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Cricket under Veil and Violence : The Echoes of Resistance in The Taliban Cricket Club

ABSTRACT : Cricket has evolved from a mere source of entertainment to a profound societal influence. Its rich history extends beyond the pitch, inspiring culture and community worldwide. Timeri N. Murari's novel, 'The Taliban Cricket Club,' sheds light on cricket's multifaceted role, portraying it as a symbol of resistance and liberation rather than just a game.

In the narrative, Rukhsana, a brave young Afghan journalist, finds herself amid an ordinary cricket match that transforms into an act of defiance against the oppressive Taliban regime. The Taliban, seeking to improve its global image, forms a national cricket team. For Rukhsana, this presents a rare chance to escape a forced marriage and reclaim her fate.

The novel intricately weaves cricket matches into a secretive effort to challenge brutal ideologies and preserve dignity, serving as a backdrop for Rukhsana and her teammates to conspire for freedom. Murari illustrates how cricket becomes a beacon of hope and courage, offering a voice in a repressive environment.

Ultimately, 'The Taliban Cricket Club' emphasizes resilience and determination, revealing that even under strict oppression, individuals can creatively protest injustice. This exploration of cricket as a literary device

highlights the yearning for liberation, particularly for women under Taliban rule. The novel encourages readers to recognize how a simple game can ignite revolutionary spirit and symbolize the fight for a brighter future. Through vivid connections to real events, it underscores the transformative power of sports in dark times.

Keywords:- Cricket against Taliban, Sports as Rebellion, Cricket for freedom, Sports under oppression, Chained anklets, Transformative power.

Timeri N. Murari, a distinguished Indian novelist, journalist, and playwright, has long been known for his engagement with themes of identity, resistance, and human resilience. His works often bridge the personal and the political, reflecting a nuanced understanding of individual agency within repressive social systems. Born in Madras (now Chennai) and educated in Canada and the United Kingdom, Murari has written across genres and continents, yet much of his fiction remains deeply rooted in South Asian realities. His storytelling blends literary sensitivity with journalistic insight, often spotlighting marginalized voices against sweeping historical and political backdrops.

One of his most compelling novels, *The Taliban Cricket Club* (2012), is set in Taliban-ruled Kabul, a city shrouded in silence, surveillance, and the systematic erasure of women's rights. The story follows Rukhsana, a young Afghan woman and former journalist, whose

voice and freedom have been stifled under the brutal religious orthodoxy of the Taliban regime. When the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice suddenly announces a national cricket tournament, ostensibly to create goodwill and international recognition, Rukhsana sees within it a daring opportunity: to escape. Under the pretext of forming a team, she gathers her brother and cousins and begins training them, all while secretly coaching from behind the veil—a burqa that conceals not only her body but her ambitions, intellect, and identity.

Murari's choice to center the plot around cricket—seen by many as a leisurely, even gentlemanly sport—creates a striking contrast with the violent, fear-stricken world his characters inhabit. In *The Taliban Cricket Club*, the game becomes more than a pastime; it is a thread of hope, a coded form of resistance, and a subtle rebellion against the regime's draconian laws. The novel captures not only the grimness of life under the Taliban, especially for women, but also the quiet courage that survives in the unlikeliest of spaces—from a hidden notebook to the careful grip of a cricket bat. Through this juxtaposition of veiled repression and defiant play, Murari offers a narrative that is as politically charged as it is emotionally resonant, illuminating the profound power of sport, memory, and determination in times of darkness.

Cricket as Cultural Subversion:

Resistance in Ritual and Recreation: In a regime that dictates dress, movement, speech, and silence—especially for women—cricket becomes a profound act of cultural subversion in *The Taliban Cricket Club*. For Rukhsana, who once thrived as a journalist, silenced by the Taliban's closure of newspapers and repression of female agency, the cricket tournament offers a rare chance to act, plan, and defy. It is not merely the possibility of winning a game that motivates her, but the dream of escape, autonomy, and dignity. As she notes early in the novel, "I couldn't write anymore, couldn't speak freely, couldn't even laugh loudly. But I could think" (p. 12). This power to think, strategize, and coach becomes her form of resistance.

The Taliban's announcement of a national cricket tournament underlines the regime's hypocritical engagement with global norms. They seek recognition by adopting the trappings of civilization, even as they continue brutal public punishments and gender apartheid. Rukhsana sees through this façade and understands that sport, too, can be weaponized. Yet she chooses to turn it on its head. Her secret coaching of male players—particularly her brother Jahan and cousin Shaheen—mirrors her concealed voice and intellect, still active beneath the burqa. Murari paints the training sessions with care, showing how the act of throwing a ball, adjusting a stance, or watching a pitch turn in spin becomes a coded form of empowerment:

"The burqa may have hidden my face, but my voice could still instruct. I could make them play like their lives depended on it. Because they did" (p. 86).

Importantly, the novel does not reduce cricket to a simplistic metaphor. Murari is attentive to the sport's complexities and rules, integrating them into the emotional and political stakes of the plot. The training sessions allow moments of normalcy, even joy, in a world of fear. Cricket becomes a space where time behaves differently, where strategy and freedom intersect. For Rukhsana, the sound of leather on willow is not just familiar—it is redemptive.

The male characters, too, evolve under Rukhsana's guidance. Her brother Jahan gradually moves from scepticism to full cooperation, trusting her judgment despite the patriarchal norms they have all absorbed. This reversal—of a woman guiding men in a public and physical realm—is revolutionary in the Taliban's Kabul. As Rukhsana reflects, "I didn't need to unburden history or change the world. I just needed to get us on that plane" (p. 143).

Through cricket, Murari reimagines resistance not as dramatic rebellion but as quiet, deliberate preparation. Each training session, each whispered instruction, becomes a note in a larger symphony of survival. The stakes are enormous, yet the tools are subtle: a pair of cricket shoes, a scratch on the pitch, the slow development of a team identity. These are the echoes of resistance that

reverberate beneath the veil and violence.

Veiled Voice: Gender, Identity, and the Power of Rukhsana's Defiance: At the heart of *The Taliban Cricket Club* lies a profound meditation on gendered resistance. Rukhsana is not merely a character navigating repression—she is the embodiment of a silenced voice that refuses to disappear. Beneath the physical veil of her burqa lies not submission but strategy, knowledge, and yearning. Her journalistic training makes her acutely aware of the regime's tactics of control, and her intellect allows her to exploit the very structures intended to oppress her.

Rukhsana's voice—though publicly stifled—is vividly present throughout the narrative, guiding the reader through her internal battles and outward defiance. When she says, "They may have taken my job, but not my mind" (p. 22), she articulates a critical truth: authoritarian systems may dominate bodies, but they cannot fully extinguish thought. Her strategic manipulation of the cricket tournament, masquerading as compliance while plotting escape, underscores the theme of hidden rebellion.

Murari constructs Rukhsana as a character whose resistance is rooted not in confrontation but in calculation. She embodies what theorist Michel de Certeau might call "tactics" of the weak—everyday acts of subversion within systems of power. Her decision to train the team under Taliban noses, to speak

softly and obey outwardly while maneuvering inwardly, reveals a nuanced form of rebellion. "Silence," she says, "was a language I learned to speak fluently" (p. 31).

The symbolism of the burqa is central to Murari's exploration of gender and control. For the Taliban, it is an instrument of erasure; for Rukhsana, it becomes a camouflage—allowing her to move, observe, and plan. In one key scene, she notes, "They thought the burqa blinded me, but it only sharpened what I heard" (p. 55). Here, Murari reverses the traditional narrative of female invisibility, transforming the veil into a site of resistance.

Rukhsana's femininity is not erased in this process—it is redefined. Her relationships, particularly with her mother and her young cousin Mina, are tender and rooted in shared suffering. Yet, they also reflect a lineage of resilience. When she braids Mina's hair or cooks a meal, these domestic acts are not signs of submission but of cultural preservation under siege. In these moments, Murari shows how resistance can take shape even in routine gestures.

Moreover, Rukhsana's knowledge of cricket—typically a male-dominated sport—becomes a feminist statement in itself. She understands field placements, batting orders, and psychological pressure points better than the men around her. Her authority on the pitch challenges traditional gender roles, and the respect she commands from her

players subtly chips away at the gender hierarchies embedded in both Afghan society and Taliban ideology.

Murari's depiction of Rukhsana aligns with broader feminist literary traditions, wherein the act of storytelling becomes resistance. Her narration is sharp, ironic, and emotionally controlled. She observes the absurdities of Taliban rule with biting clarity—describing their rituals and proclamations with both fear and satire. Through her eyes, the reader experiences the cruelty of repression and the quiet valor of survival.

In sum, Rukhsana's character is the novel's most resonant echo of defiance. She turns the imposed silence into a stage for strategy, the veil into a shield, and a sport into a script for escape. Through her, Murari articulates a vision of empowerment rooted not in loud rebellion but in the intelligence of survival—a resistance played, like cricket itself, with patience, precision, and purpose.

Symbols and Echoes: Cricket, Veil, and the Language of Subtle Revolt: Murari's narrative brims with rich symbols that collectively evoke the spirit of defiance under oppression. Cricket, the most obvious symbol, extends beyond its literal presence in the text. It stands as a metaphor for dignity, discipline, and democratic order in a world governed by tyranny. In a society where rules are applied arbitrarily and justice is administered violently, the structured fairness of cricket provides a moral

counterpoint. The game's insistence on fairness, team effort, and individual merit challenges the Taliban's regime of fear and hierarchy.

The veil, too, emerges as a dual symbol—of both imposed invisibility and strategic camouflage. For the Taliban, it represents ideological domination. For Rukhsana, it becomes a form of agency. It enables her to navigate public space, strategize without detection, and subvert from within. Murari subverts the trope of female invisibility by transforming the burqa into a tactical instrument, one that paradoxically amplifies Rukhsana's vision and audibility.

Even seemingly mundane objects—a cricket bat, a ball, a headscarf, or a travel form—gain symbolic resonance. The cricket bat becomes a weapon not of violence but of hope. The ball, passed from one player to another, symbolizes trust and coordination. The hidden passport applications and visa forms represent the tenuous possibility of freedom. These objects operate as silent witnesses to the characters' dreams and efforts to reclaim autonomy.

Language, particularly Rukhsana's internal monologue, also functions symbolically. Her thoughts are precise and poetic, filled with irony and suppressed rage. Her silence in public contrasts with her eloquence in narration, underlining the theme that thought itself is an act of resistance. The juxtaposition of what is spoken and unspoken in the novel highlights the psychological depth

of repression and the resourcefulness required to survive it.

The title of the novel itself is symbolic. The inclusion of “cricket club” in the context of Taliban rule is absurd on its face—a calculated irony. Murari uses this juxtaposition to underscore the clash between totalitarian control and the human spirit’s irrepressible desire for expression. The “club,” typically a space of voluntary community, becomes here a zone of necessary collusion and urgent escape.

These symbols collectively resonate like echoes—subtle but persistent, quiet yet defiant. They are not declarations of rebellion but murmurs of persistence, reminders that even in the darkest regimes, individuals find ways to signal their humanity and their refusal to be erased.

Rukhsana’s Strategy – A Woman, A Bat and, A Secret War: Imagine living in a world where speaking your truth could get you silenced – or worse. That’s Rukhsana’s reality, a bold journalist trapped under the Taliban’s iron fist. But when the administration tries to play “nice guy” by hoisting flashy cricket tournament to trick the world into thinking they are progressive, Rukhsana spots a golden opportunity. Cricket is the Taliban’s propaganda tool, but Rukhsana turns it into a weapon. At the story’s heart Rukhsana, a journalist forced to bury her voice under the Taliban’s tyranny. The protagonist is a journalist under Taliban rule. The Taliban organizes

a cricket tournament to appear modern, which is ironic because they are oppressive. Rukhsana uses this opportunity by disguising herself and other women as male players to rebel. The cricket terms are metaphors for their fight against patriarchy, and each match helps them plan an escape. Cricket is a sport with specific terms like boundaries, wickets, bats, balls. These are metaphors for rebellion and relating each action in the game to an act of defiance. Hitting a boundary is not just scoring runs but challenging the oppressive rules. The idea of disguise is crucial here – women pretending to be men to participate, which are both a literal and a metaphorical act of resistance.

The Taliban conspires to create a positive image in the eyes of the world by interacting through this game in the international matches. On the other side the same game stands as an act of defiance and revolution against the inhuman tyrannical regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan. By forcing readers to question who truly ‘owns’ the game, the story reveals how marginalised groups, especially women, can hijack oppressive systems for liberation. The Narrator Rukhsana hides rebellion within the Taliban’s approved cricket tournament as like the Greeks hiding soldiers in wooden horse to infiltrate Troy. The Taliban enforces strict gender segregation, but Rukhsana disguises as male players, turning the regime’s own rules against them. She tried to hide her identity by

changing her name and appearance from Rukhsana to Babur and from female to male: "But I am hiding –as Babur. I have to stay by Maader. The best place to hide is where they have already looked." (p.130)

The central figure has changed her dress from female to male against the strict dress code. She does not like to put on hijab but she has to put on. Such dislike can also be seen in some other women too. They are required to cover not only their faces by wearing a mask, but the blind rules emphasized covering the whole of their face and wearing black eyeglasses and gloves. They are told not to wear jeans and tight clothes or colourful dresses, only loose black coverings. It is painful and unacceptable not to have the right to wear what they want, not even the colour they like:

"Why is she wearing a man's clothes? If the religious police catch her dressed like a man they will beat her." (p.137)

Cricket as Symbolic Tool: Murari's cricket is not an ordinary game. He uses the sports of cricket not only as a part of the plot but as a powerful symbol of resistance, identity, and freedom. While the Taliban rule is marked by fear, oppression, and unpredictability, cricket represents fairness, discipline, and proper structure. This difference becomes prominent to the novel's theme – the clash between rules and ruthlessness. Cricket thrives on teamwork and respect, the Taliban rule through fear and violence, punishing people without reason and confiscating even basic

freedoms. For Rukhsana, the cricket bat becomes her weapon of choice this in this dark battle. She doesn't own anything in her own life. She is restricted making decisions about her own body, future of even her voice, holding the bat gives her a very rare sense of control. The cricket pitch too transforms into a secret sanctuary. Here, disguised as male players, Rukhsana and her teammates explain briefly about escape from their suffocating reality. Even the sports colonial roots, once a symbol of foreign control, are shifted. Rukhsana hijacks a game designed by British colonizers and repurposes it as a tool for Afghan women's liberation. Cricket an ordinary game is capable of dismantling a kingdom build on terror. Kabul's dust-choked alleys are flickering the Taliban's brutality. Beneath the scorching Kabul sun, the women shed their identities as oppressed subjects. Disguised as men, they experience a temporary liberation – their laughter, sweat, and shouts blending into the rhythm of the game. In these moments, the pitch is no longer just grass and dirt, it's a space where they reclaim agency, where their bodies move freely, unaffected from the weight of burqas. Once a symbol of British imperialism, cricket becomes a tool for Afghan women to resist to a new kind of tyranny. The Taliban, seeking to exploit the game's global appeal to sanitize their image, unknowing handed Rukhsana a weapon. She hijacks their propaganda, turning their tournament into a stage for

her quiet revolution. Through cricket, they make bonds of solidarity for whispering plans of escape. In Kabul's oppressive landscape, cricket becomes a language of hope, providing that even under the boot of tyranny, the human spirit can carve out pockets of freedom, one defiant stroke at a time. Since the Taliban seized power in August 2021, Afghanistan has seen the systematic implementation and enforcement of discriminatory policies and gender apartheid. Women were facing increasingly restrictive laws, regulations, and orders, which have eliminated many of the rights they had gained over the previous two decades.

These discriminatory policies, combined with restrictions on mobility and diminished opportunities for promotion, have institutionalized gender inequality within the social system. The deliberate marginalization of female blocked career advancement reflects a broader strategy to erode their professional standing and contributions to society. As a result, the scenario became increasingly hostile for women, depriving them of both financial stability and opportunities to shape academic discourse. These oppressive measures not only undermine their feeling of security, but they erode their sense of identity and purpose in life. The resulting feelings of isolation, anxiety, and professional loss have severely impacted their mental health and well-being.

Literature, Resistance, and the Undying

Echoes of Freedom: In *The Taliban Cricket Club*, Timeri N. Murari composes a quiet yet forceful symphony of resistance—one played not with drums of war or firebrands of protest, but with whispers, cricket bats, concealed strategies, and silenced voices that refuse erasure. The novel reminds us that the deepest resistance does not always roar; it often moves in whispers, coded gestures, hidden plans, and the unwavering will to endure.

Through Rukhsana, Murari crafts a heroine whose resistance is intellectual, emotional, and physical. Her courage lies in strategy rather than spectacle, in determination rather than defiance. In choosing cricket—a colonial legacy, a tool of global diplomacy, and a distinctly rule-bound game—as his central metaphor, Murari cleverly challenges both the Taliban's brutality and global indifference. The novel becomes not just a story of one woman's struggle to reclaim her freedom, but a commentary on how culture, memory, and even sport can be wielded as weapons of dignity.

This is where Murari's genius lies: he gives voice to those silenced, movement to those immobilized, and hope to those trapped under veils of repression. The story reverberates far beyond Kabul. It speaks to every regime that fears the thinking woman, every society that punishes the dreaming citizen, and every reader who has ever believed in the transformative power of the human spirit.

In the end, *The Taliban Cricket Club* is not just a novel about escape. It is a novel about the art of staying human under inhuman conditions. And in that humanity—expressed through sport, family, silence, and strategy—echoes the loudest form of resistance.

Thus, cricket in *'The Taliban Cricket Club'* becomes much more than a game. It is a form of defiance, a tool of protest, and a ray of hope in a dark and repressive regime. Murari skilfully used the contrast between cricket's rules and the Taliban's ruthlessness to highlight how even a small opportunity like a cricket tournament can become a powerful step towards freedom and change.

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