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To cite this article: Ana Raquel Romeu Aguiar (2024) 'Our team will definitely win the cup': the Keralan support of Brazil and Argentina during Men's World Cup 2022, Soccer & Society, 25:4-6, 722-736, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2024.2332095](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2024.2332095)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2024.2332095>



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Published online: 21 Mar 2024.



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# ‘Our team will definitely win the cup’: the Keralan support of Brazil and Argentina during Men’s World Cup 2022

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## ABSTRACT

At the end of 2022, the FIFA Men’s World Cup took place in Qatar, and Argentina won its third title. Among the worldwide supporters, India, a nation that had never played at the event, caught my attention. This study focuses on the state of Kerala, a mainly rural zone in Southwest India, and its massive support for Brazil and Argentina. After a literature review on football in India, the globalization of football, and team rivalries, the study analyzes a few English-written news articles to understand such manifestation of fandom in Kerala, and focuses on the giant cut-outs to find the answer as to why Brazil and Argentina are the teams who received the biggest support. It concludes that the said support has social, political, mediatic, identitarian, and religious roots. The article ends with the question as to how these manifestations differ in different countries, states, championships, and religions.

## Introduction

From 20 November 2022 to 18 December 2022, the 22nd edition of FIFA Men’s World Cup (hereafter World Cup) took place in Qatar, for the first time in the Middle East. The event, which usually happens during June and July, happened in November–December due to the host country’s extreme climate in the summer, where temperature rises over 40 degrees.<sup>1</sup> After a shocking defeat against Saudi Arabia on the first match, Argentina outlasted 31 other teams and became the World Champion for the third time – the first time for soccer idol Lionel Messi and the first time for Latin America in 20 years. The final match against the former reigning champion France was decided on penalties, when the Latino nation scored four goals and the European nation, only two. Meanwhile, Argentina’s biggest rival, Brazil, despite being one of the contenders for the title, was eliminated in the quarterfinals against Croatia, also after penalties.

Not only was this victory celebrated by Argentinians or lamented by Brazilians, but also by Indian supporters of Brazil and Argentina. Although India has never competed in the World Cup, soccer fans still celebrate and perform fan culture, and Brazil and Argentina seem to be the biggest fandoms in the World’s second most populated country.

This work focuses on the state of Kerala, in southwestern coastal India surrounded by mountain ranges on the east and by the Indian Ocean on the west. With around 33 million inhabitants, most citizens follow Hinduism, while a quarter of its population is Muslim, and Christians constitute 1/5 of the population. The population is mainly rural and agriculture is the main economic sector of the

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state.<sup>2</sup> Soccer has been a part of Kerala's life to the extent that they created 'Sevens', a shorter, non-official version of it with fewer players and smaller soccer grounds.<sup>3</sup>

After a literature review on soccer in India and the globalization of the sport, I selected images and interviews of Kerala residents showing their support for either Brazil or Argentina, as well as their rivalry against each other. Giant cut-outs, flags, wall paintings, and even cemetery fights went viral on social media and were recognized by FIFA, Brazil's and Argentina's selections, and a few of its players.

## Literature review

### *Soccer in India*

Soccer was first introduced to India during British colonization in cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, and Karachi. Whilst it is not yet possible to define the exact year the sport came to the country, it is known that one of the first matches happened in Calcutta, in 1854.<sup>4</sup> The oldest team, Dalhousie Club, was established in 1878. At first, soccer was used by colonizers as a 'moral tool' in Victorian schools from the North, as the sport taught principles such as hard work, perseverance, loyalty, and obedience.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, East India, e.g. Calcutta, turned soccer into a form of resistance against those colonizers.<sup>6</sup>

Colleges played a pivotal role in the history of soccer in India. Sports activities became mandatory at the end of the nineteenth century, around the same time the nationalist resistance movements of Bengal started gaining traction,<sup>7</sup> and these movements found in soccer a way to rebel against the British:

Rigorous physical exercise, it was thought, was a way to counter the British stereotyping of effeminacy. The move to playing football is not a coincidence either. The realization that the cultivation of masculine strength by participating in indigenous sports such as wrestling and bodybuilding was not enough, prompted the shift to football. The futility of the physical culture movement, in evidence during the age of consent controversy, in establishing the Bengali's physical strength vis-à-vis the British, had made it imperative for the educated Bengali middle classes to practice manly colonial sports such as football, cricket and tennis.<sup>8</sup>

As the competitive spirit increased, the first national tournaments started to appear at the end of the nineteenth century. In one of these tournaments, the IFA Shield of 1911, the Indian team Mohun Bagan, with mostly barefoot players, beat the British East Yorkshire Regiment 2–1, in front of 60–80,000 spectators. Not only did it become one of the most iconic matches in Indian history, but the club also became a nationalistic symbol.<sup>9</sup> Playing barefoot was also seen as a nationalistic symbol as they were able to defeat boot-wearing British players.<sup>10</sup>

Soccer was also a tool against discrimination. Nagendraprasad Sarbadhikary, known as 'the father of football' in India,<sup>11</sup> was one of the main figures on that end. He criticized the caste prejudice in sporting clubs, especially coming from upper and middle classes. Sarbadhikary dissolved the popular Wellington Club when richer members protested against the induction of Moni Das to the club because Das was from a lower caste. Sarbadhikary, then, created the Sovabazar Club, with Das as one of the members. To fight discrimination, the membership was not restricted to class, caste, religion, and even nationality. Because of such policy, Sovabazar Club became one of the most important clubs in Colonial India.<sup>12</sup> A few years later, the Mohammedan Sporting Club was created, and, after the victory against the British Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1940, became a symbol for Muslim Indians and for the Muslims' separatist movement.<sup>13</sup> Mohammedan also became the first Indian team to challenge the supremacy of the British on the soccer field in India by winning nearly all major tournaments like the IFA Shield, Durand Cup, Rovers Cup and the Calcutta Football League.<sup>14</sup>

India used to be one of the most powerful teams in Asia until the 1960s. They won several medals in regional and continental leagues, such as the Asian Games, the Quadrangular tournament, Asia Cup, and Asia Junior. They qualified to four successive Olympic Games from 1948 to 1960, and even finished 4th in Melbourne 1956. They also qualified to the World Cup in 1950 but due to financial and logistical reasons, they could not travel to host country Brazil and they had to withdraw from the event.<sup>15</sup> It is said, however, that the unwillingness to play with boots, consequently ruining their barefoot game plan, was the true reason India did not come to Brazil.<sup>16</sup> This was the only time India qualified to the event, which means the country has never participated in the World Cup.

After the 1970s, there was stagnation in India's soccer scene, and the Asian soccer powerhouses shifted from South Asia and Southeast Asia to West Asia and East Asia.<sup>17</sup> Both West and East Asia, due to petrol exports and industrialization, respectively, had more money to invest in their teams, while poorer India could not do the same, despite being a former powerhouse. Initially after Independence in 1847, in some contests, wearing boots was mandatory, and not everyone from the barefoot Indian team could afford boots, which also affected the standard of soccer in the country. However, since the 1960s playing with boots became mandatory. At some point, the sport became too centralized in Calcutta, which affected some clubs, and players that did never get proper recognition as they did not play in Calcutta's teams or tournaments.<sup>18</sup> Weather also played a role as Calcutta's rainy season turned soccer football grounds into a muddy area where the athletes could not practice safely.<sup>19</sup> When television arrived in India, in the 1980s, the Indian population could see how foreigners played football, making soccer fans look down on their own national team for its amateurism.<sup>20</sup>

Kerala, for example, is located in Southwest India, therefore, far from Calcutta's soccer scene. Kerala only started to leave its mark on the national soccer scene in the late 1960s, and its consolidation happened after the Kerala team won Santosh Trophy for the first time in 1973.<sup>21</sup> Later in that century, establishments started investing in the region to promote the sport. The government helped in the mission by investing in infrastructure and opening sports schools and colleges.<sup>22</sup>

Mani and Krishnamurthy point out that 'regional arts and sports clubs in Kerala have been known to have played a substantial role in the formation of social spaces that refuse to identify with dominant state or religious institutions'.<sup>23</sup> They analysed the Nainamvalappu Football Fans Association (NFFA), an organization located in Calicut (or Kozhikode), in Northern Kerala. NFFA tried to position itself as an apolitical organization, yet they had political influence. During the 2015 elections, their demand for the construction of a mini-stadium in Khoti became a crucial factor that could decide who would win the upcoming election. That influence turned into 8.000 votes, showing how soccer can unite people for a common interest.<sup>24</sup>

### ***The globalization of soccer***

Mangan defines the British imperialism as one of the factors for the globalization of sports, soccer included. While colonizing countries, the British also exported their ideas and habits, and locals gradually adapted it.<sup>25</sup> India's soccer story is an example of this, as it was brought by the British Empire and mainly played by the British at first, then was appropriated by locals, who imposed some changes (e.g. playing barefoot), and became an anticolonialist weapon against the British themselves.

Decades later, media became another factor in globalization. In an article 'A Sporting Colony of Growing Global Capital: Globalization and Indian Soccer', Majumdar and Bandyopadhyay

affirmed that ‘televised sport, for the Indian masses, became a vehicle for stimulating wants, mustering desires and triggering fantasies’.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in a popular novel, *Striker*, Moti Nandi tells the story of the main character aspiring to be a soccer player who is offered a contract to play in Brazil’s Santos football club, home of worldwide soccer legends like Pelé – and later on, Neymar. The article’s authors argue that the way the novel describes Pelé is proof of his status as an icon in India and helped make Brazil the nation’s favourite team.<sup>27</sup>

The main issue brought by the authors is that national teams and national tournaments were becoming less popular from the 1990s as many Indian soccer fans would rather pay cable TV to watch European Leagues:

Failure on the part of the cable operators to telecast an important European football match often results in them getting beaten up and their offices ransacked. No such ruckus follows a Mohun Bagan-East Bengal encounter, which have hardly been telecast live in recent years.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, foreign professionals are more appreciated than local professionals. Not only does that apply to players, but also to coaches. Consequently, it is harder to improve the Indian national team, resulting in not satisfactory results in international tournaments.<sup>29</sup>

### **Soccer rivalries**

Parrish and Tyler point out that rivalries have several origins: identity (both geographical and cultural), history, psychology etc. The teams become an extension of a supporter’s identity, and their feats go beyond praising the team’s efforts, and become a personal feat for the support, as if they were the ones who achieved it.<sup>30</sup> Rivalries in soccer are not limited to teams from the same town – they also manifest in regions vs. regions, nations vs. nations, or even championships vs. championships.

However, in Brazil, there is a phenomenon that may disrupt rivalries: *torcidas organizadas*, or TOs (organized supporters, in English). *Torcidas organizadas* are associations of supporters that, despite not being official, are usually recognized by the team and have institutional partnerships with the clubs. TOs usually have a bad reputation among Brazilian supporters who are not part of them because their images are constantly related to violence.

TOs can be disruptive in both ways: increasing rivalries within the same team and creating alliances with other TOs from rival teams. Lima, Moura and Antunes state that the main reason for rivalries against TOs is the dispute for space in the stadium. Clubs often reserve a section of the stadium seats to the recognized TOs (all of which are separated). Still, because this separation is not precise (there is nothing on the venue properly separating them), it may become quite blurry and may trigger some incidents. Furthermore, as they continue to increase, the space reserved for them becomes insufficient, causing more issues.<sup>31</sup>

TOs establish alliances with other TOs, yet these alliances are motivated by rivalries. Oliveira and Veloso cite the example of an alliance between Torcida Jovem do Botafogo (Botafogo/RJ), Força Jovem do Vasco (Vasco/RJ), Mancha Alviverde (Palmeiras/SP), and Galoucura (Atlético Mineiro/MG). Even though Botafogo and Vasco are rivals, this alliance surged from a similar hand gesture in common, where supporters cross their hands and show their middle fingers. This gesture is a provocation against the TOs of Flamengo (RJ). In the end, two rivals unite to provoke another rival of theirs.<sup>32</sup>

The Brazil-Argentina rivalry can go beyond the national selection. Sometimes, in international competitions such as *Libertadores* or *Sudamericana*, Brazilians root for the Brazilian team (unless, of course, it is the biggest rival of one’s own team) to win just



because the other team is from Argentina, and vice versa. For example, the Facebook post of a popular soccer page showed that Fluminense (Brazil) won the Libertadores Cup against Boca Juniors (Argentina) in 2023. Comments on the post ranged from ‘I support Corinthians (SP) but these guys deserved it a lot. They played so well. Congratulations, Fluminense’ and ‘I am a Botafogo (RJ) supporter but I was rooting for Fluminense’ to ‘If there are sad Argentinians then I’m happy’, ‘Every suffering for Boca Juniors supporters is not enough’ and ‘If the Argentinians and the Flamengo supporters are sad, Brazil is happy’.<sup>33</sup>

## Methods

I selected cut-outs displayed in Kerala during the World Cup, consulted articles about the subject, and analysed the cut outs, photos, the interviews, and the crosses between images and discourses. Sources varied from national news portals to international media outlets which noticed the frenzy in Kerala. For the latter, nearly all the journalists were South Asian correspondents. Since I speak neither Malayalam, Kerala’s official language, nor Hindi or any other semi-official language in India, all articles I analysed were written in English

## Discussion

### Cutouts

One of the ways the Keralans visually showed their support for Brazil and Argentina was using giant cut-outs. Figures 1 and 2 show cut-outs of Messi and Neymar in the middle of a riverbank in Pullavoor.



**Figures 1 and 2.** Messi’s cut-out in Pullavoor before and after Neymar’s outcut outsized it. Note: The first picture was taken from Al Jazeera; the second, from The Irish Sun.<sup>34</sup>

*The Irish Sun* explores the rivalry narrative in its article. The author comments that the Argentinian fans placed Messi's 9-metre cut-out first, then the Brazilian fans placed Neymar's 12-metre cut-out on the same riverbank to outsize Messi's.<sup>35</sup>

Rivalries can be classified in two ways: the dispute-density rivalry, defined by the number of disputes, and the enduring rivalry, defined by the severity and time.<sup>36</sup> Discourse and identity also matter in rivalries, as one can observe in chants: not only do fans express where they belong, but also where they do not belong. For example, fans will echo how much they love their own team and, on the next minute, they will insult their rivals.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, 'carefully choreographed displays of colourful flags and banners are also utilized by fans inside the stadium, in order to intimidate rival fans and demonstrate that they are superior, taking 'audio-visual passion to new heights'.<sup>38</sup>

The cut-outs work similarly to the chants in this case. Instead of fans echoing their support, their giant idols do the job. Brazil fans chose the same spot as Argentina fans to intimidate them by creating a taller, thus better, cut-out. However, there is another key factor: next to the area<sup>39</sup> the fans placed the cut-outs, there is a soccer ground, as shown in Figures 3 and 4.



Figures 3 and 4. Neymar's giant cut-out. Soccer ground near the riverbank in where the outcuts were placed. Both pictures were taken from Google users.<sup>40</sup>

That means fans did not randomly pick a place: their idols are next to them, showing off their World Cup Titles while they perform their own soccer, perhaps hoping for a future like Moti Nandi's *Striker* protagonist's. In an article from *The New York Times*, Raj interviewed Nousheer Nellikode, who was responsible for Messi's cut-out, confirmed that:

During World Cups, large cutouts of star players can be found along roads and in other places around Kerala. 'But inside the river next to the football field from my childhood? That is special to this village setting', Nellikode said.<sup>41</sup>

The river was not the only place where these cut-outs appeared. Figure 5 shows a 32-metre cut-out of Neymar placed in Ottapalam, and Figure 6 shows a giant Messi cut-out in Vellayil.



**Figures 5 and 6.** Neymar's and Messi's giant cutouts. Figure 5 was taken from *Diário do Nordeste*; and figure 6, from *Al Jazeera*.<sup>42</sup>

For reference, the Cristo Redentor statue, one of Brazil's main postcards, is 38-metres high.<sup>43</sup>

Cut-outs play a similar role of statues by representing political values through iconography.<sup>44</sup> Not only do we find cut-outs of soccer players but also of cricket players, famous actors, and even Prime Minister Narendra Modi across India. Statues are also source of activism as monuments of colonizers, for example, are taken down and given place to local heroes instead.<sup>45</sup> If the Brazilian and the Argentinian Keralan fans consider Brazil and Argentina their teams, are Neymar and Messi being portrayed as local heroes?

Giant cut-outs are a popular way of promoting a product or service, especially in rural India, as it would grab the attention and arouse the interest of the population.<sup>46</sup> It is likely that this strategy has religious roots, as Hinduism and iconography walk hand in hand. Hindus can use, for example, the image of a deity just for worshipping, as 'iconography and pantheism are the very founts of an average Hindu devotee's faith'.<sup>47</sup> Kerala is a mainly Hindu-majority state, so these visual depictions are more 'normalized' than in Muslim dominated regions of India.

Yet, we can find new layers of interpretation in those cut-outs, as we can see in [Figure 7](#), which shows [Figure 5](#) from another perspective.





**Figures 7.** Photo posted by Neymar of the cut-out shown in Figure 5. Taken from Neymar's website twitter account.<sup>48</sup>

Vertical angle shots are used to express power relations.<sup>49</sup> The photo was taken in a low-angle shot, which indicates image power.<sup>50</sup> Messaris argues that "The mapping between image-viewer power relation and vertical camera angle is based on the structural features of real-life situations in which we 'look up' to powerful people and 'look down' upon weak people."<sup>51</sup> Given all the contexts from this article, the photo portrays Neymar from a heroic perspective, where adults and kids have him as a possible inspiration, especially if they aspire(d) to be soccer players.

### **The media**

India's support for Argentina started during the 1980s. Before that, Brazil was the main representation of Latin American soccer,<sup>52</sup> but once the television arrived in India, in the same decade, Indian soccer fans could see the triumph of the Argentinian team, especially Maradona's successful campaign that led to Argentina's second World Cup trophy in 1986.<sup>53</sup> After that, both Argentina and Brazil became the representation of the soccer that challenged Europe's, as many professional players and idols from both teams came from underprivileged backgrounds, and Indians identified

more with that background than with European players 'who were only capable of using their body as machines'.<sup>54</sup>

The representation of both teams as 'hope' comes from soccer history, especially during the beginning of last century. Natali points out that Latin American countries – Uruguay more specifically – were the first ones to allow people of colour and people of lower social classes in what was restricted to the elites and middle classes, and faced backlash because of that. It was no different in Latin America, and perhaps more evident in Brazil. When América-RJ hired a black player to the team, several white players abandoned it. Furthermore, several athletes had to disguise traces of their black or mestizo identity to play the game, and sometimes even the disguises were not enough and they were prohibited to represent a team or the national selection.<sup>55</sup> After some pressure, the teams gradually started accepting black players, which ended up in the iconic era of the 1950s and 1960s, when Pelé and Garrincha, two men of colour, were considered two of the best of the world.<sup>56</sup> The author compares how Brazil appropriated and changed the entire soccer scenario – from its public to its language – to what happened with cricket in India.<sup>57</sup> It is possible that their roles as decolonizers created a feeling of identification as 'in the Brazilians, the Bengalis find their poor, non-white clones, who can meet their dream of meeting the imperialists and neo-colonialists head on'.<sup>58</sup>

Naha highlights the impact of Pelé on India's fan culture, more evident after the idol's visit to Calcutta, in 1977. The press and biographies were responsible for starting the portrayal of Pelé as a hero, since television had not arrived in India during his soccer career.<sup>59</sup> Mark and Pearson defines the hero archetype as one who 'triumphs over evil, adversity, or a major challenge, and in so doing, inspires us all'.<sup>60</sup> It is the archetype that will face a challenge and, with its talent and bravery, will overcome it and make the world a better place. This narrative suits Pelé's journey: a black man who had to face racism yet triumphed against whiter teams and players who undermined him and the Brazilian selection for not being white enough. It is no surprise that he is also a symbol of 'black solidarity'.<sup>61</sup>

Like Moti Nandi's book, several Indian articles, biographies, and stories also portray Pelé in a heroic light. For this study, I will highlight two of them, both taken from Naha's study. The first one is Pelé's biography by Jayanta Dutta, *Ami Pelé Bolchi* (I am Pele Speaking) (1972). Not only does Dutta comments about his feats, but also imagines his career had been born in India:

Dutta acknowledged that Pelé was fortunate to have been born in Brazil. Had he been born in India, he would have been beaten by his father for playing football instead of studying. Good sporting performances would have earned him a clerical job in a bank. He would have travelled in tram cars and buy his own daily grocery. He would have got an Arjuna or a Padmashri–governmental awards in recognition of one's sporting accomplishments. Had he been an Indian, playing in the Merdeka tournament in Indonesia would have been his destiny; he would not have ruled the game.<sup>62</sup>

Therefore, Pelé, and consequently the Brazilian team, also became a symbol of 'what could have been', as we can also observe in Nandi's novel, because the main character, Prasun, dreams of becoming a professional soccer player – and particularly a soccer player in a Brazilian team.

The second work is a short story by Dibyendu Palit about a clerk who is a Brazil supporter and refuses to root for any other team:

'No, that's not possible'. Kinkar sat up straight, 'Brazil can't lose'.  
You don't realize. Why do we care if Brazil wins or loses?

Kinkar stared at him for a short while. Watching Dilip with intent, he said, 'Excuse me. I can be his servant, but can't betray Brazil. Brazil will win. I'll go to him after we lift the Cup'.

Dilip sat down. He looked Kinkar straight in the eyes, 'You're strange. Why do you support Brazil so fanatically?'

'Because-', Kinkar fumbled for words, looking confused and desperate to respond. Taking a brief pause, he said, 'You know why? I feel they are my team, they are like us-'.<sup>63</sup>

In the present, the discourse slightly changed. Instead of 'they are like us', the Brazilian team is now part of them. The same applies to the Argentinian team and its fans. In an article for *The Guardian*, Ellis-Petersen interviewed supporters of Argentina about their expectations for the final against France and the reason they are such avid fans of a team from another continent. Argentina supporter S Abhijith, from the village of Mallappuzhassery, answered 'For us, this is the biggest celebration', he said. 'Our team will definitely win the cup'.<sup>64</sup> At *South First*, Jha also interviewed some locals. Jinil Narayanan, an Argentina fan, commented that:

I have been waiting for this for the most of my lifetime. What we lost in the last moment of 2014, we regained this year. Argentina won by beating both teams that they lost to in 2018, it was revenge for us but ended up in glory!<sup>65</sup>

For *The Hindu*, Praveen interviewed Salih Malappuram, the administrator of a collective of Argentina fans on Whatsapp: 'Many of us got beaten up by the police for celebrating late into night. But the pain was nothing compared to the joy of ending the 36 years-long wait to see our team at the top of world football'.<sup>66</sup>

The rivalry was also present among the Keralan supporters. A video went viral after supporters of Brazil and Argentina clashed in Kollam in a cemetery. It was not stated what triggered the reaction. Piauí describes a case where a student refused to respond to a Messi-themed question in an exam because she was 'a Neymar fan and a Brazilian supporter' and 'did not like Messi'.<sup>67</sup>

One can also notice other forms of support. *The Hindustan Times* affirms that, in Kochi, a group of 17 fans – residents of Mundakkamugal village – pooled funds and bought a house for ₹23 lakh – just to watch matches together!<sup>68</sup> *India Today* shows another case where people in the village contributed with a few hundred rupees so that they could prepare the posters and paintings all around the village. It also states that the colony, located in Thiruvananthapuram, has its soccer team and a painting with a phrase reading 'Say No to Drugs and Yes to Football'.<sup>69</sup>

The affection for the two South American teams was also seen in similar forms in previous World Cups. 2018 seemed even more polarized. While in 2022, supporters for, for example, Portugal were spotted, one news media affirms that not even the reigning champions Germany had a significant number of supporters if compared to Brazil in Argentina.<sup>70</sup> In the same year, a Kerala couple grabbed the media's attention. Thrissur-based Monisha and Roshan wore Brazil's and Argentina's jerseys, and celebrated their rivalry in their wedding photoshoot. The couple is passionate about soccer, which led to picking the iconic rivalry as their theme. *The New Indian Express* stated in the same article that there was a wedding reception of another couple (Jobin and Irene) that was Argentina-themed – everything in light blue and white tones, including the cake.<sup>71</sup>

This feeling of belonging might appear natural because of the lack of their national team at the World Cup, but India's history also explains such big love. Both Brazil and Argentina were underdog nations who heroically made history when their potential was undermined for not being either white or European. They became anticolonialist symbols, which is part of the symbolic meaning soccer has in India. In an article for *The Times of India*, author Arnab Ray says he is an Argentina supporter but in case they are eliminated, he will 'of course, root for Brazil, and after that every non-European nation all the way to the very end. Kinship of the oppressed, we are like this only'.<sup>72</sup>

After such tremendous support, Argentina noticed Kerala. In 2023, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan (also an Argentina supporter) was gifted an Argentina jersey by the Argentinian ambassador Hugo Javier Gobbi.<sup>73</sup> In the same year, Kerala sports minister V Abdurahiman stated that the Argentinian team was interested in playing in Kerala, and they reinforced the will in the following year as well.<sup>74</sup> The Messi-led team is predicted to

arrive in Kerala in October of 2025, where they will play two matches and coach thousands of soccer lovers in a collaboration with Kerala Football Association.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

Kerala's support for Brazil and Argentina comes from a similar anticolonialist narrative: both teams found their paths to victory against the imperialist white European nations that once undermined them for their non-white players. As soccer became a weapon against the British, it is logical to support nations who also had to face colonialism throughout their stories. This is also where one can notice the roots for such identification.

The giant cut-outs and decorations are a visual way to show Keralans' support for their favourite team, and a way to maintain the rivalry between them, especially as an awaited match between the two teams has not happened in a World Cup in decades. The supporters ask themselves and even challenge their rivals to try to be better than them. The giant cut-outs are also a way to reinforce a player's status as the hero for them, as someone they look up to, as shown by Neymar's tweeted picture.

The media and other writings also played an important role as several authors wrote stories where they portrayed Pelé as an icon and the Brazilian team as the symbol of hope and opportunities for aspiring soccer players. As television arrived in India during the time of Maradona's Argentina, fandom around Argentina was at its peak.

There are questions that demand deeper studies. How do different religions interpret these manifestations? How different is the support from Kerala from the support from India's neighbours like Pakistan and Bangladesh?<sup>76</sup> Or even inside India itself: is there any difference between Kerala's manifestations and Kolkata's manifestations? Also, what do other unexplored forms of showing support, such as wall paintings, tell about Kerala's relation to soccer? Is there any difference between the support and rivalry in huge events like World Cup to smaller continental events like Copa América? Finally, how can one compare the support for Brazil and Argentina with the support for the Indian soccer team or perhaps local teams? It is hoped future studies will address some of these questions.

## Notes

1. World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal: Qatar. n.d. <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/qatar/climate-data-historical#:~:text=Qatar%20has%20a%20desert%20climate,fall%20below%205%C2%B0C>.
2. Noble, 'Kerala'.
3. 'Sevens Football and Malappuram'.
4. Majumdar and Bandyopadhyay, *A Social History of Indian Football*, 6.
5. Ibid., 7.
6. Ibid., 8.
7. Ibid., 9.
8. Ibid., 10.
9. Kapadia, 'Triumphs and Disasters', 18. Also see Bandyopadhyay, *Playing for Freedom*.
10. Majumdar and Bandyopadhyay, *A Social History of Indian Football*, 18.
11. Ibid., 12.
12. Ibid., 14–15.
13. Kapadia, 'Triumphs and Disasters', 21.
14. It won the Calcutta Football League five in a row from 1934 to 1938. See Bandyopadhyay, *Scoring Off the Field*, Chapter 3.
15. Kapadia, 'Triumphs and Disasters', 23–24.
16. Ray, 'The Decline of Indian Football', 512.
17. Ibid., 511.
18. Ibid., 515.
19. Ibid., 514.



20. Ibid., 516.
21. Majumdar and Bandyopadhyay, *A Social History of Indian Football*, 119.
22. Ibid., 119–120.
23. Mani and Krishnamurthy, *Making a locality*, 2.
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35. Hughes, 'Fans erect 40 ft Neymar cut-out'.
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37. Ibid., 483.
38. Ibid., 484.
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44. Frank and Ristic, 'Urban Fallism', 554.
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46. Suresh and Sathyanarayana, 'Rural Communications', 34.
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49. Feng and O'Halloran, 'The visual representation of metaphor', 322.
50. Ibid., 330.
51. Messaris, *Visual literacy*, cited in ibid, 330.
52. Boria Majumdar tells this story of Brazil's importance in India in general and Calcutta (Kolkata) in particular in an article that deals with the impact of Brazil's World Cup victory of 2002 in Kolkata. See Majumdar, 'Kolkata colonized'. However, he remained more or less silent on the significant presence of Argentinian fans in Kolkata during the World Cup and the arch rivalry between Brazil and Argentina fans in the city at that time.
53. Mitra and Naha, 'Politics and international fandom in a fringe nation', 4.
54. Ibid., 5–6.
55. Natali, 'The Realm of the Possible', 269.
56. Ibid., 270.

57. Ibid., 271.
58. Naha, 'Of magic and mania', 808.
59. Ibid., 808.
60. Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 105.
61. Naha, 'Of magic and mania', 810.
62. Ibid., 810–811.
63. Ibid., 816.
64. Ellis-Petersen, "Our Team Will Win".
65. Jha, 'Kerala erupts in a rollercoaster'.
66. Praveen, 'Argentina fans in Kerala on cloud nine'.
67. Corrêa, 'Na Índia, uma torcida dividida entre Brasil e Argentina'.
68. Kar, 'FIFA fervour turns violent in Kerala as Argentina-Brazil fans clash, video viral'.
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70. Raghavan, 'Why Kerala is polarized between Brazil & Argentina'.
71. The New Indian Express, 'Soccer-crazy couple have a ball in the rain'.
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76. One work mentions Bangladeshis to be no less fanatic in their support for Argentina and Brazil. See Bandyopadhyay, *Bangladesh Playing*, Chapter 3.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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