

BAREFOOT IN BENGAL

Written by

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Inspired by a true story

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EXT. FORT WILLIAM FOOTBALL STANDS INDIAN SIDE - DAY

A football field surrounded by seating stands stuffed with hundreds of people.

SUDHIR CHATTERJEE walks up into the stands while munching on roasted peanuts from a newspaper cone. He is in his 30s with a thin moustache, wears traditional dhoti-kurta clothing with a long silk scarf and speaks with an English accent.

From his elevated position, he has a view of the crowd and also the short, squat but sprawling buildings of Calcutta in the background. He looks around taking the scene in.

The Union Jack flies above it all.

TITLE CARD: CALCUTTA, INDIA

JANUARY 1911

MALE STUDENT #1 bumps into Sudhir.

MALE STUDENT #1
Sorry! Sorry! Oh, professor it's
you! How are you?

SUDHIR
I'm good, I'm good. I didn't
realise you boys liked football?

MALE STUDENT #1
We came to see our boys give those
goras a good thrashing! Would you
like to join us? We're sitting back
there.

SUDHIR
Oh no, no, you go ahead. I'm
meeting a friend.

Sudhir looks down to the far side of the field.

EXT. FORT WILLIAM FOOTBALL STANDS BRITISH SIDE - DAY

A sign reads "DOGS AND INDIANS NOT ALLOWED" with a large SECURITY GUARD standing next to it.

Behind the goal, sit the British in comparatively better seating with shade from the burning sun. They greet each other, sit, chat and sip cool beverages.

EXT. FORT WILLIAM FOOTBALL STANDS INDIAN SIDE - DAY

PRIVA (O.S.)
Don't push! Eh, stop pushing!

Sudhir walks towards a crowd of Indians surrounding someone. They are all standing around SIBDAS BHADURI, aka Shibe (Sheeb), who is furiously signing autographs. He's in his late 20s, sports a heavy moustache, is tall and good looking.

SIBDAS
One at a time, one at a time
please!

SUDHIR
Shibe! SHIBE!

PRIVA, a young teen, turns to Sudhir.

PRIVA
Hey, wait your turn like everyone
else!

SIBDAS
Sudhir! There you are!
(to everyone)
All right everyone, I can sign more
after the match! Let's focus on
today's game!

PRIVA
Sir, do you think the Bengal Rajas
stand a chance against the British?

Everyone looks expectantly at Sibdas.

SIBDAS
You know, I wish it was my team on
the field today, but the Middlesex
Regiment invited the Bengal Rajas
for this exhibition match. And I
know they will make us all proud!

The small crowd cheers.

EXT. FORT WILLIAM FOOTBALL STANDS INDIAN SIDE - DAY

Sibdas leads Sudhir to their seats.

SIBDAS
You took your time getting here.

They sit and Sibdas takes some of Sudhir's peanuts.

SUDHIR
Yes, sorry about that.

SIBDAS

Well, you couldn't have gotten lost, you've been here enough times. I thought maybe you were still stuck in school, putting little stars on your student's essays?

SUDHIR
Some of us have to do real work for
a living.

A couple of Indian men call out from the distance.

MAN #1	MAN #2
Good to see you Sibdas da!	Sibdas da, how are you?

SIBDAS
Hello! Hello! Nomoskar! I'm good
thank you! Thank you!

SUDHIR
Does that happen all the time now?

SIBDAS
(shrugs)
Team captains have to keep the fans happy, especially when it's Mohun Bagan. Do you know how many local league trophies they've won? It's a lot of pressure.

SUDHIR
Well, they're aggressive enough.
What time is kick off?

SIBDAS

Patience my friend, patience. You can't rush our British masters. It's not every day they deign to invite a "native" team to their precious football league. But the goras have made a mistake today. We're in for a good show. That is, once all the VIP goras show up.

EXT. HOWRAH JUNCTION RAILWAY STATION - DAY

A steam train pulls into an over-crowded station.

HENRY CLARKE, a high ranking officer, stands waiting impatiently with 2 COOLIES, searching in the crowd. He is in his mid 40s, fit and healthy in a military uniform.

HENRY

There she is!
(to Coolies)
Go! Go!
(to Emily)
Emily! Emily! Over here my dear!
Over here!

EMILY TAYLOR, in her early 20s, a pretty brunette alights from the train. She is a gust of passion and life, dressed in white shirt and beige pants tucked into black boots.

EMILY

Uncle Henry! It's so wonderful to see you!

She hugs him tightly. He grunts.

HENRY

Oof! Likewise my dear! My goodness, let me take a look at you. Whatever are you wearing!? This isn't a safari you know! What kind of a woman wears this outfit?

EMILY

A modern woman, uncle, that's who. I'm not squeezing into a dress unless I have to. Besides, I think I look rather fetching don't you?

HENRY

(laughs)
Some things don't change eh?

EMILY

Where's father?

HENRY

Where else but at work? How was the trip? Not too draining I hope?

EMILY

Oh the boat ride over was absolute boredom. But once we hit land...this country is wonderful! The people, the color, the food, everything. I love it!

HENRY

Then you're going to love Calcutta.

The Coolies come out with the bags.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Come on, hurry! To the car as quickly as you can.

(to Emily)

Come, we better get moving.

They start weaving through the loud, heaving masses.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You've come at the best possible time my dear. The IFA Shield begins in a few months! All the exhibition matches are on now!

EMILY

The what?

HENRY

The Indian Football Association! And it's an exciting one at that.

EMILY

Not football again. Has it followed me here as well?

HENRY

The locals play a good game. Come along, I'm to shepherd you to an exhibition match. Your father asked me to bring you straight there.

Emily stops and looks at Henry.

EMILY

Oh no. Uncle I've just stepped off the train and you're telling me we are going to a football game!? At least let me wash up and change!

HENRY

Orders my dear. I'm just following orders. Come, come, you won't regret it. We mustn't miss kickoff!

He pulls her along.

EMILY

Oh for goodness sake!

EXT. FORT WILLIAM FOOTBALL FIELD STREETS

Their car pulls up and the chauffeur opens the door for them.

EXT. FORT WILLIAM FOOTBALL STANDS BRITISH SIDE - DAY

Henry escorts Emily.

HENRY

The Middlesex Regiment are one of the best military teams and the Bengal Rajas are one of the oldest local teams in the country. It should be a good match.

EMILY

Uncle, what does gora mean?

HENRY

Where did you hear that?

EMILY

I just kept catching snippets of it as we were walking.

HENRY

Oh. Well, uh, it's what the locals call us my dear. We are the goras.

They approach some seats next to an OLD BRITISH LADY.

OLD BRITISH LADY

Well hello! Good afternoon Mr. Clarke, good to see you!

HENRY

Good afternoon madam! Wonderful day for a match isn't it?

OLD BRITISH LADY

Yes indeed, yes indeed!

EMILY

(slyly)
Friend of yours?

HENRY

Oh, more like an acquaintance.
(whispers)
There's not much to do here for wives of senior officers, you know, so they pop in to watch some games.
(to the Old British Lady)

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

Madam, I'd like to introduce you to
Emily Taylor, Douglas' daughter.

OLD BRITISH LADY

Lieutenant General Taylor?

HENRY

Yes indeed. She's just come over
from England.

EMILY

Morning!

OLD BRITISH LADY

Hello my dear! What a pretty little
thing you are! Oh! What
an...interesting outfit. I didn't
realise fashion had become quite
so...manly back home!

EMILY

Oh don't worry, it hasn't. I just
like to wear clothes I can breathe
in is all. Enjoy the match!

Henry hands her a pair of binoculars.

HENRY

Here, take a look.

Emily looks around with interest. A cheer goes up as the
Indian team, the Bengal Rajas, arrive and start practicing.

EMILY

Is football such a big sport here?

HENRY

Well to be perfectly honest, it's
not that popular but it's rare for
natives to play against a military
team. Quite an honor in fact. You
can see the Muslims over there,
(points to the right of the field)
the Hindus over there...
(points to the left of the field)

EMILY

-and we sit at the head of the
table?

HENRY

It's uh...a little more complicated
than that.

She watches some players practicing.

EMILY

Are they barefoot!? What happened
to their boots?

HENRY

Oh Indian teams never wear boots.

EMILY

Why ever not?

OLD BRITISH LADY

Because they're natives my dear.
Probably could never afford them.
Although, they'll feel the might of
the British boot today won't they?

She laughs loudly to herself. Emily smiles awkwardly.

EMILY

What time will father arrive?

HENRY

He'll be here. The Lieutenant
General has to make an appearance.
The one thing you and him share - a
dismissive attitude towards the
greatest game on Earth!

A commotion is heard at the far end of the field.

EMILY

What's happening over there?

HENRY

I'm not sure really...oh wait, it's
one of these upstart players from a
local club, Mohun Bagan. Just got
made captain apparently. Young
fellow don't you know? Name of
Sibdas something or other...

OLD BRITISH LADY

Mohun Bagan? Nothing but young
ruffians I say! Thought they could
take our boys on in the IFA league.
We showed them last year didn't we?
Serves them right of course.
The IFA league is for British teams
only. The cream of the crop!

EMILY

I thought IFA stood for the *Indian*
Football Association?

OLD BRITISH LADY

What of it? We're in India aren't
we?

HENRY

Bhaduri!
(snaps his fingers)
That's it! His name is Sibdas
Bhaduri!

EXT. FORT WILLIAM FOOTBALL STANDS INDIAN SIDE - DAY

Sibdas is getting mobbed again by a few young students. They
call out his name and ask him to autograph various items.
Sudhir looks on in annoyance.

MALE STUDENT #1

Hey Professor Chatterjee! You
didn't tell us you know Sibdas
Bhaduri!

SIBDAS

Ok, enough for now every one. After
the match, I can sign more after
the match! Thank you!

The students groan in disappointment and start to leave.

SUDHIR

This is getting ridiculous!

SIBDAS

Ah, you get used to it.
(looks out onto the field)
These Rajas are a good team. I
mean, I'd change the entire
formation and make them more attack
heavy...well, you'd know better.
You were always the master
strategist, right professor?
Don't you miss it Sudhir? Even a
little?

SUDHIR

What? Playing football? Come on
Shibe, that's all in the past.

SIBDAS

It wasn't that long ago.

SUDHIR

It is for me.

SIBDAS

I've been thinking...as a new team captain...it makes sense to build a team of talented and trustworthy players...don't you think?

SUDHIR

Of course. Makes complete sense.

SIBDAS

As in people I've played with in the past and trust implicitly...

Sudhir closes his eyes and shakes his head.

SUDHIR

Please tell me you didn't invite me here to ask me to join your team.

SIBDAS

OF COURSE NOT!

(beat)

Well, maybe. Just look around you. Look at all these people and how excited they are! Are you telling me you don't miss it?

SUDHIR

No. I don't. I told you Shibe, I'm a teacher now. Football was fun but I have to focus on my career.

Sibdas pauses then sighs in defeat.

SIBDAS

Shame really. Let's face it, no one can read an offensive better than you.

But one day Sudhir, if I get desperate, one day, I will show up at your classroom and on that day, I will not take no for an answer.

SUDHIR

Sometimes I wish I'd never touched a bloody football!

SIBDAS

Ah come on! Don't be so serious! It would be perfect don't you think?

(MORE)

SIBDAS (CONT'D)

You'd be a professor on the field
and a professor in real life?

Sibdas laughs.

SUDHIR

Hilarious.

EXT. FORT WILLIAM FOOTBALL STANDS BRITISH SIDE - DAY

Emily looks through the binoculars.

EMILY

Who's that sitting with the
football captain? What's his name
again? Sibdas? Who's he talking to?

HENRY

God, it's getting hot isn't it?
Aren't you hot? I could use a
drink.

EMILY

Uncle, pay attention! Who's that
Sibdas fellow sitting with?

HENRY

Hmm? Which one?

EMILY

The one in the long scarf. The good
looking one.