings. On the second day of play, a turning point comes when the Untouchable Kachra bowls three

of the British batsmen out in quick succession with his devastating spin action. Eventually, it is the villagers' turn to bat, and the opening partnership of Bhuvan and Devan starts well as they pile up the runs. Soon, though, the village team is in trouble when Devan is unexpectedly run out and Ishmayeel, also a good batsman, is forced to leave the field injured after being hit by a savage delivery from the British fast bowler. On the final day, as the game comes down to the last few balls, Bhuvan, the only batsman to have survived, is partnered by the last villager, the crippled Untouchable Kachra. The situation looks hopeless for the village side. But with five runs left to make on the very last ball, Bhuvan smashes the ball high into the air. Captain Russell, standing in a deep fielding position, catches the ball and the villagers seem to have lost. The final twist in the plot, however, is that Russell has caught the ball outside the boundary, meaning that the catch is void and Bhuvan has secured victory with a spectacular Tendulkar-style six. At the end of the film, the Champaner cantonment is disbanded and Russell is ignominiously transferred to the wastes of Central Africa. The film closes with the monsoon rains bringing relief and promise of a full harvest. As the patriotic Victorian traveller A. G. Bagot wrote:

Cricket is acknowledged to be the national game *par excellence* of Englishmen. Wherever they may be, north, south, east, or west, sooner or later, provided a sufficient number are gathered together, there is certain to be a cricket match; and climate has little or no effect on their ardor, for you will find them playing on the burning sand of the desert with as much zest as if it was the best possible. (26)

Cricket helped to preserve a sense of identity for the British exiled in the subcontinent. In *Lagaan*, there are echoes of the Indian nationalist cinema in the period leading up to independence from British rule. During the 1940's, Gandhian

motifs were sprinkled generously through popular Indian film narratives; and their inclusion was met with rapturous applause from local audiences across the country. So much so that at the height of the peaceful insurgence, all Gandhian representations were banned from the cinema in India, even the most seemingly benign references ended up on the censor's cutting room floor.

Gowariker produces an engagingly, affective alchemy of image and sound, which intervenes critically in the discourses of British colonial rule. The Gandhian idealism of the film provides a rather problematic approach to the problems of communalism. The very ahistorical treatment of the narrative silences the historical roots of communal and caste based problems in the Indian history. Siriyavan Anand raises this problematic politics of the narrative as he argues: *Lagaan*, which partakes of and perpetuates this folklore of cricket as universal social solvent, lends itself very eminently to a 'casteist' reading precisely because of its thematic inflections and its choice of things to celebrate and suppress"(4). Thus, the historical selectiveness and convenience of silence on certain aspects of the narrative renders *Lagaan* a nationalistic ethos, which embraces the non-caste Hindus and non-Hindus with a gesture of condescension and needful afterthought. The international reception of *Lagaan* was quite favourable and many reviewers found it to be a fine product of Hindi cinema. Robert Ewert writes:

Set in India in 1893, it combines sports with political intrigue, romance with evil scheming, musical numbers with low comedy and high drama, and is therefore soundly in the tradition of the entertainments produced by the Bombay film industry. *Lagaan* is a utopian fantasy of a perfect community, brought together in literal and figurative harmony. (1)

Thus, *Lagaan* is not received or evaluated within the western film tradition of realism, but within a separate category of typical Hindi cinema that is marked for its melodramatic and musical elements. He further adds a memory of the films we all grew up on, with clearly defined villains and heroes, a romantic triangle, and even a comic character who saves the day. *Lagaan* is a well-crafted, hugely entertaining epic that has the representation of the Indian culture. It appears that the appeal of *Lagaan* for the foreign audience was primarily due to the epic presentation of the exotic India rather than the complex nationalistic and postcolonial politics underlying the narrative. Besides the exotic charm of Bollywood movies, the surface level rhetoric of the film has also struck some favorable keys, as could be seen in some parts. Ashis Nandy adds further weight to Indian claims over the colonizer's game:

Cricket is an Indian game accidentally discovered by the English. Like chilly, which was discovered in South America and came to India only in medieval times to become an inescapable part of Indian cuisine, cricket, too, is now foreign to India only according to the historians and Ideologists. To most Indians the game now looks more Indian than English. (1)

Throughout the movie, one witnesses repeated scenes of male dominance in both the local society and in the British settlement. The exhibition of such a tradition serves as a means of conservation of a tradition that says male dominance is acceptable and passes that social value on to the next generation who will do the same.

Lagaan uses cricket as a means of resistance and defiance against the exploitative colonial government. The largely peasant population of a fictional village Champaner is unable to pay *Lagaan* due to the recurring bad harvest. However, the colonial government is adamant to have its share of revenue, resulting in the extreme

pressure from the local ruler upon the villagers. The collective complaint of the villagers regarding their inability to pay the *Lagaan* is met with a sneer from Captain Russell, the British commander appointed there. In a mocking manner, Russell throws a challenge to a villager named Bhuvan to play a cricket match. According to this challenge, a victory for the villagers in the match against British officers' team would result in underwriting of due revenue for the previous three years. This challenge is accepted by Bhuvan, a young leader figure among the villagers. While the challenge itself can be seen as an assertion of the British superiority, the acceptance of challenge can be interpreted as an act of resistance or subversion. However, the most crucial aspect of this cricket is the team formation. Bhuvan, an upper caste Hindu, becomes the default captain of the team. Most of the players are from the same caste category. However, this team is given a more inclusive character through the selection of a Muslim, a Sikh and an untouchable player.

Although it may seem that the film conserves the traditional values held by colonial Britain and India, in actuality the film presents the aforementioned traditions to suggest that the human spirit is as strong as the transmission of cultural knowledge, specifically in its quest for equality regardless of class, gender, or race, as this essay will show. It is the inclusion of the untouchable player, Kachra that highlights the issue of casteism and also allows the protagonist Bhuvan to challenge this discriminatory practice. The divisive impact of communalism or casteism within the nationalistic discourse is expressed through the speech of upper caste Hindu villagers. The main character Bhuvan suggest his villagers the issue of cast system. This is wrong. You are polluting the whole system. "We'll fight the British. But mingle with a low-caste, never!" While, villager's speech reflects the communal and caste based divisions. Bhuvan's response could be seen as an expression of Gandhian/Nehruvian

nationalism. He refuses to let go of Kachra and questions the morality of all the villagers.

Lagaan presents a colonial past in which resistance to the colonizer ‘unifies’ the villagers, but only under the banner of nationalism. From the conservatism of the film’s depiction of the village to its token inclusion of Muslims, Sikhs, and untouchables, *Lagaan* unwittingly reasserts the primacy of Indian nationalism, and does so through the two-pronged approach of recasting both the Indian history. It has been remarked elsewhere that the main love story of *Lagaan*, between Gauri and Bhuvan echoes the stories and imagery surrounding the Krishna-Radha narratives as told in various *puranas* and illustrated in Indian painting. In this movie, which exhibits the peasant’s revolt, we see that colonial administration and its intervention though present, is not the major concern of the movie than to fight for the right. The villagers, had been aware or conscious as were the peasants in actual, of the injustice done to them (giving lagan or tax every year), but when they had felt exploited, they revolted and this indeed united the whole community. In which, peasants of different caste and religion come together to rebel, the portrayal of the untouchable and the women characters in the movie is to reveal different and silenced histories. The mute Kachra and marginalized women in the film point to repressive strategies and practices within subaltern tale of victory and make viewers to the histories of gender, class, caste and other silenced tales of colonialism, anti-colonialism or nationalism that need to be told. *Lagaan* shows how Bollywood can go beyond parameters of the educators to encourage the masses to actively and critically engage with mass culture in order to rethink forms of received knowledge and history. It can open up space for alternative voices and empower the people to actively engage with master texts.

One distinguished feature of traditional Indian society still practiced today, although not officially, is the caste system, a hierarchy in which each member of society is born into one of five levels: the Brahman (priests) at the highest level, followed by the Kshatriya (rulers, warriors, and landowners), the Vaishya (merchants), the Shudra (artisans and agriculturalists), and lastly the Harijan (untouchables) at the bottom of the hierarchy (Callahan). However, the film ultimately challenges perpetuation of this social order. The first example of the caste system that we see is with the Raja. While the British controlled the land, the Raja acts as an intermediary between Captain Russell and the villagers; it is he to whom the residents of Champaner go when the *Lagaan* is raised because he is higher up in the caste system and they are simple farmers near the bottom level. With the unification of people from different cast and race, villagers conquest British team in cricket game in Champaner. It is the depiction of Indian nationalism in *Lagaan*.

Another aspect of the movie is shown in some part. The first example of male dominance appears in Champaner where only the men confront the Raja about the increase in *Lagaan* and go with him to appeal to the British; this is because India is, and has been, a patriarchal society in which men are in charge of the community and its well-being and the women's responsibility is to their husbands and families. Such gender positions are once again seen when the cricket team is formed only of men because it would be unacceptable to have a woman on the team; instead, any woman wishing to participate does so by providing the team members with meals and moral support. One must wonder if this tendency toward separating the men from the women stems from the same need to place one another into caste levels if it comes from a need to show superiority over one another. It is almost as though being female is a caste level all its own in regards to the restrictions on what one can and cannot do.

As for the British, male dominance is seen in Captain Russell's treatment of his sister Elizabeth.

This allegorical, postcolonial text pitches itself across different temporalities to forge an imagined Indian utopia; what could have, and with faith, what might still become an Indian reality. What if Gandhian ideals of multi-ethnic and multi-faith harmony had taken deeper root? What if the trauma of Partition had been avoided, or might still be overcome? This is the big picture at the core of *Lagaan's* moral storytelling. Still today then, it is not just a cricket. A cricket match against the ex-colonizer is also a re-enactment of the colonial struggle. By means of systematically remembering the rules of the game from a minority perspective, the former colonies altered the shape of cricket and exposed its inherent fissures, thereby also unhinging the sport from its Englishness. Thus, the game of cricket as practiced in India and elsewhere across the globe, most evidently in the British Commonwealth, provides a counter narrative, it employs the art of mimicry, which simultaneously critiques and celebrates. As Bhabha, explicates:

The ambivalence of mimicry almost but not quite suggests that the fetishes colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter appeal. What I have called its 'identity effects' are always crucially split. Under cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is a part-object that radically revalues the normative knowledge's of the priority of race, writing, history. For the fetish mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it de-authorizes them. (90)

Lagaan sets up a passionate desire to see the cad Russell defeated. When the officer's own sister, Elizabeth, takes the dangerous decision to assist the villagers in comprehending this strange game, she goes 'out of bounds' beyond the pale; and has

to arrange clandestine coaching sessions away from the prying eyes of her kinsfolk. In doing so, Elizabeth is displaying empathy and an ethical friendship that transgresses the code of her racial order. It also complicates the picture of the colonial master, by underscoring the patriarchal foundations of that project and nuances the gendered politics at play within the dominant order.

Interestingly, thanks to the rules of cricket, the villagers pull victory from the cinders of defeat. Just when all seems lost, there is an additional ball due to the bowler's foot being over the bowling crease. This no ball affords one more opportunity to score an unlikely victory. With six runs required Bhuvan, who had crossed during the previous illicit delivery and now has the strike, summons up all his reserves and pride and majestically strikes the ball high in the air towards the boundary. In true dramatic fashion, it is Captain Russell who happens to be positioned under the ball's trajectory, and it takes an eternity to return to ground level; the suspense is palpable. Russell catches the ball, but his conceited joy turns to dismay, as it is evident that he has stepped over the boundary line to secure the catch. The six runs is signaled by the umpire, and Russell and his cronies are inconsolable; but the villagers flood onto the pitch to celebrate, and just to underscore the significance of the moment the heavens suddenly open and the overdue rains provide a further dimension to their unbridled celebrations. The final ball victory provides the catalyst for the British to dissolve their encampment in Champaner, they are tripped up by their own rules; cricket becomes then an act of decolonization, a peaceful form of resistance. Bhuvan, the Captain Marvel of the Indian villagers, makes the observation that the British game of cricket resembles '*gilli-danda*', played with sticks and a ball, which he played as a child. This former one has sought out Bhuvan because, as he boldly declares, he hates the British and wants to fight them in any way he can with

sword or bat. Devan, who learned cricket from the British, is fearsome both as a batsman and a bowler, and the spirit of the whole team is raised by his inclusion.

Grant Farred has suggested:

Devan is arguably the instantiation of the Gandhian ideal of transreligious and ethnic cooperation because he is the only player on the team who is not a Champaner resident. He comes in search of the village because he has heard of the match, and he comes only to offer cultural and ideological resource, as an “Indian” helping his fellow countrymen combat colonialism. (114)

The film’s narrator comments that a defeat in the cricket pitch is such a blow to English honour and pride that the English contingent decides to pack up and leave Champaner. Manthia Diawara in the context of the Caribbean writes: “The very introduction of cricket to new places is a way of asserting British cultural presence, a way of linking sports to politics” (31). The game cricket was an unofficial In *Lagaan*, Elizabeth, Captain Russell’s sister, occupies a social category that is inescapably radicalized as well as gendered. She is not only a white woman, she is thought of as a white woman, both by the whites and the non-whites. Elizabeth’s presence in the colony Champaner, makes her complicit to the imperial enterprise, although she is ‘ambiguously placed’ in the colonizing process. Anne McClintock notes that colonial women “experienced the process of colonialism very differently from colonial men” and those Victorian women appear to have held a different relationship to imperialism from men, mainly by virtue of their positioning in the domestic ideology of gender. Elizabeth, like Gauri and other native women in the colonies, is not considered an equal partner in sports. She is not a member of the cricket team, only an engaged onlooker. However, her appropriation of the role of the cricket coach and teaching the

peasants the intricacies of the game disrupts the masculine preserve of the game. It allows us to locate the 'other' gender's challenge to rigid systems that maintain agency and 'culture' as western male preserve.

Lagaan was a sport film that not only achieved phenomenal success, but has also achieved cult status as the first crossover Bollywood film. When the colonial mission of importing sport as a civilizing tool is successfully turned on its head. Being a non-violent arena of assertion, cricket is successfully transformed into a tool to subvert colonial rule. The success of the movie through cricket connection and the jingoism has demanded the broader analysis of the film. Goli, Tipu, Guran and Bhuvan are the peasants of Champaner and the folklore of Indian independence akin to Gandhian movement of Swaraj. The film captures the symbolic independence of Champaner village as the reward for domesticating the alien game of the Britishers. In the case of sport; it would be easy to assume that its role consisted solely of ensuring that indigenous elites and later entire native populations would accommodate themselves to British games and by extension to British rule. But sport's legacy in this respect is double-edged. Whilst playing the imperialist masters games might well be conceived of as an indication of cultural inferiority, it has also given colonial peoples opportunities to measure themselves against their present and former rulers. Nowhere is this more apparent in that most archetypal of English sports, cricket, which became hugely important as a marker of identity in many corners of the former British Empire- perhaps most notably in Australia, the Indian sub-continent and the English speaking Caribbean. Victory over the English cricket team in such countries became one of the most convenient and visible ways of measuring the extent to which the colonial mantle had been lifted.

The situation of the transgressive European woman in *Lagaan* threatened with enclosure and expulsion from the colony, by her male sibling, is an acknowledgement of women's 'private' struggles and a pointer to the oppression of women across racial boundaries. It establishes that the imperial project followed a strict genderideology of domesticity, and that transgressions against it culminated in punitive actions.

Elizabeth's portrayal in *Lagaan* as a benevolent benefactor of the natives and her participation in native festivities also question the sealed, homogeneous structure and content of western cultural discourse, while her love for Bhuvan interrogates the notions of racial purity enunciated in colonialist fiction. Her participation in Hindu festivals and passion for a native is a threat to the projected cultural organicity of Victorian England. However, Elizabeth's positioning in the film also problematically projects the white woman as the rescuer of the 'other' race. Placed beside her cold, rapacious brother, the film veers towards an idealization of Elizabeth, as woman. The film reiterates the essentialist notions of womanhood by connecting womanhood with vulnerability, sensitivity, and passion, all suggested by Elizabeth's gender.

Thus, regarding imperialism and nationalism, *Lagaan* deserves credit for being able to write into the prescribed history of modernity, the multi accentuality of the lived experience of India – ambiguity, ambivalence and contradictions – and further for opening up spaces for alternative voices. *Lagaan* tells the story of the small village of Champaner in Northern India and its struggle with the British over the *Lagaan*, an annual land tax that is paid to the British consisting of a portion of the village crops. Despite a terrible drought, the British double the *Lagaan* and the villagers have no choice but to go before Captain Russell, the British army captain in charge of Champaner, and plead with him to lift the *Lagaan* for the season as the people may not even have enough crops to survive the year. Captain Russell proposes

a deal to the villagers saying that if they can beat the British in a game of cricket then the *Lagaan* will not be levied for the next three years, but if the British win, the villagers must pay triple the *Lagaan* at the end of the season. With the aid of Captain Russell's sister, Elizabeth, and the leadership of a young man named Bhuvan, the villagers learn the game. In the end, after the British take a devastating lead in the tournament, Bhuvan and his team win by default when the British make a mistake.



Fig. 6 finally, villagers of Champaner won the cricket match

III. Cricket as a Mode of Colonial Resistance and Solidarity

This thesis centers on the issue of nationalism and colonial resistance by the indigenous Indian people in Ashutosh Gowariker's film *Lagaan*. Thus it tries to explore the ethos of nationalism in Indian people. Drawing upon the notion of Partha Chatterjee's, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Anthony Smith's, in *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* and Benedict Anderson's influential book, *Imagined Communities*, it explores illustrations where nationalism is demonstrated by colonial resistance. The story of the movie shows the conflict between colonizers and colonized in a cricket game. Captain Russell, the British commander invites to play the game. If the British win, the peasants, despite the drought, will have to pay triple taxes. If the Indians win, they will be exempted from taxation for three years. The subsequent events of the film can be predicted by any person who has previously seen a sports film. Bhuvan gathers a team, each member of which has some special contribution to make. The villain acts villainously. The game is played. At first the Indians appear to be losing, but each of members of their team makes his special contribution and the good guys win.

Lagaan is at once a story of nationalist anti-colonialism and also a parable of a utopian Gandhian post-Independence India. Bollywood films can be and continue to be read as nationalistic ethos, to read *Lagaan* as devotion of nationalism:

Champaner/India was oppressed and gradually through communitarian alliance and leadership rose to consciousness and freedom is to regard all forms of oppositional movements, including Indian nationalism, as a linear, evolutionary project. The history of cricket in India and the dominant historical discourses of Indian national identity share a rather uncomfortable relation. By virtue of its sheer popularity, Cricket has become a part of the national identity in India. While the game could be

witnessed in virtually every corner of the country, historically it still remains a part of the colonial legacy and initially it was adopted by the elite class only. Moreover, the early development of the game among the native population was strictly divided across the communal lines. Thus, the actual historical account of the game places it in a conflicting relation with the Gandhian idea of nationalism and his vision of an egalitarian society.

Thus, Ashutosh Gowariker's film *Lagaan* uses a fictional cricket match to introduce a pseudo-historical event in the public consciousness that only conforms to the Gandhian vision of an Indian society and presents a unifying discourse of nationalism. The cricket team is both a symbol of the native resistance against the colonial masters through subversive use of cricket and a picture of the pluralistic unity within the idea of India as a nation. On the other hand, this film also presents the possibility of being read or seen as an expression of nationalism.

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