



Football Coaches as Gramscian “Organic Intellectuals”: Exploring The Intersections of Football Driven Youth Subculture and Communication in Vyasarpadi (North Chennai)

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ABSTRACT

Studies on youth subcultures were pioneered by Stuart Hall and his colleagues, in particular, Dick Hebdige (1979), at the height of cultural studies’ emergence as a transdisciplinary plane during the 1970s-1980s. Subcultures made possible by youth and other sections of a given society are, according to Stuart Hall, the “raw material of social existence” (1976, p.10). They are innovative sites of communication as they bring together acts of resistance as acts of communication. In this context, this paper seeks to explore the intersections of Football driven youth subculture in one of the marginalised neighbourhoods of North Chennai, Vyasarpadi. Football has been the preferred sport among youth, both men and women, for the past few decades. The game has anchored the emergence of a youth subculture that is inspired and motivated in equal measure by the sport as well as the erstwhile players, who are seeking to leverage the game for the all-around development of the youth. Antonio Gramsci’s (1929-1935/1971) concept of “organic intellectuals” is employed in this paper, Stuart Hall’s notions on Articulation (1980) and subcultures (1975) to examine the intersections of the Football driven youth culture, with the objective of uncovering the emergence of the coaches as “organic intellectuals”. This research flows as an autoethnographic account of myself as a football fan/research subject.

Keywords: Youth subcultures, Articulation, Community, Football, North Chennai, Organic intellectuals.

Football as a site of cultural practice

Football fans can have a big influence on their football clubs (Johnston, 2014). But in the case of marginalised communities, they are one step forward towards the game (Yifen, 2015). In North Chennai, Young footballers, football coaches and senior players have taken the game of football as an ideological object and as a communication medium to unite local people who are seeking to leverage the game for the all-around development of the youth and their community. For us, football matters a lot.

This research is a self-reflexive effort to understand and analyse the football driven Youth Subculture and Communication of Vyasarpadi (North Chennai) - which remains to be the backward and marginalised part of the metropolis and a victim of government apathy, where football coaches have taken the game to guide the youth for their community development. And also, how they resist and contest their marginalisation and caste identities by the ritual of playing/teaching football to break the obstacle built in the society. This research seeks to map the ideas of Antonio Gramsci's (1929-1935/1971) concept of "organic intellectuals" and alongside Stuart Hall's notions on Articulation (1980) and subcultures (1976), to examine the intersections of the football driven youth culture, with the objective of uncovering the emergence of the coaches as "organic intellectuals" on and off the pitch.

While cricket attracted upper-caste/class persons as their patrons and audience, football, hockey, and kabaddi have a much wider class and caste constituency (Sen, 2015). India is not the one-sport nation as it is often made out to be and shows why it had failed in many other sports" (Dart, 2017). In a country like India, where cricket is dominating the sports arena, football and other sports are very rare to see on the streets. Football and other sports have long been marginalized within Indian culture. But few places are exceptions. Football is one of the major and dominating sports activities in the northern part of Chennai city. Areas such as Vyasapadi, Royapuram, Washermenpet, Thiruvottriyur, Perambur, etc., are practising football as the number one sport activity. These areas evolved around their longing for the development of themselves and their communities. This paper explores the youth subculture and role football & its coaches play in shaping and producing a progressive environment in a marginalised community through a focus on three specific processes that include articulation, organic intellectual and development.

Autoethnography as a Methodology

Autoethnography is typically defined as an approach to research that puts the self at the centre of cultural analysis (Chang, 2008). Autoethnography is an emerging qualitative research method that allows the author to write in a highly personalised style, drawing on his or her experience to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon. "Personal narratives can address several key theoretical debates in contemporary sociology: macro and micro linkages; structure, agency and their intersection; [and] social reproduction and social change" (Laslett, 1999, P.392). Ellis & Bochner (2000) use a personal narrative to be the same thing as an autoethnography, while others use autoethnography as a means of explicitly linking concepts from the literature to the narrated personal experience (Holt, 2001; Sparkes, 1996).

This research paper is part of my ongoing doctoral research work and put together with my own autoethnographic observations over the last six years as a football fan firstly and lately as a researcher. Though I am an insider of the research area, I am an outsider to the game when it is played in tournaments as I am not a professional player. In addition, supported by fieldwork and following SC-STEDS (Slum Children's Sports Talent, Education & Development Society)

football club for the past four years, other methods such as In-depth interviews were conducted with coaches, players, young kids, parents, and the public most of whom were well known to me over the years apart from a few new ones. The interviews were mostly casual and conducted in their own environment. Focus group discussions provided additional valuable information.

I have chosen two playgrounds/grass-root community centres in Vyasarpadi - Slum Children's Sports Talent and Education & Development Society (SC-STEDS) located in Mullai Nagar and Kannaikapuram corporation playground. The reasons for choosing these grounds are twofold: these are run in a self-supportive manner with their own finances in the Chennai Corporation ground and secondly, they are popular among the marginalised sections of the area.

I am writing this paper with a heavy heart as I have been made to suffer from inferiority complex because of the stigmatisation made possible by the ongoing spatial politics against North Chennai and its communities by media representations and government policies. I am also aware that my relationship with football can help me overcome this as it cannot be objectified by others as I have my own in-depth, self-reflexivity driven narrative which comes from my heart as a citizen of this place and as a football fan. This will become the basis of strength for this autoethnographic account. I am inspired to think like this because the elders who played football and graduated to become coaches are helping the young boys and girls of my community to shed the effects of such spatial politics and discrimination.

I chose autoethnography as it is best suited to relieve the pain I went through and what the people of my area are going through. Why we should suffer humiliations heaped on us by the media and other segments of the population of the city? Why does the media portray us badly? Why police arrest not the drug dealers, but the youngsters who are consuming it? These are questions of deep import having linkages with football and how the sport is seen as a site of hope by the youth of North Chennai.

In the following part, I would like to introduce the geographical area of my research. I would also introduce the need for subculture study in the marginalised sites. Secondly, I would engage with Gramsci's (1971) concept of Organic Intellectual and Stuart Hall's notion of Articulation (1980) to understand the everyday lives of Football driven youth subculture and practices of coaches and players in their marginalised settings on how the coaches are making the people for their all-round development.

North Chennai: A site of government apathy

Chennai is the capital city of Tamil Nadu. According to Census data of India (2011), Chennai (earlier named Madras) is the fourth largest city by population in an Indian city, and one of the main business and commercial hubs of South India with India's fourth-biggest port. Despite its claim to modernity, the city continues to be shaped two sides by both its colonial and cultural past (Dhamodharan & Gorringer, 2021).

Most cities in the world are divided in terms of their regions - into north, south, east, and west. Though the geographical divide is based on size and population, it is also a part of the class divide, social and economic divide, at least in the case of Chennai. A well-known urban historian and heritage activist of Chennai late S. Muthaiah said that "North Madras was where the city began. It's a whole area worth exploring in the context of our identity as citizens of Madras" (Alexander, 2017). South and North Madras (North Chennai is famously known as North Madras) are culturally different from each other, this division is mainly based on class, caste, skin-colour, language, work and space. This spatial segregation happened as a part of the

cultural and social legacy of the British Raj. During the colonial period, the city was divided into 'White Town' and 'Black Town'. The division was made possible later by industrialization - "North Chennai has long been a centre for industrial growth and the concentration of the working population. It is a white-collar and blue-collar divide" (D' Sami (2018)).

Census data of India 2011 reported the total number of the ghettos (Slums) in Chennai city numbers 329,827 in which a population of 1,342,337 resides. This is around 28.89% of the total population of Chennai city. Among them, many are housed in Northern Chennai. Workers in North Chennai came from different parts of Tamil Nadu and even from other states. Chennai has become the industrial hub of Tamil Nadu, and the workers and their factories are mostly located in the northern part of the city. There is a geographical division of the class kind in Chennai, South Madras is home to the middle and upper classes of the city's residential localities. In comparison, north Madras is home to the daily wage and factory workers.

Damodaran and Gorrige (2021) noted that "the appearance of the globalising city can hardly be seen in the northern city areas which are principally working-class areas, largely inhabited by Dalit, Christian, Muslim, fishing, and other oppressed communities" (p. 20).

One of the reports published in a newspaper goes on to show that North Chennai is not a market place for fast food.

.....for most branded fast-food chains and cafes, north Chennai still seems to be a blind spot. The most popular consensus is that much of the population in north Chennai is working class and therefore not the ideal market segment for these outlets (Khan, 2013).

On another note, North Chennai has always been represented by the media in an unethical way and portrayed the people of this region in an uncertain manner. Most of such representations are featured especially in cinema.

In contemporary Tamil films, the representation of North Chennai as a spatially distinct, masculine, homogeneous, and violent urban ghetto had turned the slums and kuppams (residential areas associated with Dalits) in the neighbourhood to dangerous spaces that feed the casteist anxieties and desires of Tamil imagination. This marks the criminalisation of the neighbourhood and its inhabitants as pathologically anti-social (Damodaran & Gorrige, 2021, p.19).

Another report published in a news outlet presents North Chennai as follows:

The depiction of North Chennai as a place for gang wars, drug menace, and unclean surroundings is wrong and, in a way, it is also an attack on the working class, their families, and way of life, youth and children. Systematically, North Chennai has been kept as an underdeveloped part of the city" (D Sami, 2018).

This kind of social stratification is made deliberately on space with power, which also implies a stratification of mobility and immobility. This urban form is described by Lefebvre (1996) as not merely physical but also psychological and social at the same time.

Being a victim of this representation, many questions went into my mind. Why media always show and represent us in this manner and give an image of people with a darker side and ultimately makes others, who don't know anything about our struggles and lifestyle every day, believe in these representations that are far from real. But that was completely a blind representation of our life and space. Here, life is colourful as we have our own way of lifestyle, language, culture and politics in our everyday life. Being a young research scholar and a victim of this marginalisation, I wanted to describe the culture I have seen from my childhood that was deliberately ignored by the media and society.

Vyasarjadi: A subcultural face of North Chennai

Vyasarjadi is one of the happening places in North Chennai. It has multicultural faces, has many subcultural activities that happen in people's lives, said famous Tamil novelist, writer, activist Karan Karky. Different versions are given for the origin of the name of the place. In one version Vayasar Munivar (a sage) came and meditated here, so his name was kept after his death. Other versions hold the view that it has Buddhist origins. The oral histories of the place are more interesting. To gather more concrete information, I met North Chennai women novelist Shalin Maria Lawrence. She gave relevant documents and guided me to know more about the history of Vyasarjadi. She explained that earlier the entire place was called perumparacheri and Vyasarjadi has nothing to do with the Vyasa sage, Vyasarjadi is a Telugu word for Vesharupadi. Padi in Tamil and Telugu means ridge land (forest area). According to the inscriptions of the Vijayanagara king, Mahamandaleswarar, the three land grants are given by an individual for the Thiruvallikkeni Parthasarathy temple - Pudhupakkam, Veperiy and Vyasarjadi.

Lawrence (2018) vouches for the fact that the people of the area are natives and they have been living here long before the formation of the city of Madras. Agriculture was their dominant occupation for several centuries. There were two rivers flowing through the area. People also engaged in the crafts of weaving and bamboo materials. After the advent of the British, people from Moolakothalam, Veperiy, Broadway and Parrys came and settled here. The majority of them were Dalits.

There are also colonies in the area which has Burmese connections. During the period of late M. Bhakthavatsalam's chief ministership (1963-1967), the returning Tamil refugees from present-day Myanmar (Burma) were given land to settle in some parts of Vyasarjadi. Vyasarjadi covers the areas of Magazine Puram, *Kannikapuram*, Mullai nagar, Bharathi Nagar as well as BV Colony, Shastri Nagar, Sharma Nagar the cluster of resettlement colonies known as Burma Colonies.

Vyasarjadi holds within itself not only a long history but also a thriving multi-cultural and multi-ethnic environment in matters of food, dress, music, sports, and everyday practices. The omnipresence of Burmese food joints, football grounds, hip-hop and Gaana music groups stand testimony to the same. Ramakrishnan's (2004) research on gaana says "Gaana songs emerged as a subculture on the fringes of Chennai's slums offering an evocative, reflexive rendering of social issues by the city's poorest and marginalised and is also largely seen as a Dalit aesthetic form. Like gaana in musical form, in sports Boxing, Carrom, Kabbadi and Football have emerged as youth Subculture in the marginalised sites."

Is Vyasarjadi known only for Football? What happened to other games?

For a long time, boxing, carrom and kabbadi were also very visible in the public spaces of Vyasarjadi, alongside football. Carrom was seen promoting boardroom culture and contributing to gang formation and gambling by the police as it is played mostly in the open spaces of the streets or in some houses. Caste and political factors contributed to the downfall of boxing. Kabbadi is seen as a sport which does not result in wider recognition for those who take to it. Footballers, especially the coaches and senior players are seeking to use it as an ideological objective mode of resistance to survive rather succeed in the business of the game. Vyasarjadi has produced more national players in Boxing, Carrom, Kabbadi and more other sports. It remains the only place where more football players are engaged in community and personal development through the game in the last three decades.

Culture is Ordinary

Williams (1958) argued strongly that culture is ordinary and not elite in one of his best critically celebrated essays 'Culture is Ordinary' published in 1958.

We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life—the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative efforts. Some writers reserve the word of one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture are questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind (Williams, 1958/1989. p.4).

As Williams (1958) stated, culture exists in every society and every mind, but who is creating the culture and who made us to believe that unfamiliar culture became a part of our culture. For example, Bharatanatyam became a symbolic representation of Tamil Nadu dance, but is it practiced or performed by everyone in Tamil society? Whose culture and practice are imposed on us? The same question is applicable to cultures of the iconic Madras filter coffee, cricket - as cultures of sport etc., At this point, another cultural studies scholar, Dick Hebdige's (1979) said that culture is not a classical one. The classical or high cultures are cultivated by the elites and the powerful.

“Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Edward B Tylor, 1971, p. 1) Scottish football player and manager Jock Stein said, “Football is nothing without fans” (Waters, 2020). I found this enlightening and started reflecting on the images that are still in my mind. From childhood, I used to see ‘load men’ (workers who carry goods on their bodies from vehicles and offload them), who wear the jersey of national football teams or international clubs. In many cases, their jerseys were faded, but their pride as fans of football was remarkable. Fan culture has become a significant arena for communication studies, but art educators and researchers have not paid enough attention to it (Chen, 2007). I am passionate about sport, having been a spectator and an amateur player in a few sports for most of my life. But for a long time, a few questions were always crossing my mind. Why sports do not figure as important in our society and academic research? Why does cricket command a huge following in India?

Being a football fan for the past seven years and what I learned from the lectures on cultural studies by my professor and guide G. Ravindran and the muttram's cultural field trips, I have a natural inclination to engage in an autoethnographic reflection and recording of my locations as a football fan and member of the community where football was practised for various reasons.

Football driven youth subculture in Vysarpadi

Cricket has become the anchor of the dominant sports culture in India. Compared to youngsters in other parts of Chennai, who are hooked to cricket, youth in Vysarpadi have a remarkable passion for football. They have their role models in their elder brothers. During the football world cup, the few areas and grounds in Vysarpadi have a festive look. This reminds me that football is not another sport, but signifies a subculture among these people, especially among the youth. It is a subculture, meant to empower the community and provide a platform to express their desires and aspirations.

Talking about Subculture, and especially youth subculture, I cannot afford to ignore the works of cultural studies pioneered by Stuart Hall and his colleagues, in particular, Dick Hebdige (1979) that emerged as a transdisciplinary plane during the 1970s-1980s. Subculture studies came to the limelight in the times of post-war Britain.

Subculture is in the expressive forms and rituals of those subordinate groups – the teddy boys and mods and rockers, the skinheads and the punks (Hebdige, 1979). The emergence of these particular youth subcultures is formed as well as faded in the economic, social, and cultural changes that post war Britain was undergoing that time. He also stated Subcultures form in communal and symbolic engagements with the larger system of late industrial culture; they have organized around, but not wholly determined by, age and class, and are expressed in the creation of styles (1979). These subculture styles are not to be taken as simply as resisting hegemony or as magical resolutions to social issues.

Subcultures made possible by youth and other sections of a given society are, according to Stuart Hall, the “raw material of social existence” (1976. p.10). They are innovative sites of communication as they bring together acts of resistance as acts of communication. Like in the case of post-war Britain, youth in these sites were made to fall into a trap of hooliganism, they were alienated from society. In many a case, the youth of North Madras were made to become rowdies, miscreants, drug abusers, etc., so they lose to attain their desire. But youth in these locations creatively used the game football, where it can be seen as a subculture activity to form an anti-establishment political movement in the sites of Vysarpadi, North Chennai.

I am aware that both cricket and football are not native sports of India. I am more interested to learn why people of my community are relating to football as something more than a sport and a part of their daily lives which is ordinary as well as a subculture that springboards for their economic and social aspirations and to overcome the issues of discrimination, exclusion, and communal violence. This football-driven youth subculture in the sites of Vysarpadi is produced within specific articulation.

Articulation of football youth subculture

As cited by Featherstone (2011), Stuart Hall sees articulation as

the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage that is not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time. You must ask, under what circumstance can a connection be forged or made? So, the so-called ‘unity’ of discourse is really the articulation of distinct, different elements, which can be re-articulated in different ways because they have no necessary belongingness” (1996, p. 141).

In the case of Vysarpadi, this youth subculture is mainly articulated by two different elements, ‘Football’ and ‘Marginalised Community’.

Football: It is just a material object, that was made in either rubber, Nylon, PVC (Poly Vinyl Carbonate), PU (Polyurethane), or PVC/PU mix. Like other sports, football is just another game in the world. For many around the world football means joy, happiness, leisure activity, etc., but in the sites of marginalised communities, football has the magical power to unite people and transform their lives. It is a sport that requires stamina and survival skills. People in these sites are naturally caught up in the acts of building their stamina to survive as workers who are engaged in physical labor. Football fits in perfectly when the same people also strive for their development and their community development. It is a game of physical endurance. It provides the plane of social and cultural endurance as well to those who are hooked to it.

Marginalised Community: Raymond Williams (1976), in his Keywords, said that community can be a warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships or a warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems

never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term. In the Sport-for-Development project, Schulenkorf (2012) cited Elias (1974) who said “the use of the term community has remained to some extent associated with the hope and the wish of reviving once more the closer, warmer, more harmonious type of bonds between people vaguely attributed to past ages” (xiii). Schulenkorf (2012) also cited French philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas’s argument on the community to point out that to achieve togetherness between diverse (groups of) people who are separated or divided socially, culturally, politically, economically, and/or geographically, they need to be brought together in consensual face-to-face contact and in social contexts where equitable interpersonal co-operation and group cohesion are fostered. The marginalised communities in the sites of Vysarpadi are separated or divided with many different aspects, socially, economically, politically, spatially, etc.,

Althusser made Stuart Hall “live in and with difference” (Hall, 1985, pp. 91-92). According to Hall (1985), unity of difference is a site of articulation. Talking about Althusser’s difference, Hall (1985) argued that

Althusser’s break with a monistic conception of marxism demanded the theorization of difference — the recognition that there are different social contradictions with different origins; that the contradictions which drive the historical process forward do not always appear in the same place, and will not always have the same historical effects. We have to think about the articulation between different contradictions; about the different specificities and temporal durations through which they operate, about the different modalities through which they function (Hall, 1985, pp. 91-92).

In the case of football, we are not only reading the football or game, but we are reading the different elements, both correspondence and contradiction elements like grounds, clubs, coaches and coaching staffs, players, children, supporters, media, matches, veteran players, other athletes, those who don’t support football, etc., and people in Vysarpadi are different in their age, gender, class, colour, language, caste, religion, education, politics, job, income, geographical, origins, which lead to contradictions among the people. Though there are many differences among these people, there are more similarities among them that include marginalisation, poverty, guilt, hunger, school dropout, unemployment, fake crimes, drug addiction, child labor, family problems, drinkers, cannabis addicts, etc., Though the difference are more pronounced in an individual or less in a group, their similarities affect the entire communities. So there comes a few football-driven youth subculture articulated as new social formations in these sites. They strongly believe football brings ‘unity’ among them.

About Culture, Stuart Hall noted in his masterpiece on cultural studies *Resistance Through Rituals* he says “...that level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life and give expressive form to their social and material...experience.” (1975/1991, p.10) Thus, each subculture represents a different way of handling of the raw material of social existence. The raw material is always mediated: inflected by the historical context in which it is encountered; posited upon a specific ideological field which gives it a particular life and particular meanings and creates a social formation. This football subculture is made possible by the people, especially youth and coaches on these sites with the available raw material on their social existence. They keep practicing one thing commonly for their development together with the ideology of and on football.

Football as an ideological object in the marginalised community

According to Stuart Hall, all ideologies are practices. It does not follow that because all practices are in ideology, or inscribed by ideology, all practices are nothing but ideology (Hall, 1985). Football, the most popular sport in the world, is a game of passion, devotion, joy, hope, and transformation. One might have expected that, since it has been termed the people's game, football would be different from other sports in this respect, and to some extent, this is the case. (Walvin, 2000). Why has football become a people's game? Football has a magical power to unite people and transform their lives, it's quite a unique sport. The player must be fit physically and mentally, need more stamina, determination, hard work, dedication, and team spirit and more importantly, have to fight till the last second of the game. It brings power and gives them the confidence to survive. People in marginalised communities always strive for a battle to survive and are determined to succeed. So the nature of the game suits them and they adapt quickly. Football is becoming an ideological object in these sites. Knowingly or unknowingly, football is becoming a part of their lives and they became the ideological subjects to football. It applies to me also, for a football fanatic, though football is the most commodified version in another part of the world, and romanticised by many. Here people in Vysarpadi are seeking development through the game football. They practice different strategies/styles in and off the ground to resist themselves from hegemonic power and society.

Football culture has a long history in North Madras. "Since the British colonial period, football is played in this part, but as a daily wage working class, our elders took the game very lightly. To elevate the living conditions of youth and children in Vysarpadi, Bro. Sigamani, a Salesian priest and a group of young men from the Christian institutions introduced the game in the late 1980s in a big way among the marginalised members of the community" (Thangaraj. N, Football Coach (SC-STEDS), Personal Communication, August 2017).

Vayasarpadi is one of the main areas for football development in the city, the coaches come up with many ideas to develop the game, they bring more people into the game and they also spread the game to nearby places. They organize small tournaments among the neighbourhood communities. In the past, these communities and nearby places were known for huge conflicts due to various political, social and economic factors. However, small friendly tournaments created a comradeship among them that helped maintain healthy competitive rivalry among the groups.

For Hall articulation "...has the considerable advantage of enabling us to think of how specific practices articulated around contradictions that do not all arise in the same way, at the same point, in the same moment, can nevertheless be thought together" (1985, p. 69).

Practices of articulation of subculture

As a communication student, with some sociological and cultural studies perspectives, I have been curious to know what brings the people of North Chennai and football together. Football has multiple associations with factors of caste, education, employment, and empowerment. Retired Income Tax officer and former football player/coach, Saravanan, who secured the government job because of his interest in sports' specially football, said: "Myself and my family are having a good meal every day because of football. It gave me a job, a house, and a good reputation in society. With words, I cannot tell you the relationship I have with football." (Saravanan, Personal Communication, Phone Call, January 2021)

Admittedly, football has a strong connection with these people without any doubt. But does football alone bring unity to this place? No, a game may grab their interest, and make them participate. The nature of the place is suited more for football practice. Even games like

Boxing, Carrom had its own versions of subcultures that faded due to the deliberate efforts of the powers-be in this society. But in the case of the football youth subculture, the senior player and coaches play an active role in ensuring that the youth subculture stays vibrant for a long period and subsequently gets transferred to the next generations.

In many cases, as the youth has grown up with elders, it considers senior players as role models for the game as well as life. The local coaches have contributed to certain social changes in these areas. A 14 years an enthusiastic young player said “We can also find a number of local of Neymar, Messi, Ronaldo, Willian, and Drogba in every street, and for the same reason Vyasarpadi has another name, Mini Brazil. Though Neymar was my favourite player, I always used to follow my elder brothers in my club”. (Thilak Kumar, Personal Interview, May 2019) Coaches produce a good number of players and at the same time they carefully handle the political blinds around them, on their grounds or club.

A strong sense of Articulation happens on the football field as well as in the streets with the help of football coaches and senior players. For many football clubs and coaches, their community is an important one, working with the community is a powerful tool for engagement. Football clubs and coaches have the power to connect both people and football with their social issues. It is part of everyday life that people can relate to.

Community football coach: An organic intellectual

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields” (Antonio Gramsci, 1971, pp. 134-135).

This critical definition of the organic intellectual came out obvious, from the social group rather than the intellectual. In addition to Gramsci’s notion Bamyeh, A, M. (2014) described, the organic intellectual is assumed to be understandable in terms of the larger symbols and activities that provide an already constituted group with more cohesion and homogeneity than would be produced, presumably, by its material activity alone. Organic intellectual activity, far from being a dispensable luxury, seems socially unavoidable (p. 9). It makes sense of the social groups as chances to understand better shifts, transformation and debates with the help of the person with the local knowledge intellectuals who stand-in for a community for a change. In North Chennai the Football coaches are organic intellectuals, and they address social issues by connecting people with football.

Every player here has a story to tell about the conditions of facticity experienced. One among them is Thangaraj, football coach of SC-STEDS. “Nobody explained the potential of football towards us, it’s a reflection of what we missed in our childhood and that’s why we started this academy to produce more good players,” (Thangaraj. N, Personal Communication, August 2017). In 1997, he along with his brother Umapathi and with a few friends started the football training center in a corporation playground called the SC-STEDS (Slum Children’s Sports Talent, Education & Development Society). “Earlier it was a dry pond where all the wastages were thrown into and was also a preferred hangout for people to consume alcohol. We decided to use this place, we conducted the meeting in the streets and explained about our plans. With the help of inhabitants in the area, we cleaned up this place and started practising football here. Later, recognising the success of our club activity, the Chennai Corporation came forward to build a playground in this place, located in Mullai Nagar of Vyasarpadi” said coach

Thangaraj. What is important to emphasise here is that an empty unused place was turned into a site of cultural activity that also brought forth 'unity' among diverse groups in North Chennai. The playground is being used to train the slum children around Vyasarpadi and its surrounding areas in football along with life skills. More than 200 kids including 80 girls are taking training regularly on a shift basis. The playground has the distinction of being Tamil Nadu's first corporation artificial grass ground ever made for football.

Bamyeh, (2014) suggested four important amendments to Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals.

First, while the organic intellectual may be a product of a social group, second, his activity may be traced to the intellectual demands of complex everyday life. Third, he tends to have a nuanced connection to 'high culture,' which he regards as a vehicle for his own social program rather than as its own fetish. And fourth, the effectiveness of the organic intellectual is related to his ability to transform reality even as he claims to preserve it (2014, pp. 9-10).

The Football coaches of North Chennai are having these above-mentioned amendments and practicing these in a day to day life with people, making them dream and setting up the route for their development with the help of football.

Firstly, the football coaches were born and grew up battling through difficulties and struggles caused by government apathy towards North Chennai. They have a better understanding of their community problems. Their role towards their community is not merely to express its homogeneity and cohesion, but they also defend the social changes. For example, they connect people with football and address the social context of their being in society and explain that to a wider public. In every sense, the coaches are defending a new understanding of their community and engaging people in it to herald change. People's participation happens in the football field as well as in the streets with the help of football coaches and senior players. For many football clubs and coaches, their community is an important one, working with the community is a powerful tool for engagement. In tune with this idea, the youth of north Chennai and their elders have cultivated over the years their own grassroots training community at the local level. The power of the game helps to transform their society better with hundreds of local coaches and grassroots organizations in north Chennai.

Everyday practices in the football field

Secondly, organic intellectualism is an everyday activity. Organic intellectuals may however be best understood in terms of what they themselves claim to do, namely as defenders of 'local knowledge in general, rather than of any specific community. (Bamyeh, 2014, pp. 9 -10).

Football coach Thangaraj said, that in the beginning, football was used for a time pass and for keeping youngsters preoccupied in a healthy and productive mode. But, "later we realized that it was a game that could transform the lives of people, by uniting people. The nature of the football game synced with our real-life emotions. So, we chose to play football. Being football players/coaches, we strongly felt that we do have a major role to play in addressing issues that affect the young people in the community on a local level".

Henning Eichberg (1997/2014) "Space for sport should be amenable to being used in multifunctional ways, by a variety of sports and other cultural activities." (p.71) Many government football bodies have used football in a very effective manner. In England, football was used to combat anti-social behaviour, such as smoking, alcohol/drug misuse; glue sniffing and making 'hoax' phone calls to the emergency services (Mellor, 2002). Similar activities are practiced in north Chennai playgrounds with the help of local coaches and their individual ideas.

Thirdly, compared to the professional coaches, the role of an organic intellectual coach is slightly difficult. Though they are professionals in terms of coaching, they have another role to do continuously, teach the players and the public about the social issues in order to (en)counter live street politics. "... all voluntary activities by individual citizens intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system" (Kaase and Marsh 1979, p.42). The human imagination is exercised in sports sites with extraordinary creativity (Patricia, Vertinsky and Bale, 2004). Apart from football practice, there are many activities happening for the cause of social development. I have been watching the working class members' struggles and the way they use public space (playground) in their day to day life for their political participation. Coaches apply their ideas, imaginations, theory and visions towards their community. On the football grounds, they produce a better future for the players. With the production of ideas, their daily routines include practices (training) and social activities. Through their actions, they convert the public space (playground) into a social space. In North Madras, football fields are seen as a site of representation to express opposition.

The ground thus emerges as an emblem of local identity, an icon to the community from which the controlling club draws its followers (Bale 2001; Cohen 1972). There is no classroom blackboard here, instead they use the playground as a classroom and pitch as their blackboard. Opportunities available here not only enable them to play football but also overcome the social challenges that pull them behind. By teaching them issues such as social integration, gender equality, and unemployment into their football practice time.

Coach Thangaraj is using football as a tool to unite people. Initially, he focused on children to train and develop their life skills. In Vyasarpadi, Thangaraj organised women education programme, launched fight against child marriage and helped early school dropouts to continue their education. In recent times, his academy organised a summer camp that focused on football as well as other social activities. "With football alone, we can't change this system; we are using football to unite people. For us participation is important. We are trying to identify the issues and help the people" (Thangaraj, Personal Communication, August 2017). In addition, every day we have a problem, either created by the government or our circumstance. So we are trying to engage people with some sort of other activities like political dramas, awareness campaigns, public discussion, and rally in the street, etc, and create awareness among the so that they can raise their voice for them as well their community.

Kannikapuram is another area in North Chennai where the football coaches are actively working with people to bring about a decisive change in their lives. It has one of the city's biggest corporation grounds that encourages about 10 to 150 kids entering football training every year. Some of them have signed for playing in football clubs in the city as well in the state clubs. Coach Anand (late) Krishnan 47, Srinivasan, 46, and a few others started the *Kannikapuram Football Club* (KFC) for children and *Kannikapuram Veteran Football Club* (KVFC) for people above 40 years. The involvement of these gentlemen in sports is outstanding. They spend more time in the ground rather than in their home.

With the love for the game and with the memory of his late friend and football coach Anand, his friends and young volunteers organising football tournaments and summer camps for their kids around their surroundings without fail. "Sports includes all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction among kids. In his memory, we are still working with these kids and making them stronger" (Srinivasan, Personal Communication, August 2017)

For the past 12 years, coaches have been organising a summer special football camp for children of the neighboring areas. The 21 days camp is organized from their own pocket money. It is to be noted that even the common public, who are regular visitors to the ground, contribute towards the camp fund because they recognise that sports will help kids and adults get out of the gutters. In *Kannikapuram* Football Club (KFC), 60 girls are getting trained in football. Football is the only game that attracts more girls from North Chennai to participate in. “Football is generally seen as a tough game for girls. However, despite the economic and gender odds, girls are fighting hard in the game of football. Each year, the number of girls participants is increasing. Apart from playing the game, women players are transforming themselves into referees and coaches. (Bheemabhai, Personal Communication, May 2019). He also added, “Football brings more job opportunities from the government and private sector. Football clubs from our city and other states come forward to pick right talent to play for their clubs. I got an appointment in railways to play for the Southern Railway FC. Through job opportunities, we can eventually overcome the conditions of poverty.”

Conclusion

“Teaching education with sports is a bit of a challenge, but football helps a lot to unite the kids here and change their community-oriented vision,” (Thangaraj, Personal Communication, August 2017). Football and education were combined and kids studied more on the ground after playing a game. This also reduced the instance of child labor in our area and nearby places. A majority of the kids got admission in schools through the sports quota. A few schools in the city request coaches to send kids who are proficient in the game. “I never ever thought my son will study in Don Bosco, but now he made me and the school proud by winning many trophies, all happened because of the efforts of Thangaraj master” (Selvi.S. Personal Communication, May 2019) a thanks statement given by SC-STEDS young player Thilak’s mother. It also shows his ability to transform reality and engage people. Hence football coaches of North Madras are organic intellectuals.

Delaney’s sees youth subcultures “as a vehicle of collective self-defense for working-class teenagers” (Delaney, 1982). In tune with this idea, the youth of North Chennai and their elders have cultivated over the years their own grassroots training community at the local level. The power of the game helps to transform their society better with hundreds of local coaches and grassroots organizations in north Chennai.

Empowerment – as a collaborative process – should, for example, enhance individual and collective capacities, improve efficacy, address inequities and, where poverty is implicated, promote social and economic justice and wellbeing (Reid, 2006). A strong sense of development happens in a marginalised community made possible by the subculture driven by the youths and senior football players and supporters of this very own community made possible by the organic intellectual coaches.

While sports is set up as an entrainment object, its fans and players are playing a spectator role in society. Whereas in the case of football it is seen as a public sport. Mansouri noted that public sport, on the other hand, was intended to improve health, education, and relaxation. By using simple sports equipment that has perennial value, the public sport would definitely be suitable for both sexes and for different age and social groups, which would thus reflect political and economic equality demanded in the names of both democracy and socialism (1982). It is not only a game to play in their land, it is much more about the people who fight for their second freedom.

Orjuela, C. (2003), a peace researcher, described the struggle of oppressed community participation stating that individuals and groups often do not possess the resources to take over time-intensive community roles, as they are primarily concerned with their own survival. This statement explains that on the one hand many people are involving themselves in social activity in the community, on the other, there are people who do not care about social projects, while there are others who do not have the time to participate. This gap leads to another problem, lack of participation and implementation of new ideas for community development. But in the case of North Chennai, a new kind of production of social space is happening with coaches, footballers, and people engaging in the common ground of development through and in the football grounds.

Notes on Contributor

Sukumar Thangaraj (30) is a full time PhD Scholar at the Department of Journalism and Communication, University of Madras. He is presently working towards the completion of his thesis on the intersections of Football driven youth subculture and communication in North Chennai. He is an avid football fan. Born in North Chennai, he grew up with imageries and experiences with Football and its key promoters, the players and the coaches. He is also a social photographer interested in teaching photography to children of his neighbourhood under the banner of the forum he established, Madras Marabinar, along with colleagues from Muttram, the folk and theatre arts group. He can be contacted at filmfotografisuku04@gmail.com.

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