

**Impact  
Factor  
3.025**

**ISSN 2349-638x**

**Refereed And Indexed Journal**

**AAYUSHI  
INTERNATIONAL  
INTERDISCIPLINARY  
RESEARCH JOURNAL  
(AIIRJ)**

**Monthly Publish Journal**

**VOL-IV**

**ISSUE-VI**

**JUN**

**2017**

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**Arvind Adiga's Selection Day: A Journey Towards Rediscovering the Self****Dr. Aradhana Vaidya**

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**Abstract:**

*Arvind Adiga's Selection Day was published in 2016. The Booker Prize winner writer has yet again come up with a novel on his favourite theme- India and the dark world of the metro city Mumbai. Adiga's earlier novel too have dealt with the Mumbai city and the ugliness and the darkness that have engulfed the city due to the corruption and dirty politics. The novel Selection Day deals with the world of cricket. It is through the game of cricket, Adiga has touched upon several other themes. It is a wonderful book about human-relations, about the freedom to be an individual, over-ambitious parents and their big dreams, and also about rediscovering the self through a laborious journey. It is the story of two innocent boys from the slums whose father is hell-bent on making them cricket champions like Sachin Tendulkar. Radha and Manju are the brothers who haven't had a normal childhood because they were constantly preparing for the selection day that would decide their future. The book begins with 'Three years before the Selection Day'. It takes the readers through the rigorous period of preparation for the selection day; along with this also unfolds a tale of freedom to choose sexuality and life. Manju emerges as the protagonist of the novel with his strange manners and unpredictable nature. Cricket, is not by choice, it is forced on the boys by their father. In this article I have tried to follow the process of self-discovery by Radha and Manju and also about the identity crisis faced by them.*

**Key-words:** Cricket, champions, selection-day.

Arvind Adiga's fiction in Selection Day is a wonderful story of two brothers and their ambitious father. Radha and Manju are boys from slums whose mother has left them and their father is obsessed with the dream of making them the best cricketers of India. In this novel the writer introduces us to the cricket world where dreams are built and shattered every day, where there is lots of hard work and sleepless nights, where the name and fame changes with every single match. Cricket Gods are created and dethroned with the matches that are played. In this world everything is temporary and yet everyone strives to make it to the top. The players have to face money-crunch, lack of good nutritious food and struggle to get good equipments. There is also the politics that determine the future of the players. Amidst all this the player is reduced only to a mere figure. His personal life and his freedom to choose his identity and sexuality is totally neglected. Adiga has taken the readers into the unknown realm of the cricket world which is not as glorious as it is projected in the media.

*Selection Day* is not only a book about cricket and the game-politics. It has beautifully explored human relations and the human psyche. The cut-throat world we live in has little scope for emotions and sentiments. It is a materialistic world where money and fame plays a very vital role. Manju is the protagonist of the story. His elder brother, Radha, too plays an equally important role. On the background of the game, Adiga has explored the relations between two brothers and their over-ambitious father. The father had decided very early that the boys would become the next Sachin-Kumble of India. After his wife deserted him, he left his small village for Mumbai. He knew that the future of his boys was in Mumbai. With stark poverty and no other connection it was

difficult to relocate in a city like Mumbai. They find a place in the slums where the boys start with the cricket practice. Mohan Kumar has to bear the mocking comments of many people for his ambition and his poverty. He took every insult with a smile for he knew he would have the last laugh.

“Revenge is the capitalism of the poor: conserve the original wound, defer immediate gratification, fatten the first insult with new insults, invest and reinvest spite, and keep waiting for the perfect moment to strike back. Because every mocking remark that Mohan Kumar had heard about his plan to produce champions had been stored away in his memory...(40)

The next difficult thing is to find a rich person who would sponsor the talented boys. He knew it would be almost impossible to finance the boys on his own. Tommy, the cricket coach of the boys comes to rescue. He convinces Mr. Anand Mehta to finance the boys. He sees a lot of talent in Radha and Manju and knows that the boys would make it to the top. Mr Mehta agrees to sponsor Radha but Mr. Tommy convinces him that it would make headlines in the media if two brothers are introduced at the same time.

“Eight thousand’ Mohan Kumar said. ‘For one boy. And fifteen thousand for both. Two?’ The investor broke into an incredulous smile. ‘Two? I’ve done plenty of charity in my time, mate, but I did not come here to make a donation.’ ‘Two. Two is the opportunity.’ Tommy Sir bunched his fingers together. ‘Two is the visionary aspect. Listen. Sports alone isn’t enough today. People want sport and a story. I know, because I am also a writer. Two brothers from the slum making it big. One of them looks like a film-star. It’s a story.’ (38)

Hereafter starts the rigorous practice. Radha is a talented boy seen as the next Sachin Tendulkar. Manju is always the ‘second best’ and he is not to compete with his brother. Radha looks like a ‘hero’ whereas Manju is the one with pimples and average looks. While Radha’s world revolves around cricket, Manju has other dreams. Manju has always wanted to pursue his studies in science but their father had no place for studies in his scheme. Manju longed to go to college but he knew there was no use.

“What was the point of studying? He, like Radha, would have to drop out after the SSC exams to concentrate on cricket. Their father had already decided. Tommy Sir, for once, agreed with their father.”(82)

Their father made them take an oath in front of God that both of them would not shave nor study nor drive a car. This was their contract with God Subramanya. While Radha thought of these rules as the bars of the prison, Manju doted on his father. He had tremendous faith in him and believed he was a magician-

“My Appa is once again a magician!- and I want the whole world to know this. If he promises something, anything, that thing will come true.” (58)

There is another boy who is preparing for the selection day - Javed Ansari, who comes for practice in a car. Manju develops a strange bond with Javed. Javed is the voice of Manju’s dreams. Javed is a rich brat who knows the ways of the world. He is loud and vociferous and Manju admires him for his dare-devil attitude. This admiration develops into an unnamed bond which everyone else label as ‘homo’. Manju himself is baffled with this strange feeling. He is aware that all people including his brother are talking about his relation with Javed. ‘Is the world’s second-best batsman a homo?’(176). He is for the first time introduced to the concept of homosexuality. People talk about it, are actively engaged in it and it is also an age-old practice and yet the law labels it as illegal. Mohan Kumar does not approve of Manju’s involvement with Javed and warns Manju to stay away

from him. When Javed Ansari advises Manju to follow his own dreams rather than fulfill his father's dreams, Mohan Kumar is furious.

'That Mohammedan boy is the one telling Manju, give up cricket and go to the college. Science! 2,500 rupees for lab fees; 1,500 rupees for a dissection box. To cut open cockroaches! You know he is in trouble with the police, this Mohammedan. He has a gang and they smoked ganja one day and drove their bikes full speed thorough Navi Mumbai. Without a driving license. Through red lights. His father is a rich man and paid the police to let him go. Big thief walks free. (165)

The novel travels on different planes. It is about ambition and dreams, about the game politics and complexities of life. It is most importantly about relationships. Radha and Manju are no rivals and yet time and again they have to pose like competitors. Initially Radha is proved to be the best but as he develops the 'Weight-transfer issue' he loses his grip on the game. Disheartened and disillusioned he wishes this problem to vanish on its own. "Weight-transfer issue'. The phrase was as heavy as a death-sentence."(176) Initially Radha is selected to go to England for six weeks on a scholarship. It is later however, Manju who leaves for England. The rift between the brothers is invisible and yet gets prominent with every passing day. Manju was always told that he is the 'second-best batsman'. They both grew-up believing this. Now suddenly it is Manju who is being projected as the best. Sofia, Radha's girlfriend also leaves him and joins Manju. This is a major blow to Radha. Angry and jealous, Radha hit backs at Manju- "...I-m-p-o-t-a-n-t. Like you, Manju. Just like you.' Radha winked. 'Sofia would marry you in two minutes. You treated her badly, but you know she'd leave her husband for you. How much money has she given you by now? She's your new sponsor.'"(271)

Radha could see Manju floundering between his wants. He was living in two worlds- he liked women and he was attracted to men. He saw that his brother was different and yet he could not accept it. Manju himself has identity crisis. Who is he really? What does he want from life- he is confused. All he realized was that he was not a normal person like his brother. He did not drink, nor had sex nor was he interested in any normal activity which boys of his age were engaged in. He felt attracted to Javed and he knew this was not normal. He knew not why. It felt weird that his sexuality would define his individuality. Running away from the problem was not the solution. But he could not face it either.

"Manju had long ago accepted- it had occurred to him one evening in the changing room of the Wankhade stadium, after a particular innings-that what he had known for Javed must have been what the film songs called love, and that his fear of this fact had driven him away from Navi Mumbai and back to cricket."(276)

Wanting to study and follow his ambition, Manju had initially decided to give up cricket at Javed's behest. He believed Javed when he said that he should follow his heart. Later, however, after a lot of introspection he accepted his feelings for Javed. This is the time when he decided to move away from Navi Mumbai and return to the world of cricket. He would become a cricket coach, just like Tommy Sir. He would live alone. His uniqueness would be his identity.

Adiga has once again, with this novel, done what he is best at. He has very delicately disentangled the threads of emotion that so much hold a human being away from oneself. He has very slowly reached the depth of Manju's heart and finally helped Manju to know his real self. Mumbai and cricket are two things that had changed the course of Manju's life. He had finally found salvation in this. There was no escape. Reaching out to one's true self can be said to be the main theme of this novel. The world of cricket along with the demanding life of Mumbai, finally helps

Manju to know and accept his real self. Adiga has no grudges about both. He accepts that cricket is the soul of India. Mumbai too is a wonderful city. As he states- "Mumbai is a dying city, true. But there is one thing that it will always have. One beautiful thing Integrity. The integrity of the Bombay common man, known and celebrated throughout India, deeper than granite, the true bedrock of the city." (56)

Adiga's *Selection Day* is not a commentary on cricket. Though, when you read the novel you realize that it is written by one who has followed the game closely. There are characters that resemble some real players yet the writer has not boldly come open with it. His characters tell a tale yet we know it is the author that is speaking. As Keshava Guha points out, "*Selection Day* is written at an angle to conventional realism; Adiga does not construct the illusion that we see this world through the eyes of his characters. We see it thorough the author's eyes, and what emerges most powerfully, as with Hardy, is the author's own personality: the force of his humanity and his social and political vision." <sup>1</sup>

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All the quotes are taken from the book *Selection Day* by Arvind Adiga.

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