

Sachin Tendulkar's Playing It My Way: A Study of Sports Autobiographies and National Pride

Micky Barua

*Assistant Professor, Dept. of Humanities, Vidyalandar Institute of Technology, Wadala (East)
PIN-400037*

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The "gentleman's game" cricket has long since retained a specialised niche in English literature which can be accounted to the unique culture of the sport which emphasizes on ideals like grace, sportsmanship, character and complexity. Making use of these ideals Cricket has persistently made inroads into various forms of literature ranging from Victorian Literature to the recent cricket fictions from Australia and New Zealand. While today's reading fraternity may be enjoying the recent releases of Cric fictions Jock Serong's *The Rules of Backyard Cricket* (2016) or W. J. Foote's *Poetry in Motion: The Tragic Tale of the Pukemanu Prodigy*, New Zealand's *Greatest Slow Bowler* (2003), one cannot help but only contemplate the thought process of the legendary Charles Dickens who first ventured to include a brief description of a cricket match between the All-Muggleton team and the Dingley Dell Cricket Club in his famous novel *The Pickwick Papers*. Albeit, Cricket being the official summer sport in England, it is the fast-gaining popularity of this sport in South Asia that is drawing global attention. This popularity is not merely as a sport, but as a platform for various ventures, the most commonly sought medium being literature in the form of cric fiction. The onus of this amalgamation can be accounted to the tendency of fiction to sneak into cricket anecdotes and prevalence of writers equipped with the gifted literary skills to connect the game of cricket with the reality beyond the boundary fence.

Today's game of cricket surpasses political, socio-cultural, religious and geographical divides. It has the potential of being an effective catalyst towards social cohesion, unity, excitement and integration. The global diffusion of this sport not only facilitates the development of an identity at the individual, local or national level, but is also

proving to be a powerhouse gaining usage as sociocultural, political and economic means. The transnational interconnectedness has created open grounds for presenting the various societal issues in the global context, thereby fuelling the scope for further study before jumping into any conclusion. Given the game's fast paced growth, the cricketing autobiographies are majorly concentrating on developments within cricket that are unheard of. One such autobiography that have been considered for reading is Sachin Tendulkar's *Playing it My Way*. In this autobiography, an effort shall be made to undermine how the notion of nation and identity is intertwined in the making of a cricketing legend.

This study scrutinizes the autobiography to assess how sports and nationalism are connected. This chapter is a study of Sachin Tendulkar's *Playing it My Way* to show how these texts establish and contest the notions of rivalry and success. The autobiography starts with the dream of every father to make his child a national icon of sports. This was evident in the first chapter, *Childhood*, where Sachin's father says to his son: "You are a cricketer and sportsman. You are fortunate to be representing your country, and that is a great honour" (P W Y 4)

His elder brother, Ajit Tendulkar is a father figure for him as it was he who observed his natural batting swing while playing with his colony friends. The idling of time during summers led Ajit to think of Ramakant Achrekar's coaching camp where Sachin had his foundational training. The role of a coach as a transitional parent was evident in various instances of his life and he acknowledges his success to his coach:

Looking back at these years of cricket, I must say I owe a lot to my coach Ramakant Achrekar – as well as his assistants....Had it not

been for Sir, I would not be the cricketer I turned out to be. He was a strict disciplinarian and did everything he could for me.

(P M W 28)

Sachin fondly recalls his first tour which is like a dream come true for him as he got an opportunity to play cricket for India. He was playing the most difficult cricket of playing Pakistan in Pakistan. Nevertheless, a cricketer feels pride in the very realization that he was playing competitive cricket and had become a part of the Indian squad. This affiliation to nation and national identity is linked to his identity as a cricketing legend.

Though any sport heralds the ideals of sportsmanship, conflict and team building, there are some unpleasant feelings associated with sports too. On his first day of international cricket, Sachin witnessed a person coming to the field abusing Kapil Dev for being in Pakistan. The notion of nationalism, of sportsmanship were questioned in the mind of a young cricketer:

The truth is that it was much more than a cricket match that was being played between the two teams. The political history of partition has always cast a pall over India-Pakistan cricket and it was my first taste of this unfortunate reality. (PMY 37)

The journey of Sachin continued through foreign conditions which gave him a wealth of experience. The series of India in New Zealand in February-March 1990, India in England in July-August 1990, India in Australia in November 1991 to February 1992 had many life lessons for Sachin. It had those precious moments of meeting Viv Richards, Sir Donald Bradman. Meeting legendary heroes of cricket had a fundamental impact on his career.

For any cricketer, captaincy is a great honor and Sachin too had to uphold the flag of India as a captain. The pressures of media, selection committee etc. were all undoubtedly the challenges which Sachin had handled with grace and patience. He contemplates the lack of team bonding in the matches and also the anomaly of decisions made by selection committee. Perhaps the notion of nation building is also fraught with certain challenges as expressed:

Looking back at my own captaincy career, I felt I could have achieved better results during my first stint as captain had there been more cooperation. I never felt totally comfortable with the relationship with the selectors...Every captain sets out to win but it's not always possible to do so in international sport. (P MW 175)

The 2003 World Cup was special for Sachin as the bat he was presented with as the Man of the Tournament was made of gold though he did not realize it till he landed in Mumbai. Sachin was awarded for scoring 673 runs though he was more at loss of his team than happy on his personal achievement:

Looking back, the 2003 World Cup remains a bitter-sweet memory. We played some excellent cricket as a team and I contributed well in almost all of the matches – but not in the final...the World Cup Trophy was still eluding me. (P M W 235)

J. Coakley and Eric Dunning in Handbook of Sports Studies propound that sport and societies are so closely linked that sport can be considered as a social system. Undoubtedly, this was evident in the memoir of Sachin Tendulkar too. They describe one of the positions that have developed over a period of time: “Sports and societies are most accurately conceptualized as the unplanned products of the interaction over time of pluralities of conscious, interdependent, differently powerful, emotional as well as rational ‘embodied’ human beings who make choices” (Coakley and Dunning xxviii).

John Loy and Douglas Booth explore the functionalist paradigm to consider sport as a means of social integration and as a site of social conflict. According to them, sport is a social system wherein the rules of the game are internalised by the members of the community who participate in or appreciate the game. Cricket as a site of conflict and bonding, was clearly apparent in the autobiography of Sachin Tendulkar. Loy and Booth also identify five basic functions of sport at the social level, taking inspiration from Christopher Stevenson and John Nixon:

1. Socio-emotional function, wherein sport contributes to the maintenance of socio-psychological stability;
2. Socialization, wherein sport contributes to the inculcation of cultural beliefs and mores;
3. Integrative function, wherein sport contributes to the harmonious integration of disparate individuals and diverse groups;
4. Political function, wherein sport is used for ideological purposes;
5. Social mobility function, wherein sport serves as a source of upward mobility. (Loy and Booth 15)

Loy and Booth also consider the micro-functionalism of sport groups that act as social systems. They explore the concepts such as leadership behaviour, group competition and group

conflict along the lines of conflict study. They provide four functions of group sport in this context:

1. the function of group-bonding;
2. the safety-valve function of releasing hostility
3. the scapegoat function of searching for enemies
4. the function of acquiring alliances. (Loy and Booth 16)

In this context, a functional analysis of sport underpins the theories of conflict, deviance, social change and the consensus approach. After the disappointment of 2007 World Cup, Sachin had erratic thoughts of retiring from cricket. At this critical juncture, we could underline the ideologies layed by Loy and Booth when Sachin received some encouraging words from Viv Richards who had called him in India from West Indies and had spoken for about forty-five minutes: "He assured me that there was a lot of cricket left in me and insisted that I shouldn't even think about stopping playing" (P M Y 272).

The concluding matches of Sachin's career also has a deep impact amongst his fans as they throng in large numbers in both 199th Test match at Kolkata and his 200th match at Mumbai. 14th November 2013 is the day of this famous match when Sachin padded for the last time. The enthusiasm of the fans to see their idol for the ultimate time in the cricket field with the national colours is evident from the moment the captains went in for the toss: "Most of the crowd wanted to see me bat, so a loud cheer went up when it was announced that India had won the toss. But they were quickly disappointed when MS Dhoni opted to field" (P MW 429). There are a lot of significant gestures in this match to commemorate the day. The Captain requests Sachin to lead the team after gifting him with a special cap made for the occasion. Sachin on his part passes on his feelings to the fellow team mates: "I reminded them of our duty towards the sport and the need to uphold the spirit of cricket at all times. I consider it the duty of every generation of cricketers to set examples for the next generation and inspire the youth to embrace the sport. It is the least we can do for the sport that has given us our identity" (P M W 430). The last innings of Sachin is perhaps one of the most challenging one in his 22 career: "I now had to deal with two very difficult challenges – protecting my wicket and controlling my emotions. I took my time to settle down before taking guard again" (P M W 431). The conclusion of the match is even more heart-warming with the customary guard of honour. He also knows that he is no longer

be hearing the epic chants of 'SachinnnnSachinnnn' in the days to come. Sachin acknowledges the participation of each and every person he remembers who plays a role in his cricketing career no matter how small it may be. He also thanks all his fans who have stood behind him all throughout his journey: "After a while I told the crowd I'd finish soon, only for them to scream 'Noooooooooooo!' It seemed they wanted me to carry on. In the end I spoke for twenty minutes, the longest I have ever spoken at a stretch in my life" (P M W437).

After completing the autobiography, it becomes evident that Sachin's celebrity status did not arise in isolation from social and cultural contexts. His widespread appeal can be attributed to the way his sporting potential developed in harmony with India's cultural evolution over time. The selected text primarily focuses on Sachin's achievements on the cricket field and his iconic status, leaving limited scope for an in-depth exploration of his personal identity in relation to his public persona.

This study is confined to the content presented in the autobiography, which has the potential to reshape perspectives on the making of a sportsman by rediscovering Sachin's life both on and off the field. As suggested by critical theories, *Playing It My Way* not only reinforces the idea that sports and sporting icons transcend cultural stereotypes often depicted in literature, but also reveals the deeper significance of sports through the lens of a sportsman's struggles. It further aligns with the Figurational Theory by highlighting the complexities of a global sport like cricket and its connection to local and national identities, as exemplified by Sachin Tendulkar.

Sachin's autobiography holds a unique place in the history of modern cricket, encapsulating the traits necessary to excel and endure at the highest levels of the sport. By offering a detailed account of his 24-year career, during which he played 664 international matches and scored 34,357 runs, the autobiography solidifies its importance in cricket's legacy.

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