



Dreams and Disappointments in Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day*

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Sports is considered one of the most sought-after pass-times to have a positive impact on individuals and society in various ways, including physical and mental health, national unity, economic growth and enhancing international relations. Behind the screens players and administrators have different versions which are not often shared. Adiga brings to light the nuances involved in playing a part of any team, the passion, dedication and hard work and also the disappointments that come with it.

Through Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day* (2016), the aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between sensationalism and the game of cricket, as well as the potential for talented cricketers to go from obscurity to fame. With cricket as its central theme, *Selection Day* embraces the gloomy side of a busy city, Mumbai, and the hopes and disappointments of its citizens, in a Dickensian manner. Aravind Adiga, the 2008 Booker Prize winner, a social critic examines themes like family, identity, ambition, and socioeconomic status along with more significant issues like corruption in sports and the effects of globalisation on Indian society. Though some degree of sensationalism is often a natural part of sports reporting, as it can add to the excitement and drama of a match, Adiga views this sensationalism as the problem of the country. *Selection Day* is packed with observant, accurate insights concerning the risks of raising children in a country where politics and sports have degraded into demeaning forms of popular entertainment. Adiga exhorts the readers to view sports as merely a kind of entertainment.

Keywords: Cricket, Sensationalism, Socioeconomic status, Globalisation, Dickensian

Suggestive of the title, the novel *Selection Day* is about the selection of players to advance into a professional level in the game of cricket. Cricket, a game that is quite popular all around the world, particularly in India, Pakistan, Australia, England, South Africa, and the Caribbean, is extremely popular for a number of

reasons, including its fascinating history, fun gameplay, and ability to unite people. With more than 300 years of history, cricket has developed into a fascinating sport. It continues to be a very thrilling sport to watch and follow because of unpredictable results, heart-pounding moments, and unexpected twists and turns. With the launch of the Indian Premier League in 2008, India's contribution to the growth of cricket has increased the sport's popularity around the world. Though Cricket has the power to bring together people from many origins and cultures, whether it be on the pitch or in front of the screen. Aravind Adiga uses the same game to expose the other side of it too.

Brothers on the field is not an uncommon sight with Waugh brothers, Pathan brothers Chappell brothers and many more. In a similar fashion Aravind Adiga, a social critic, has created *Selection Day* (2016) that revolves around two brothers Radha Krishna Kumar and Manjunath Kumar, who are raised by Mohan Kumar, their father, a cricket fanatic. The desire to achieve fame through cricket is solely based on their ambitious father Mohan's device to escape poverty. Mohan is adamant about turning his sons into cricket stars and devotes all of his resources to their training. As the two brothers get ready for Selection Day, a significant day in their lives, with the hope that they would be seen by talent agencies and picked up for a cricket team, the plot develops. Adiga traces the boys' desire to succeed and the fear of failure.

Anand Metha is introduced as the one who would provide funding in exchange for the boys' future share. This facilitates Radha and Manju to live a better life in spite of their own personal struggles and conflicts they grapple with. Their father keeps reminding them of the adverse situation they will have to live in if they fail to succeed in cricket. His despotic hold on his boys has made his life miserable as much as his sons'. Ashish Gupta writes, "Cricket is, of course, a wonderful way of writing about shattered dreams – both personal and national" (102). The boys are left with no other choice than to breathe cricket.

Through most of the characters, Adiga illustrates how being compelled to pursue what one does not desire ultimately leads to mediocrity. Of the two brothers, Radha is already a celebrated star, though Manju also proves his mettle. Javid Ansari, an affluent Muslim boy joins the cricket team who is as good as the Kumar brothers. The players eventually give in to their fury after being forced to pursue things they did not want.

Adiga sums up his discontent with Indian society when Anand Mehta tells a young Punjabi American businesswoman about the way Indians like to be portrayed hinting that in actuality it is the contrary:

O I do read Indian novels sometimes. But you know, Ms. Rupinder, what we Indians want in literature, at least the kind written in English, is not literature at all, but flattery. We want to see ourselves depicted as soulful, sensitive, profound, valorous, wounded, tolerant and funny beings. All that Jhumpa Lahiri stuff. But the truth is, we are absolutely nothing of that kind... We are animals of the jungle, who will eat our neighbour's children in five minutes, and our own in ten. Keep this in mind before you do any business in this country. (Selection Day, 233)

When the Kumar brothers' venture into cricket begins, they are seen closely knit but later their rivalry is established in the cricket ground due to the prevalent cut-throat competition. Radha, the better of the two, gets inclined towards cricket, though forced into the game, whereas Manju wishes to become a forensic scientist, by watching a TV show on the Crime Scene Investigation "*CSI Las Vegas*" (77), but evolves to be a better sports star. Manju is fortunate enough to get a chance to spend one and a half months at J. F. Browns International school playing cricket, attending classes. He recollects his relish for science and mathematics and also his efforts to read British newspapers. Of all he relishes the opportunity to experience first-hand "the uplifting culture of the United Kingdom" (142). On the day of selection to represent the Under-19 League, and advance into the team, Manju is selected leaving Radha dejected and disillusioned with no other option than to head to his ancestral village.

Adiga depicts the need for young people to define their identities and how they utterly fail at it. Each of the characters aspire to pursue their dreams and end up in an entirely different career. Anand Mehta visualises the "young man from Mumbai or Delhi as a vulture above the nations, scavenging for his identity" (234). Radha returns at the end to live on Manju's earnings from being a cricket star. Javed quits cricket as he detects corruption and gives a try at films and Manju, the celebrated star is made to retire at the age of twenty-seven and replace his mentor, Tommy Sir.

Class is a constant theme with Adiga. He depicts the working of India by juxtaposing the Kumar family living in the slums of Mumbai with that of Javed and Anand Mehta who are scions of people in top business classes. Anand Mehta discovers something in a new capitalism project that owners of clubs and leagues can relate to, and he enslaves those who are willing to be slaves. The Punjabi woman wonders whether it is illegal or not when, Anand proudly proclaims that Manjunath is his "fully sponsored little superman (235), to bribe the boy until he is eighteen. Anand retorts that "nothing's illegal in India" (235).

Adiga has always brought to light the cruder side of life that is often ignored. When it comes to cricket

most of the time only the positive things get written about, whereas the common man has no clue as to what is going on with the players and their personal lives. The players are idolised and are looked upon as the perfect beings with no worries. In *Selection Day*, Adiga has succinctly portrayed their disappointments and also how even the dreams at times are not theirs to begin with. Success in sports is seldom without a personal cost and might be fleeting. In the journey of pursuing, one's dream others are left with disappointments. Adiga strives to respond to the reality of the game with maximum finesse and commitment.

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