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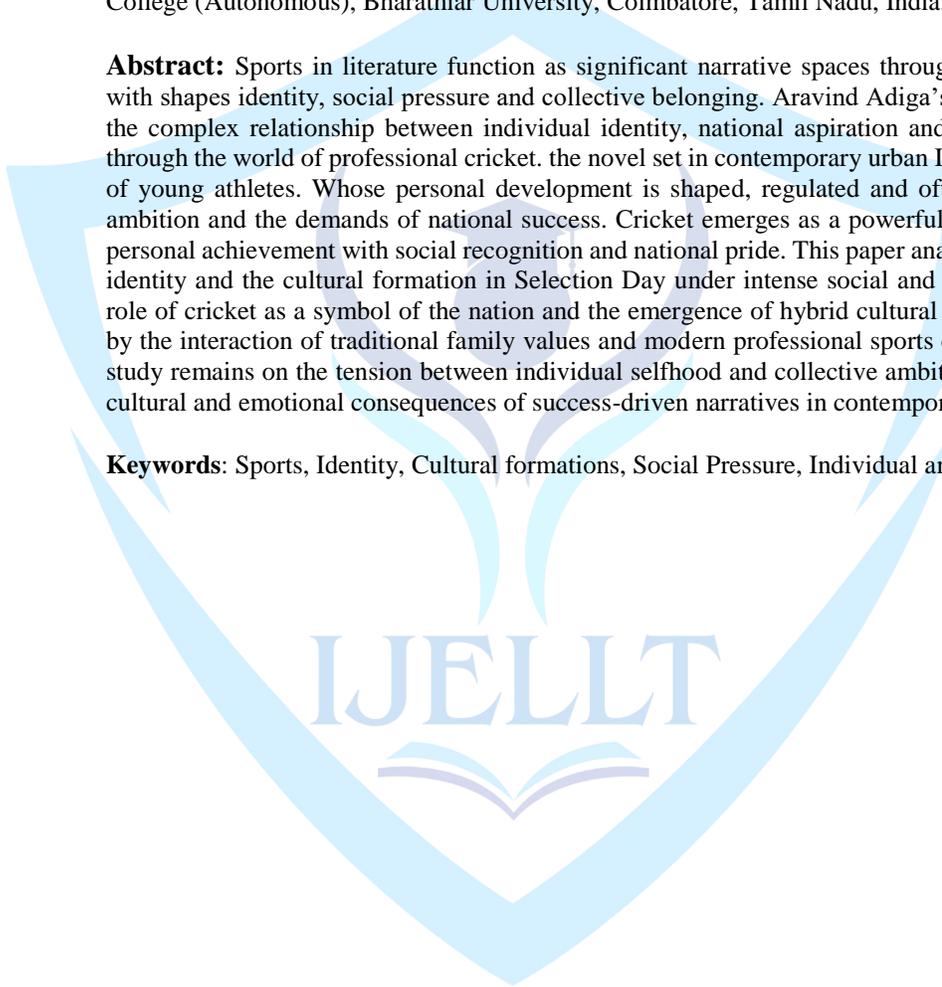
Sporting Identity and Cultural Formation in Aravind Adiga's Selection Day

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Abstract: Sports in literature function as significant narrative spaces through which writers engage with shapes identity, social pressure and collective belonging. Aravind Adiga's Selection Day explores the complex relationship between individual identity, national aspiration and cultural transformation through the world of professional cricket. the novel set in contemporary urban India, it presents the lives of young athletes. Whose personal development is shaped, regulated and often distorted by familial ambition and the demands of national success. Cricket emerges as a powerful cultural force that links personal achievement with social recognition and national pride. This paper analyses the construction of identity and the cultural formation in Selection Day under intense social and emotional pressure. The role of cricket as a symbol of the nation and the emergence of hybrid cultural formations were created by the interaction of traditional family values and modern professional sports culture. The focus of the study remains on the tension between individual selfhood and collective ambition that highlighting the cultural and emotional consequences of success-driven narratives in contemporary Indian society.

Keywords: Sports, Identity, Cultural formations, Social Pressure, Individual and Collective Ambition



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Introduction

Sports fiction has become an important space for examining identity, ambition and social pressure in contemporary society. Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day* stands out as a significant contribution to this genre, using cricket as a central narrative framework to explore questions of selfhood, belonging and success. In the Indian context, cricket carries meanings that extend far beyond sport, closely connected with national pride, social mobility and global recognition. Sania Mirza, the former Indian professional tennis player states, "I don't play tennis to prove a point to anyone. I play for my country and myself." (Sania Mirza) *Selection Day* set in contemporary urban India, it portrays the lives of young athletes whose personal development is shaped and regulated by familial ambition and the demands of professional sport. Through the experiences of Radhakrishna Kumar (Radha) and Manjunath Kumar (Manju), the novel reveals the emotional and cultural consequences of a success driven system in which individual identity is subordinated to national and social expectations. Cricket emerges as a powerful cultural force linking personal achievement with collective aspiration. This paper examines the novel through the interconnected concerns of identity, nation and hybrid cultural formation, focusing on the tension between individual selfhood and collective ambition in modern India.

Selection Day lies in the construction of identity under sustained social and emotional pressure. From early childhood, Radha and Manju are denied the freedom to explore their individuality. Their father Mohan Kumar, exercises absolute authority over their lives, shaping their routines, discipline and emotional responses in preparation for cricketing success. Mohan Kumar exposed his true interest, which was neither in studies nor in cricket. Manju, on the other hand, played for financial reasons and had a hidden passion for forensic science. As a result, he enrolled in Ruia college without permission from his father. Manju just played cricket to fulfil his father's goal. Manju felt that his father's rules for cricket and daily activities, including prohibitions on shaving, pornography and driving, were like prison for both brothers. Mohan Kumar says, "three principal dangers on the path to glory-premature shaving, pornography and car driving. He adds one more- The Mohammedan (a left- hander!)." (*Selection Day* 63). Identity is presented as something imposed and regulated, rather than organically developed. "Every man must martyr himself to something; but we have martyred ourselves to this mediocrity." (*Selection Day* 279) Radha largely conforms to the role designed for him. His sense of self aligns with discipline, obedience and physical endurance, his value is measured through performance. Manju's experience, however, reveals a deeper internal conflict. Although gifted as a cricketer, he struggles to reconcile his personal sensibility with the rigid demands of professional sport.

His discomfort exposes the emotional strain produced by externally imposed identity and highlights the tension between inner inclination and external expectation.

The novel presents identity as increasingly fragmented when shaped solely by success-oriented goals. Manju's intellectual curiosity and emotional sensitivity place him at odds with the competitive sporting environment. His identity remains unstable, divided between loyalty to his father and a desire for autonomy. Such instability reflects the broader experience of young individuals in contemporary India, where success is narrowly defined and deviation from prescribed paths is discouraged. The research article titled *Lack Of Sex Education Among The Indians: Aravind Adiga's Observation In Selection Day (2021)* by the scholar C. Suganiya observes that, *Mediocre is the one who is inclined towards someone or something for some time and changes his mind later towards another person or object. Here, Manju refers as a mediocre. Sometimes Manju was attracted to stranger women and Sofia but another time he was attracted to Javed. Similarly, sometimes he was very interested in playing cricket but then he wanted to give up cricket and become a scientist (3276).*

In *Selection Day*, cricket functions as a symbolic representation of the nation. Selection into elite teams signifies more than professional advancement, it marks entry into national visibility and recognition. Young players are trained to associate personal success with national pride, carrying the weight of collective expectation on their shoulders. The nation appears in the novel as a demanding force that prioritizes discipline, sacrifice and emotional restraint. Fear, doubt and vulnerability are discouraged, as they conflict with the ideal image of the successful national sportsman. Emotional endurance becomes a requirement, reinforcing a narrow model of achievement tied to national aspiration. Adiga exposes the conditional nature of national belonging within this framework. Recognition persists only as long as performance continues, while failure leads to neglect and erasure. This conditional acceptance creates constant anxiety, binding identity to results rather than personal worth. Manju's struggle reveals the exclusions embedded in this system, showing that those who do not conform to dominant expectations are quietly sidelined, regardless of talent or effort.

Selection Day reflects a society undergoing rapid cultural transition, where traditional values coexist with modern professional ambitions. The Kumar family operates within a framework of obedience, sacrifice and authority. Yet their aspirations are shaped by ideas of fame, financial success and global recognition associated with professional cricket. Cricket academies in the novel represent hybrid cultural spaces.

They merge local realities with global sporting standards, combining discipline with commercialization. Players are trained using modern techniques while remaining bound to familial authority and social hierarchy. This cultural blending generates tension, as characters attempt to negotiate conflicting expectations. “nothing’s illegal in India, Anand Metha replied with a smile. Because technically, everything’s illegal in India.” (Selection Day 235) Mumbai itself emerges as a hybrid environment marked by opportunity and inequality, tradition and modernity. The boys navigate cramped domestic spaces and elite sporting institutions, moving between contrasting cultural worlds. Their identities are shaped by both local upbringing and global sporting culture, producing a sense of partial belonging rather than stability.

The intersection of identity, nation and hybrid culture forms the core of Selection Day. Ankur Yadav observes that, “In India some people enjoy Cricket as a sport, some adduce it to nationalism and some consider it a business venture.” (159) Cricket becomes the site where these forces converge, shaping young lives through discipline, aspiration and expectation. Identity is constructed in response to national ideals, while cultural hybridity complicates the experience of belonging. Manju’s journey embodies this intersection. Expected to become a national symbol, he simultaneously struggles within a hybrid cultural environment that values obedience and innovation. His gradual withdrawal from cricket represents a rejection of imposed identity and a refusal to conform to a narrow definition of success. This choice underscores the cost of collective ambition and affirms the importance of personal integrity.

Conclusion

The novel portrays identity as shaped under intense pressure, often at the expense of personal freedom. Cricket operates as a cultural space where national aspiration and modern transformation intersect, producing fragmented and uncertain selves. By focusing on the experiences of young cricketers, the novel exposes the emotional cost of success-driven narratives and the exclusions embedded within national ideals. The hybrid cultural environment complicates identity formation, leaving individuals suspended between tradition and modernity.

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