

We sincerely pay our thanks to all teaching and non-teaching colleagues, members of the committee formed for this purpose. We express our heartfelt gratitude to the participants from India and abroad, for their encouraging response, which has made this conference as a national event.

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ADIGA'S SELECTION DAY: A STORY OF ASPIRATION AND DISCONTENTMENT IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN INDIA

Dr. Vasant D Satpute

Adiga's *Selection Day* is a story of aspiration and discontentment in contemporary urban India. The Kumars, the protagonists of *Selection Day*, are driven by liberalization's most seductive promise: social mobility. The vehicle of their aspiration is cricket. In his writing Aravind Adiga is drawn towards the gap between the glitter and gleam of India Shining and the violence, inequality and social misery that gives a partial lie to the nation's desire to rebrand itself (Guha Keshav). *Selection Day* is a story of two brothers- Radha Kumar and Manjunath Kumar-- and their father Mohan Kumar. It is also a story of commodification of human skills and games such as cricket. It is not a romantic story about cricket as it has been up to now, but the story of how the lives of all concerned are destroyed because of cricket. It describes the post 1983 world of cricket. Radha and Manju are found to be skilled in cricket and everyone, including the boys, their father and the people in cricket

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business, try to catch this opportunity and are disillusioned because they forget the natural conditions and limitations of human lives.

Mohan Kumar had grown in poor Taluka, Ratnagiri in Alur in the foothills of the Western Ghats of Karnataka. In his childhood he worked on a coffee estate. Thirty years ago when Mohan Kumar was in his village he saw a chained elephant. He thought the elephant is enchanted by the mahout, and similarly they too are chained by invisible chains of the circumstance. As an effect he decides to fight back these chains of poverty and mediocrity. Meanwhile, when his elder son Radha breaks the windows of the neighborhood houses, he is reminded of Sachin Tendulkar, who also did the same. Thinking his son to be gifted in cricket he leaves his village and reaches Mumbai. To make a living in Mumbai, he sells chutneys and tries to train Radha as a batsman in every way.

When a child, Manjunath the younger son of Mohan Kumar, was as normal as any child of his age, (He had a secret habit of licking and eating tiny things such as mirrors, floors, buttons and needles.) but when it is found that Manju too is skilled in cricket Mohan Kumar forces him too, to concentrate on the game. He does not allow him to do even school assignments— Manju has to hide his assignments from his father.

Mohan Kumar is a possessed person. He is ready to go to any extent to train his sons as best cricketers. He thinks that his sons are gifted and they are born for being stars in cricket, that they are blessed by the God of cricket Lord Subramanya. Also, being superstitious he does not allow his sons to shave until they turn 22 because, he thinks that, if they do and there is a razor cut, it will change hormones in the body. He also does weekly genital check-ups of the boys, which embarrasses them. They are made to go through pre-sleep rituals— Radha is made to say 'I want to become the world's best batsman' and Manju, 'the second best batsman'. He also prevents his sons from looking at girls. When he finds Radha and Sophia in a hotel room, he threatens to kill both of them

When the story begins Promod Sawant, the head coach at Ali Weinberg International School Bandra where the boys are learning, requests Tommy Sir, the cricket scout who sponsors the players and trains them to be selected in the Ranji Trophy team, to select even Manju, Radha the young Lion's younger brother. Tommy Sir has helped 13 players to play in Ranji Trophy team.

Anand Mehta runs a sponsorship programme for cricketers under 15 and supports the brilliant cricket stars financially. Both the sons are accepted for the scholarship and there is a contract between Anand Mehta and Mohan Kumar. In exchange for one third of the boys' earning of the whole life, Anand Mehta is to pay an interest-free loan of 50000 rupees and five thousand rupees a month as a stipend. For the first year Anand Mehta has paid sixty thousand plus fifty thousand to the boys' father plus twenty thousand to the scout Tommy Sir, but the demands of the father keep increasing. They consider the boys to be assets.

With that much money Mohan Kumar thinks of buying gold and real estate. In the beginning they lived in a 326 square feet brick shed at Shastrinagar slum of Dahisar. But now Mohan Kumar's ambition keeps growing powerful as days pass. He sells his family land in Alur and with that amount added to the fifty thousand rupees paid by Anand Mehta and also the saving of twenty thousand rupees (two thousand rupees a month) he buys a new flat in a comparatively posh locality of the Tattvamasi Housing Society in Chhada Nagar, Chembur. When they move to their new flat they do not take old Sharadha, Mohan Kumar's relative, with them. She has been feeding them till now.

Not only the father, the cricket scout and the mentor Anand Mehta too ill-treat the boys. When Radha drops a catch in a practice session Tommy Sir hits him with the same ball. Anand Mehta considers Radha to be his investment and visits the Kumars' and wakes up Manju at midnight. Manju takes dread from the visit and begins seeing the same dream in which he sees darkness. When Mohan Kumar and Manju go to apologize on the part of Radha, Anand Mehta humiliates them and makes both of them drink



wine.

Mohan Kumar the control-freak father watches every match of the boys, but he is not allowed to see his sons on the cricket ground. Whenever he tries to enter the cricket ground he is sent out; he is also prevented from interfering in the boys' life. Mohan Kumar gets angry at this treatment and swears that he will avenge this treatment when his son Radha becomes famous. The boys too are fed up with their father's eccentrics and think of taking revenge upon him when they grow up.

After a year or so there is a new Young Lion competitor to Radha. He is fifteen-year old student of Ali Weinberg School. His name is Javed Ansari, the young nephew of Ranji Trophy star Imtiaz Ansari who now represents Yorkshire country in England. Javed's father is a textbook importer in Vashi and has been a cricket commentator for BBC. Mohan Kumar has adds Javed Ansari into the following three dangers on their path to glory— premature shaving, pornography and car driving.

Manjunath Kumar is in ninth standard. In one of the match when selector Shrinath is watching the game, shrewd Manjunath plays well and as an effect gets noticed. Tommy Sir now is more interested in Manju than in Radha. Manju plays very well despite the fracture in the left hand thumb as a consequence of beating by the father. So when the game is over Tommy Sir threatens Mohan of dire consequences and takes Manju to hospital. Being afraid of the police Mohan Kumar closes himself in the bathroom and comes out only on the assurance by Manju that he will not go to the police. Radha tells Manju that it was he who should have impressed the selectors and not Manju. Mohan is not allowed even to enter the boys' room and the boys too threaten him that they will inform Tommy Sir if he does.

The father and Tommy Sir have decided for Manju to concentrate on cricket instead of on school and if necessary on dropping school as Radha did. Manju is interested in science and in detective stories, and wants to continue his education. Javed, the rebel, too persuades Manju for continuing his education.

Radha had scored 300 runs in Mumbai school cricket in one day's play which was the highest score recorded in Mumbai by a batsman under the age of sixteen. After that he went to see Shah Rukh Khan. While playing in the Harris Shield in the school cricket shrewd Manjunath plays for three days and breaking Radha's record scores 497 runs. He misses just by three runs to become the first under 18 school batsmen to score 500 runs. He does so because he understands that different people— including Founder Ali, who grants scholarship to the cricketers—, are watching him. On one occasion Manju himself discloses to Javed that he plays only if they are watching. He also dreams of playing for Mumbai and India. On the other side the batting average of Radha falls down due to weight transfer problem. In this way Founder Ali grants scholarship to Manju instead of Radha. This decision of Ali's creates competition between the brothers. Mohan Kumar thinks that as the mahout ties the elephant with invisible chains, Founder Ali too is playing the same trick with the three Kumars. Manjunath is sent to England for six weeks and here Radha thinks that he should have been selected instead. He gets discouraged and begins going to the internet cafes to play video games.

Tommy Sir has dedicated whole his life to cricket. He has spent 40 years to create successful players like Sachin Tendulkar and Sunil Gawaskar, and now he thinks that Manju will be the next Sachin. As soon as Munjunath returns from England he takes a press conference at the age of 15 and expresses his wish of playing for the country. Later on Manju's record of scoring 497 runs in a day too is broken by another Young Lion.

On the selection day Mohan Kumar tells Radha that Lord Subramanya will help them in selecting Radha. Radha too has the superstition and he too prays to Lord Subramanya and plays with Sachin Tendulkar's gloves on. He needs only 50 runs to impress the selectors but he is out at twenty. He gets angry and beats the bowler and runs away and goes to their village. The bowler's uncle demands a compensation of 75000 rupees from the mentor Anand Mehta. On the other hand, Manju succeeds in making more runs



on selection day and in impressing the selectors, but due to Radha, they are a bit nervous about the selection of even Manju and ask Manju to play in another match. Manju gets angry with the whole system of cricket and remains absent in the alternative selection match.

Cricket disturbs the lives of a number of people related to it. Javed becomes Manju's friend and keeps requesting him to do what his heart asks him to. He himself rebels against his father because his father has tried to force his wish on his elder brother—his brother has committed suicide. Javed asks Manju too to join him. Javed is in the Mad-Max gang which smokes ganja and breaks traffic signals from Powai all the way to Bandra to show that they are not afraid of the police or anyone else. He is also against the exploitation by the system of cricket sponsorship where the rich exploit the poor. He thinks what is important is what one desires and not money and cricket. He also asks Manju to come to his house in Navi Mumbai and takes him to his career counselor who tells Manju to do things that he likes. One week after selection day Manju runs away and begins living with Javed. There he reads his cartoon books.

Radha's life too is spoiled due to cricket because out of his frustration he beats the bowler and runs away to his village. The police are after him. He requests Manju for paying the compensation to the boy's uncle because he wanted to come back and play cricket. But when he returns he gets one of his legs broken in an accident and remains a limp. Tommy Sir's and Anand Mehta's careers too are finished because not only Radha but Manju too has run away after Anand Mehta has been paying them for three years and two months. He tries to concentrate on the power plant in Dhanbad but that power plant too slips out of his hand. Tommy Sir dies in a stroke while hiking mountains. He cannot fulfill his lifelong wish of seeing Manju play for Mumbai neither can he complete his Illustrative History of Marathas.

In the end Manju goes back to cricket and makes it into Mumbai Under 19 Team. Eleven years after the selection day Manju

is twenty-seven years old. Meanwhile he has played for India Under 19 and for Mumbai three seasons in the Ranji. But now he is dropped from the teams because there is another legend in the cricket named Ashwin Trivedi. Manju's brother comes back. All the three members of the family live separately and Manju meets Radha on Manju's birthday every year for three years now. Manju's hair started to grey and he looks older of the two. Radha's ex-girlfriend Sophia is now Manju's sponsor. Mohan Kumar is no more than a vegetable, unable to move his hand. Manju has now accepted the job of a cricket coach in an academy named Swadesh Symphony. Manju himself does not know whether he likes men or women. He likes to be alone. Manju loved Javed but was afraid of the unnatural relations. In the end Manju thinks that cricket has made his life hell and decides not to go to cricket again.

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