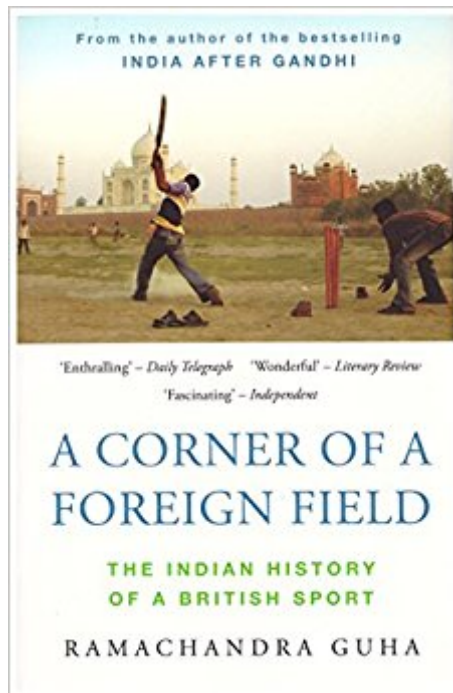




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A Corner Of A Foreign Field: The Indian History Of A British Sport



Synopsis

C. K. Nayudu and Sachin Tendulkar naturally figure in this captivating history of cricket in India, but so too—in arresting and unexpected ways—do Mahatma Gandhi and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The Indian careers of those great English cricketers Lord Harris and D. R. Jardine provide a window into the operations of Empire, while the extraordinary life of India's first great slow bowler, Palwankar Baloo, introduces the still-unfinished struggle against caste discrimination. Later chapters explore the competition between Hindu and Muslim cricketers in colonial India and the extraordinary passions now provoked when India plays Pakistan. An important, pioneering work, this is also a beautifully-written meditation on the ramifications of sport in society at large, and on how sport can influence both social and political history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"An original, scholarly, and highly entertaining work by a writer who combines the skills of biographer, anthropologist, cricket journalist, and political historian." — The Spectator
"A fascinating social study, absorbingly told and with much charm." — The Independent
"Guha effortlessly blends political and social history with a chronology of the game and those who play it in a country, as he puts it, 'where all things are turned upside down.'" — Time Out

Ramachandra Guha is the author of several books, including *How Much Should a Person Consume*, *India After Gandhi*, and *Savaging the Civilized*.

Arrived on time. My father really enjoyed the book!

2008 was a great year for me. One of the highlights was regular book club meetings where I got introduced to Ramachandra Guha (by a friend). I got the book "A corner of a foreign field" by Ramachandra Guha for coming second in a quiz. I liked owning the book because it had the book smell which I adore. I never got around to reading till March 2009. The main reason - I thought it would be a book filled with details and scores of Cricket matches played through the ages. I could not have been more wrong. The book is a look back on history of India through evolution of Cricket. It is a breezy read even for a non cricketing buff. The most important part of the book was the rise of Palwankars in cricketing world. Baloo Palwankar was born in the caste of Chamar (cobblers) and became one of the best bowlers in the pre-independent India. It is his skill which allowed him to play along with "so called" high caste players. This is the time when untouchables were not allowed inside homes, temples and other public places. Even though Baloo Palwankar represented India, he was not allowed inside the pavillion during the initial years. He formed a great partnership with a wicket keeper called Seshasayee. Seshasayee is a Tamil Iyengar. For those of you who do not know caste equations; Tamil Iyengars are considered on top of the caste heaps. I am sure the spirit of the game would have made Baloo and Seshasayee hug each other and dance with joy whenever they took wickets together. I would give a million dollars to see the sight. Baloo was denied captaincy through out his life because of his caste. This created lots of furore amongst the fans arguing for and against the practice. There is no doubt in my mind that this debate contributed a lot for removal of untouchability. Baloo inspired his brothers to become Cricketers. One of his brother Vithal Palwankar became Captain of the Indian team. This could happen because the Captain of the Hindu team would stand down during the matches citing injury and forcing the hands of the team managers. The most telling part of the book was comparison between under privileged sports persons in India and the rest of the world. I am sure very few of you would have know about Baloo Palwankar. However every one in the US remembers Jackie Robinson the first black person to play major league base ball. Jackie was remembered by the US president Bill Clinton and made a moving speech on the 50th anniversary of the first match Jackie played in the major league. Why is that we forget our heroes who are not even remembered even by Dalit leaders asks the authour. He tries to deduce himself; a. Is it because Palwankars played Cricket before India became a full test playing nation? b. Or should we blame politics because Baloo Palwankar fought an election against Dr. Ambedkar and lost? c. Or should we simply pin the blame on that always available scapegoat, the lack of interest in history among Indians. The book has enthused me so much that I plan to start a sports scholarship in the name of Palwankars. Ofcourse, I need to get a job first. The book also

clearly showed why Advani was misunderstood when he said Jinnah was a secularist. The book has a speech by Jinnah where he praises the hindu muslim unity and says that the communities should laud cricketing victories achieved by each other. I wrote a longish review because any thing less would not do justice to this wonderful book. It goes without saying that you can borrow this book on condition of returning it to me. Normally I am not possessive of any book as I always felt sharing with out any condition enhances the book value. However I would like to possess this book.

My expectations were high after having read 'The Picador Book of Cricket', edited by Guha. However, the book suffers from too much emphasis on the pentangular and then loses its way without an evident theme uniting the various topics. Guha's research is first-class of course and deserves a lot of credit for rediscovering the story of Balu Palwankar. For a book that frequently appears in lists of the best cricket books, it is a tad disappointing.

Guha's book is an wonderfully researched work on the evolution of cricket in India starting from the early adoption of a British game by the Bombay Parsis to the 1999 world cup. The book meanders through the history of British India - interestingly, cricket & politics were largely more separate then, than after the Indian partition, particularly since Kashmir emerged as an issue of central importance - the kings & commoners, the religious commune of the pentangulars, the MCC teams & the ambivalent loyalties of the British in India, not least divisive among them the team captained by Douglas Jardine. Combine this with the complex caste hierarchies, the constitutional & the revolutionary nationalists, throw in a little Gandhian intervention & you get quite a concoction of history, politics & sports stirred up with something mischievously spicy. But of particular interest to me was what I learnt about Indian cricketers before Pakistan was another country, & what I learnt about India & Pakistan, after they separated but before cricket really established itself as a mirror of popular sentiment & a benchmark of national prestige. There are certain interesting notes on why cricket is indeed so popular in India or the Indian subcontinent - the most popular one being a sort of national pride in beating the British at something, the more exalted ones around the cosmic sensibilities of a 5 day game to the Hindu. Interesting also are the notes on contradictory positions on cricket when it comes to India playing Pakistan - largely in the final decade of the twentieth century with India rife with riots & religious divide as is the ubiquitous & timeless gentility of the men who have played this game for more than a century separated from the social, historical, religious, & racial biases of its gargantuan following. If history & cricket both interest you, then this book is your poison. @souvikstweets

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