



Postmodern Features of Contemporary Culture: Representation and Sporting Celebrity

Subhasish Guha

State-Aided College Teacher (I)
Department of English
Pritilata Waddedar Mahavidyalaya, Nadia, WB

Abstract: The following paper examines the phenomenon of sporting celebrity by studying the media representation of the English footballer David Beckham at the turn of the century. It analyses the dynamic process of stardom and argues that such major stars draw in major media vortexes. The paper goes on to show that in the cultural context of the time - a time preoccupied with style, fashion, and decor, such celebrities ultimately represent our fantasies of lifestyle, luxury, consumption, and display. The paper also argues that Beckham belongs to a decidedly postmodern celebrity culture where his representations in the media are markedly self-referential, outlandishly ostentatious, and obviously not 'real'.

Keywords: celebrity, consumption, media, postmodern, representation.

"We've got matching dogs (Rottweiler), matching watches (gold Rolexes), similar wardrobes, matching Jags. I like all that. I mean, I know it's tacky, but it makes me laugh."

Victoria Adams aka Posh Spice married to David Beckham.

(Gentleman).

Introduction

At the start of the twenty-first century (similar to the preceding centuries) the image of a sports star was a site where discourses of youth, morality, and masculinities would converge and were inextricably intertwined. What was distinct about the media representation of sports stars at the turn of the century was the intensity of media coverage of sports and the concomitant sporting star system's centrality in the media sport industry. Another interesting development was the way in which the image of the sports star became the point of convergence of social anxieties over morality and masculinities. Therefore, a study of media representations of sports stars is essentially a way to examine the processes of social contestation regarding ideas of morality and concepts of how men should behave. Such explorations reveal how popular culture constitutes a key interface between everyday commonsense and more organised political discourse.



As far as discourses of morality and masculinities are concerned, the image of the sports star provided a site for expressing the lack or crisis of both the ideas. The theme of a generalised decline manifesting itself in a supposed crisis in morality has been front and centre in discussions about sports since the 1990s. While the Right explains this by pointing towards the disintegration of the family, single-parent families, surging crime rates, and a failing education system, the Left looked for explanations in the failure of the welfare state.

One of the reasons posited as a reason for this crisis in morality was the issue of relativism; which had not only undermined cultural values but the whole notion of cultural value. A once stable system of cultural hierarchy was argued to have been disrupted. As Gary Whannel argues "The rise of modern popular culture, the assault on traditional aesthetic judgements, the development of modes of theorising that question the high culture-popular culture distinction, the supposed process of 'dumbing-down', and the 'postmodern turn' have all combined to dislodge the dominance of a secure set of cultural judgements. The concept of cultural value itself is lost. In such a relativised world, it is no surprise that traditional moral values no longer command respect. From this perspective, then, moral decline is closely linked to the rise of cultural relativism." (Whannel 5).

In the process of contributing to the growth of popularity of sport, the media have also produced a sporting star system, as a result of which sporting stars increasingly started finding themselves under public scrutiny. This was exacerbated with the sports organization's concern for their public image; an image expressed in moral terms. A recurrent theme in such stories is that because such stars are in the public eye and are a potential influence on the young, they are expected to have higher moral standards than other people in everyday life. Related to this moral issue is also that of masculinities. Images of sports stars have played a key role in the construction of masculine identities.

The following discussion is based on the proposition that "in a time when discourses regarding crises of masculinity and of morality have been prominent, forms of popular culture are revealing sites in which to examine the unstable attempts to deal with crisis. Sports stars, in particular, being significantly structured by notions of both masculinity and morality, provide a potentially productive field of study." (Whannel 8). The discussion explores representation of media images of sports stars in that they are also political, ideological, and about power relations. It will be informed by the theoretical work on decentred and multiple subjectivities, and the growing power of an increasingly consumption-centred society where the symbolic power of goods has both lost their material conditions of production and superseded their use value. It will deal with the restless vortex of celebrity and examine the emergence of celebrity at the core of popular culture. The intensity of focus on sports stars (individuals) has meant that their images have become a melting pot for discourses on morality and masculinities, of identity and consumption. The circuit of production-consumption-production in which productive consumption and consumptive production fuel each other is taken into account.

Sports Stars and the Postmodern

The question of the symbolic value of sports stars is a tricky one in a postmodern culture. Since the grand-narratives of modernity are argued to have lost their value, it leaves us with the



conundrum of figuring out the position of the ethics of fair play or the project of character development that framed nineteenth-century athleticism. Equally puzzling is the problem of the concept of role models if identities are irredeemably fractured and ambiguous. Now that consumption and commodification have triumphed, what about the transcendent *jouissance* of a sporting performance experienced before commodification? Gary Whannel's answer to this is that "our persistent desire for the authentic, the intense, the real, and even the original, even though we understand, in however an inchoate way, that culture cannot readily provide these things suggests, that while we inhabit a cultural world that has many postmodern elements, we have not witnessed the triumph of post-modernity or the eclipse of modernity." (Whannel 201). Indeed the world we inhabit is complex marked by uneven development where different modes of being coexist with uncomfortable tension. Sports fans, music lovers and other enthusiasts now seem to live out an intense and passionate experience related to the object of their passion and at the same time realize it to be commodified and transformed beyond their reach. Such a sports fan is, as it were, both the producer and the consumer of his own pleasure and is all the while still not in control- a unique paradox of consumptive production and productive consumption. But this culture of consumption is indeed significant for us. This is what King highlights as the foremost feature of postmodernism- as a shift in values from thrift to profligacy. He argues that the third stage of capitalism is:

characterised by huge multi-national corporations, whose existence depends on the emergence and expansion of the consumer market. The emergence of this consumer market has necessitated in a shift from production to consumption, which in turn has required a complete overhauling of the value system. The values of thrift, discipline, and reason...have become unsuitable for this third stage of capitalism. For this economic system to survive, individuals must not repress their desires...but must satisfy those desires by indulgence in the consumer market. (King 122-23).

The curious case of the Beckhams

An indulgence in the consumer market, as opposed to thrift (dominant in representations of someone like Stanley Matthews) is what typifies the representations of David Beckham. His image which became a dominant representation of British sports media at the turn of the century always remained a kind of strangely elusive and anchorless image – a floating signifier with the potential of becoming attached to a range of discursive elements with equal plausibility. His highly publicised romance with Victoria Adams (another media star) combined with his good looks, football talent, and his playing for Manchester United (a club that drew massive support and loathing because they became a symbol of football being dominated by only the richest clubs) all made him the proverbial 'golden boy'.

His highly-publicized relationship with Victoria Adams (Posh Spice of the Spice Girls) resulted in the couple featuring in the centre stage of the celebrity space of the popular media – with Beckham featuring prominently in sports media consumed largely by men, and Victoria featuring in the tabloid coverage of pop music. The couple also featured in magazines like *OK*, predominantly read by women. The image of Beckham posed a challenge to the heterosexual conformity of the sporting arena's convention of male self-presentation because of the narcissistic self-absorption associated



with it and also due to its deviance from the traditional masculinised footballer's manners. In a way, Beckham's image seemed to speak louder than his words. He did not give many interviews and his voice was not often heard. Then there was his perceived lack of self-assertion. This contrasted with his assertive partner who stood sharply in contrast with the traditional, largely invisible housewife of a footballer. This posed a challenge to the hegemonic masculinity with its concomitant assumption of the man as a dominant partner. All this taken together seemed to have played a part in the feeling of anxiety of the male football subculture which is very sensitive to unconventional masculine behaviour and which often degenerates into homophobia.

This was evident in a widely publicised photograph of Beckham on a holiday with Victoria in the summer of 1998 wearing a sarong. The photograph was circulated in the tabloid with the intention of showing his supposed 'emasculisation' by highlighting his deviance from the traditional standards of masculinity. Press articles and cartoons questioning Beckham's masculinity soon followed. One such 'joke' picture was headlined 'FROCK SKINNER' featuring comedians Frank Skinner and David Baddiel. Skinner is in the sarong a la Beckham and Baddiel poses and pouts like Posh Spice. (Whannel 202).

Then came Beckham's sending-off in a crucial match in the 1998 world cup. This provided a point of condensation for discourses reflecting unease which had been brewing for some time. However, the story in the popular press soon turned into a narrative of redemption and triumph after him winning several trophies in the course of the following year, marrying Victoria, and then fathering a child with all this featuring in the following edition of *OK*. It was a celebration of traditional family values. This was just another example of the commodification and glamorisation of the private sphere of the lives of a media star.

Humour and abuse

This tabloid revolution which was built upon the erosion of a sharp distinction between the public and the private exemplified the new genre of celebrity-based magazines such as *OK* and *Hello*. Primarily dealing with stories about easily recognized stars, such magazines fuelled the trend of celebrity gossip. The areas of life which were private not too long back were now in public. Just like the coverage of other sports stars, the tone of the initial phase of coverage about Beckham was celebratory- one of his early biographies by Bobby Blake being just the perfect example. Beckham's rise is described as "phenomenal" and he is "a heart throb to millions of teenage girls, a hero to as many football-mad boys." (Blake 10). The book points to his fun-loving nature but constructs him in terms of discipline and responsibility: "he likes a few beers with the lads occasionally or a glass of wine with a meal, but never more than once a week" because "You have to take care of yourself at this level." (Blake 44).

The tide started changing from the 1998 world cup when he was sent off (due to kicking an opponent). in a crucial match against Argentina - a match which England eventually lost. After a rough tackle, Beckham had a moment to reflect and still rather lazily kicked his opponent in full view of the referee. The languid nature of the kick fitted the construction of Beckham as slightly foppish. The episode drew a lot of hostile press comment and made Beckham the butt of many jokes, many of which ridiculed his supposed dull-wittedness.



The September 1999 edition of *Vanity Fair* reported on this heady mix of tabloid castigation and fan anger: “the pretty boy scapegoat was lynched in effigy...when the 98-99 season began, any football fan who had ever loathed Manchester United pilloried their preening, blonde-streaked right-winger with chants invective and profane.” (Daly). *GQ* even went to the extent of reporting that “when George Best played he was offered booze after every game; Beckham gets boos before, during and after every game whether he wants it or not.” (Andrews and Jackson 140). But, all this castigation was not only due to him being sent off in a crucial football match. If the furore over his photograph with a sarong was anything to go by, he was punished for not conforming to the expected conventions of masculinity – for deviating too far away from the defensive conservatism of a football subculture with its built-in and perennial fears of any hint of ‘effeminacy’. This fear of emasculation triggered by a public figure that deviates by a huge margin from the unalterable standards of masculinity so favoured in English football culture explains a lot of the hostility directed at him.

The innuendoes suggested that Victoria dominated him, chose his clothes for him, and that all this was unmasculine. The sarong picture still continued to be a part of many narrativisations of his story. The May 1999 *GQ* edition commented that the sarong picture made him “look like a twerp” while captioning the picture with “Becks and Posh with their hers and hers wardrobe.” (Whannel 205). His attending at unmasculine events like fashion shows and his sartorial adventurousness transgressed the laddish code. This resulted in the popular press constructing Beckham as feminised and emasculated. One such instance is evident in the *Sun* where Beckham was shown dressed in a Spice Girl Union Jack mini-dress and platform shoes, with a musical agent asking him, “So David... what other tips on being a pop-star did Posh give you?” (Andrews and Jackson 141). The popular press had constructed Beckham as feminised and emasculated.

Some of the hostile and offensive comments hurled at footballers are suggestive of male working-class humour which revolves around sexual infidelity and sexual humiliation. The same was the case here with Beckham; Posh to be more precise. (The offensive chants which relate to sexual humiliation are reported obliquely by newspapers). The issue of the function of aggressiveness in humour and feelings of shame in sexual references has been discussed by Freud in cases like this where sports stars or celebrities in general are subjected to abuse with offensive sexual innuendoes and are humiliated by making public the private domain of sexuality. Freud argues that the “utterance of obscene words compels the person who is assailed to imagine the part of the body or the procedure in question and shows him/her that the assailant is himself imagining it.” (Freud 198). Bergson’s views on laughter are also worth noting in this context of the weaponisation of humour. He argues that laughter is “incompatible with emotion or with sympathy with its object, and that it always implies a certain callousness, even a touch of malice.” (Mathewson 6). Such humour, interestingly enough, is often a distinctive feature of male camaraderie. He goes on to explain that laughter has to make a painful impact on the person it is directed at because it belongs to men in groups and is intended to humiliate. To use his own words, “By laughter society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness.” (Mathewson 7). In fact, jokes and abuse typically deal with the repressed, awkward, and disturbing psychological fears. The obsession with offensive sexual jokes in crude abuses can signify both



submission and humiliation. It is indicative of a working-class masculine class which is fraught with fears- of both the feminine and the homoerotic. In our context, the allegedly emasculated Beckham offered a convenient symbol onto which such fears could be condensed.

Beckham, however, went on to have a successful season. The narrative then became that he had gained maturity and so deserved to be rehabilitated; that “Beckham took strength from adversity” and “demonstrated impressive resilience” and that “fatherhood and his pending marriage to Spice Girl Victoria Adams, suggest that at 24 he is already capable of controlling his own destiny.” (Hart). So, this maturation was attributed to his becoming a family man unlike someone like George Best. In fact, the Easter Week edition of *Time Out* (1999) developed this theme of redemption through love in a dramatic fashion when it featured Beckham in their front cover with white trousers and a see-through shirt and with a pose evocative of Christ and the Crucifixion. The caption read: “Easter Exclusive: The Resurrection of David Beckham.” (Andrews and Jackson 142). The caption for *TV Times* who, later that year, used a similar photo was “David Beckham from sinner to saint: Red Hot and Spicy” (Andrews and Jackson 143). According to Garry Whannel, this was the “perfect Jesus for the nineties- good-looking, stylish, talented, and engaged to a successful female pop singer - a Christ of Consumption.” (Whannel 206).

The ‘royal’ wedding and media vortex

A sudden explosion in media outlets and a dizzying speed of information circulation creates a vortex effect where various media constantly feed off each other and columnists and commentators are drawn in, like a vortex (more so in an age of electronic and digital information exchange) towards certain major events - the wedding of Beck and Posh being such an example. With certain such events dominating the headlines, it becomes difficult for columnists and reporters to talk about anything else. They are drawn in as if by a vortex. The death of Princess Diana was one such example. Such a vortextual movement produces a short-term compression of the media agenda in which other topics disappear or are somehow connected to the said event- from comedians to television presenters, from politicians to radio phone-ins, from cartoons to news magazines, from news columnists to cultural events.

Their photos featured extensively in the front covers of various magazines throughout 1999. The self-referential nature of the focus on them gradually became self-generating. *OK* magazine bought the rights of the marriage itself, devoting several issues solely on the ‘The Wedding of the Decade’, declaring the marriage to be “the wedding the whole world had been waiting to see.” (Andrews and Jackson, 143). *Evening Standard* featured a cartoon showing God in an armchair saying, “I’ve postponed the end of the world until I’ve seen the Beckham wedding pictures.” (Exclusive Wedding Pictures).

While many sports stars before Beckham have been publicly cherished and honoured and their fame spread well beyond the world of sports, it is difficult to find anyone whose image had so thoroughly seep into the largely sports-free world of publishing aimed at women. This is obviously to a great extent due to his relationship with Spice Girl Victoria Adams, the wedding and the baby. But this also transformed the image of Beckham into a site where many discourses intersect - discourses about:



the conventional footballer's concept of high fashion (Hugo Boss and Armani), and the gender-bending glamour of pop-music, the discipline of elite football, and the hedonism of celebrity partying, working-class masculinity and pop-glamourised sexuality, concepts of family life and changing gender roles, and his own reticence and celebrity flamboyance. All this is lived out in the crucible of the public gaze, in which 'Beckham' becomes the vocal point of a wide range of intersecting discourses- the central point of a vortextual process. (Whannel 207).

The wedding was presented as a Royal Wedding. The media mobilisation of public attention was reminiscent of royal weddings. Regal splendour and royal connections were front and centre in the media representations of the wedding. Comparisons were made with the marriage between Prince Edward and Sophie Rhys-Jones with the *Daily Mail* even declaring that "After Edward and Sophie's low-key affair, the spice girl and the soccer star show them how to stage a proper royal wedding" (Andrews and Jackson, 144). *The Guardian* described Victoria as "the queen of the castle" and that "the supreme glitziness of their marriage makes the Prince Edward's marriage to Sophie Rhys-Jones look a comparatively frumpy occasion." (*Gentleman*). *Daily Mail* with its featured headline "I QUEEN POSH TAKE THEE, KING BECKS" reaffirmed the superiority of the event compared to the recent royal wedding as far as splendour and pageantry is concerned:

From the regal 'thrones' at the reception to the imperial purple carpets and rows of liveried attendants, the sheer spectacle of yesterday's event could not have been more of a constant to the real Royal Wedding last month...Prince Edward and his bride Sophie Rhys-Jones wanted their wedding to be a low-key family day with as little fuss as possible. David and Victoria didn't. They wanted pomp and splendour and they made sure they got it. (Andrews and Jackson 145).

Hayden in her anthropological discussion on British royalty argued that "The Queen's majesty needs other individuals to radiate and enhance it." (Hayden 35). In this case, the combined presence of designers, celebrity guests, guards, and the media produced such an effect. The *Sun* wrote on the "regal thrones at their fairy-tale wedding banquet" and on how "Victoria looked like a queen" while the text elaborates upon a covertly taken photo from the ceremony by adding that 'Queen' Posh Spice sits "with love for her "king" David Beckham glowing in her eyes. (Whannel 208). The *Sun* extended the royal metaphor into the political domain with its headline the following day:

THE SUN ASKS THE BIG QUESTION, WHO RULES
WHICH COUPLE IS MORE POPULAR IN BRITAIN TODAY? CALL AND
VOTE NOW. (Whannel 208).

The paper featured two wedding photos - one of Edward and Sophie and the other of David and Victoria with phone numbers for readers to vote. The royal associations were reinforced by the fact that the company in charge for arranging the wedding ceremony was the one responsible for Queen Anne's 40th birthday celebrations and that of her son's 21st. The flowers were reportedly provided by "two of the most respected florists in the business" (*Andrews and Jackson, 145*). It was

reported that Slim Barrett, the jeweller who had made pieces for the late Princess of Wales designed a beautiful gold and diamond coronet for Victoria. Even the mad rush of the press to cover the event was interpreted as proof of the wedding being more interesting than that of the royals because there were “no paparazzi risking their lives for pictures of Edward Windsor and Sophie Rhys-Jones.” (*Andrews and Jackson, Sport Stars, 145*).

Conspicuous consumption and display

Beckham and Posh found themselves at the centre of a tableau of consumption and display because the lifestyle of celebrities become the focal point of media attention in a culture fawning over questions of style, interior decor, and the like. The sumptuous nature of their wedding is best exemplified by Veblen’s idea of conspicuous consumption- where “wealthy elites advertise their riches through highly visible forms of display.” (Veblen 51). However, the couple are also part of an ordinary lifestyle in that they represent the aspiration to accrue material wealth, commodities, and display. And most of the coverage of the wedding indeed centred around monetary value with almost a fixation on designer labels- from the selling of the wedding rights to OK for a million to spending 120,000 pounds on rings alone, from the usher receiving a golden Rolex watch to the newly-weds spending their “first night of married life in the castle’s 3900 dollars a night Royal Suite” (Whannel 210). such examples could be multiplied almost endlessly. Here are a few more samples to highlight the theme of conspicuous consumption. The bridesmaids were dressed as ‘woodland flower fairies’ in outfits specially designed by renowned theatrical costumers. The best man got a specially designed Cartier watch. As for the menu the couple “personally conducted a taste test of dozens of different dishes to decide what they wanted to include on their wedding menu.” Music was from a “eighteen-piece string orchestra” and the cake was a “lavish three-tier creation by Rachel Mount.” (*Andrews and Jackson 146*). Over 400 people were reportedly engaged for the ceremony and three lorries full of flowers were needed.. The descriptive language in many such detailed reporting almost evokes a sense of decadent luxury:

Carpeted in sumptuous deep red, with the walls lined with a pleated ivory taffeta lining, the marquee was more than fitting for the most famous celebrity couple in the world. The spectacular flower arrangements were in three colours: burgundy, green and purple, which created a suitably regal effect. (*Whannel, 210*).

The 2236 marquee guests had sat in gold-coloured chairs at 12 round tables. They would have marvelled at the ornately designed 7ft naked gold figurines- and the two huge Egyptian black cats with piercing gold eyes. (*Andrews and Jackson, 147*).

Victoria’s views on this flamboyant display reveal a decidedly postmodern ironic sensibility. Upon being called out by an expert for the design of an inverted coat of arms for the wedding as being “tacky and amateurish”, she snapped, saying:

“Does anybody really give a shit - d’you know what I mean? Having your own crest- it’s one of them innit? ‘We’re just thinking, this is the biggest day of our lives- we’re just going to go over the top and make it entertaining for everybody. Much as we want it, it’s still one of those.” (Daly).



Being constructed in inter-textual terms, the entire event was indeed markedly hyper-real. The various representations of the wedding also revealed a wistful nostalgia for earlier periods of excesses which the real Royal Family could now no longer stage. As Garry Whannel says "It is as if the Beckham wedding had been staged by the Prince Regent in the Brighton Pavillion." (Whannel 211). The reactions to the spectacle of the wedding on the part of the press revealed the links between class and taste. While *The Observer* deemed it to be pleasant but not particularly bright, *The Sun* called it a fairy-tale. *The Daily Express* commented that the couple had elevated vulgarity into an art form (Whannel 211). *The Guardian* felt that it was "confirmation of a country's coarsening, a dissonant hymn in praise of mammon." (Andrews and Jackson 147). Sue Carroll of the *Daily Mirror* both acknowledges and defends the 'tackiness' of the event:

Well, I admit it was breathtakingly tacky. Barbie-dom meets Brookside, Versace-cum-Spanish brothel...There was something splendid about their fascinating show business excess. Something so utterly over the top it made your heart soar to witness the noble tradition of the truly tacky wedding in all its flamboyant glory. (Whannel 211).

She goes on to describe them as a "couple so totally besotted and wrapped up in one another even their hardened footie mates respect their displays of soppy sentimentality. (Andrews and Jackson 147). It almost seemed as if their love for each other was repeatedly invoked to legitimize the obvious excess. The presiding bishop was convinced that "the couple were in touch with their innermost feelings." (Andrews and Jackson 147). Then there was the effort to focus on their modesty. Posh was quoted as saying "If I'd had a more low-key wedding I would have been called a tight cow. As it is, people say we were flush and over the top. Well that's fine. But we had the most amazing day and that's all that counts." (Whannel 211). "They honestly regard it as a family event. They don't go to many celebrity parties" (*Gentleman*). said a spokesperson of Victoria Adams. Beckham, when asked about his football achievements said "They're all important but having a child means more than anything." (Whannel 211). Lavish display here is excused and legitimized as "ritualistic excesses and abundance that precedes the responsibilities of family and parenthood." (Whannel 211). Thus the representations of the Beckhams after their wedding managed to balance the potential tension between conspicuous consumption and family responsibility. All this contributes to a 'glamorous, but just like us' effect. Rarely have two celebrities commodified their private lives to such lucrative effect.

Beckham' and the postmodern celebrity

A comparison with Liverpool's Robbie Fowler will reveal the fact that Beckham is a postmodern celebrity. Fowler is moulded in the northern working-class masculinity with a workerist and socialist sensibility; someone known to show his support for striking Dockers and homeless people. His baiting of Chelsea's Grahame le Saux also revealed his homophobia (Le Saux was actually a heterosexual, but from the perspective of working-class subculture masculinity his reading of *Guardian* and being an art lover clearly made him a 'suspect'). Fowler did avoid the trappings of flamboyant styles in spite of considerable wealth. As far as representation is concerned, Fowler was found to be and represented as a working class boy made good and in consonance with a grounded northern working-class masculinity.



Beckham, the post-‘new lad’ man on the other hand has flourished in an environment where “men’s interest in fashion, style, narcissism, and the possibility of being objectified have all been nurtured by a decade of the style press (*Arena, GQ, FHM*).” (Whannel 212). It was indeed an era where sports, fashion, and glamour became more interlinked than ever. It was a world where fame is commodified and Beckham the person is almost subsumed by Beckham the image to the point where “His star persona has become the substance, the marketable object.” (Whannel 212). While Fowler seemed to be grounded, Beckham seemed rootless: “he can be dressed in anything because surface appearance is all.” (Whannel 212).

Conclusion

This is one of the reasons that he seems to be a postmodern figure in the realm of representation. The fact that no real chaos ensued after the potentially blasphemous cover of *Time Out* suggests this reading because even if he is dressed as Christ, it does not matter because he is not ‘real’. In this world of media vortex (characterised by sudden and intense media coverage of a certain celebrity, in this case a sporting star), consumption is the new democracy and style is indeed the new cultural capital. The performative skills of David Beckham and Victoria Adams were crucial in their commodification and this, after endless repetitions led to a state where they ended up ‘well known for being well-known’. All this together has led to a decentering of the footballer and the singer respectively. Thus, the curious case of the celebrity status of the Beckhams provides a rich area to study the processes of ‘celebritydom’ and its dynamic relation with the media vortextuality. The image of the sporting star assumes utmost importance as it can be studied to reveal the supposedly postmodern features of the contemporary culture - surface appearance, depthlessness, outlandishly ostentatious, and self-referential in nature. If the cultural context (a fascination with style, fashion, and décor) of the times is taken into consideration it can be safely said that celebrities like the Beckhams in the end represent our fantasies of lifestyle, luxury, conspicuous consumption, and display.

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Author Bio: Mr. Subhasish Guha is, at present, a State Aided College Teacher (I) in the Department of English, Pritilata Waddedar Mahavidyalaya, Nadia, West Bengal. His current area of interest is studying sports and spectacles of antiquity as a cultural performance.