

"The Cricket Team"*

The film *Lagaan*, written and directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, is set in India in 1893, during the British Raj. The villagers of Champaner have to pay a tax of their corn to the local ruler, and he in turn must pay it to the British forces controlling the district. When the villagers complain that they cannot pay because of the drought, the British commander, Captain Russell, challenges one of them, Bhuvan, to bet with him. Bhuvan, who has made a rude remark about cricket, can save the village from *lagaan* for three years if his team can beat the British in a game of cricket. Bhuvan accepts. He receives help from Russell's sister Elizabeth, who regards the bet as unfair. The film, which was nominated for an Oscar, is mostly in Hindi with English subtitles.

1 (*The VILLAGERS are practising for the match against the British. They still need one more player in their team. BHUVAN gives the ball to the Sikh, DEVA. ISAR takes the bat. ISAR is the father of BHUVAN'S girlfriend, GAURI.*)

BHUVAN Deva, you bowl. Isar Kaka, you bat.
 All of you spread out. (*to DEVA*)
 Bowl a little slower to Isar Kaka.

DEVA All right.

10 (*ELIZABETH RUSSELL stands by the wicket in the umpire's position. DEVA bowls, and ISAR hits the ball high. BHAGA is under it, but fails to catch it. The camera shows BHUVAN'S impatient reaction. DEVA bowls again. ISAR hits the ball, which runs along the ground, chased by BHUVAN. It stops by KACHRA'S feet. KACHRA is an 'untouchable'.*)

15 BHUVAN Hey, Kachra, throw the ball.
 (*KACHRA hesitates*)

 Stop gaping and throw it, will you?

20 (*KACHRA hesitantly throws the ball to BHUVAN; it hits the ground in front of him and bounces to one side. BHUVAN looks in amazement.*)

BHUVAN What did you do?

KACHRA I didn't do anything. You said throw.

25 BHUVAN (*starting back towards the other players*)
 Come here. Come on.

KACHRA I didn't do anything. You said throw.

BHUVAN Come here all of you. Eliza memsahib, watch Kachra closely. Kachra, throw it again.

30 KACHRA I did no wrong. He asked me to throw the ball.

BHUVAN Throw the ball. Not with the left hand. With the right.

35 (*KACHRA throws the ball with his disabled hand. The ball bounces to one side.*)

BHUVAN See how it spins!

ELIZABETH (*in English*)

 Amazing. He's actually spinning the ball.

40 BHUVAN We have found our 11th player. Come, Kachra, Isar Kaka, you'll face him. Goli, give Kachra the ball. Arjan,



Cricket is one of the strongest ties between Commonwealth countries. Australia, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the West Indies, Zimbabwe and England all play regular international matches

throw the ball. (*They all stand looking at him.*) What's the matter? Why is everyone staring?

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LAKHA No, no. We will not play!

(*Everyone sitting watching round the ground gets up.*)

VOICES Why? What happened?

LAKHA This damn untouchable! Play with us? No way! He cannot play with us!

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(*walks away, waving his arms*)

ISAR That's right. We will not mingle with an untouchable.

OTHERS This cannot be. It's unthinkable.

I am not playing.

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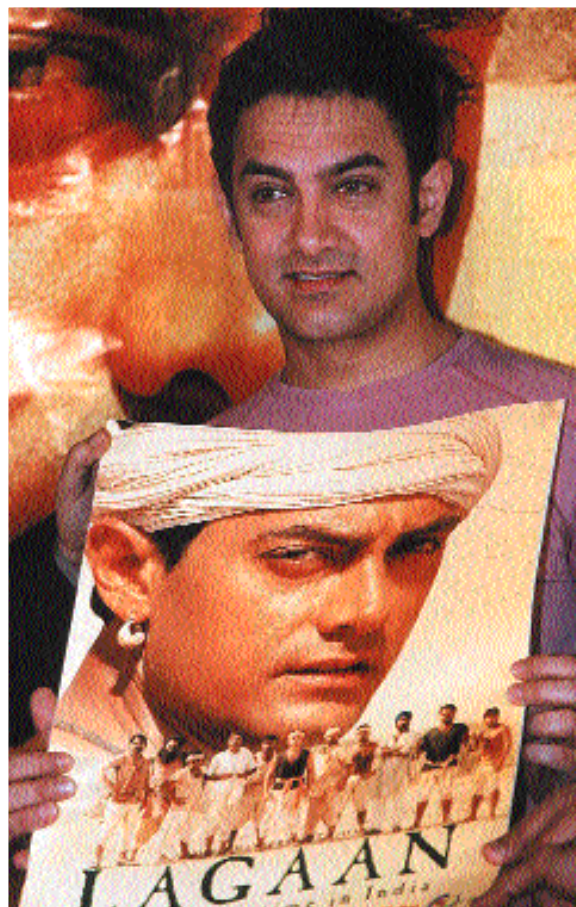
We too won't play.

CHIEF What are you doing? This is wrong. You are polluting the whole system. We'll fight the British. But mingle with a low-caste, never!

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LAKHA Kachra, scam! Get out of here!

BHUVAN Kachra.
(*putting his hand on KACHRA'S shoulder*)
WOMEN Oh, my God! He touched him!
65 BHUVAN You brand people untouchable and pollute humanity. You choke the air in our village with this caste division. Is it right to shatter hearts in the name of skin colour? Then why worship Ram, who ate a tribal's half-eaten berries? The Lord himself was ferried by a low-caste boatman. And you talk of untouchables! And you, Isar Kaka? You're a physician. You check an ailing patient's pulse and treat him. Do your scriptures tell you to let untouchables die? If that is so, then that is the gravest crime on humanity. After today, no one will regard a physician as God's other form!
70 LAKHA You wanted a strong player, right? Kachra is a cripple.
BHUVAN Your hands aren't deformed. It's by God's grace you can say this. But the man you call a cripple will be our greatest strength. This lifeless hand will lead us to victory. Let me remind you all of one thing. This is not a game we are playing for fun or entertainment. This is a battle we must win! Our goal is freedom from lagaan and welfare for our village. And for that I will remain unbowed! Whether you support me or not, Kachra will play.
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(*Looks are exchanged. A Muslim nods.*)
ISAR Bhuvan, my son. Shame cannot enter eyes that are fully open.
95 ARJAN I agree with Isar Bhai. You are right.
CHIEF Kachra will play with us.
(*The VILLAGERS and ELIZABETH are smiling. KACHRA'S eyes fill with tears. Just then some British soldiers appear with CAPTAIN RUSSELL. BHUVAN and the team line up, with ELIZABETH, facing them. Then music begins for a song and dance routine with images of the team training.*)
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Actor Aamir Khan holding a poster for his film Lagaan

Song: Over and over say this, my friend 105
May victory be ours and defeat their lot.
Let no one win against us
Come on, walk on
All who challenge us will perish
Come on, walk on 110
Even if it is pitch dark
Come on, walk on
Let no one lag behind
Come on, walk on
Should one finger rise it shall break 115
When five fingers join they make a fist...

Bollywood

The popular film industry in India is often known as 'Bollywood', a combination of Hollywood and Bombay, where the films were first made. Bombay, or Mumbai (the modern name insisted on by Hindu nationalists), still contains major studios, although there is an equally important centre of the industry in the southern city of Madras. Traditionally, Bollywood films have colourful scenes of music and dancing, a clear-cut distinction between heroes and villains, thrilling action sequences and a romantic love-story between a beautiful heroine and a larger-than-life hero, although even on-screen kisses were considered taboo for many years. Leading Bollywood actors like Aamir Khan (the star of *Lagaan*) or Shah Rukh Khan (*Devdas*) are as famous in India as Hollywood stars are for us. There is also a tradition of serious films in India, like the iconic *Mother India*, or the realist cinema of Satyajit Ray.

Vocabulary

6 to bowl (v.): to throw the ball in a special way in cricket - **6 to bat** (v.): to hit the ball in cricket - **6 Kaka** (n.): Hindi word for Uncle - **10 wicket** (n.): three stumps (sticks) in the ground with balls (short sticks) on top of them which the batsman must try to defend in cricket - **11 umpire** (n.): a person who makes sure the rules are obeyed in cricket - **memsahib** (n.): used formerly in India as a title of respect for a lady - **37 to spin** (v.): to make the ball turn so that it bounces in an unexpected way - **61 scram** (interjection): go away - **70 tribal** (n.): name used in India for the original inhabitants before the Aryan peoples arrived; they are the ancestors of the dalits - **73 physician** (n.): doctor - **96 Bhai** (n.): Hindi word for Brother

Explanations

3 Sikh: a follower of the Sikh religion, which rejects 'superstitions and blind rituals' including the caste system. Deva has joined the team to oppose the British - **16 untouchable:** someone belonging to the lowest caste in India, or outside the other castes (outcaste); they are now usually known by their own chosen term dalit (oppressed) - **69 Ram** (Rama): Rama is the hero of the *Ramayana*, which describes how he was exiled with his wife Sita and a companion, and how they lived in the forest. While they were there, Shabri, a tribal girl, gave Rama berries to eat, and to check they were fully ripe she bit into each one first. - **71 low-caste boatman:** The *Ramayana* describes how Kewat ferried Rama, Sita and Laxman across the Ganges and washed their feet.

AWARENESS

- 1 What was the situation in India in 1893? Find out about the history of British India and the position of the Indian Princes (Maharajahs).
- 2 Find out how cricket is played.
- 3 What are the main religious and social groups in India?

COMPREHENSION

- 4 Why does Bhuvan want Kachra to be in the team?
- 5 Why do the other villagers at first refuse to play with him?

ANALYSIS

- 6 Explain the meaning of the verb 'pollute' and comment on how it is used here.
- 7 What arguments does Bhuvan use to persuade the others?
- 8 How does this scene relate to the song that follows it? What political relevance might this have?
- 9 What do the villagers have to do to win their freedom? How does this compare with what is described in Text 4 ('Methwold's Game')

OPINION

- 10 'The man you call a cripple will be our greatest strength.' (l. 83) What examples can you think of where weakness becomes strength?
- 11 Kachra is excluded at first because of his caste, and because he is disabled. What are the causes and effects of exclusion and bullying in our society, or in your own experience?
- 12 The film is in Hindi with English subtitles. English is spoken worldwide, but only by 3% of Indians - the higher educated - although that is 30 million people. There are 12 main different native languages. If you were an Indian author, would you write in English, or one of the native languages?

PROJECT

- 13 Find out more about 'Bollywood' and the Indian film industry centred on Mumbai and Madras. How important is it in world terms, and what influence has it had?

INTERNET PROJECTS

- 14 Watch the film *Lagaan* (available on DVD), then compare and contrast reviews on the web. Start by looking them up on a search engine, or try a movie review site like www.rottentomatoes.com. Try to write your own short review.
- 15 Find out about the international game of cricket. Which countries play? Who are some of the famous players? You could start on the BBC website www.bbc.co.uk and click cricket in the sports section. Is there a cricket team anywhere near you which you could watch or join? Or you might try to obtain a virtual cricket game (see www.cricketgames.com).