

## Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day*: A Model of Cultural Paradigm Shift in India

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### Abstract

In this era of commercialization, the nature of cultural values and the aspirations of post-modern generations have significantly taken new shifts and credence. Aravind Adiga's novel *Selection Day* (1915), reflects the commercialization of cricket in India. It is framed in the contemporary cricket centric people of India who push the young generations into the world of cricket to fulfil their commercial needs. In the novel Mohan Kumar who, without knowing the inclinations of his sons, determines their career. His desire to see them as the best and the second-best cricketers in the world remains unfulfilled. So, this paper will be a critique on the both aspects (positive and negative) of obsession towards cricket. Firstly, it aims to perceive how the glamour of cricket engrosses the minds of the people, journalists and sponsors who misapprehend the potential of young growing children and put them on the stage of cricket which leads them into the state of penitence. The other aspect the paper will rationalize that how the power of this obsession helps the people (Kumar family) to come out from a slum area to a metropolitan city.

**Keywords:** Commercialization, cultural shifts, generations, contemporary, engrosses, power, misapprehend, metropolitan.

The 'Commercialization of games' has been one of the dominant orientation at the present time. In this process of commercialization, the aura of sports has diminished, and a 'popular culture' has evolved out grasping the commercial aspect in it. Here the popular

culture simply means the interest of the masses. The renowned cultural critic Raymond Williams writes about this new form that, “all cultures are, at any time, in any epoch, basically the production of the dominant class” (905). According to him ‘culture’ is the product of the ‘dominant class’ of the society which is found in the accessible form, “popular culture is always, and must be, the culture of the dominant class transmitted in an accessible form” (905). Aravind Adiga’s novel *Selection Day* (2016) deals with the commercialization of cricket and reveals multi-facet merits and demerits of passion towards cricket in India. The story of the novel revolves around cricket obsessed people in India who want to earn name and money through hiring young cricketers. Pramod Sawant comes with a news of a talented cricketer Manjunath Kumar to a cricket obsessed coach of Mumbai Cricket Association, Tommy Sir, who is a visionary but now becomes frustrated and sick of cricket because of his constant failure in search of a gifted cricketer. His mental agony is noticeable at the beginning of the novel when he broaches, “Pramod, I am sick of cricket talk me of battles” (1). He wants to fulfil the ambitious dream, “before I die, I want to discover a new Vivian Richards, Hanif Mohammed or Don Bradman” (10). He has a dealing with Mohan Kumar who envisages of his sons that, “one of us should be the best batsman in the world, and the other the second best” (20). Mohan Kumar, who is very poor and lives in a slum of Mumbai. Highly speculative of his sons (Radha Kumar and Manju Kumar) will be star cricketer in future and put them under strict rules i.e. ‘his austerity for their cricket practice and foods’. Every year he goes to his village Mangalore to pray God of Cricket: Kukke Subramanya, their ‘family deity’ to bless his sons. Tommy Sir dislikes the fellow, but curious to hire the young boys as Adiga writes, “Tommy Sir wants the boy more than he wants a glass of water on a hot day” (11). He introduces the boys to Anand Mehta, an investor, who negotiates with the branded sponsors. He picks the boys for his ‘cricket sponsorship programme’ offering

money to Mohan Kumar, the penniless father, “simple. I’ll give you certain sum a month. You can pay all your expenses using this certain sum. In return, I negotiate for him in the future with Adidas or Nike or whoever wants him when he joins Indian Premier League” (36). Discontented with the contact, as he wants fifteen thousand per month for both the boys, which the boys do not engross. Mohan Kumar does not allow the pairs to do other activities of their attention, like, watching T.V., making friends, eating fast-foods. He only wishes them to practice in the ground. Once he found Radha with a girl named ‘Sofia’ unable to endure the sight he chases them, while chasing, his leg gets injured. Mr. Mehta comes forward and offers the material comfort to treat his injury. When the Harris Shield trophy begins, Manju proves his potential scoring 497 runs, while his elder brother Radha (highly regarded) fails on every front. Here Javed, his rival who is not interested in cricket also scores well. Like Radha his father wants him to be the captain of Indian team as he says, “I’m in his business. He wants to make me captain of India” (113). Manju also confesses to Javed that he wishes to be a scientist rather than a cricketer. Meanwhile Manju gets selected for scholarship, to visit a tour, of England for six weeks while his elder brother fails to be selected. Mohan Kumar gets disappointed, thinking that Manju has stolen the place of his elder brother. He calls him, “Radha, come back, we will work out a plan together. We’ll make Manju return what he stole-” (131). But on the other side the selection of Manju gives him some excitement. Radha starts rivalry with Manju, “maybe if I keep pinching you like this, I will destroy your batting arm, Manju” (135). On his return from England, spending six weeks, Manju gets limelight through his interviews in press conferences. He is asked about English culture and foods. Manju does not change his life style because of the fear of his father, although Javed tries to persuade him to learn English manners and criticises him. Manju shares his thoughts and interests with Javed, even shares his homosexuality. His family once used to live in a

slum in Dahisar now lives in a respectable place Chembur with the ‘power of cricket’, “we discovered our first young Lion this evening three years ago in a slum in Dahisar. Today, he lives in a good neighbourhood in Chembur: proof of the magical power of cricket to uplift lives in today’s India” (187). On the selection day, when everybody is highly speculative about Radha’s talent, but he fails, which shocks everyone on the other hand Manju is highly appreciated. Manju, thinking he has taken the place of his elder brother runs away to Navi Mumbai sheltering in the house of Javed, his cricket co-star. But the memories of cricket hallucinates him and he returns. The abrupt setting of the second part of the novel is seen after eleven years of the selection day. Manjunath Kumar is twenty-seven-year-old, his contract with sponsorship has been terminated. Both brothers share their memories: Tommy Sir, who has died, Anand Mehta and their father.

The novel displays both the positive and negative aspects of cricket in India. On the one hand it shows how cricket highly attracts the masses, provides entertainment and luxurious life style. At the same time, it shows that the imposition of this highly competitive game leads the youth into distress. Mohan Kumar’s ambitious yearning to direct his sons into cricket is a gamble and imposition. Adiga mentions the story of some boys he met to write this book, “they are told they must make the cut on selection day: or else there is no future for them and their families” (interview). He wants them to be the best batsmen of the world without knowing their comforts. He is more concerned about earning money and uplifting his family position, which is part of a slum area in Mumbai. To him cricket is the best medium to get out of it. Consequently, he gets the reward, the power of cricket fulfils his dream to move from a slum to a high-class society, Chembur. He has certain contract with Mr. Mehta who pays him an amount of money in exchange of his sons, with the help of his money he improves his poverty. But the obsessed cricket centric nature makes him blind. He is

unconcerned about his children's requirements, puts them under strict rules. His son Manju has taste for 'scientific pursuit' which he prohibits. Because of his constant pressure, he becomes a 'villain' in the eyes of his sons as Radha says to Manju, "don't think about going back to that man to Chambur" (246). Radha, although being exceptional, fails on all the occasions. The failure of Mohan Kumar represents many parents in India, which Adiga acknowledges about, who are fanatical about the cricketing world, and more than this, they are fascinated with the extravagance life style of it. At the last of the novel Adiga wants to convey the message that parents must consider about the choices of their children as he reveals through the conversation of Radha and Manju; who are unsatisfied with their lives and share their thoughts, "He threw Manju's envelop to the ground 'You're drunk Radha. Eleven years ago, I had no choice. How many times have I told you? 'then have children. And make sure they have a choice. You know I can't do it'" (278).

The novel interrogates the role of 'Indian media' which Adiga examines, is in the worst condition. The media channels are more oriented to the 'yellow journalism' (sensational news) than presenting the requirement of the citizens. Adiga writes, "for that we must understand the second problem facing India today. Sensationalism. In other world, our Indian media, which is the joke of the world" (128). He senses the deteriorated functioning of the Indian media who die for TRP of their channels. Because cricket is a dominating game in India and has taken the place of other national games, the journalists find it the best way to attract the minds of young generation. About the dominance of cricket-oriented journalism, he writes, "and the biggest sensation we have in this country is called cricket" (128). An article about cricket expresses that, "Success in the sport even at the school level brings the boys media attention making them local celebrities first in Dahisar Slum and their Bandra School and later in their Chembur housing society" (Hindustan Times).

‘Corruption’ is one of the dark faces encircling in this game. IPL and other cricket leagues are generating platform for ‘match fixing’ where bookies operate their channels from different parts of the world. The last lines of CBI report of match fixing reveals that, “the crisis facing cricket is very different and far more sinister than ‘body line’ controversy. Cricket, as it is played at present, does not appear to be same game played” (75). Adiga recounts number of incidents of the past history, where the matches were fixed from the ‘underworld’. In an interview he says, “there have been numerous scandals associated with match fixing and illegal batting ...if you walk down the streets of Indian city today, you’ll see people gambling money on matches that are happening across the world, whether they feature India or not” (interview). The coach in agony of lose reveals, “my darling, my cricket. Phixed and ph...ed. How did this thing, our shield and chivalry, our Roncesvalles and Excalibur, go over other side, and become part of this great nastiness” (review). In modern time, the game cricket is not played for the sake of game, it has been game of ambition and glamour. The involvement of ‘Bollywood celebrities’ has given a new appearance to this game. Mehta describes the game as “state-sponsored lobotomy” (review).

Another prominent facet about the modern cricket is its ‘agreement with the sponsors’. Sponsors, for the sake of the publicity of their products and brands offer them innumerable amount of money. Adiga writes about the role of sponsors, through which cricketers win fame. Mr. Mehta pays a big amount to Mohan Kumar, a deal for Manju, in return he will negotiate with brands and get his money back, “I negotiate of him in the future with Adidas or Nike or whoever wants him when he joins Indian premier league” (36). This shows the dominance of the game on modern life style where superfluous players are role model for youngsters and others. Adiga says:

There's always a fair amount of money involved in cricket in India. But what happened in the last two decades is that, ironically, this game that in some ways began in England and was, if you will, an aristocratic backlash against industrial capitalism, that game has become the spearhead of new Indian capitalism, in the sense that cricket is used to sell everything here, from mobile phone to consumer product like shampoo and soap. (Interview)

The Indian Premier League is one of the prominent agents of 'commercialized culture' in India as Adiga says, "Indian Premier League has taken the commercialization of game to a new level" (interview). Here sponsors play important roles who auction the players with great enthusiasm with big deal of money. He argues, IPL has made cricket access to lower class, which he says, "down to the social hierarchy. So, the lot of poor boys are playing cricket" (interview). The two months of IPL festival millions of people watch the clash from the different parts of the world, but, the dark facet of it becomes apparent when what happens behind the curtain is uncovered. Here businessmen search young talented cricketers to sponsor their merchandise as Mr. Mehta does in the novel. This episode is based on the real incident of Adiga's life. He comments, "this businessman was looking for boys to sponsor, on the understanding if they made it in the IPL to play for Mumbai or India, he would receive a substantial portion of their marketing or advertising revenue" (interview).

To conclude the novel demonstrates how cricket has been made an agent of entertainment, popularity, earning money and in the most negative sense corruption. It is mislaying its gentle spirit of game and entertainment and has become 'industry of money' and 'corruption'. The country like India where 22 percent of population comes under the below poverty line is offering such innumerable amount to the cricketers is a parody. The Board of Cricket Control in India is the richest cricket boards in the world and on the other

hand other games are facing big crisis of money. Along with this the novel reflects that dimension of society whose covetousness leads their 'new generation' into 'unproductivity'. In this sense the leading character Mohan Kumar is the 'villain' of the novel who spoils the scientific career of Manju Kumar and forces him to choose his profession as a cricketer. His 'ambition' to become 'prosperous' and 'wealthy' is partly filled when he manages to come out of the slum Dahisar to Chambur, but this ambition renders his children in the state of penitence who blame each other at the last of the novel thinking about those missed opportunities. The man he contracts with; Mr. Mehta, similarly, shares the boys' fortune to strengthen his financial need. The quest of coach, Tommy Sir, also remains unfulfilled who dies just after Manju is selected for the Mumbai cricket team where he fails. Thus, the whole novel revolves around making a superstructure on the base of cricket. This superstructure (commercial power) of cricket is affecting the intellectual, ethical, ontological, metaphysical progress of the post-modern society. In this process a new cultural society, which is more concerned about the pursuit of money and glamour, is manifesting.

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