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Cricket, Media and the Nation: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Three Mediated Moments in Indian Cricket

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ABSTRACT: This autoethnographic essay explores the media and cultural construct of key Indian cricketers. It suggests that these key cricketers mobilized important moments in the history of Indian cricket—through the lens of one cricket fan (the author). The essay is offered to readers as a (qualitative / interpretative) engagement with the role of sports icons in the wider (identity centered) narrative of nations in the post-colonial world. The essay interweaves the role and development of mass media and heightened experience of cricket fans right from vernacularization to evolving television aesthetics, multiple cameras, visual heightened the cricket experience of fans and its linkages to Indian nationhood, symbolism of masculinity and global success.

KEYWORDS: ***Cricket; Indian cricket; Sports Icons, media, nation***

1. Introduction

In this paper, I will attempt to map through an autoethnographic lens, three key moments in the history of Indian cricket (and their mediated contexts).

First, a quick note on the Autoethnographic method.[i] It is part of the qualitative analysis tradition, that eschews the discourse of scientific analysis (data sets, statistics, surveys, impersonal language) and centers a poetic, reflexive mode of presentation, based on the premise that emotion is as important as numbers; that the personal is always sociological; that the political is always mediated—and that there are immutable ties between self, society and narrative.

Working within this tradition, I use my two identities—an avid cricket fan (born and raised in India) and a scholar of Media Studies in the United States to construct a personal/sociological accounting of the history of Indian cricket. This history is not one of dates, times and places but rather of cultural conjunctures as reflected in the personal history of the author and the mediated history of the cricketing icons that have shaped Indian cricket. While I do not claim social scientific generalizability, my reading of these players and moments in India cricket is informed by the literature of Sports Studies, Media Studies and

Transnational Cultural Studies (which is grounded in the broader enterprise of generalizable theorization). Specifically, the essay:

(a) Connects sports in post-colonial contexts with the development of the nation as new imagined community (Appadurai, 1990, 1997; Aloysius, 1998; Bose, 1986; Guha, 1997, 2002; Majumdar, 2004).
(b) Centers the role of sports players as representative of wider cultural forces at play, including the development of a celebrity culture in emergent nation-states (Bose, 2002, Cashman, 1980), centered on the male sports figure and masculinity as a sporting discourse (Cashmore and Parker, 2003; Smart, 2005).
(c) Situates Mass Media *as central* to the processes identified in the two above points (Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Rowe, 2003; Whannel, 1992; Wenner, 1998) including but not limited to seeing Mass Media as mobilizers of "fame" in the processes of modernity (Boyle and Haynes, 1999), cultural globalization and transnational capitalism (Bernstein and Blain, 2003; Chung 2003).

Before I begin, a brief note on Cricket. Second only to soccer as the world's most popular sport, it is played with a bat and ball, involving two teams made up of eleven players each. The goal of each side is to score as many runs as possible. The cricket field is oval with a rectangular middle which is known as the pitch. The players have three roles: batting, bowling and fielding. Much like baseball, there are specialized bowlers depending on the kind of bowling they undertake (fast, seam, swing, spin) and fielding positions. Bowlers rotate through with fast bowlers beginning the inning and then transitioning to spin.[ii] Games are played in a variety of formats—five-day test matches, short one day games and evening (or time-restricted) only games (called T20). Cricket originated in England and then became a colonial sport. Today, it is played by most of its former colonies, but has an especially devoted following in the Indian subcontinent.

2. The Boy in the Tree

This memory could have come from elsewhere—maybe out of a R.K. Narayan novel[iii] but I am certain its mine: A dusty street, a dustier boy, walking barefoot in the hot sun. Darting between clumps of shade as he makes his way to the nearby store to get nankatai for tea. He clutches a Sony transistor (bought recently, it's a prized possession that belongs to his father) close to his ear. India is playing Australia. The boy weaves in tandem with the rise and fall of the crescendo of static. As the sound fades, but the faint, tinny sound of the announcer gets animated, the boy knows that something has happened, something bad. He clutches his head, sinks down under a tree—pushing the transistor fiercely against his ear. Slowly, he gets up, swings up on the tree's limb and dangles his feet, waiting for the score. In his head he imagines the cricketer's whose faces and postures he knows from the special color issue of *Illustrated Weekly* that now adorn his wall. Sitting in the tree, he surrenders to the world of cricket, suspended by the sounds of a distant world.

The First Moment: Falling in Love, Watching Vishwanath. Gundappa Vishwanath is a short man, absurdly short even by Indian standards. There is nothing of the modern-day athlete about him—the bulging muscles, the tall frame. In the years to come he will look

positively rotund. But on this day, as a teenager when I see him, he is merely stocky. His wrists are huge—I have gaped at them as he came around signing autographs after batting at the nets in New Delhi's Ferozshah Kotla Cricket ground. India is playing Pakistan and I watch Vishwanath come in, to bat at one drop. He walks in, to bat in his usual unhurried fashion, as if this was not the most important thing to be happening in the nation right now. Sikander Bakht, an eminently forgettable Pakistani bowler, comes in, to bowl. His first ball is outside the off stump, and Vishwanath moves onto the back foot, his bat goes up rapier like and he executes the shot that has come to define him-the square cut. The ball races to the boundary. Four runs off the first ball. Vishwanath, it is well-known, never takes time to settle in; gauge the bowler, figure out the bounce in the pitch; adopt a tactic before starting an innings. He approaches every ball, with a single goal—to hit it with elegance, beauty and clarity. It is said that he never accumulates runs, he spends them. He is not a miser, but a spendthrift. His bat caresses the ball, in an intimate, loving arc. In this way, I am seduced by Vishwanath, and like all first loves, there has never been any other that can take his place. Vishwanath remains the (national) center of my cricketing imagination, centered on an etiology of performance, that simply put is about only one thing: Art.

Farred (2004) suggests that through "charting the history of cricket in the subcontinent we can also map, for want of a better phrase, the genealogy of a national essence" (p.94). This essence, I would suggest is located within the kinds of spectatorship that watching Vishwanath engendered—a mode of nationalist viewing that was firmly rooted in the praxis and poetics of performance. Appadurai (1997) suggests that playing, watching, remembering and fantasizing about cricket are all related to the erotics of Indian nationalism. "The erotic pleasure of watching cricket for Indian male subjects is the pleasure of agency in an imagined community, which in many other arenas is violently contested. This pleasure is neither wholly cathartic nor vicarious because playing cricket is close to, or part of, the experience of many Indian males. It is however, magnified, politicized, and spectacularized without losing its links to the lived experience of bodily competence and agnostic bonding" (p.111). There is, he asserts a complex link "between gender, fantasy, nation and excitement" (p.111).

Appadurai (1997) goes onto suggest that mass media played an important part in the development of this relationship between gender, nation and fandom: "In the process of vernacularization (through books, newspapers, radio, and television) it became an emblem of Indian nationhood at the same time that it became inscribed, as practice, onto the Indian (male) body. Decolonization in this case not only involves the creation of imagined communities through the workings of print capitalism…but it also involves the appropriation of agnostic body skills that can further lend passion and purpose to the community so imagined" (p. 112).

I would like to suggest that Vishwanath was emblematic of a certain kind of imagined community—one tied to an orientalist vision of Indian masculinity, that took sustenance from early media (radio, print and state-run television) in India. Specifically, I would like to argue that Vishwanath represented one textual moment in a series of texts that began with Ranjitsinghji and continued through players like C.K. Nayadu, M. A. K. Pataudi, Salim Durrani, Mohammad Azharuddin and V.V.S. Laxman.

Different generations fall in love with different texts (Vishwanath in my case) but within the same nationalist conjuncture, one predicated on a specific praxis/poetics of performance. In this sense, there is not a temporal synchrony at work here, but a diffused, spatial and aesthetic principle that governs this moment. A moment that began with RanjitSinghji, where one must necessarily begin. Simply put, what RanjitSinghji began was a way of performing Indian-ness.

His batting was not only about getting runs but the manner in which he got them. "He was seen in cricket circles as carrying a peculiar oriental glow," the great C.B. Fry said of him that "he moved as if he had no bones; one would not be surprised to see brown curves burning in the grass where one of his cuts had traveled or blue flame shimmering round his bat, as he made one of his strokes." Neville Cardus said "when he batted, strange light was seen for the first time on English fields" (Appadurai, 1997, 96).

Ranjit Singhji was accepted by England as a particular kind of oriental. Nowhere is this more evident than in how he was covered by two generations of English journalists. Neville Cardus wrote, "Ranji was the most remarkable instance in all of cricket's history of a man expressing through his game not only his individual genius but the genius of his race. No Englishmen could have batted like Ranji. In 1896, the Daily Telegraph compared Ranjitsinji's wrists to jungle creepers and declared that he had turned cricket into an "oriental poem of action." References to jugglery, wizardry and black magic became ubiquitous in contemporary articles about the man and his batting (Sen, 2001, 242).

What began as orientalist trope became social fact—the batting of Vishwanath and his descendants are part of the process of decolonization—the power of subaltern agency—making the terms of the masters their own. It is the willing participation of the spectator in such viewership (through radio, print and television) and in the willing disposition of the performer to present such a bodily agency that completes the pact between nation, gender and passion that Appadurai suggests. I am not, however, suggesting that there is a uniformity of expression or agency in each of the players identified above, or even that they are received with the exact same language that framed Ranji—I am, however, suggesting that they are trajectories that take sustenance from the colonial imagination and in due course animate the narrative of the nation—helping frame moments of national reconstruction. Needless to add, none of this becomes possible without the talent (technical and cultural) of the cricket players/teams themselves.

Mansour Ali Khan Pataudi, also known as the "Nawab of Pataudi" (a Royal title--his family ruled the seat of Pataudi) was perhaps the closest in both educational heritage and colonial affiliation (his father played for England) to the legacy of Ranjitsinghji. Nicknamed "Tiger," his place in the annals of Indian cricket rest firmly in his leadership of India, a task that made him in the words of Wisden, the English Cricket Almanac, "Unarguably, India's greatest captain ever."

The text of Pataudi had three synedochical elements—the nickname, "Tiger" begetting a constitutive bearing—"royal"; a batting style that became condensed with being blind in one eye, and a defining shot, the leg-glance (where the ball is flicked off the legs). This construct

emerges in a world before television—primarily in black and white newspapers (where his image often blurs with the historical memory/imagery of his father) and later in color magazines. Tiger emerges as a specific kind of postcolonial text, where the mastery of the indigenous (ruler) to combat both personal circumstance (the loss of his feudal lands and his right eye) and take on the task of the national reconstruction using an indigenous language—the three spinners—who in turn can be read as continuous within the narrative history of orientalism where guile and wonder (the snake charmer, the Indian rope trick, and so forth) mix unproblematically with the exotic and wondrous. The cultural work that Pataudi performed was reinscribing the colonial imagination, along lines already established by RanjitSinghji. Like the former, who was often afflicted with poor health (asthma) but played on pluckily, so was Pataudi cast in a similar vein—as somebody who could overcome the limitations of his (and his nations) lot by the sheer will—a trait that drew squarely on existing notions about Victorian masculinity, a trait often used as a model to emulate by the indigenous elite (to which Pataudi belonged).

However, Pataudi was not merely the extension of a colonial logic, he also began an important personal (and national) journey. He married a film star, Sharmila Tagore, and in the process married Cricket and Bollywood, the two defining media/cultural practices of Indian (public) life. It is also significant that as a Muslim, leading India in the post-partition era (after India was divided into a largely Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan), he embodied a specific kind of agency—where the bonds of religion were simultaneously confirmed and effaced in the envelope of royalty that surrounded him as a player. His work as a text of secularism worked paradoxically, through the twin narratives of royalty and celebrity culture—he combined them both on the cricket field, where he led a team of mainly middle class (and some working class) Indians into national consciousness. [iv]

Mohammad Azharuddin, the magnificent Indian batsman and former captain, exemplified the same discursive range.

I was lucky to see (and cover as a reporter) Azharuddin's batting in a regional cricket match, before his debut for India. In addition to the leg glance, he showed a penchant for a shot that came to define his career. This was a cover drive off his back foot. He hit then Indian captain Kapil Dev (who was bowling to him) for a succession of boundaries. It was a shot unlike any other because he was clearly breaking some rules. He hit the cover drive not with his shoulders (like most batsman) but largely with his wrists. He would lean back, move his feet marginally (as opposed to classic full step back) and then swoop down over the ball in a short graceful arc, that would guide more than smash the ball between the gully and cover for four runs. It was clearly an endeavor that spoke to a special gift and those of us in press box, knew immediately that we were watching something extraordinary. We got out of our seats and crowded around the balcony. Shortly after this innings, Azhar made his debut for India and scored three consecutive centuries, but I have always had a certain satisfaction in knowing that I saw him bat, before he became a national and global cricketing icon—watched him, in a sense, construct the persona and performative text that he became in later life.

Azharuddin's orientalist/nationalist performance arrived at a historical post-colonial moment—the emergence of satellite television in the early to mid-eighties and the

development of what Appadurai refers to as "the means of modernity." Azharuddin's textual history can be intimately tied to early globalization (or using the banal label of the times—"market liberalization") and deregulatory changes in the nature of the Indian state. Specifically, Azharuddin was the first beneficiary of a new kind of television aesthetic—the use of multiple cameras. A key element was the use of one camera exclusively focused on a close up of the batsman. The images from this camera were used for the other key narrative element from this time period—the slow-motion replay. This allowed the viewer to participate fully, with the batsman. Watching Azharuddin meant taking part, with his masculinity, with an erotic immersion in his square drive.

The orientalist moment lived on in a batsman, Azharuddin closely mentored—V.V.S. Laxman. Laxman was a complex, contradictory text embodying the cultural and economic circumstance in which he performed. He represented a completeness in orientalist expression—he had all the shots—the glance, the drive, the cut, the hook and he played them all of them with the consummate timing and minimal force. But he was also the least successful of the batsman that preceded him within this discursive ambit—unlike Vishwanath, Pataudi and Azharuddin he was not a consistent part of the Indian side. Frequently seen as inconsistent he is known primarily for his few iconic innings.

Reading Laxman last (in this section) is appropriate, because I would like to suggest that Laxman represents the end point of a certain kind of discursive functionality around national identity—he spoke in a dying language. The context of the game of cricket has been fundamentally altered—cricket is now primarily a medium of rational accounting and corporate expression (seen in the accumulation of runs, the taking of wickets) using a model of masculinity predicated on power and consistency. The kinds of visual aesthetics and physical performance that Laxman represented has not necessarily gone out of fashion—the five-day test match is an arena where it still exists, but even there the needs of run accumulation take primacy over the ways in which they are scored. In this fundamental sense, the "failure" of Laxman can be seen as part of wider problematic about post-coloniality—the emergence of a national order, framed through the prism of corporate performativity; the development of a theory of the body and perhaps most crucially, an engagement with the demands of accountability—"you are only as good as your last innings," rather than a performance outside of time and necessity, the kinds of aesthetics that underlay the orientalist vision of cricketing. It is indeed an end of this "moment" of cricket, where the love of watching a performance takes second place to the love of accumulation, the focus of the next "moment."

3. The Second Moment: Moving Nations, Making Money

Cricket as a "means of modernity" reached its full development through the media/cultural work of two of India's greatest batsman, both cast in almost identical physical and technical mold—Sunil Gavaskar and Sachin Tendulkar. Gavaskar's career spanned the 1970-80's and Tendulkar (who played his first test at the age of sixteen) has been the leading batsman for India since the 1990's. Dominating the last four decades of cricket in India, these two batsmen have come to define the postcolonial conjuncture of Indian cricket with the nation-state in modern times. I will discuss both these batsmen together.

Watching Gavaskar (both as a reporter and as a fan), I was struck by the technical excellence, the mastery of performance. It is this single, fundamentally constitutive element in his batting that exemplified the self-determination of the modern Indian nation-state. It is a moment of post-colonial de-linking, where the tools of the masters are not dismantled but revisited, through the discourse of mastery in place of mimicry. Gone is the exotic, orientalist construct of an Indian aesthetic in batting, gone too is the fundamental anxiety about identity that bedevils the post-colonial when the master leaves. Here the post-colonial moment is manifest in a fully realized model of performance and reconstituted authenticity. Gavaskar is never compared to any English batsman; if there is a parallel drawn it is to Don Bradman, the greatest batsman to have played the game (He played for Australia, his identity marked not by nationality but by his technical perfection and a relentless pursuit of runs). The 1970's were a decade of change and turbulence, as Indian democracy under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi went through a period of corruption, political strife, war with Pakistan and the imposition of emergency rule. It was a period of fundamental changes in the workings of the Indian state, from an era of Nehruvian Socialism to the travails of a mixed economy and the entrenchment of political corruption.

These fundamental changes found expression in popular culture through the emergence of a Bollywood star, Amitabh Bachchan as an "angry young man" and Sunil Gavaskar, as the Indian "anchor" on whose shoulder much of India's journey of national self-realization (through cricket) rested. Gavaskar showed the way in ways that is hard to describe today—growing up in India in the 1970's, the fate of India was tied in a profound way to how Gavaskar performed in a test. When Gavaskar got out early, a despondency descended on the nation, who knew that the rest of the team were incapable of scoring runs, doing what was necessary to stave off defeat. It appeared as if the terms of the social contract with destiny—success or failure—rested on his bat.

Vishwanath, Gavaskar's contemporary (and brother in law) was deeply loved but we understood that he could not be relied on. He belonged to a different time and place, a different cultural and political aesthetic—where India and other postcolonial nations were marked with extraordinary individual gifts but lacking the grit and backbone to succeed in a world of (masculine) industrialism (both personal and sociological) that the developed west had a monopoly on—with one exception—Gavaskar.

Gavaskar became in a very real sense, the nation, each time he walked out to bat. While later Indian teams had other stars, in the 1970's and early 1980's, India only had one. What was equally significant about Gavaskar was his complete understanding of his role—he realized that he embodied a new kind of identity politics to cricket—it was a based on a Bombay(regional), cultural (Hindu, middle class) and national (Indian) identity. He also belonged to the marketplace, a place almost never visited by Vishwanath. One of the first cricketers to understand the power of advertising, he was frequently seen on magazines, newspapers and later on television. One particular advertisement for a shaving cream was memorable: It showed a close-up of Gavaskar shaving. With each stroke of the shaving stick, the cream was wiped off, revealing his smooth skin. Appearing on this arc of smoothly shaved skin, was an image of Gavaskar playing a cricketing shot. When I began shaving, I

was a willing participant, in this aesthetic, imagining (and coalescing) images of Gavaskar and my own shaving with his batting. It was not uncommon for me after shaving to pick up a cricket bat in my bedroom and practice a few shots before the mirror! The power of performativity that Gavaskar represented lay precisely in his ability to capture the paradoxes of the moment—a moment of a nation-state in transition, a period of regeneration of identity politics, that prefigured the rise of both the corporate state and the rise of the Hindu centered national politics in the 1990's. Gavaskar gave rise to a specific kind of national identity—working successfully in the divide between nation and market, past and present. It was an identity that Tendulkar who followed him was to fully realize, both on and off the cricket field.

The similarities between Gavaskar and Tendulkar were often pointed out—they are both from Bombay, both short and compact, both share a nickname—"the little master." Tendulkar fulfilled the cultural work begun by Gavaskar in three interrelated ways—his batting revealed not just the discourse of mastery, but a new (corporate) language for recasting the cultural practice of cricket in the post-colonial world. This is tied to the genre of cricket in which each batsman played. Gavaskar's batting revolved around the five-day test match. The one-day game was still in its infancy when he finished his career. Tendulkar established his credentials in both the one-day game and the test match. An entire generation of batsman's techniques were caught in the paradigmatic change that the one-day game format represented but not Tendulkar. He became a point of origin--fashioning a style of batting that has been copied by batsman around the world—a sound defense and a mode of attack, predicated on that defense. For this reason, while (like Gavaskar) he is called "the little master," he alone is called "master blaster." The kind of aggressive intent that Tendulkar showed was rarely evident in the career of Gavaskar. A certain kind of batsman died with the emergence and dominance of the one-day game—the classic purist—and a certain kind of batsman was born—the unorthodox hitter, who could change the game in a few overs. Tendulkar, by contrast, excelled in both versions—he was not a transitional figure, who could straddle both worlds, but the embodiment of classical practices married to modern means. In this sense, he was sui generis.

Tendulkar was also a brand—his cherubic face, often likened to the Indian God, Krishna, was everywhere in India's urban/media landscape—on billboards, plastered to the side of telephone poles, and through advertising (television, print, new media) where he pitched everything from soft drinks, to cars to shoes and everything in between. In his complete embrace of the moment of market liberalization, he represented a clear break from both the past, marked by fealty to the state, region, nation (and test cricket) and ideas about post-colonial affiliation (such as the "commonwealth" or even, "third world").

Instead, Tendulkar's rise to stardom was centered on the rise of the Hindu subject. The rise of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) to national power and its political philosophy of Hindutva (centered on the idea of India as a land of and for Hindus—a philosophy in direct opposition to Nehruvian secularism, the founding doctrine of Indian democracy are parallel texts to the cricketing performance of Tendulkar—a practice that while not co-determinative, speaks to a larger paradigmatic shift in Indian culture and politics, a centering of a certain kind of post-

colonial identity—at home in the world of modern industrialism and (simultaneously) a regressive, essentialized Hinduism.[iv]

I want to conclude with a brief consideration of another former Indian batsman, Virender Sehwag who rounds out the narrative contingencies of this post-colonial moment. Sehwag was perhaps the most potent opening batsman of the contemporary era, having the capacity to destroy the best fast bowlers of the world. He is a fascinating player/text to deconstruct in that he has consciously modeled himself after his idol, Sachin Tendulkar. His conscious participation in this act of (collective/national) determination is central to the pleasure that Sehwag offered to post-colonial subjects. When he first appeared on the scene, he looked eerily like Tendulkar. Built almost identically, he dressed, walked and copied all the mannerisms of Tendulkar. In one memorable magazine spread, the two players were positioned side by side, with the writer, detailing the minute similarities and differences between the two players. His narrative trajectory was constituted around a single question—would he be able to become another little master? There were a set of related questions that followed—Could he ever be as good as Tendulkar? Was he a mere mimic, a poor man's Tendulkar? This fundamentally post-modern concern (the relationship between the real and the facsimile; between authenticity and imitation) was early on the central defining feature of Sehwag's career—but he moved beyond it, early and often.

Sehwag may have begun with the frame of mimicry and imitation (of Tendulkar) but he stretched the performative frame of Indian batting in new and unpredictable ways. By matching Tendulkar stroke for stroke when they opened the innings for India, and often surpassing him, the Tendulkar-Sehwag show became the most entertaining opening partnership in all of contemporary cricket. Watching them together, the pleasure of critical comparison become a national obsession—each moment of their individual expression—was an entry point into a conversation about Indian masculinity and identity. There were two key elements in most comparisons—the first was the element of classicism. Each shot, the punch of the back foot, the cover drive, the pull and perhaps most crucially, the lofted drive that both batsmen employed frequently were compared by fans with attention played to minute deviations from the classic posture and rendition of each shot. Tendulkar it was always noted rarely wavered from classic elementalism. Even when he improvised, the beginning of each shot was anchored by a strict adherence to the axioms of tradition—playing in the V (an expression referring to batting straight, rather than across the line of the ball), playing the ball down, rather than in the air. Sehwag, on the other hand began with the same classic orientation, but at the last minute changed the trajectory of the shot and its rendition. Slow-motion replays of shots allowed for the minute examination of how each player presented a different rendition. Television was central to the pleasure that both Tendulkar and Sehwag accord. They emerged into the national and global scene as the Indian media market settled into a stable pattern of market liberalization, bringing in television companies like ESPN, and establishing media voyeurism as a primary mechanism for establishing a relationship between sport and nation. In doing so, the primary agency for understanding Cricket moved from the outside to the inside, from the trees and maidan to the large screen TV and the darkened (preferably air conditioned) room. Cricket became part of a familiar place for contemporary viewers, a place shaped by the entertainment-political complex, a place with a shared language about identity, celebrity and consumption.

Sehwag moved the national conversation about Cricket in a different direction from Tendulkar, whose performance was predicated on his resting place—as the icon of a modern (Hindu) India. Sehwag was an innovative, audacious performer who belonged clearly in the arena of the spectacle—he was a child of the commodity-world, rather than arena of cultural/religious/national revival. When he batted, the Indian nation, sat at the edge of their seats, waiting to see the next extravagance of expression that Sehwag might provide. When Tendulkar batted, they sat back, with the pleasure of watching something powerful and nuanced, assured and dependable. Put another way, if Tendulkar was the resting place of contemporary Indian modernity, Sehwag was the force that pushed it forward to a place that is still taking shape—whose form is being determined by more recent texts—the former captains Sourav Ganguly and Mahender Singh Dhoni (and current captain Virat Kohli). The cultural context these captains performed are constitutive elements of the last moment of Indian post coloniality, one marked by increasing importance into the global market economy, and a sense of arrival of the nation-state (to which I now turn in conclusion).

4. The Man and his Laptop

I know this memory is mine—they are varied and many. They are comprised of hours of watching (thank you YouTube, CricInfo and ESPN). Watching from afar that is—Athens, Georgia, USA to be precise. The watching has sustained the entirety of my diasporic experience—graduate school in all immersive intensity; finding and keeping an academic job in all its institutional uncertainty; raising a family with all its cultural liminality—and then reaching this moment—the kids leaving home (but returning, hopefully not for long), Cricket channels in the comfort of your American home (or a *desi* compatriot)—and the beginning of ever longer visits to the Home of Cricket (No, not, you England).

5. The Third Moment: Global Missions, National Icons

The contemporary period of post coloniality and Indian cricket is marked by four interrelated elements—a sustained discourse of aggressive masculinity—paralleling the rise of the Indian economy and its role in global information industries; a paradigmatic shift in media/collective discourse, from within the nation to its diasporic constituents; a complete embrace of corporate fashioned identity politics, with attention focused on the male body as an index of (national) sexual expression and finally, and most crucially, a corporate philosophy ("winning is everything") representing a complete break from the history/discourse of fair play and the gentleman's game.

These four elements coalesced around the former Indian captains Saurav Ganguly and Mahender Singh Dhoni—and continue today in the current captain Virat Kohli. For purposes of brevity (and that Kohli is still playing-and his work as a cultural text is incomplete), I will focus my comments on Ganguly and Dhoni.

Ganguly was India's most successful captain (during his tenure), leading the side much as he batted—with intuition, arrogance and unstinted aggression. India won tests at a steady pace, went to the World Cup Finals in 2003 and was the only team to put up a fight against

Australia, the dominant (and overbearing) team of the cricketing world. A controversial figure, for picking fights with opponents, he bred a culture of complete allegiance to his team and complete contempt towards the opposition. He bred a similar culture of spectatorship and membership in national identity. This often put him at odds with older Indians and parts of the media establishment. The child, equally of television and the Internet, Ganguly's every move and score were fodder for feverish debate and passion.

There are many images that come to mind—but the one that remains is one of Ganguly standing on the balcony at Lords, the home of cricketing tradition, taking off his shirt and waving it in the air. His lean, muscled body is arched in arrogance, the gold chains and hirsute masculinity, inviting erotic attention. This match, a one-day international game between England and India played on July 14, 2002 is worth dwelling on. It represents a paradigmatic moment in India's national engagement with Cricket (embodying each of the four elements identified above).

The relevance of this game cannot be overemphasized in the annals of modern Indian cricket. It is often seen as the turning point in how Indian cricket has been played. Before this game, the "old guard" of Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid dominated discussion of India's batting. After this game, Virender Sehwag and two new faces—Mohammad Kaif and Yuvraj Singh became central figures in the cricketing imagination. Both, in their twenties, they represented identical cricketing styles—quick, direct, aggressive, both fundamentally shaped in the image of their maker—the captain, Saurav Ganguly. Kaif and Yuvraj were often spoken as if they are two sides of the same coin—a one-two punch, whose identities were anchored not in their Muslim or Hindu/Sikh heritages but in their mobilization of a certain style of playing, one uniquely suited to both an image of the Indian nation taking its place on the world stage (and the television screen). This game being played at Lords can manifestly be read as a "revenge of the colonies" narrative and it was in a sense some of that (An English paper, The Observer, for example said of the match, "In the past many (of the Indians) have enchanted us with the wristy magic of their batsmen. This Indian side contains plenty of those, but there is also a steel and an athleticism that was often absent from their predecessors."). But equally, it was played before a large Indian diasporic population in England. It also became one of the most popular videos sold in DVD forms and visited on-line. My younger son, a cricket devotee, first came to the power of cricket watching this game—as Kaif and Yuvraj chased the England total, I could sense in his involvement—something sociological—he was experiencing something new—a diasporic pleasure—made up by the desire to participate (from afar and on one's terms) with the idea of personal/national origin.

When the game was over and India had won, one image remained burned in the national imagination—the image of Ganguly, his shirt removed, waving it in the face of tradition, of history, willing the nation it seemed to embrace its new history. It is hard not to read this as a text about post-colonial arrival—an arrival that speaks fundamentally to a deeply masculinized identity, one predicated on the presentation of self as an object of consumption—an object that is simultaneously indigenous (in the ethnic construct of the brown body) and global (in its posture, the presentation of the body as an object of lust/desire). As further evidence of the moment's post-coloniality was what the team did after

its win—it went to an Italian restaurant—this in London, the home, as is often noted, of the best Indian restaurants in the world ! There can be little more that needs to be said—this moment of arrival, presumes not just an awareness of "Italian Food" as a marker of a wider, western practice of consumption, but of the value of "choice" as a symbol of victory. The Indian team not only wins on a world stage, but it consumes on a world stage as well—it does not stay ghettoized within its own diasporic/ethnic space/restaurant but like the "masters" it has agency--sampling the menus of different cultures—in the spirit of a colonial experiment. The past has indeed become the present.

In the 20/20 World Cup held in 2007, which was won by India's under its then young captain, Mahinder Singh Dhoni. Near the end of the close and tension-filled game, India beat Pakistan by five runs. Minutes later, apparently in a moment of abandon, Dhoni took off his jersey, gave it to a young fan and marched topless before the crowd.

It is significant that in his first moment of triumph as a captain, Dhoni chose the rhetorical gesture used by his mentor on the balcony at Lords—the removal of his shirt. One can freely speculate that Ganguly's gesture must have been on his (and the nation's) mind, when he removed his shirt. Dhoni's gesture brought to fruition, the presentation of a certain masculinist aesthetic—one that I have suggested revolves around the presentation of the naked male body, as the text on which the nation's collective fantasies about global success and personal agency can be written.

6. Conclusion

In this critical autoethnographic essay, I have tried to offer one way of thinking about the links between nation, self and sport. Simultaneously personal and sociological, it suggests that these three moments were important historical conjunctures in the story of the Indian nation. This story has always been enmeshed in relations both within and outside the nation. From the colonial to the diasporic to the transnational, the story of cricket is that of the Indian nation, stretching to include its citizens, fans and viewers in broader networks of relations.
I hope by reading this parsing apart in the life of one man—and his former nation's sport will help the reader think through his or her own mediated sport history—in the broader context of narrating the story of *their* nation.

End Notes [i]

[i] Autoethnographic writing varies enormously since it draws on the narrative voice of the individual (and her subject). But broadly speaking, writing in the field is rich in the ideas and practices of the "inner" quest (often dealing with issues of identity, personal pain, suffering and angst) and those of the "outer" quest (often dealing with issues of life-space, family relationship, personal/ professional divides). The "goal" of an autoethnographic analysis is fidelity to the subject—and finding a narrative voice that fits the subject. Generally speaking, the proof of an autoethnographic essay is in its construction. Like poetry, the form is the function; thematic treatment is tied to narrative energy. In this paper, the subject is cricket and nationalism, and I chose a lens of different "moments" both personal and sociological in

crafting the narrative. There are several books outlining and showcasing the method, including James, Adams and Ellis (2013); Pensoneau-Conway (2017 and Denzin (2014). There is also a newly minted journal (*The Journal of Autoethnography*) by the University of California Press and a conference organized by the International Symposium on Autoethnography and Narrative (ISAN).

[ii] To get a complete sense of the rules and laws of cricket there is no better source than the webpage of the Marylebone Cricket Club (https://www.lords.org/mcc/the-laws-of-cricket) in England (where the game was born).

[iii] R. K. Narayan (1906-2001) was a leading Indian writer (in English) was known for his portrayal of daily, rural and small-town life in India. His most important books were *Swami and Friends, The Guide* and *The Bachelor of Arts*.

[iv] My reading of Tendulkar draws on Ezekial (2002) and Nalapat and Parker (2005).

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