

Rahim, Amal Dutta, P.K. and Nayeem: The Coaches Who Shaped Indian Football

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Abstract

This article traces the impact on Indian football of four charismatic and successful coaches, S.A. Rahim, the most successful international coach, twice winning the gold medal in the Asian Games in 1951 and 1962, Amal Dutta, India's first professional coach, P.K Banerjee, the most successful domestic coach with 53 trophies, and Syed Nayeemuddin, the only person ever to win the highest national sports award as both a player and coach. The impact of this quartet on Indian football, their tactical acumen, introduction of new systems of play, relationships with the All India football Federation (AIFF) and their management skills are all highlighted in this article. Above all, this article traces the changing face of Indian football whilst presenting biographical sketches of these four coaches. The article also reveals that despite experimenting with several foreign coaches, mostly from Eastern Europe, India has had its limited international success with local coaches.

Introduction

The success of South Korea and Japan in the 2002 World Cup football tournament has had a wider resonance across Asia. In India it has sparked some quite intense debate amongst football fans envious of their neighbours' successes. Various claims have been made that only the recruitment of a foreign coach will improve the national team's results and the overall standard of play in the country. Many feel that it is precisely this factor that underpins the recent resurgence of other Asian nations. It has been strongly argued that South Korea's appearance in the semi-final was due to Dutch coach Guus Hiddink's brilliant training and that Japan's notable improvement in reaching the second round was because of Frenchman Philippe Troussier's coaching abilities. So the fans and critics feel that a foreign coach can be the solution to India's woes, and will be able to raise standards from the current morass of mediocrity. There are, however, no easy solutions, as even a brief consideration of Indian football history reveals. There have been several foreign coaches in recent memory, who did not deliver on the hopes Indian fans had placed in them. The earliest was Harry Wright of England who came in the early 1960s and was national team coach for the 1964 Asia Cup in Israel. Dietmar Pfiefer of the erstwhile German Democratic Republic (GDR) was Technical Director of the national team in 1981-82, his period in charge including an unsuccessful Asian Games in Delhi. Bob Bootland from England was briefly the national coach in 1983, but achieved little. Then from 1983 to 1985 the late Milovan Cirovic of the former Yugoslavia who had also coached Red Star Belgrade was in charge. Joseph Gelei of Hungary followed him from 1990 to 1991. Next came the Czech, Jerry Pesek, from 1993 to 1994. Dr. Rustam Akhramov of

Uzbekistan, succeeded him in 1995 and remained in post for only one year. Much to the disappointment of fans, none of these coaches have made an appreciable difference to football standards in the country.

In the hope of rewriting history, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) appointed a thirty-nine year old Englishman Stephen Constantine, a qualified FIFA instructor as national coach in June 2002. How he fares and how much freedom he gets in team selection, training camps and international exposure remains to be seen. The chequered history of other foreign coaches, and (as will be seen in this essay), the history of AIFF obstruction, myopia and outright foolishness, give little sustenance to the dreams many Indians harbour of qualifying for the World Cup in the foreseeable future.

While foreign coaches represented the possibility of importing expertise, it has in fact been Indian coaches who have been more successful in improving fitness levels, standards of play and introducing new tactics and playing formations. The quartet who achieved most success with their clubs and country are the late Syed Abdul Rahim of Hyderabad, Amal Dutta and P.K. Banerjee of Bengal and Syed Nayeemuddin, also born in Hyderabad, but who pursued his coaching career in Calcutta. For nearly half a century from 1950 until the 1990s this famous four shaped the destiny of Indian football by their personalities, dedication, inspirational coaching and tactical innovations. Each was highly motivated and shared a common belief that Indian coaches were inferior to none. This study focuses on the careers of the four coaches, with club and country, their successes, styles of management, relationships with players and authorities (like the AIFF) and above all how they re-shaped Indian football. In doing so, it challenges the complacent view that what India needs is a foreign coach. It shows that great coaches have been available to Indian clubs and country. The great pity is that their talents have not always been recognised and harnessed by those who wield power in the game.

Syed Abdul Rahim: A Great Leader of Hyderabad and National Football

India's most successful and revered coach Syed Abdul Rahim was born in 1909 in the city of the Nizams, Hyderabad. The city was famous for the legendary black and yellow shirted Hyderabad City Police that dominated the football scene in the years just following Independence.¹ Their success belies the fact that during the 1940s teams in Hyderabad, and in most cities in India, had no separate coaching staff. It was generally left to senior players to train and teach the team and formal coaching was almost non-existent. In this situation the efforts of the young Syed Abdul Rahim to specialise as a coach were seen as revolutionary. A teacher by profession, he was a well-read person, practical psychologist, great tactician, motivator and disciplinarian. Through an emphasis on tactics and playing formations he showed how important a specialised coach could be in the development of a football team. His successes in making Hyderabad City Police the most successful Indian club side of the

1950s heightened his reputation. The club famously won the Rovers Cup in consecutive years from 1950 to 1955 under his guidance. It was with the club that Rahim gained most of his coaching experience, and the players he developed there formed the backbone of his squad when he became national team coach in 1950.² It was with the national team, however, that he gained most fame and assured his reputation as perhaps the greatest manager in the history of Indian football.

Like the late Sir Alf Ramsay he was fiercely loyal to his players and typical of his generation had a very patriarchal and paternal attitude. He was cast in the mould of authoritarian figures like Sepp Herberger, who guided West Germany to the 1954 World Cup, or the legendary Herbert Chapman, who inspired Arsenal to several league and FA Cup triumphs in the 1920s and early 1930s, or Brian Clough, who managed Nottingham Forest in the 1980s and 1990s. He had such a powerful presence that even senior players avoided eye contact with him. When he entered the room, every player, including the famous ones like Aziz, Latif or P.K. Banerjee, looked away. His seriousness sometimes bordered on severity. He frowned upon the usual distractions of playing cards, as he felt that it upset team-spirit and marred concentration and discipline, or even having an occasional drink. Instead, he encouraged his players, to read, analyse and discuss the game during their spare time, while watching films was the only non-football entertainment he tolerated.³

His disciplined attitude and talents for the game led to many rewards. He is responsible for India's most treasured moments in international football. One of the earliest and most notable of these came in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, when he guided his team to the semi finals. Achievements such as this were based on tactical courage, vision and a willingness to learn from foreign innovators. He employed the 4-2-4 system with the Indian team even before Brazil had popularised it in the 1958 World Cup. This situation arose because, as a keen student of the game, he discovered and then applied the playing systems used by the famous Hungarian coach Gusztav Sebes and his trainer Marton Bukovi, who coached the 'Golden Squad' of Hungary. The 1952 Olympic champions and 1954 World Cup runners up, who remained unbeaten for four years, had used the tactic of a deep-lying centre forward to confuse the opposition, who mostly played in the conventional 3-2-5 system. The legendary Nandor Hidegkuti was used as the deep-lying centre forward, and co-ordinated the whole team's strategy from behind the attack.⁴

Inspired by what he saw, Rahim used a similar system in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, however, he made his own adjustments to suit the nature of his squad. Instead of a deep-lying centre forward, he used skipper and inside forward Samar 'Badru' Banerjee in the withdrawn, playmaker's role. The four forwards were P.K. Banerjee on the right, Neville D'Souza as the striker and Tulsidas Balam and J. Kittu on the left. India beat Australia 4-2 in the quarter-finals, with striker Neville D'Souza scoring a hat-trick. In the semi

finals India led mighty Yugoslavia 1-0 but conceded goals in the last ten minutes due to lack of stamina to lose 1-4. India's approach play was a revelation and, as a measure of Rahim's brilliance, renowned critics Dr Willy Meisel and Sir Stanley Rous praised their exhilarating play.⁵ India's performance in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics should also be evaluated within the context of Asian football at that time. The other two Asian qualifiers for the 1956 Olympics both lost in the first round. Japan lost 0-2 to Australia and Thailand were humiliated 1-9 by the United Kingdom So just nine years after Independence, Rahim's India was seen as the *tour de force* of Asian football, a status that has unfortunately declined considerably in the last two decades.

Rahim also guided India to success in the South-East Asian Quadrangular tournaments held in Colombo (1952), Rangoon (1953), Calcutta (1954) and Dacca (1955). His team also finished runners up in the Merdeka International Tournament, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 1959. India remained unbeaten but came second on goal average. In the Asian games, his teams won gold medals in Delhi (1951) and Jakarta (1962). This was a fine achievement, illustrated by the fact that Rahim is the only coach to have led India to win gold medals in football at the Asian Games and thus to have established their supremacy as the best team on the continent. As such, he ought to be recognised as the country's most successful national team coach, who laid the foundations for future success, though these were not especially well built upon, despite the efforts of later coaches.

Nonetheless, it is the 1962 Asiad gold medal that remains Indian football's and Rahim's greatest hour, not least because of the difficult circumstances in which it was achieved. India's *chef-de-mission* to the 1962 Jakarta Asiad, the late G.D. Sondhi, had criticised the hosts for excluding both Israel and Taiwan from the Asian Games for political reasons. Thus right from the beginning, the crowds were hostile to India.⁶ Jarnail Singh, India's ace defender, who also captained the Asian All Stars XI in 1966 and 1967 recalls the atmosphere of hostility in Jakarta. As a devout Sikh, Jarnail always wore a turban, which made him very conspicuous. To avoid the hostility of the passionate crowds, Jarnail traveled, sitting on the floor in the team bus. Recalling the final against South Korea, Jarnail said:

the capacity crowd of over 100,000 booed us and did not even pay respect to our national anthem. When the ball came in our half, such was the din that the referee's whistle was not audible. When we attacked there was pin drop silence. As most of the Indian contingent had returned home, we had limited support. We were grateful to the Pakistan hockey team (they had beaten India 2-0 in the final on the day before), which cheered for us throughout the match.⁷

Rahim's subtle psychological ploys motivated the Indian players on the day of the final. In the dressing room, he made the entire squad hold hands and sing the national anthem *Jana Gana Mana*. This was also repeated at half-time. The players were inspired as they were compared to freedom fighters trying to uphold the dignity of the country's flag. His pre-match instructions were to play with courage, commitment and to shut out the crowd noise. Defenders were advised to avoid offside tactics, in case the referee's whistle was inaudible in the din.⁸ These motivations, along with some clever tactical adaptation, proved the key to success, India going on to win 2-1 with goals from Jarnail Singh and P.K. Banerjee.⁹ This highlight of Indian football history shows how much the country owes to Rahim: he built a team that proved Indians could play on the world stage, one that many outside critics respected, and one that took India to the pinnacle of Asian football. For this alone, and for his achievements in Hyderabad, Rahim should be recognised as having had the most profound impact on Indian football in the twentieth century.

Amal Dutta: India's First Professional Coach

The short-statured but large hearted Amal Dutta was a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde type of character: inspiring, intelligent and successful, but often self destructive. He rose to fame for becoming India's first professional coach, a courageous move at the time but one that paved the way for future generations of full-time, well paid coaches. His profile in the game was enhanced by media interest in his long-running rivalry with fellow coach P.K. Banerjee. It is for his innovation and courage in bringing new tactical systems to Indian club football, however, that Dutta's influence on the game ought to be appreciated.

A refreshingly innovative coach, recognised as the finest thinker of the game in India, his attitude to life has been bold and ahead of his time. In the early 1960s he defied the archetypal Bengali middle class dream of a secure government job, retiring from the Indian Railways to become a full-time coach. At a time when socialist thinking prevailed, the economy was struggling, and football offered little financial remuneration, this was indeed a bold step.

His famed tactical innovations were also bold. In 1969 as Mohun Bagan's coach he introduced the 4-2-4 formation in the country despite opposition from within the club. In 1988 as Technical Director of the Indian team, he made the national squad play in the 4-4-2 formation for the first time. In the twilight of his career, he experimented again in 1997 and using a three back system, having Mohun Bagan play in the celebrated 'Diamond' 3-4-3 formation. All these new formations were used to extract the maximum potential from his players, and signalled his determination to ensure India kept up with global changes in tactics, methods and styles of play.¹⁰

His attitude was always one of defying tradition and being willing to explore new territories, a view of life and football with which not everyone around him always empathised. A competent midfielder with East Bengal in

the 1950s he represented India in the 1954 Asian Games at Manila. After his playing career was over, he went to England for a one-year FA coaching course, where he was taught by the renowned Walter Winterbottom.

On returning to India, his first major assignment was to coach Railways in 1960 for the Santosh trophy (the senior National Football Championship of India). In 1963 came his first position with a big club, when he joined East Bengal midway through the Calcutta league. In the first half of the season, his team had been beaten 3-0 by bitter rivals Mohun Bagan. In the return leg, under Dutta's tutelage, however, they avenged this loss with a 2-0 victory, their goals coming from Ashim Moulick and Noor. Such examples of rescuing a team in adversity have been a regular feature of Dutta's career. As he once jocularly remarked: 'I am known as a Harley Street specialist. When the patient has been treated by all doctors and not recovered, they come to me'.¹¹

He remained as coach with East Bengal in 1964 but a year later, he took the first of several bold steps in his chequered career. He quit the security of his job in the Indian Railways and opted to become a full time football coach, the first-ever in India and a feat for which he has received little recognition. The magnitude of such a step in the mid-1960s can be put in perspective by examining the remuneration received by Calcutta's leading stars in those days. Top players like Jarnail Singh, Peter Thangraj, Ashim Moulick and Ram Bahadur received Rs. 8-12,000 per annum (about £115 to £175 per annum on current exchange rates). Except for Jarnail Singh, all other players depended on their employment in banks or public sector firms.¹² A comparison might also be made with P.K. Banerjee, then at the peak of his playing career as a right winger with Eastern Railway. Banerjee was much in demand by both East Bengal and Mohun Bagan but he never quit the security of his job in Eastern Railway. In later years Banerjee has often admitted that he never took the plunge because of family responsibilities and steady income from his job.¹³

Explaining why he was more inclined to take the risk, Dutta said:

football was my passion. My dream was to start a football academy and groom youngsters and make them international class players. To leave a secure job was a risk, I was newly married and was not sure how I would support my family. I often showed football videos to neighbourhood children and charged them a small amount to augment my income.¹⁴

His dream of setting up a football academy never materialised because he lacked the temperament to procure sponsorship from the private sector and during his coaching career never secured large sums of money like P.K. Banerjee or Syed Nayeemuddin. However, his willingness to take up the challenge of being India's first professional coach, in an era when salaries were so pitiful and such concepts were embryonic, is laudable.

After having established his coaching credentials for some years in Orissa and Kerala, Dutta returned to Calcutta as Mohun Bagan's coach in the 1969-70 season. During this season he made Bagan play in the 4-2-4 formation for the first time. Until then most Indian teams played in the 3-2-5 formation. Dashing and diminutive right back Bhabhani Roy became the first Indian wingback to regularly overlap and link up with his attack. Bagan's left wing back that year, the phlegmatic Altaf Ahmed, selected for the prestigious Asian All Stars squad in 1965, was an old-fashioned defender, who excelled in sound interceptions and clean tackling but did not like to overlap and initiate attacks. Pragmatic in his attitude towards players, Amal Dutta sensed that Altaf was too set in his ways to change. So the left back was allowed to initiate moves from his own half. Bhabhani Roy was younger and faster and so Bagan started playing a modified 4-2-4 system with only the right back linking up with the attackers. This proved immediately successful, as the club went on to win the coveted League title and the IFA Shield. In the final of the latter they triumphed over archrivals East Bengal 3-1, with left winger Pranab Ganguly scoring twice and striker Sukalyan Ghosh Dastidar netting the other goal. Such was the impact of Dutta's new formation that several other clubs started to copy this system.

To introduce this innovatory system, however, he had faced considerable opposition even from within his own club. Legendary former international defender Salien Manna, who was later awarded the Padma Shree, one of India's highest sports awards, scoffed at a system in which defenders became attackers. Determined to attempt change, the persuasive Dutta showed the Bagan officials videocassettes of teams such as then twice World champions Brazil playing in the 4-2-4 system. Finally, Manna and others relented and Dutta became famous as the man who brought 4-2-4 to club football in India.¹⁵

After years of success with leading clubs like Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, Dutta was made Technical Director of the Indian squad in 1987, with Syed Nayeemuddin as the chief coach. Planning meticulously, he enjoyed his tenure and introduced the Indian team to a new 4-4-2 formation. He was the first to make the Indian team play with either retracting wingers like Babu Mani or Uttam Mukherjee or with all-purpose midfielders. In the 1988 Nehru Cup at Siliguri, India played inspired football against formidable East European teams. In a 1-1 draw with Poland, it was central midfielder P. Vijaykumar who scored the goal. India played well against Hungary, taking the lead when defender Tarun Dey scored a penalty kick, before losing the match 1-2. Dutta's success was getting India to play effectively in the new 4-4-2 formation.¹⁶

Despite making such progress, the short-sighted AIFF failed once again to support the talent available to them. Dutta was dropped from the Indian coaching squad for the Asia Cup qualifying group at Doha, Qatar, in February 1988, a month after the Nehru Cup at Siliguri, for demanding proper remuneration. As a professional, he expected due payment for his services, but the AIFF was tardy in their response. Since then he was surprisingly never used

as a national coach for even age group teams. This is unfortunate as he excels in moulding talented juniors into mature players. Experienced international midfielder Satyajit Chatterjee considers Dutta to be the best coach he has ever played under and admits that the coach played a pivotal role in harnessing his talent during his first season with Bagan in 1986.¹⁷

After his abrupt dismissal from the Indian team he returned to club coaching and in 1991 again performed another Houdini-like rescue act in mid-season. Subash Bhowmick, in his first stint as coach with a big club like Mohun Bagan, was proving unsuccessful. With the same personnel, some change of positions and subtle psychology, Dutta transformed Bagan's season of despair into one of hope and success. Suddenly the team played with newfound cohesion, conviction and confidence. They won the Rovers Cup in Mumbai, beating Mohammedan Sporting 1-0 in the final, and reached the final of the DCM tournament in Delhi, losing 0-1 to Iranian champions Pas Club.

In the 1997 season Dutta created another sensation with his tactical innovation the 'Diamond system', basically a 3-4-3 formation, with a defensive midfielder playing as a screen ahead of the central defender. Bagan used the three back system with midfielder Debjit Ghosh playing as a defensive screen. This new system aroused spectator and media interest especially after Bagan's 6-0 demolition of Churchill Brothers in the KBL Federation Cup quarter-finals. The crowds flocked back in the hope of witnessing attacking football. The 1997 KBL Federation Cup semifinal between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan attracted a record crowd of 131,000 at the Salt Lake stadium Calcutta. The match was a setback for Dutta and his system. Baichung Bhutia's hat trick enabled East Bengal to win 4-1. Despite trenchant criticism Dutta persisted with his system and his single-mindedness eventually paid off. Bagan played some memorable matches that season winning the Calcutta league, finishing runners up in the Durand tournament and annexing the DCM trophy for the first time. In the DCM semi final, Bagan defeated the newly formed F.C. Kochin 3-1, with a vintage display of attacking football, to avenge their Durand final defeat by the same team a fortnight earlier.¹⁸

Dutta also proved himself a great personnel-manager at this time. There was just a couple of days gap between these two premier tournaments in the capital and Bagan had little time to recover after the defeat (1-3 to F.C. Kochin) in the Durand final. The players were despondent, Chima did not eat for a day, some had niggling injuries and the team did not want to play in the DCM tournament. The coach revived the squad's morale by hiring a bus and taking them out for a day of sight-seeing and fun in Delhi, instead of a routine practice session. The players were not blamed for the Durand final defeat. With morale restored, Dutta planned ahead and achieved success in the DCM tournament.¹⁹

Finally, how does one assess Dutta in relation to other great Indian coaches? There is no doubt that he is highly respected by his contemporaries. Air India's Bimal Ghosh, chosen as the best coach in the 1998 Philips National

league rates Dutta, 'as the best reader of the game in Indian football. His substitutions are always very good'.²⁰ He does not have the international success of the late Rahim but that was not his fault, as the AIFF never gave him a fair deal. However, his place in history is secure as India's first professional coach, the great innovator with unsurpassed tactical acumen and ability to understand the game. A voracious reader, his knowledge of football and his analysis of trends in world football has always been informative. A man of multi-faceted interests he has read widely from Shakespeare to Salman Rushdie and relaxes by playing musical instruments. His only 'Achilles heel' is his incessant struggle with officialdom that prevented him from getting his due, though much of the fault doubtless lies with the authorities who were unwilling to let this great sporting entrepreneur fully express his talents. It is to the loss of Indian football that his greatness was constantly questioned by the parsimonious mediocrity of the game's more conservative elements.

P. K. Banerjee: Five Decades of a Football Celebrity

In the 1970s there was a popular saying in Indian football, 'where P.K. goes the trophies go'.²¹ Such was the success rate of this charismatic coach, renowned for his oratory skills and astute reading of the game, that any club he coached excelled. Pradeep Kumar Banerjee, popularly known as 'P.K.' became India's first coach to have a glamorous media image. It was he who first made clubs realise that the role of the coach is indispensable and gave coaches a certain status. Prior to P.K., great coaches like Rahim and Amal Dutta were revered but were neither larger than life personalities nor the darlings of the media. Their brilliance was only recognised in football circles. Rahim, who grew up in British India, tended to be reserved, quiet, full of intense concentration, and was not inclined to show his feelings in public. In contrast, P.K. had the personality to give football coaching both glamour and respectability. He belonged to a new generation, not afraid to show his emotions on the field, the gesticulations and incessant instructions revealed his intense involvement with coaching, and he quickly became a favourite of the admiring crowds (despite switching between rivals East Bengal and Mohun Bagan).

He started his first major coaching position with East Bengal in 1972. Traditionally East Bengal's passionate supporters are either displaced people from that geographical region (now Bangladesh) or those who came to Calcutta in search of employment. In the early 1970s, the young men who supported East Bengal were first generation migrants, who grew up in refugee tents in the aftermath of partition. These men had a nostalgic longing for their homeland and bitterness about life. These contrary feelings were amalgamated and formed the basis for their fervent support and identification with East Bengal club. Thus their football club became a source of collective joy and a chance to express their dislike of the traditional establishment of West Bengal. For such passionate supporters, P.K. was a hero, with his expansive gestures, frenzied

involvement in coaching and verbal ingenuity. The fans were delighted at the new found success he brought to the club. He was India's equivalent of Bill Shankly: persuasive, clairvoyant and passionate about the game. He brought a new dimension to football coaching in India, the coach as a star. His rivalry with Amal Dutta, during the 1970s and 1980s is well documented.²²

P.K. Banerjee was the first Indian coach who realised the importance of working with the media. The timing of other social changes, however, were helpful to his personal cause. His career coincided with a time when the Indian print media was in the throes of change. For two decades after Independence, the sports pages of all Indian newspapers were bland, with just results and sedate match reports with few photographs or player profiles. In the 1970s newspapers and magazines, especially the regional and vernacular ones, realised that more exciting sports coverage would help their sales figures. Better late than never, the newspapers and magazines started projecting sports personalities. P.K. became a journalist's delight with his effervescent personality, and he set the trend of providing crisp match analysis and numerous juicy quotes. Even today he is India's outstanding football analyst on TV and always provides interesting insights into the game.

Born in Jamshedpur in 1936, P.K. was a precocious prodigy. He played as a right winger for Bihar, in the Santosh trophy at the tender age of fifteen. In 1954 he migrated to Calcutta, to develop his football career and started with Aryans F.C. The following year he took a job with Eastern Railway and stayed with them throughout his career, resisting moves to either East Bengal or Mohun Bagan. A dashing but tricky right winger with a blistering shot, he first played for India, as a nineteen year old, in the 1955 Quadrangular tournament in Dhaka. He became an Olympian in 1956 at the age of twenty and later captained India in the 1960 Rome Olympics. When India won the gold medal in the 1962 Asian Games, he scored in the final against South Korea and was chosen as Asia's best winger.²³ Recurring injury problems caused him to retire from international football in 1967 and gradually his playing career ceased. After his playing career ended he opted to become a coach and undertook several courses at home and abroad.

P.K. had a natural instinct for coaching and since the late 1960s he has been involved in training a range of teams. Over three decades later he is still passionate about the game: even in 2002 at the age of 66 he was Technical Director of the Indian Under sixteen year old team, previously in July 2000 he was Technical Director of the Indian national team for the inaugural tour to England. He has been associated with the Indian team at every age-group level, sub-juniors, juniors, Olympic under-23 in the 1999 pre-Olympics and the senior national team. His involvement with coaching the national team started in the 1970 Bangkok Asian Games, when he shared the responsibilities with the late G.M.H. Basha. Their team won the bronze and this was to become the last medal won by an Indian team in a major international competition. P.K. has

coached India in four Asian Games: in Bangkok (1970), Tehran (1974), Delhi (1982) and Seoul (1986). The Indian team also performed creditably at the 1982 Asian Games under his guidance, losing by a ninetieth minute freak free-kick goal to Saudi Arabia in the quarter-finals. In the 1986 Merdeka international tournament, at Kuala Lumpur he took India to the semi-finals, including a memorable 4-3 win over South Korea.

His club-coaching career started with the Calcutta first division sides Bata Sports and Eastern Railway. His involvement, excellent game reading and motivation soon became apparent and East Bengal acquired his services for the 1972 season. His well organised, highly motivated squad were sensational in their first season, and became the first and only team in the post-Independence era to win the Calcutta league without conceding a goal: certainly a memorable debut season for the new coach. Besides the Calcutta league, East Bengal won the Durand tournament and IFA Shield and were joint champions with Mohun Bagan in the Rovers cup.²⁴ East Bengal, like all teams later coached by P.K. had an organised defence, relied on quick counter-attacks and displayed great tactical awareness. Except for brief periods when he was either involved with the National team or for three years (1993-96) when he became the Technical Director of the Tata Football Academy, he remained active as a club coach. From 1972 until his last spell with Mohun Bagan in 1999, P.K. has coached either East Bengal or Bagan, a remarkable feat of consistency.

Like his mentor, SA. Rahim, the wily P.K. also excelled in subtle use of human psychology to motivate his proteges to excel. During East Bengal's glory years from 1970-75 (when they won the Calcutta League six consecutive times), P.K., who was their coach from 1972 onwards, devised some innovative methods of motivation. If at half time the team was trailing or struggling, he would get them into a huddle on the field, and, after some verbal encouragement, make the players touch the club shirt as a pledge of total involvement. East Bengal's passionate army of supporters relished such gestures of identification and the increased volume of the crowd support boosted the team's morale in the second half. Another instance that comes to mind is how he cajoled two of the hardest kickers in Indian football, wingers Subash Bhowmick and Swapan Sengupta to improve the power in their shots. At the end of some training sessions, P.K. would taunt both players that they could not kick the ball as powerfully as he did in his heyday. Irrked by such remarks, both Bhowmick and Sengupta spent long sessions after practice improving the power in their shots.²⁵

His finest act of motivation, however, came prior to the 1997 KBL Federation Cup semi-final between East Bengal (P.K. as coach) and Mohun Bagan (Amal Dutta as coach). The match was being billed as the clash of the coaching titans. Bagan, playing exciting attacking football, in the 3-4-3 formation, had crushed all opposition on the way to the semi final, and were favourites to win the match. The regional newspapers and magazines had built

up great expectations for this match and Calcutta was in frenzy. As part of his tactics, Dutta suggested East Bengal's main striker Baichung Bhutia was overrated and would not trouble his experienced team. On the eve of the final, the P.K. Banerjee invited Baichung to dinner and provided a detailed account of the scorn being heaped on him in the vernacular Bengali media by the rival coach. This made Baichung livid and highly motivated and the next day he guided East Bengal to a memorable 4-1 victory in front of a record number of 131,000 fans at the Salt Lake stadium, Calcutta.²⁶ He even scored the first-ever hat trick in a derby match between arch rivals East Bengal and Mohun Bagan.²⁷

In club football, P.K. has won every major tournament in India. In the 1977 season he guided Mohun Bagan to a historic feat, winning the IFA Shield, Rovers Cup and Durand Cup respectively to achieve their first-ever triple-crown triumph in one season.²⁸ Yet, his greatest hour came as East Bengal coach against two North Korean club sides, firstly in the 1973 IFA Shield final in Calcutta, and secondly in the DCM finals at Delhi in the same year.

In the early 1970s the North Koreans were regarded as the best in Asia due to their 1966 World Cup success where they beat Italy 1-0 and reached the quarter-finals in which they led Portugal 3-0 before conceding five goals. In the IFA Shield final, Pyongyang City Club, with five World Cup players in their ranks, succumbed to East Bengal's range of passing and variety in attack. They lost 1-3 with goals by Subash Bhowmick (2) and Mohammed Akbar. The North Korean club, Dok Ro Gang, which contested the DCM tournament final against East Bengal in Delhi in 1973, had six 1966 World Cup players. Yet, East Bengal out-thought the North Koreans by using a flexible 4-5-1 system. Mohammed Akbar was the lone forward and East Bengal's packed midfield enabled them to dominate play. The North Koreans were so impressed with East Bengal's display that their embassy in Delhi made recordings of the Calcutta team's matches and sent them back to Pyongyang for analysis. The North Koreans feared that India, with six East Bengal players in their ranks would be their most dangerous opponents in the 1974 Asian Games. It seems their preparations proved fruitful as India were heavily defeated 4-1.²⁹

Astute substitutions, clever change of tactics and variation in approach play made P.K. Banerjee's teams attractive to watch. His teams could either play defensive or attacking football depending on the situation. Throughout his career he was a pragmatic but charismatic and successful coach. His ability to handle star players was outstanding, combining tact with discipline. P.K.'s management style was modern as he realised the role of star players and encouraged individual brilliance. But perhaps his most significant achievement was to make the clubs and the media take the role of the coach more seriously.

Syed Nayeemuddin: A Successful Disciplinarian

During his playing days, Syed Nayeemuddin, born in 1944 in Hyderabad, was one of the most accomplished defenders in the country. His ball skills,

anticipation and clever passing were brilliant to behold. The versatile 'Nayeem', as he was popularly known, has played in defence, midfield and even as a forward for both club and country. He was selected to lead the first Indian team for the Asian Youth Football championships in 1963. He represented the senior national team, regularly from 1964 to 1971, and he was captain of the Indian team in 1970 when India finished third in both the Merdeka tournament and the Bangkok Asian Games. In 1967, his talents were recognised when he was chosen to play in the Asian All Stars team. His career developed with Hyderabad City Police (known in the 1960s as Andhra Pradesh Police) which he joined in 1963 and where he learnt his football skills under the tutelage of the legendary late Rahim. In the 1966 season he shifted to East Bengal, Calcutta and remained in the 'City of Joy' until the end of his playing career. He also played for the other two popular Calcutta clubs, Mohun Bagan and Mohammedan Sporting.³⁰ A trendy dresser and classy player, Nayeem was a pin-up boy of the 1960s and early 1970s. Supporters of the East Bengal club nicknamed him 'Dev Anand of football',³¹ after India's most popular Hindi movie star of the 1960s.

He gained prominence as a coach in the 1990s achieving much success with both East Bengal and Mohun Bagan. Between 1990 and 1995 he won 25 trophies in club football and guided Bengal to three successive triumphs, 1993-95 in the Santosh Trophy.³² Quiet, softly spoken but immensely serious he took up coaching after injury terminated his playing career in the mid-1970s. After finishing a coaching course in India, he took degrees and diplomas in coaching from Germany, Hungary, England and Brazil. Armed with a philosophy that coaches should never stop learning, he continues to attend coaching courses all over the world, often financing his own way. In 2001, for instance, he attended a UEFA sponsored coaching course in Kuala Lumpur and Amsterdam, where Andy Roxborough and Dr. Josep Vengloss were the chief instructors.³³

His coaching career can be divided into two phases. In the early 1980s he started with Mohammedan Sporting and made an impact through his attention to physical fitness, proper diet, ample rest, personal discipline and gruelling practice sessions. He became assistant coach to the national team in 1983 and was junior national coach from 1984 to 1986. From 1987 to 1989 he was national coach, in the Jawaharlal Nehru international tournament, the South Asian Federation Games at Calcutta in which India won the gold medal, and the Asia Cup. His first stint as national coach was not very memorable, as he was overshadowed by Amal Dutta who was the Technical Director from 1987 to early 1988. At this stage in his career it was felt that Nayeem needed more experience as a club coach to learn how to tackle crisis situations and improve his management skills.

Nayeem blossomed in his second stint as club coach, which started in 1990 becoming renowned as the man for a crisis. His rise to fame started in August 1990, when he took over from Shyam Thapa as coach of East Bengal

because the team was struggling. Through his professional endeavour, tactical acumen and understanding of a player's form, Nayeem quickly transformed the fortunes of Calcutta's glamour club. They remained undefeated for the rest of the season and won a unique triple-crown of the IFA Shield, Durand and Rovers Cup, a rare feat achieved only once before in Indian football by arch rivals Mohun Bagan in 1977. A strict disciplinarian, Nayeem's focus on small details and personal attention to players improved East Bengal's game that season. For instance, he made both veteran international Babu Mani and promising Bikash Panji play a roving game on the right flank and continuously interchange positions. Instead of making one of these talented players redundant, he used both to maximum effect and the right flank became East Bengal's main source of attack. Another major factor in East Bengal's revival of fortunes that season was Nayeem's transformation of the skillful playmaker Krishanu Dey, who many had dismissed as too fragile and inconsistent. By making Krishanu do weight training and fitness exercises at the gymnasium the career of India's best passer of the ball was revived. Krishanu's deft through passes and combination with strikers Chima Okorie and Kuljit Singh made East Bengal's attack lethal in both 1990-91 and 1991-92. Nayeem brought a new dimension to Indian football, by compelling his players to do weight training and even sand running, as part of their regular training sessions. He persuaded the East Bengal officials to build a gymnasium for the players. With this emphasis on fitness, nutritive diet, proper rest and adequate medical care, East Bengal became the fittest team in India for the two seasons that Nayeem was in charge.

In the 1991-92 season he won another three titles, Durand, IFA Shield and Calcutta league with East Bengal. The 1991 Durand triumph was memorable as it enabled East Bengal to emulate their rivals Mohun Bagan and win India's oldest tournament three years in a row. Earlier Bagan had managed this feat twice, 1963-65 and 1984-86. After a dispute with club officials, Nayeem departed to Mohun Bagan for two seasons from 1992-94. His Midas touch again prevailed and the club won ten trophies in two seasons,

Nayeem's greatest hour in club football was, however, in 1994. He was asked to take over from Shymal Ghosh, East Bengal's coach that season, just two days before the prestigious Rovers Cup tournament in Mumbai. East Bengal had been floundering, and had failed to win a single trophy that season. Yet within the space of one month, Nayeem helped East Bengal to win both the Rovers Cup and IFA Shield. Realising that his midfield was fragile he opted for the 4-4-2 formation instead of the customary 4-3-3 system.³⁴ In doing so, he once again demonstrated a successful acumen for tactical change.

Nayeem's management style is based on improving his players' fitness and technical abilities. He transformed the career of the dashing, speedy but inconsistent winger P. Manoharan, in his first season with East Bengal by improving his control, first touch and ability to run into space. Realising that

the lanky Nigerian, Emeka Ezeugo, who played for both East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting in the 1980s, lacked the necessary speed to succeed as a striker, Nayeem transformed him into a midfielder. The rest is history. Emeka who had come to India as a student became a professional in Europe with Lyngby of Denmark and later Honved of Hungary. He represented Nigeria in midfield in both the 1994 African Nations Cup (which Nigeria won) and the 1994 World Cup in USA. Emeka has always acknowledged Nayeem's help in transforming his career.³⁵

As a coach, Nayeem is in the mould of Argentina's former skipper and national coach Daniel Passarella, a strict disciplinarian, with emphasis on personal discipline, short hair, no late nights, fitness, rigorous training sessions and extreme loyalty to his players. At post-match press briefings he never singles out individual players for excessive praise or criticism but upholds the collective effort. He also discourages players from giving individual interviews during a tournament. Taciturn and reserved by nature, Nayeem is media-shy and does not mingle much with either officials or the media. This personality trait of aloofness has frequently caused Nayeem problems, as his successes have been glossed over and minor rumours blown out of proportion. The players admire Nayeem's seriousness and attention to detail but occasionally resist his interference in their personal affairs. Nayeem's point of view is that he wants to ensure that younger players follow a disciplined lifestyle, as he is aware of the pitfalls of fame and quick money. Older players have a double-edged reaction to his style of management. They assail his rigorous coaching but also realise that the attention to fitness and diet will extend their playing careers. He always insists that his players should only drink mineral water, have lots of vitamins and follow a diet that increases their strength and stamina. Much to his personal chagrin, both club and AIFF officials have often misunderstood the stress he placed on nutritive diet and healthy living conditions. He has been branded as an expensive and demanding coach, when his aims were simply to bring about the best in his players.

In 1997, Syed Nayeemuddin was appointed national coach until the conclusion of the 1998 Bangkok Asian Games. He developed a physically fit, tactically alert, cohesive and confident national team that dominated regional competitions during his tenure. In the 1997 South Asian Football Federation championships, in Kathmandu, India beat Maldives 5-1 in the final and won \$50,000, the highest ever prize money. Earlier that year, India reached the semifinals of the Nehru International tournament at Kochi in Kerala for the first time. His teams played in a flexible 4-4-2 or 4-3-3 system. Yet the AIFF treated Nayeem shabbily and ignored all his pleas for foreign exposure ahead of the 1998 Bangkok Asiad. Prior to the Asian Games, held in December 1998, India did not play a single practice match from September 1997 to November 1998. A fortnight before the start of the Games, India played two friendly matches in Delhi and Calcutta against Uzbekistan. Contrast this with South Korea's

preparation for the 2002 World Cup. Since taking over in January 2001, Hiddink's South Korean team played 26 internationals either as friendly matches or in tournaments, during a span of sixteen months. So whilst Hiddink remained optimistic and busy, and even got the K-League dates changed, Nayeem showed less initiative during his tenure as national coach. Despite being paid Rs. 50,000 a month his talent was not put to good use. This is arguably another example of why India does not succeed in international football. Despite limited exposure, Nayeem's team did well in the 1998 Asian Games reaching the quarterfinal league phase. They lost narrowly 0-1 to Japan, which contained five players including midfielder Junichi Inamoto and striker Tadayuki Suzuki who excelled in the 2002 World Cup. In fact after the match, Troussier complimented Nayeem and said that the team had a great future.³⁶

As a coach Nayeem has always wanted total control especially as regards diet, rest, fitness and team selection. This quest for perfection and reluctance to communicate with the media has made Nayeem more sinned against than sinning. He remains a much-maligned coach, whose invaluable services, have neither been fully utilised nor appreciated by the AIFF.³⁷

Conclusion

Thus it can be seen that in the context of Indian football's international image and tactical development, Rahim, P.K., Amal Dutta and Nayeem have all made significant contributions. Rahim achieved international success and gave Indian football a dominant status in Asia in the decade after Independence. During Rahim's time, India was rated as the best in Asia and most entertaining team to watch, and were dubbed widely as 'the Brazil of Asia'. Amal Dutta, India's first professional coach will be remembered for his tactical innovations, developing talent and introducing new playing formations like 4-2-4 and 4-4-2 in Indian football. P.K. Banerjee heralded a new era in Indian football, the coach as media celebrity. He is remembered for his flamboyant personality, brilliant motivation, tactical know-how and ability to handle complex personalities and mould them into a formidable unit. His successes with East Bengal against foreign clubs and with the national team in the early 1970s enhanced Indian football's prestige. Nayeem's emphasis on physical fitness, personal attention to improve player's abilities, assessment of a player's form and game reading have been remarkable. During his tenure as national coach he made India a regional power despite little help from the AIFF. The careers of these coaches show how determined and skilled individuals have helped shape Indian football. The obstacles they faced in trying to improve and modernise the game, however, reveal much about why India have failed to perform internationally since Rahim's famous gold in the 1962 Asian Games.

NOTES:

1. N. Ganesan, 'Rahim and After', *Sport and Pastime Magazine*, 16 July 1964, pp. 9-11. The team had previously been known as the City Afghans, named after the Police force that operated during the reign of the Nizam of Hyderabad.
2. India's best performance in the Olympics was in 1956 at Melbourne when they came fourth. The Indian squad had eight players who learnt their football in Hyderabad. They were defenders Aziz, M.A. Salam Ahmed Hussain and Latif, left half Noor Mohammed, and forwards Kannayan, Zulfiqar and Tulsidas Balaram. At one stage during the 1950s football was the most popular and watched sport in Hyderabad. The standard was also very high and fifteen teams from this city annually participated in all India tournaments, in different parts of the country. As a consequence, Hyderabad posed a brief but significant threat to the traditional dominance of Bengal.
3. Personal communication with the late S.A. Rahim's son, S.S. Hakeem, January, 2001.
4. R. Taylor and K. Jamrich, eds., *Puskas on Puskas: The Life and Times of a Footballing Legend* (London: Robson Books, 1998). pp. 57-73.
5. S.L. Ghosh, ed., *Indian Football* (New Delhi: Shaheed Prakashan Press, 1975). p. 56.
6. M. Ghaus and N. Kapadia, 'Jarnail Who?', *Sportsworld Magazine*, 25 August-7 September, 1993, pp. 60-3.
7. Ghaus and Kapadia, 'Jarnail Who?', pp. 60-3.
8. Personal communication with P.K. Banerjee and Yusuf Khan, members of India's 1962 Asiad team September, 1997.
9. N. Kapadia, 'Triumphs and Disasters: The Story of Indian Football, 1889-2000' in P. Dimeo and J. Mills, eds., *Soccer in South Asia: Empire, Nation, Diaspora* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), p. 25.
10. N. Kapadia, 'Amal Dutta: An Institution but Anti-establishment' in M. Chakraborty, ed., *Amal Dutta* (Calcutta: Shristi Prakashan, 1999). pp. 130-4.
11. Kapadia, 'Amal Dutta', p. 131.
12. Kapadia, 'Amal Dutta', p. 131.
13. N. Kapadia, 'It's Got to be JCT', *Sportsworld Magazine*, 21 June-4 July 1995, pp. 52-7.
14. Personal communication with Amal Dutta, December, 1991.
15. Kapadia, 'Amal Dutta'.
16. Kapadia, 'Amal Dutta', p. 133.

17. Personal communication with former international midfielder, Satyajit Chatterjee, January, 1995.
18. Kapadia, 'Amal Dutta', p. 133.
19. Kapadia, 'Amal Dutta', p. 133.
20. Personal communication with Bimal Ghosh.
21. N. Kapadia, 'Indian Football Needs the Midas touch', *Economic Times*, 4 December, 1994, p. 17.
22. For details see Bengali language newspapers such as *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Jugantar*, *Ganashakti*, and *Aajkal*. The English language newspapers such as the *Hindu* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* carried stories on football but have been less inclined to cover such personality-driven stories.
23. Ghosh, *Indian Football*, p. 207.
24. Until the start of the National Football League in the 1996-97 season, the three most prestigious tournaments in the country were the Durand Cup in Delhi (started in 1888) the Rovers Cup in Bombay (started in 1891) and the IFA Shield in Calcutta (started in 1893). All three were knockout tournaments, with a quarter final league phase and they were started by the British to popularise the game and provide entertainment during the British Raj. Through the passing years, these three tournaments became institutions in India.
25. Personal communication with P.K. Banerjee, January, 1996.
26. Personal communication with P.K. Banerjee, January, 1996. Another important tournament in the country is the Federation Cup, a knock out competition, like the F. A. Cup started by the AIFF in 1977. Briefly from 1996-98, the Federation Cup was sponsored and was known as the Kalyani Black Label Federation Cup.
21. The intense rivalry between Mohun Bagan and East Bengal started in 1924. Between then and July 2002, they have played each other a total of 252 times but Baichung still remains the only player to have scored a hat-trick in this clash of the titans.
28. Only Mohun Bagan in 1977 with P.K. Banerjee and East Bengal in 1990 with Nayeem as coach have annexed the Triple Crown, winning the IFA Shield, Durand and Rovers Cup in one season.
29. N. Kapadia, 'Triumphs and Disasters: The Story of Indian Football, 1889-2000' in Dimeo and Mills, *Soccer in South Asia*, p. 23.
30. Ghosh, *Indian Football*, pp. 214-15.
31. Personal communication with Syed Nayeemuddin, April, 1997.
32. Kapadia, 'Indian Football needs the Midas touch', p. 17.

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33. Personal communication with Syed Nayeemuddin, April, 1997.
34. Kapadia, 'Indian Football needs the Midas touch', p. 17
35. Kapadia, 'Indian Football needs the Midas touch', p. 17.
36. N. Kapadia, 'What Ails Indian Football', *Frontline Magazine*, 19 July 2002, pp. 12-14.
37. Since then Nayeem has only been employed for brief spells with Mohun Bagan and East Bengal. He remains out of favour as senior players dislike his hard training and conspire with officials who do not like the extra expenditure incurred because of his insistence on a strict dietary regime.