

Conversations about the Commonwealth of Cricket | Text Transcript | CIRCLE

This is a text transcript for the event “Conversations about the Commonwealth of Cricket” presented by the Canada India Research Centre for Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Guelph. The event was recorded on January 9, 2021. The guest speakers were Ramachandra Guha and Kanta Murali. The event was moderated by John Harriss.

Transcript:

John Harriss:

Okay I think that we should make a start. I'd just like to welcome everybody to this webinar this morning. Where I'm sitting Saturday morning where others are sitting Saturday evening. Perhaps even I don't know, Sunday morning. My name is John Harriss. I'm from Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. Though I'm currently sitting in Ontario in Canada. My only qualification for chairing the webinar today is that I'm a long-term cricket fan myself.

As I was saying to Ram earlier, my memories of cricket go back to 1953 and the oval test match when England won the ashes after many years. My only appearance, I think the only other qualification I have Ram is that I did once appear on the BBC cricket program. Actually, speaking about the era when senior English cricketers refused to tour in India which is an interesting kind of era in cricket history to reflect upon.

I should just say a few words before we go any further about CIRCLE. CIRCLE is the Canada India Research Center for Learning and Engagement. Which was established at the University of Guelph in February last year and which aims to be an interdisciplinary nucleus in Canada for cutting-edge research on India and the Indian diaspora. To showcase, advocate, catalyze and foster an equitable respectful and sustained exchange of knowledge between Canadian and Indian scholars on complex emerging and unexplored topics related to sustainability and social and economic well-being.

The center was of course established just as the pandemic was taking off and I think it's greatly to the credit of CIRCLE, shows its vitality, that the center ran I think nine webinars and one book panel last year, all in the context of the pandemic.

Today's webinar is the first CIRCLE event of 2021 and it's on conversations about the commonwealth of cricket in which Kanta Murali will discuss his new book with the author Ramachandra Guha and it really is a particular pleasure for me to introduce the speakers.

Let me start if I may with Kanta, whom I had the great pleasure of teaching many years ago when she studied at the London School of Economics. She's now associate professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto and the author of a fine book entitled *Caste, Class and Capital: The Social and Political Origins of Economic Policy in India*, but it's not as an

outstanding young political scientist that Kanta joins us today, rather it's because of the great work that she did as a sports journalist before she turned to academics.

I remember Kanta in particular a remarkable long essay that you wrote in front line about Sunil Gavaskar and why he rather than Kapil Dev should have received from wisdom the accolade of Indian cricketer of the century, and for those listening who are interested, that essay is to be found in the issue of front line for August the 31st of 2002.

Sports writings loss has been a Political Sciences gain, just as history won out against sports journalism in the career of our friend Robin Jeffrey the eminent historian of Kerala who started out in life too as a sports journalist. Our second speaker and the author of the commonwealth of cricket is Ramachandra Guha, who more than any other speaker I've ever introduced merits that old cliché of needs no introduction but nonetheless I will go on to say a little bit about Ram.

He is of course the most outstanding historian of contemporary India, the author of the magnificent *India after Gandhi* and more recently of two volumes of *biography of the Mahatma* as well as of a number of other major work. And we shouldn't forget uh his first book *The Unquiet Woods* which is a seminal work of an environmental history. He's also as many of you will know, a fiery public intellectual who's never been afraid to speak his mind. To the extent that I'm sure I'm not the only person around here who worries about your safety in the current climate in India.

There was a time though when I think that Ram was probably best known actually as a writer on cricket. Perhaps especially for the book *A Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian history of a British sport* and as he explained in an interview I did with him some years ago for the journal development and change, his whole career has actually been influenced in significant ways by his passion for cricket.

He told me then that I quote, "my early professional ambitions were sporting rather than scholarly. I wanted to play cricket for India" and he explained to me how the need to spend long afternoons in the nets bowling his off breaks actually played a very significant part in the choices he made as a student. It was only after five years I think it was of playing cricket very seriously that you realized that you weren't quite good enough to turn professional. It was in that context that you went off to study first sociology and then to become such a distinguished writer of history.

The commonwealth of cricket which has the lovely long subtitle of a lifelong love affair with the most subtle and sophisticated game known to humankind, sentiments with which I entirely agree. The commonwealth of cricket in some ways picks up on the story that you started to tell me those years ago. It is in part an autobiography of Ram's life through cricket— that's one way of describing the book.

Before I hand over to Kanta and Ram, I should say a little bit about how we're going to proceed today. I think we'll start with what we hope is intended to be a conversation between Kanta

and Ram for 40-45 minutes at that order of time. Then we'll open up to a wider discussion. I'm asking all participants, if you wouldn't mind please, to keep on mute and without video because otherwise there may be problems with the technology.

If you'd like to comment or pose a question to Ram or to Kanta, would you please write it in the chat box and then we'll open it up at the end of the session and I'll be able to relay your questions or your comments to our two speakers. Well, the fact you've got to write your questions and comments we'll encourage you to make them fairly brief. Though I guess that many of us listening in today, like me, will be encouraged to reminisce about our own sort of most vivid memories of great cricket matches. Anyway, that's quite enough of me. I very happy to hand over now to our speakers and I think to Kanta for you to start.

Kanta Murali:

Thank you John and thank you Sharada and everyone else it's CIRCLE for organizing this event. I wanted to begin by congratulating you Ram, on your fourth and extremely charming, is the best way I can describe this book, that's come to have all the elements I think that one associates with your writing. The ability to tell fascinating stories, the absolutely engaging style of writing and the wit and humor that runs through several pages of the book. As anyone who picks up this book will know and as John mentioned that it is a personal autobiography told through cricket and so, in that sense this is the most personal of all your books and so it has a very different quality to say a corner of a foreign field in that particular sense.

The book is also many things, in reading the book you know I found it to be many things. So, let me just very briefly suggest those several things that the book is. Apart from being a personal autobiography, by definition personal, but an autobiography through cricket it's as many have described it and as you yourself describe it in the second part of the subtitle a love letter to cricket or as you call it an ode to a lifelong love of love affair with cricket. It's also in many ways a tribute to your uncle Durai, who is the foremost hero in this book in many ways. Above all that, on a more macro level it's a story of the changing nature of the game and more importantly the changing sociology of cricket in India: of those who play it, of those who watch it, and also those who administer it.

It brought out many emotions for me, lots of warmth and smiles of the various stories that are told in the book. A fascination with thinking about the sociology of cricket, the de-centering of cricket from Bombay as you put it. In many ways it also brought out other less happy emotions shall we say. So, disappointment when you realize what cricket does at their core are, and I'll come to that in our conversations about chapters nine and ten of the book at some point. But also, in a sense a loss and a nostalgia for an era of cricket where the appreciation was of the aesthetics and art of cricket in many ways, but equally an appreciation of a particular type of internationalism of the cricket fan. Where essentially you know you could revel in the skills of a Gavaskar, Richards or a Miandad in equal measure to some extent, something that we seem to have lost in the world of cricket more recently.

But let me begin actually from the personal moving to the more macro aspects of the book. So, let me just begin by asking you what motivated you to write this book because at one point in the book you mentioned how I think it's *Spin and Other Turns* was written after the Babri Masjid demolition, I think *Wickets in the East* was written at a time when you were perhaps homesick for India being in new England in that sense. So, you know what prompted this book?

Ramachandra Guha:

I'll answer that in a minute Kanta, but first thanks to Sharada and CIRCLE for putting this together. Thank you John for your wonderful introduction. It's great to be reunited with Kanta, whom I also first knew as a cricket writer in the pages of *frontline*. Though, dare we say she has graduated or moved on from then, but I'm happy to have brought her back to one of our interests through this session.

You know Kanta, I knew I wanted to write about my uncle Durai. I mean he's been a profound influence on me, on my love of cricket, on my sense of what team spirit is and solidarity is, his ethical conduct, you know, in everything he's done and of course the extraordinary way in which he overcame his handicap you know. Very recently, again this is sort of remembering a bit but that's in the spirit of this conversation in the book.

I found out that one of my uncle Durai's college friends, was the columnist and writer Arun Shourie. They were contemporaries in St. Stephen's in the 1950s and early 1960s. Where Durai played cricket and Arun Shourie played hockey. I mean this is an aspect of Arun Shourie not many people know, but it was a Delhi University full-back and Arun Shourie he told me this 60 years later. Arun Shourie and I have a complicated history, including disagreements on a rather unfortunate book he wrote on Ambedkar but admiration for other styles he took and so on.

I never met him till recently, and then we found out that there's this connection – my uncle. He told me, he said, in college Durai was always a hero of all of us because he had a crippled right hand and he still played university level cricket. So, to fight adversity, to deal, faith may have given you a bad hand, but you will overcome it. So, I always knew I wanted to write about my uncle, but I wasn't sure what form it would take.

It so happened that in my late 50s after many years of being an ordinary fan, I was struck into this role as an accidental administrator I've been asked by the supreme court to be one of the people to try and clean up Indian cricket. With the operative word being 'try' and spectacularly fail which we hopefully come to later in the conversation. Then I thought maybe there's an art to a book. An ordinary fan being introduced by his mama. I mean maternal uncle, a very close relationship, particularly in south India. A mama who had no children of his own. His only sister's only son who could board a leg break at the age of six and on whom he put all his ambitions and his own frustrations. And that's what there's an up to a life with cricket because you start with as a fan and you end up very unlikely inside the BCCI.

So that's where I started writing and I also found it liberating in that I started writing just after the second volume of my Gandhi biography was published. Far too long, with too many

footnotes, with every fact attempted to be checked and I said, “what the hell. I've got to write based on what's in my heart, what's in my mind and what I think” and I managed to say that at least half a dozen howlers in this book, factual howlers in this book. Which I hope my works of scholarship have less factual howlers. But fans have pointed out, “no sir this match was played in Bombay, not in madras”, “India won this match, did not lose it”. I'll correct it in the paperback but the charm of the book may be also the few howlers it has because so it was written I think essentially because I recognize that Durai could be an art that ran right through the book you know. From someone who's on the margins or when you read it.

Now Kanta, you grew up in Chennai. All right. Which is a major center of Indian cricket. I mean after Bombay, Chennai is the oldest center. I mean it has comparative cricket going back to the 19th century. It has a storied history. It has very knowledgeable fans; arguably the most knowledgeable in those parties are most non-partisan cricket fans anywhere in the world. You grew up in a cricketing family. I don't know about your father, but your uncles played cricket, your siblings are obsessed with cricket, you grew up as part of a publishing family that had memorialized Indian cricket through its magazines and its newspapers. So, you grew up as an elite fan of Indian cricket and I grew up as a survival advantage in the cricket because I grew up in Dehradun, which is the back waters, a small town and so on and so forth. To go from there to the board, I thought I made an arc which I could try and narrate in this book.

Kanta Murali:

Yeah I'll come to several of those points in a minute, including actually this you know kind of having the introduction to cricket from small town India rather than metro India particularly in the 60s and 70s, but I'll come to that in a minute. Let me actually push you on and one of the aspects that John brought up as well, which is you know the subtitle of the book. The first part is *A lifelong love affair* but let me push you on the second part of the book which is *The Most so Subtle and Sophisticated Game Known to Humankind*. So, tell me about this the second part of the subtitle.

It's obviously an invitation to openly debate the merits of cricket versus other sports and in that sense or it's perhaps you know a humorous barb traded at perhaps you know other people maybe your family or others who have you know affiliations with other sports. So, in that sense why this need to you know to put cricket over other sports. Especially given so much of the theme of the book is about a lack of chauvinism, or the need for you know divorcing sport from chauvinism.

Ramachandra Guha:

Right. So yeah I mean, you know obviously it's a tease. Since it's an energy. It's a partly a nostalgic book as you pointed out Kanta. I wanted a kind of expansive 19th century subtitle you know. I don't know, John will know what is. I mean, doesn't Malthus' book have a very long subtitle?

John Harriss:

It most certainly does, but I can't pretend to remember it offhand.

Ramachandra Guha:

...and destitution and blah blah blah.

John Harriss:

That's right.

Ramachandra Guha:

So, I wanted an expansion in my teaching. I thought it's fun and you're quite right, I also wanted to tease partisans of other sports you know. There's a phrase in Hindi –(indiscernable)– I wanted to tease people who loved other sports, but I also passionately believe it. I do believe it's the most subtle and sophisticated. I mean baseball as compared to cricket is as Jeff boycott would put it, "it's rubbish" you know. It's so crude and the variations allowed to a fielder or a batsman are so fewer than intricate.

Arguably soccer, because it is a beautiful sport, and it is you know just the grace and elegance and fluidity with which people move. Soccer at its best may come close but soccer also is confined in that 90-minute time frame. Whereas cricket because it goes on for five days, it has so many interruptions, has an epic quality to it that I think no other sport does. Aesthetically, I would admit that soccer comes close. My friends who play golf tell me that aesthetically golf is also right up there.

Tennis before the graphite rackets. Tennis at the age of McEnroe had a great aesthetic quality that it does not have to be in the age of, you know, Djokovic and Nadal, but I do also mean it is a partisan statement on behalf of cricket. I am a chauvinist about some things. I am a chauvinist about test cricket over T20. I'm not a chauvinist about India vs. Pakistan. But in this respect I think apart from it being a tease apart from it frankly being an attention-grabbing device to have a subtitle of that kind, I think it is true. I believe it's true.

Kanta Murali:

In that sense I'll just give you a brief example. It's actually not Nadal and Djokovic but you miss the, you know for me possibly the most aesthetic of all sportsmen right, Federer in that sense. Who has been called the new year of tennis in many ways and you simply have to watch his footwork to understand the aesthetics but I'll you know this is your autobiography so in that sense.

Let me actually move to another personal element which you brought up, which is your uncle Durai. In that sense you know he's a hero of the book. He's your introduction in many ways along with your father to cricket. The stories as well as you know the actual skill and the technique, everything involved with the game and the appreciation of the aesthetics itself. So perhaps, I think it's worth you know telling this audience first a little bit about the immense role that Durai played in your cricketing life. Particularly as I'll come to in a minute because your partisan identity in cricket is through the Friends Union Cricket Club in Karnataka. So, in that sense Durai is central to your ties with cricket in that sense.

So perhaps, two parts to this question. First you know the immense role that Durai played in your cricketing life and your cricketing knowledge, but the second aspect is that I think he also represents a particular figure of an older era of grassroots cricket in India, club cricket right. Particularly in the biggest cities and you could as you point out that you know growing up in a major city.

All of us were introduced to or no you know a club that was central in the stories of this of cricket in the city and we could probably replace Friends Union Cricket Club with the other union or Alviro Peter or anything like that and we would probably all have a Durai in the back of our minds in terms of that links with cricket. So, in that sense you know the role that Durai played in your life, but also in that sense, this particular club cricket and its importance in the development of cricket and what has been the change over time and where do you see that going.

Ramachandra Guha:

Yeah so to first start with Durai in my life. So, as I said Durai is my mother's brother. My mother has five brothers. She's the only sister and she's adored by all of them. Durai had no children. A childhood accident left him with a deformed right hand and he still played very good cricket as a left arm spinner. He saw his nephew at the age of six; apparently bowled a leg break and a googly and quick succession to his father and said I'm going to make him the test cricketer that I could not become because of my handicap and of course as John explained in his introduction this ambition slowly dissipated because it could not be realized.

I played decent in school and college cricket but that was it. But I'm profoundly grateful to him for inculcating a love of cricket, a love of discipline, a love of hard work. I think I put in long hours in the archives because I had to bowl three hours in the next getting past the defensive back of Arun Lal my college captain which I never did in five years of time. Of course, just the joy of watching a match. I mean club cricket for me is still incredibly enjoyable because it's live.

Except for last year which was ruled out because of the pandemic, every year I'd watch half a dozen matches in Bangalore which has glorious weather all year round. Sitting next to the side screen watching a first division match and watching young kids match their wits against established random trophy regulars. So that's his role in my life but he's also as you suggest Kanta a paradigmatic figure in the development of Indian cricket.

You know every city has had its devoted coaches, mentors, teachers who nurture generations of cricketers. Now among the great Indian coaches in the past and in the recent past were KK Tarapore in Bangalore, who nurtured Rahul Dravid, Syed Kirmani, Roger Binny and some others. Ramakant Achrekar who nurtured Sachin Tendulkar, Ajit Agarkar, Vinod Kambli, Pravin Amre and some others. Tarak Sinha of Sonnet Club in Delhi whose most recent product is Rishabh Pant but also Raman Lamba Ashish Nehra and many other test cricketers. In your hometown I hope someone who's not been entirely forgotten A.G. Ram Singh, whose own sons were among many test cricketers he produced.

Now Durai differs from these legendary coaches in three ways. They are kind of all interconnected. One he had a full-time job and cricket mentoring was his part-time job. I mean he was a sales manager and then a director with horrific so in a full-time job he would take off to nurture cricketers. The second way which he differs is that unlike Ram Singh and Keki Tarapore and Ramakant Archrekar he never produced a test cricketer. So, there's a poignancy in that failure. We produced many trophy players to India reserves, but never a test cricketer. Thirdly, he had never been written about before and here there was me his nephew to write about him. But he is you know the kind of person whom you don't get, who is under appreciated.

I left out on the final draft of my book and some words of praise for Durai that Rahul Dravid gave in his memorial lecture. You know because he's at the age of 80. He's still there, he's mentoring people and he's absolutely incorruptible. I mean this is something you will know but romantic lovers of India don't know. Even later on IPL even club cricket is terribly corrupt. So, in Bangalore possibly even in Chennai if there's a team that's going to be demoted from the first division to the second division and its last match of the season you will have a kind of jugaad with the other team so that you get enough points to stay in the first division.

The way selections are done, how people are chosen from some clubs and not from other clubs, and Durai kind of absolute ethical standards are something I also wanted to showcase in this book. Also, as you would have noticed, right in the end I come to a political disagreement that my uncle and I had about a current primary step but that's also part of the story of this relationship.

Kanta Murali:

Let me just actually. Sharda has a point in the chat that Durai actually didn't know you were writing this book right till until you actually finished it. So, that that makes it even more you know more fascinating because of it.

Ramachandra Guha:

Absolutely, he did not know. Which is including one of the reasons why a couple of the facts about cricketing are wrong because I did not check them with him. He is now 86. He's in trail health. He's still active in mentoring his team. When the first advanced copy came and all of us

authors know how we love to see that first copy I went to his house. He had not seen anyone in COVID. I said Durai I have to come and give you something. I gave him the book he read it then he grumbled to my mother, his sister, who is 92. He called her he says, "Ram has written this book, but he's written too much about me. He should have written more about Vishwanath and Lal Bahadur and Chandrasekhar. Why the hell did it talk about me?"

[Laughs]

But I'm glad I was able to give him this book.

Kanta Murali:

Just to take off of that, since you mentioned Lal Bahadur Shastri who's in the early part of the book and because you know your introduction to sport was from Dehradun where your father was stationed. Essentially, so in that sense, and I'll come to this in a different type of question in a minute, but just personally you know being introduced to cricket in us in a smaller place, compared to you know Madras or Bombay in that sense in that particular time or a Bangalore of course.

So, did it give you a different vantage point then you made this distinction between an elite versus a mass cricket from of the start. You know what was the vantage point that coming from Dehradun in that sense you know particularly gave you about cricket. Because there's actually a very lovely line at some point in your description of one of the Dehradun matches and you say you know he used a crossbar just as a small-town cricketer could do or something to that extent, but anyway.

So, in that sense or you know whatever slogging to cow corners as a small-town cricketer could do or something to that extent but what did this coming from there what unique perspective in a sense does it give you about Indian cricket that perhaps those of us who grew up in the bigger cities don't have actually.

Ramachandra Guha:

So, I think one of the things of course it gives you, it gave me, it would give anyone from a small town in that generation is there's no high-quality life cricket in your town. There's not even a run due to rematch, let alone a test match. A principal vehicle for your cricketing education is hence all both or air in terms of stories told to me. So, there's an account in a book in my book of the first test match that India won in Chepauk in 1952 when Vinoo Mankand got 12 wickets. Durai heard this on the radio and told me about it all right.

He heard the wickets being described on the radio and then told me how he heard them being described. Now in your family your tata must have been there or one of your peripherals must have been there. What if you don't want to get that match. When you grew up and you know Wasim Akram came to play in Chennai you were there. So, your memories are oral and aural

through the radio. I think that excites your imagination in a way in which it maybe gives you a more of a romantic sense.

In the case of Dehradun, I was especially blessed because it was such a beautiful place to watch and play cricket. I mean Dehradun is now of course utterly destroyed by becoming the capital of Uttarakhand. It's you know it's been aesthetically and environmentally and socially ruined. But when I was growing up you know you had these glorious cricket fields owned by government organizations or public sector institutions.

The Himalayas to your north and the Shivaliks to your south, rimmed by you know wonderful old trees. So, the aesthetic experience was also very much part of cricket. Being out there watching, observing, chatting, soaking in the winter sun. In my case I was a scorer. So, from the age of seven or eight I would be scoring from my local club. So, I think it's a perspective which maybe you take less things for granted than you would if you're growing up in Bangalore or Delhi or Bombay.

Kanta Murali:

Yeah and I'll just point out there's a very nice story also you know, I think the first time you watch (indiscernable) in Dehradun right, so in for you it was this revelation of what India international looks like versus what a small town cricketer. So, in that sense the access to everything including being able to watch a world-class cricketer of course is markedly different but that's a good way to segue actually for us to move to you know what's underlying the book and actually a fascinating narrative of the book which is the changing social geography of cricket in India.

It's told personally in your story very well from Dehradun to Stephen's in Delhi to you know Friends Union Cricket Club and Karnataka in Bangalore to of course following India internationally and in the world of international cricket. So, in that sense this is also a story of you know the changes from the I mean for you from the 50s and 60s through Durai and your father and then from primarily from the six late 60s onwards through your own watching of cricket.

So in that sense, crickets moved from you know clearly the elite origins of cricket in India, but of course it was always I mean as (indiscernable), as your story of palm karbala has always told us that there was always space for or there was always a representative in some way who had a phenomenal story of that type but on the whole it moves from an elite to a middle class to a much more egalitarian base today in India. Equally, it's a decentering of the spatial concentration of cricket from Bombay to the other cities.

But now of course you know with Dhoni coming from Ranchi in that sense moving much further than even the major cities. Even more recently you can take a case like Tina Trajan coming from you know much more modest background in that sense and not even a small town in that sense coming up. So, in that sense what does, you know, what would you say are the most important

changes in the sociology of cricket and the social geography of cricket that you would like to highlight in the course of your watching cricket over you know it's now 50 odd years right.

Ramachandra Guha:

So, I think sociologically it's the decentering which you point out. That when we first meet England in 1971 I think six out of 11 players were from Bombay. There were I think three from Karnataka one from Delhi. In the last match we played in Australia there were two cricketers from South Africa, Jareja and Pujara and the nine others know from nine different teams. So, geographically it's been decentered.

Cricket watching has also become much less elite and much less male. I think in your generation, in Sharada's generation, many more women follow and people younger than you many more women now follow cricket, play cricket, follow cricket, are knowledgeable of cricket and some of our best writers on cricket are female. Now, this would be inconceivable when I was growing up. So, I think sociological deepening geographical deepening.

I think also something I've not talked about very much in this book because it's a memoir and not a sociological study is the role played by television in taking cricket everywhere. Now this book is also generational in that when I was growing up, compared to when you were growing up or when Sharada was growing up or and certainly compared to when my children are growing up there was not even live television. In Dehradun live television arrived in the 1980s; in Delhi in the late 1970s.

So, the first test match I watched on television was when India toured Pakistan in 1978 and I was doing my me I was 21. So, what television has done is that it is Dhoni growing up in Jharkhand can see how Adam Gilchrist bats and say I want to bat like him. So, you won't have the cross-banded village sloggers of my youth. Even small town ticketers know the elements of technique. They watch a bowler say, "hey look at how boomerang is using the crease; look at how he holds a slower ball of brick" and you'd watch 25 replays which the television cameras show you. So, I think television has allowed the ambitious young cricketer from anywhere to learn how to improve and indeed perfect the game.

So, I think these are some of the changes that have happened technology replays and the sociological and geographical deepening of the game. And of course, finally the one aspect of the game of the changes in the game that I don't like is the overwhelming importance of IPL over test cricket.

John Harriss:

Can I just jump in for one moment just very quickly on this? On the sort of social geography. I mean I remember very well that when I did my first field work in village Tamil Nadu in the early 1970s, nobody in the village really knew about cricket. Kids didn't sort of have cricket bats or do any it was not no. By the early mid 1980s when I went to the to the village, kids were playing cricket and some people were starting to follow the game. So, I mean I saw you know really

something I felt quite significant happening in those 10-15 years from the early 70s to the mid 80s. Just a little interjection. Kanta forgive me, on you go.

Ramachandra Guha:

Thank you for that John. If I may make one last point about the changes in the game.

I think again one of the, how do I put it, maybe one of the negative byproducts of television and this again awaits deeper study is the declining interest in other sports. So, when there was no television in Kerala village kids were playing football because you could play that easily enough or they were playing hockey. Now I think cricket has become the sole hegemon in Indian sports, in a way it wasn't when I was growing up. I mean India used to win the world cup and hockey; we used to produce world billiards champions; people used to watch other sports, and I think now cricket is just become it's acquired dominance with hegemony and maybe that's also in some ways unfortunate.

Kanta Murali:

I think that in the terms of hegemony I probably would slightly differ only because my introduction to sport is through tennis not too through cricket because I did play the circuit in India and things like that. It was always the case that cricket was hegemonic even in the in the you know pre-liberalization days in that sense right. It was always that other sports were the not even the poorer cousins and the poorer distant fourth cousins to cricket in some ways. So, it that's always been the case I think the money has made it extraordinarily different at this stage.

In that way, in talking about this this point about changes in cricket, I completely agree with your hatred of T20 and IPL in general. I've come to that completely. It's killed cricket for me personally as well but in that sense this talk about technology, one other key theme in the book is about and this is true of all your cricket writing, which is about the art and aesthetics of cricket. I mean, I remember you know column you wrote of C. L. R. James is beyond the boundary and so in that sense it's I forget the name of the player he's describing, but there's a whole you know chapter dedicated to some St. Hill I think...

Ramachandra Guha:

Wilton St. Hill...

Kanta Murali:

...so, in that sense and his stroke play so in that sense you know you've always had this the aesthetics of cricket has been so foremost in your own thinking about cricket and in that sense it reflects a generation of an Indian fan. You know who could talk about technique who could talk about the aesthetics of the sport so how have you know, and we seem to have lost it and at

least we see him in the in the book seems to imply that we've lost that that that fascination with the art and aesthetics of cricket in a sense is it technology that has killed that, is it chauvinism that has killed that, you know where did we lose our appreciation for that?

Ramachandra Guha:

Oh, that's a that's a great question and I think both your implied answers are correct—chauvinism and technology. So let me start with chauvinism. You know there's a brief description in the book of the only time I watched Allan Border (indiscernable) which was in 1979— he had not joined the Pakistan because he came with Kim Hughes' Australian side to play in India, he got 14 in Bangalore, and he hit a dry pass point, and the person next to me said in cricket Tamil “Harvey (indiscernable),” he had played that shot like no Harvey (indiscernable)— just three words that are very important.

Now here I am listening, and my Tamil is just about good enough to follow those three words, not many more, but you know I mean it's a beautiful name, he's just sitting next to me, a man, I mean I was it was 1979 and I was 21, this person must have been in his 50s and he had seen [Neil] Harvey play that shot, not on television, he had seen Harvey play in Bangalore or Madras and he said Harvey I mean Allan Border would not be able to say I play like Harvey because he had never seen but there was a fan who made this fabulous yet such an illuminating comparison between two great Australian left-handers and their extraordinary proficiency in opening up the offside, so there's a generational comparison, there's a there's a kind of a cultural stereotype Australian left-handers, I mean the cover drive is a beautiful shot, so you won't get that now, you won't get that anywhere, right.

Now technology has a lot to answer because it gives you everything on a plate, you're spoon fed. Many of the things I remember best are which are what's life, so you know there's an innings early in the book which I described which is an inter-college match. Halid Gidrani scoring a 180 and I can remember some of his late cuts, his pulls and his own drive still. I mean Chandu Gatkarni 100 which I described again I was 11 and I remember the strokes. Or even when I was older I mean there's a there's a match I watched which is in Manchester in 1999.

India and Pakistan were fighting over snows in Kargil. We were playing a world cup match in Manchester against the background of a warfare India versus Pakistan and I wanted to go and watch it I was in London that that summer and I could get a ticket through I wrangled a press pass but I had no place to stay and John Harris's former colleague at the London School of Economics Jonathan Parry said, “I have an anthropologist friend in Manchester Ma-Mary Sir Chatterjee and she'll give you a room and board to stay for five days for two days”, it was a one day match and because I watched it I remember a catch that Azaridin took that changed the direction of that match.

I mean Syed Anwar that beautiful left-hander was taking the match away from India, Venkatesh Prasad got a ball to move late, caught the edge and Azar took a low catch at second street, magical catch. Now if I had seen it in television, I would have been able to tell you this story 20

years later Kanta, that's what happened but you know it's often it's the memories that stick in you maybe in your mind are those moments a stroke, a ball, a catch, a wicket keeping dismissal, I mean again this is something that doesn't appear in my book but I believe that the most underappreciated cricketers are the wicket keepers because it's the most complex and difficult skill and I remember Syed Kirmani in Bangalore stumping Zahid Abbas of Dilip Doshi left side stumping I mean Zahid Abbas for 40 of 40 balls would have butchered us what he normally did till he got him stumped.

So, I think its technology takes a lot of this away and maybe because I grew up in an era when there was no technology the aesthetic style is still alive in me you know I wouldn't look for 50 replays, but I try and capture it in my mind.

Kanta Murali:

Not only do you capture it drama the book ends with this you even dream of cricket right so you're in a level of a cricket fan that's and in fact the dream I mean I shouldn't mention to the audience the dream is so detailed it's actually you give it a date 2002. Kumble is bowling to Alex Stewart. Stewart's playing for the googly but it's a straighter one and you know he edges it and Dravid takes a slip catch it slip and so in that sense, you know, your appreciation of the aesthetics is of a different level but equally this technology bit it's the loss of an imagination as well right because in many ways in the book some of this particularly of people like Vinumankar its stories that you're hearing from through Durai who's hearing it on you know a radio of the Madras test etc. and so in that sense that that ability of even second it becomes folklore it's not just and I think all of us who grew up in you know particular pre-liberalization era in India know that that that folklore associated with cricket and that imagination associated with it.

Let me move on to you know a couple of questions and I do have to bring this up. Which is the to me, it's actually not in many ways but necessarily the central part of the book but chapters nine and ten of this book are about you know your role in the committee of administrators following the Lodha committee recommendations and so you know in a sense I mean I think I read it and I was wondering does it surprise me no in many ways the shocking corruption of the BCCI I think was apparent for all of us you know for a long time to see. I think the IPL opened our eyes to some of us at least in a way that it had never done before but just more personally in that sense do you do you regret the experience do you how do you look but I mean I'll talk about what you think of cricketers in that experience in the next question but in that sense just as on a personal level how do you look back at the involvement with the committee of administrators?

Ramachandra Guha:

Well, I don't regret it I mean it was an experience I knew I mean that came my way without my asking for it. I knew it would be interesting so from the first day I kept a diary that's the only part of my book that is not based on memories but it's based on a daily diary I kept it left me I don't know like you like any uh thoughtful cricket lover I knew that the boards tank that it was

the board for cronyism and corruption in India but I was naive I thought the supreme court is trying to clear it up its appointed a group of administrators he's asked me to be served on it.

So, there was a certain naivete in which I went in I didn't expect the old guard to mount such a dogged and India event successful regard action to recapture the board and but now it's behind me I'm a fan again I'm a fan again I can still enjoy the sport and what but it's not so much the board but the conduct of the cricketers and the continued conduct of the cricketers as in what Ganguly has been doing is more present that I think is what is more depressing.

Kanta Murali:

And how much of this is a story of just you know change in India in general right is it's as much a story of what in India I mean the story of cricket in some ways the microcosm of the story of India particularly after 91 in that sense and you know uh or is the BCCI in a league of its own because you know the Deloitte report you refer to in the chapters and the extent of corruption etc. I mean at one level it doesn't surprise us, but another level is there something sweet generous about the BCCI and it's and its level of sliminess if I was to put it that way so.

Ramachandra Guha:

I think you're right. It's representative and symptomatic of wider trends in society so cronyism, corruption, nepotism are ubiquitous in business in politics and in professional life. In India ethical standards are not very you know properly adhered to anywhere superstars in the film world and in the business world and in the media world or also often don't have a moral compass just as great cricketers don't that said you're right I mean it is representative of wider malaise and institutional ethical malaise in Indian society.

Kanta Murali:

And I think yeah and I think that that word institutional is important but I think it reflects you know our general inability of our general weakness of institutions is something that you know we personalize relationships but also the person becomes much more important than the institution right and I just want to point out just briefly that it's your comments in the book it's not it wasn't a new phenomenon in the BCCI because in some ways you talk about you know the image in a Swami Stadium in Bangalore as well as the Madras Stadium and both are named of course after administrators so this is in some senses that but we probably treat that as an era of patronage rather than this pure outright corruption that we now see.

But the other part about your discussions of your experience on the committee of administrators. It's also a loss of innocence and this was in my part I wouldn't say sadness again it didn't surprise me but in that sense, I think for many people it is a sadness associated with what cricketers at the end of the day really are right. So, let me quote and this is a relatively long quote from this section of the book so let me for the benefit of the audience quote you know what conclusions you came to about current cricketers. I wouldn't say about cricketers of

you know the 60s and 70s to some extent, but you basically say and I quote, “what surprised and shocked me was how amoral India's top cricketers were”.

You go on to then say and I quote “there are four categories of cricket superstars in India: one crooks who consort with and pimp for non for bigger non-playing cricket non-cricket playing crooks; two those who are willing and keen to practice conflict of interest explicitly; three those who will try to treat those who will try to be on the right side of the law but stay absolutely silent on those in categories one and two; and four those who are themselves clean and always question those in categories one and two.

And in this context actually at the end of the day I look back at the book and I thought it's actually only Bishan Bedi who in a sense comes out you know with flying colors in your book right. I actually love the honesty with which you treat Dravid and Tendulkar actually. The only person who has a chapter in this book dedicated to him is Tendulkar and I completely agree, the glories of Tendulkar were surpassed by the last stage by the you know the sadness and the of the last stages of Tendulkar in and the want of records and things like that.

So, in that sense was it a loss of innocence I mean, was it a surprise for you to discover that your heroes at the end of the day you know had all these frailties did they or did they extend shock you through this this involvement to the community.

Ramachandra Guha:

It was deeply disappointing, it was deeply disappointing. Of course, Bedi shone even more brightly in comparison when I reflected on my experience with the board you know maybe there's one theory you know what Kanta I live in Bangalore all right. Now Bangalore is the IT and BT showpiece of India. It has entrepreneurs who by the normal standards of Indian entrepreneurs are not crooks and pimps consorting for big. It's not you know it's not the cronyism you find in shall we say parts of Western and Northern India right. Yet they don't speak up. Most of the Bangalore entrepreneurs are either in category two or category three of the you know there's only Rahul Bajaj of Pune. Rahul Bajaj is the Bishan Singh Bedi of Indian entrepreneurs you know who has that stature.

You know in Bollywood you would have with due respect great actors who are not cult figures like Naseeruddin Shah who'd speak out but no Bachchan, no Khan, no Roshan no. So, you know it's maybe reflective of a wider lack of character a deeper piece of anonymity of among successful people in India and the sympathetic explanation is they have so much to lose but that I don't buy that because if you have so you have given your standing you can take a stand. You know what, what why are Rahul Bajaj and Bishan Bedi such exceptions.

Now I think there may be some sociological reasons for this I think you know Rahul Bajaj is Jamnalal Bajaj's grandson. His grandfather went to jail with Mahatma Gandhi. Bishan Singh Bedi you know is a fearless sardar and he's willing to take any consequence you know he's not looking to cut deals or broker contract, but it is in that sense I've come to see that it is symptomatic of something much deeper and much wider you know.

But I wish I mean this Ganguly's conduct has been deeply deeply depressing and I'll tell you why. And you'll agree with me Kanta, he was an outstanding captain of the Indian team. After tiger Pataudi in the 1960s he was the first Indian test captain who was not parochial every other test captain promoted players from his state. He didn't do that. He encouraged young people. I mean people like the way he put confidence in Zahir Khan, Yuvraj Singh, Harbajan. He also with of course Kumlay and Dravid and others took us out of the opera of the match fixing era so in many ways he was an exemplary captain and a reasonably successful captain but for him to so obeys and debates himself by the way he's conducted himself as BCCI president not only in his conflict of interest but in his chamchagiri to Amit Shah I mean it's completely unnecessary I mean so it's really sad in some ways that your people like Bedi and I said in entrepreneurship and Rahul Bajaj are studying exceptions.

Kanta Murali:

Ram, I think it also talks about the psychology of you know who becomes a star cricketer right because there is you have this description of you know the superstar culture that they're all and particularly have now been brought into at you know age 16 and 18. Let alone you know only when you make the India team but in that sense these are people but at the same time to become an international cricketer you need a level of self-confidence that is far above anything that most of us can ordinarily imagine right you never second doubt yourself. So, in that sense the lack of awareness and the lack of wanting to think about other things goes hand in hand with professional success of sport do you see it that way in that sense that.

Ramachandra Guha:

That is an interesting point, very perceptive point I think. It could be that that you have the self-belief and the self-confidence that no one can doubt you and above all you can't doubt yourself you know so um yeah maybe, maybe. And I mean some of that Dravid to his credit I mean again in my book I talk about he recognized he was wrong. He thought about it first his first instinct was I'm a great cricketer. I'm an icon. Who is this busybody to criticize me? Then he reflected upon it and said maybe he has a point.

Then I also mentioned in my book that he met Mike Brearley who's known to both of us and rarely told him if you are wrong reach out to Ram and many offenses then it would be a very lovely letter. So, I think driving that sense had the level of self-awareness and reflexivity to recognize uh that he had taken the beginning public for granted.

Kanta Murali:

And I'll just point out that actually you know amongst the cricketers we classify as self-reflective in that sense, Dravid of course comes through and him chatting with Mike Brearley who was known as an intellectual of cricket in that sense. You know it wasn't surprising to me that it was he who he you know who makes him in a sense say appreciate the friendship more than the circumstances of what happened with the conflict of interest issues, but equally it's Kumar

Sangakkara who you know shines in that you say that you know he's perceptive and reflexive in a way that no other cricketer could be. So, there are you know there are of course examples of that.

Let me come to the last few questions like because I think we're almost close to possibly another ten minutes but let me I have a sec...

John Harriss:

Keep going, keep going Kanta.

Kanta Murali:

..So, amongst the you know this in relation to this the changes in cricket and even what brought you to the COA in that sense is you know how cricket has shifted because of T20 and the IPL and I won't conflate the two at the start but of course and it's a running theme both in the book and in your columns of and I think very rightly so an absolute hatred of the IPL for sure. Is it the IPL or is it the format of T20 for you, because I can completely understand the IPL part of it, or is it this is a different game to test cricket because like you I you know and I think true cricket is only the five day version but anyway.

Ramachandra Guha:

Yeah, I think it's more the IPL because the IPL reflects all I mean I am not you know possibly I can't say about you know and possibly on this panel the most sympathetic to economic liberalization. I suspect I suspect on this panel I have some good things to say about economic liberalization. I think economic liberalization did you know I think the license permit Kotaraj had run its course I think economic liberalization had you know unleashed a new way of entrepreneurship and had some good not I mean I'm not I'm not a boost of economic liberalization, but I can see some good things about it.

The IPL in some ways represented the worst to it because the vulgarity, the greed, the corruption and the social disparities. I mean the extraordinary fact that up Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa don't have a team. The whole of the Northeast doesn't have a team. Maharashtra had two teams only because he had consumers and rich folks go for these matches right.

So, I think it's the IPL and it's also secondary T20 because like you I'm a purist. I mean the true elaboration of the game is showcasing of batting, bowling, fielding, wicket keeping techniques, tactics, even better much more in a test match so I can just about watch a T20 match, just about. But I can't remember it the next day and nor can anyone else. I mean if you ask you know which was the first test match you watched Kanta, live at Chepauk.

Kanta Murali:

Live at Chepauk...

Ramachandra Guha:

Not when you were very small but one which you remember.

Kanta Murali:

Which I remember very well is the tide test of 86. I'm so sure you'll remember many individual sessions in that game. I mean I remember Kapil you know basically I think it scores 120 or 119 or something like that but basically saving the follow on yeah essentially so and I remember actually talking about you said most fans are male I was actually at that point sitting with my grandmother and it was more on a long on view as opposed to my brother and father who used to be in you know under the TNCS strand which is behind the ball exam but this was that I remember clapping you know counting down every run for the last 20 till the following was avoided actually.

Ramachandra Guha:

That's 34 years ago. All right now just ask some young kid in your family to speak for five minutes on the last IPL final bowling, batting, fielding. Just try, just try this experiment on a cricket mad kid in your family who watched every ball of the IPL with every replay impossible. So, in that sense that's what so I always prefer test cricket but at a pinch. I'll watch a T20 international match I'd describe in this book. A match I had watched on the television when Sangakkara took his side to victory in the world cup but it's so it's more IPL than T20, but I do believe as you just demonstrated that the imprint a great test match leaves on you is far more enduring, far more enriching than a T20 match ever will. And in the sense of that one last thing, it's both for spectator and player. You know Kapil Dev will remember every aspect of that match. You know you won't remember some random T20 match he played likewise with Kohli.

Kanta Murali:

And so, but so let me you know in in that sense of what the IPL has done at a more you know social or sociological level in some ways you know my conflict of the IPL in some ways, or my internal conflict is that on one hand you know the absolute corruption, the absolute I mean at the end of the day this was a leak started by Lalit Modi where Vijay Malia was a central figure right. I mean that alone is enough to you know is enough said in some ways but at the same time I find it hard not to say that it there is a democratizing quality of some sort to it.

You know I think for instance this you know the fact that Natarajan came out of it for instance most recently it reflects that. Do you see it having that quality and in a way that perhaps you know and I will say that are we just being nostalgic about test cricket are we being elite about it

in a way in that in that sense or what do you what do you see about if someone was to make the argument that there is this democratizing quality to the IPL in a way that other forms of cricket well perhaps not one day internationals but certainly test cricket has never had.

Ramachandra Guha:

So, I think Kanta it's I think the number of players that the IPL has produced is massively hyped. The belt way to the Indian test and one day team is still rather low Natrajan is an exception or the Pandiya brothers you know are an exception right. So, it's probably was inevitable in a rapidly urbanizing modernizing fast-paced society that test cricket would lose its shine and something in the evening would fill its place.

Then also it only really caters to the upper middle class. I mean when the IPL started a colleague of mine TR Ramakrishnan who was a sports journalist and was in university with me told me he said this before it started he said the greatest sufferers from the IPL will be those who the anchors on the nine o'clock English language news. No one will watch that okay.

Now this was a perceptive statement but it was an understatement because what happened then was that it became a kind of everywhere every person wanted to watch it between six and nine that even few distributors got nervous so no Shahrukh Khan's Tara would be shown between April and June. Now it's acquired such a cachet that the only speech the Prime Minister has not given at 8:30 but at 5:30 was when IPL season was on because even our Prime Minister was nervous he would not get a live and captive audience.

So, it's it is you know so whether it's good or bad I can't say but it's captured imagination people it's a drunk and people are hooked on that drug. 300 - 400 million people are hooked on that drug. So, but cricket its clearly contributions are massively high.

The IPL was had last year Ranjhi trophy players have still not been paid. The IPL has because of the enormous money it generates has created a captive and compliant media where journalists are given freebies and don't criticize at the mismanagement of the IPL. State associations are given a hush fee 28 crores every year and they keep shut about what is happening with regard to the management of a new cricket. So even I mean it's certainly been a success it's been an entertainment success if cricket today is bigger than Bollywood film the IPL has played his role in it, but I don't think its contributions to Indian sport have been satisfying Kanta.

Kanta Murali:

Fair enough and I think you do make the point in the book I mean, and you've made this point even in this conversation that essentially I mean it does perpetuate a particular inequity in that sense that as you point out you know UP, MP and Bihar don't have a team right so in that sense of you know heart of the population does and a poorer part of the population doesn't have this local tie that they that they could actually foster. So, one other aspect about the book and this is you know so much of the book is about breaking the chauvinism of the current cricket fan in that sense because it's become about jingoism, it's become about the lack of inability to

appreciate contributions from others and that aspect. Does the IPL change that in some ways in terms of you know bringing in you know bringing foreign players much closer to local ties for of cricket?

Ramachandra Guha:

I think so. I think that's probably the one ambiguously good thing about the IPL that it has moderated the jingoism that you grew up with. You know if AB De Villiers is playing for Bangalore, Jack Qualis is playing for Bangalore, Chris Gayle is playing for Bangalore, Shane Warne is playing for Rajasthan, I don't know who Murli played for, but Malinga is playing for Bombay. So, that certainly helps but in a very limited sense because it's still the few sixes that devil ears hit or the odd slower-balled Malinga bowled. I mean it's a very to appreciate to say Harvey madri adsa that's thats a different kind of experience that that a fan has you know to see it unfold over so long.

Yes, I mean maybe having foreign players play for Indian teams has but even then there's a flip side to it you know it's quite extraordinary. When auctions are held there was an analysis seven or eight I don't follow the IPL very closely but seven or eight years ago the IPL auction took place all right. Gautam Gambir because he was an Indian player I forget which team wanted him I think he would move from Delhi to Calcutta somebody wanted him, and he was Indian player Gautam Gambir commanded three times the price of AB De Villiers who was the greatest all-rounder available because he was Indian now, so this is absurd.

So, there's no market logic to you know uh some the sponsor of the Calcutta team wanted an Indian brand, so he grabbed Gotham Gambir and paid him well beyond what he was worth. So even that jingoism in price I mean you would have it in Barcelona. Barcelona would not the owner of Barcelona would not pay a Spanish footballer five times what they paid Messi you know to get all right so that so it's I mean even there is a kind of perverted kind of jingoism.

Kanta Murali:

Yeah and you point out the perverted jingoism of the IPL...

John Harriss:

Can I interrupt just for one moment? As chair, I've let the conversation go on because it's so very interesting and there hasn't been a lot of comment coming up in the in the chat box, but I think before we get to get through the next sort of 20 minutes which is our scheduled time, I think I should leave some time for those who have contributed. I think for one Sharada and I think Haroon Siddiqui is another just to come chip in on the conversation. But you go ahead now. I just sort of thought I should.

Kanta Murali:

...yeah I'm almost done. I mean I can keep going but I think that I lost my last question and perhaps that gives us 15 minutes for I do not notice there are a few comments in the chat that I can bring up as questions but so run in a sense let me you know perhaps I'll end on this not. Before we take chat questions which is that this book is about breaking the chauvinism right so there is a there are chapters dedicated to your favorite cricketers from other countries.

Lots of other countries but of course the Pakistani chapter is particularly of interest and I think of importance because there was a certainly a generation and even in the 90s when I grew up but there was an appreciation of you know you would never not say Vasim Akram was you know the most outstanding fastball of that generation right.

So, in that sense I think there that appreciation has waned over time and it's gone but the this is on a more personal note and that the but the one line of chauvinism that runs I perhaps putting it I'm jokingly calling it chauvinism that runs in the book is your love of Karnataka cricket and you are unabashedly chauvinist about this and I think you know and I think those of us who can see it and then said actually I mean it's actually a lovely tone that runs in in the book and I know it's there to chaavi people as well.

Ramachandra Guha:

Especially from coming from Tamil Nadu...

Kanta Murali:

Yeah no and I know. I think you know particularly I think the lines about you know it's only in Tamil Nadu that the people who say that you know Kirmani could have never kept to Venkat right. So, in that sense what you think you know Kirmani is the finest wicketkeeper that India's ever produced. On two levels, I will also point out the book is an ode to bowlers that's amongst the things I forgot. That in as much this is making a case for you know diminishing the prestige given to batsman and cricket in general.

Let me bring it back to the chauvinistic or the Karnataka as I will call it love or organism whatever you feel like calling it at the end of the day you say your favorite cricketing memory of all time is uh you know Karnataka beating Bombay in 74 and essentially which for you changed the face of cricket. Now I mean I don't think you know...I'm old enough to remember a period when going to a Ranji match was a thing, but yet you know in your either as you say there were 20,000 people watching Ranji matches in some ways but what explains I think but you have a love of you know local ties and local cricket both of Karnataka but the Friends Union Cricket Club but that's probably more explained as much by Durai as it is explained by anything else.

You know if I had to pick a memory of my favorite memory of cricket, I certainly wouldn't and even if I'm not I certainly didn't watch as much first-class cricket or anything like anything close

to you. I've watched a few matches thanks to my brother but that's about it. In a sense, I think most of us would say probably 1983 or something like that or in your generation you know hearing of 1971 through the radio in some ways, but I was actually struck by the fact that at the end of the day that your favorite cricketing memory is 1974 Karnataka beating Bombay in the Ranji final.

Ramachandra Guha:

Yeah, so 1971 is very important to me. That's the year we beat England and West Indies the first time. For anyone who wants to hack my phone the code is 1971. It is not my birthday, my wife's birthday, it's 1971 for anyone who wants to hack my phone. Feel free okay, you'll find nothing in it, but you can. All right so 1971 is very important. You know again it's to do with having watched that match.

In 1971 I had barely even heard because I was in boarding school and I wasn't allowed access to the common room, so I never heard Chandrasekhar six wickets live. I mean the older members of your family in Chennai would have right, or John in London would have right. So, I saw that live and because I passionately believe that match made history because we beat Bombay, Tamil Nadu, Hyderabad, Gujarat, Bengal, Haryana, Delhi, Baroda all became running trophy champions in the years to follow and the true decentering of Indian cricket began after that victory.

I mean we are talking about in 1974. I mean I was born in 1958. All through my life Bombay had been undefeated and the congress party had also been undefeated. So, you know so it was kind of in that sense I was I mean obviously living through the emergency and seeing the end of the congress party is also vivid memory. I was older then, I was 19 when Indira Gandhi lost that election. But having been there and as an off spinner to see the great Erapalli Prasanna do it, you know he got the wickets, and also the way it happened.

I talked about that run out of Ajit Wadekar, it was kind of an act of fate, you know he slipped. He was wearing new shoes and he slipped. So, I think that's why I think that matters so much to me. Also, I was there, I mean and I was like Gavaskar getting out to Prasanna I can still remember. The LBW will be not out by the you know it's these are all memories that will remain for me forever.

Kanta Murali:

I'm just saying that one thing, the one other striking aspect and this is not meant for you to reply is that now since you ended on Prasanna I was actually a bit disappointed when you said that you know in your all-time India 11 that Ashwin was close to replacing Prasanna.

Ramachandra Guha:

Coming close. I hate to admit it but he's coming close. He can bowl, he can bat, he can field...

Kanta Murali:

John can I read some of the questions from the chat?

John Harriss:

We promised to leave a little bit of time. I'm sorry, I'm going to abuse my position as chair. Just very briefly, talking of memories and Chepauk. Am I right you guys and maybe some of those in the audience like Ram and Murali will have a better memory than me, but when England played India at Chepauk in January 1973, I have the memory that Gavaskar actually opened the bowling with Solkar and they just basically sort of rubbed a little bit of shine off the ball before it was handed over to Bedi, Chandrasekhar, and Venkat. But is that a memory that plays me false or is that likely to be to be accurate? Ram? Kanta?

Ramachandra Guha:

Gavaskar certainly opened the bowling for India in some matches. Abed Ali and Solkar may have both played that match and maybe one of them was injured for the second innings that's possible, but if you permit me I have a wonderful story about that match.

Now that match Pataudi made was brought back into the Indian team. And he came back as a commoner playing under Ajit Wadekar. He played a match many innings and the story I have is not that. The England captain was Tony Lewis...

John Harriss:

That's right.

Ramachandra Guha:

Tony Lewis played against Pataudi for Cambridge versus Oxford in this 1960s. Tony Lewis was himself a classical violinist. It's just a story about cricket, how differently it was. When that match was played Pataudi found himself back in the Indian team and he told Tony Lewis keep the third evening of the test match free. He said fine. So, he thought they were going to have a drink or go to the Madras Club and talk about Oxford versus Cambridge and so on. He took him to hear, he took Tony Lewis who was an amateur classical violinist, Pataudi remembered from his student days, to hear the great Lalgudi Jayaraman play in the music academy.

John Harriss:

[Laughs]

Ramachandra Guha:

I mean it's an amazing story. I mean that is what Pataudi was like. I mean he remembered what his English wealth friend, what his passion outside cricket was. Pataudi knew what no other north Indian would have known, what Lalgudi Jayaraman stood for. Pataudi took Tony Lewis to hear him play on the third day of the Chennai test cricketing.

John Harriss:

[Laughs]

That's a very good story. That's a very good story.

Let me hand over to others who've wanted to come in and to speak rather than just doing stuff on through the chat. Sharada you have you have made some comments on the chat. Would you like to come in?

Sharada Srinivasan:

Yes. So, you know I mean this is something that I chatted with Ram about when I read the book a copy of which he sent to me. Very kindly sent to me. And we didn't quite get to this conversation about women in Indian cricket. So, a lot of the problems that you identify with Ranji cricket you know of Ranji cricket being neglected and not getting its due. I think it can be said about women in Indian cricket or women's cricket in India and a more broadly but certainly in India because it's not funded, it's not showcased as much as men's cricket, and you know there's really no talent hunting and there's no way of promoting cricket as a sport for women.

I'm wondering with the IPL coming on, is women's passion for playing cricket actually going down. I mean I'm just thinking more in terms of having seen some of the things that happen around the IPL matches. Are we now seeing or has IPL opened up, sort of the more marginal and sort of other roles that women can play in cricket, right?

So, like the concept of cheerleaders I mean cheer, cheering was you know, we didn't have cheerleaders in cricket generally, but IPL seems to have you know borrowed one of those traditions so it's mostly women who do that and also other roles. I mean commenting I think is fantastic because it shows the intellectual engagement with cricket, even if a lot of the women don't play cricket, so I'm all for it. There are lots of other roles that seem to be coming up for cricket. So, I do want to hear your thoughts on you know women in Indian cricket and women's cricket in India. Thank you.

Ramachandra Guha:

So, I haven't studied it at all carefully but impressionistically you may be right. That say 10 or 15 years ago Indian women's ticket was becoming more competitive, more people were playing it

and then you had stars if not superstars like Anjum Chopra and Mithali Raj. Now where the IPL has again put them into the shadows, that's possible, but like your point will create commentators. Isa Guha and Ebony Rainford-Brent are outstanding commentators.

They're on BBC, are Sky Sports now in Australia. I think Donna Symmonds is an outstanding West Indian female commentator. And I wish to begin with, we should have a former Indian test player you know as part of our commentary team. I think it will make it much more interesting, insightful, intelligent in the way in which the sky commentary team has become. As I said some of our best cricket writers are female. I mean Sharda Ugra and Rohit Brijnath are absolutely our two best sports writers right.

There was another outstanding sportswriter, Kadambari Murali, but for family reasons she had to migrate to America and then stop writing on sport. So, I think I saw Enron has made a comment in the chat box. The first time, in the brief stint that I was on the board, in fact Enron and I were in a committee which gave Shantha Aranganathan the first lifetime award for a female cricketer.

But I think your point about commentary, I mean if you just look at, if you get up here tomorrow morning and hear Isa Guha, I mean Indian time. And hear Isa, you'll see how much better Isa Guha is than any Indian male commentator. Why can't we have Mithali raj on Anjum Chopra. I mean our male commentators just chatter and chatter and chatter and tell us nothing that we don't see on the television.

John Harriss:

Could I just, we just got a few minutes of our sort of formal time left another person who contributed and has contributed to the chat, is administrator who I believe is Haroon Siddiqui. Would you like to come in Haroon and contribute to the conversation? I invite you to unmute yourself and come in. Nope?

Kanta Murali:

John, maybe I can jump in and read out Haroon's comment there. Haroon says that the first test he saw was in 1959, when Richie Benauds was touring India and he basically says that he saw it at Chepauk and it is imprinted in his mind forever. So, just reflecting that point you made about you know, a different era of watching cricket and the fact that that stays with you for life in a way that perhaps I feel memories don't right.

Can I pick up one more question that's on the chat actually? The first one which is from a Pakistani cricket fan Abdul Gader Hussein. Ram there is a question to you. So, he says, "as a Pakistan cricket fan, I particularly love the parts dealing with Indo-Pak cricket. I grew up with many wonderful memories of those encounters. Sadly, my kids have not experienced the same. Is there any hope? What, if any role can other cricket powers play in this regard?"

Ramachandra Guha:

So, sadly there's very little hope. So long as the Kashmir dispute festers, so long as we have a radical Hindu nationalist government in India, it's very unlikely that India and Pakistan will meet in anything other than a world cup match. But do tell your kids to read when they grow up Rahul Bhattacharya's wonderful book *Pundits for Pakistan*. Which is about the Indian tour of Pakistan in 2004 and Osman Samiuddin's magnificent history of Pakistan cricket which is called *The Unquiet Ones*. So, I think but I doubt it.

I mean there was a whole generation in the 60s and 70s that did not watch Indians who did not watch Pakistani cricketers play live. And that's sad, but given the geopolitical context, I think it's very unlikely that in the foreseeable future we'll have it. Things may change in 20 years and I recommend in my book that whenever India Pakistan test cricket starts again, it should be played for the Tendulkar trophy and I give reasons explaining why he should be the temple trophy and so on. But I mean I saw some great Indo-Pak matches both live and on television.

Kanta Murali:

And you also have an all-time Indo-Pak 11 in the book and so I think it's you know, if anyone does that it's worth looking at the chapters. This is actually another question I wanted to ask you which is, which Ram has put on the chat as well which is he wants to know who your favorite cricket writer is and whether it's Jack Fingleton. And I know in the book you talk about lacking what is it A Thompson who was your first introduction to cricket literature in that sense so anyway.

Ramachandra Guha:

This is one area in which I'm not nostalgic my favorite cricket writer is living and he's younger than me that's Gideon Haigh the great Australian Gideon Haigh.

John Harriss:

Gideon Haigh.

Ramachandra Guha:

And if I was to then would come Jack Fingleton number three would be again someone who's living and younger than me the former England captain Michael Atherton. So, some of the best cricket writing is going on today. I have mentioned Sharda Ugra and Rohit Brijnath and Rahul Bhattacharya as fine young Indian writers. So, when it comes to cricket literature, I am not nostalgic often the present wins out over the past. And Gideon Haigh is just magnificent. Wait I tell you Gideon Haigh story.

You know, Gideon Haigh has among his great books his biographies of Victor Trumper, Warwick Armstrong, a book on the packer years and a slim, a jewel of a book which is about 150 pages long on war called The Cricket War. And I was reading it on a flight to China. Now I was going from Delhi to Shanghai and I was reading it, I fell asleep, put it on the next seat and it was whacked.

So, Gideon Haigh is so admired that a businessman on an India-China flight who may have been a Chinaman whacked a copy of one more. So that's how great a cricket writer he is. So go and read Gideon Haigh, I mean he's unsurpassed. Greater even than Sierra James who wrote one great book, one imperishable book but for the range of his writing on cricket I think Gideon Haigh is just amazing.

John Harriss:

Ram I'm a little bit surprised you haven't mentioned Neville Carter since you do actually write quite a lot about you know searching out Cardiff books and so on in your book. Perhaps I could just ask you to address the question that I think Sharada has put into the chat box. What are your views on what the big three concept is doing to cricket? Is the increasing gap in quality between the top three and everyone else going to hurt international cricket in the long run? What do you think about that one?

Sharada Srinivasan:

Sorry, that is not my question that's a question from Abdul Qadir Hussain and I was just bringing it to your attention. Okay, I didn't realize he had sent it only to me.

Ramachandra Guha:

I'd say person per person or on per capita terms the best cricket team in the world is New Zealand.

Ramachandra Guha:

They're also the nicest guys you know, and I think what they're doing is amazing. I mean Kane Williamson is a fabulous player, their bowlers, their fielders. But South African cricket is declining from about a decade ago you know their fast ballers aren't what they were. They don't have the kind of batting that they once had. West Indies is a tragic and sad story. Pakistan produces the odd fabulous batsman like Babar Azam and the odd good fast bowler but they don't have a consistent team, so yes in a sense it's the big three and New Zealand who are my favorite team of all.

Kanta Murali:

Ram there's another question on the comments again from Haroon much earlier where he points out—and this is actually I'll word it as a question—he points out that when you were talking about Durai and his disability and then the fact that he played cricket he points out that you know Pataudi didn't have the use of one eye right and yet captain India and was this hero for a generation but let me also phrase that as a second part.

So, one your comments on Pataudi is as Haroon's invited you to speak about but second you know there's a very the nice aspect in the sociology of this book is that you actually juxtapose Pataudi big and Hanuman Singh actually right in that sense it's the raj of cricket in some ways and it's a true princess of cricket in some ways. I mean literally and otherwise but in that sense and it reflects that you know it reflects a particular sensibility of cricket that you know even amongst the elite of cricket that that particular group had in some ways.

Ramachandra Guha:

Yeah I mean obviously, in that sense absolutely Indian cricket has you know democratized since then. And I think Pataudi's story is exemplary and I'm glad Haroon pointed it out because I forget who it was who said it may have been the old England all-rounder George Gary, who I think he coached Pataudi when he was young who is someone who had played against Bradman and seen Pataudi when he was 16, before he lost his eye and said if he had two eyes, he'd been as good as Bradman.

You know to play test cricket with one eye and to make a comeback of that kind yeah and of course you know he had a typically English sense of humor Pataudi. Someone asked him when did you realize you could play test cricket again. He said when I saw the English bowling.

John Harriss:

[Laughs]

Ramachandra Guha:

[Laughs]

I mean he was a fabulous fielder. I mean he was someone who was he was also totally non-parochial he was also someone with some very interesting attributes. I think he was also, I mean he has a remarkable life partner who's still with us Sharmila Tagore who's an extraordinary figure. I mean I think there's a great dual biography of those two amazing people to be written.

I mean Shamila Tagore is a person of, I mean apart from her celebrated acting, she's a person of intelligence, courage, civility. But also, there are aspects of Pataudi that are very nice. I mean

one is that as soon as the privy persons were abolished he changed his name. He refused to be Nawab of Pataudi. He became MAK Pataudi. He was happy to become a commoner and to play at the vertica. And but yet on the rest day of the Madras test to hear, I mean I mean all round he is just an amazing an absolutely amazing person.

John Harriss:

Yeah, I think that's a point which I should come in I mean our formal time elapsed just a few well some minutes ago we can continue but I think that I should just sort of interject at this point because I guess that some participants will leave now if they haven't indeed left already so this is just really a moment for me to say a little formally thank you Ram very much for this wonderful, this wonderful event and Kanta and thank you Sharada for setting it up with CIRCLE with the Canada India Research Center for Learning and Engagement.

And as I mentioned at the last CIRCLE I should just I think mention to everybody that the next CIRCLE event will take place on the 21st of January when there will be a round table starting at 11 am Eastern Standard Time on Madhur Anand's book - This red line goes straight to your heart. But just to repeat and very warmly thank you Kanta, thank you Ram for such a wonderful occasion. And now let's continue talking.

Let's see I think there are quite a number of comments that have come up in the box. Sort of somewhat laconic questions from Ram your take on DRS.

Ramachandra Guha:

No, I think on balance and for it because it works for the advantage of the bowlers mostly. You know if they had been DRS Shane Moore may have got a thousand wickets because half of those LBWs were given not out particularly by English umpires who were the most conservative when it came to people padding up to like spinners. So, on balance and for it and yes yeah.

John Harriss:

And another one from Ram was cricket crisis question mark.

Ramachandra Guha:

Great book, great book and Fingleton is my favorite dead cricket writer. Gideon Hague is just a genius, you know.

John Harriss:

Right, right. And oh gosh, I, Sharada is this question on Ram's research career from you? Would you like to actually ask it in person?

Sharada Srinivasan:

Yeah sure, you know I have known, or I have read Ram's more academic work you know the unquiet words and a couple of other articles and then I read the Gandhi biography, the two volume Gandhi biography and then I you know this commonwealth of cricket is the first book of Gohan on cricket that I have read and honestly I just felt like the researcher was ever present in this book right.

So, at some point you know I think that that was in response to Kanta's first question, Ram said basically you know he wanted to hang this scholar academic thick footnotes that hat hang that hat and write something that's more personal that's more you know chatty and all of it and honestly you know, all of Ram's work is very accessible and this work of course is and a lot of us can relate to it.

But I just felt like the researcher was ever present it still has footnotes I mean I don't think you've done away with footnotes and I think you know I encourage my students that they should actually write more footnotes because a lot of the interesting details are actually tucked away in footnotes in academic writing. So, the art of writing footnotes is something I think that we can learn from all of this.

So, I want your comment on this John said in introducing you that in many ways cricket was fundamental to your research, to you becoming a researcher. But in this book I think the research has just not gone away is there. So, I want you to talk about the connection between research and cricket, especially from this book's point of view.

Ramachandra Guha:

So, a minor correction Sharada. It has footnotes but no references. And the footnotes are elaborations or teasing remarks and the footnotes are genuine footnotes at the bottom of the page you know they're not endnotes tucked away. So yeah, you're right. But I suppose and I think Kanta is also alluded to the sociology of the book. I mean the sociologist the historian is present I mean that's part of my personality but it's much more personal than any other book I have written so far or would ever write.

So it's told in the first person yeah and that's why partly it's based on memories which is why some of them are available but clearly I can't completely disavow or eliminate my scholarly self or my understanding in the politics and history and sociology of sport not just so I can't write only about the aesthetics of sport, nor can I write only about admiration and hero worship of cricketers I got to know when I was young or watched when I played young but yeah I mean it's I mean I suppose it's you know.

But it is I would still not I mean it's very personal, which means it's got a lot about some things and a lot about other things that are probably as important or more important and which are because it's clearly written through a personal lens. It doesn't pretend to be comprehensive or objective or detached I mean and I think in that sense it is different from the work of a scholar

or by someone who happens to be a scholar but it's not really you know it can't stand the test of scholarly scrutiny or rigor.

Kanta Murali:

Ram can I ask a clarification in that regard was this written from memory because it you know the way you describe it and where you describe when you've said earlier about you know there were a few corrections, but it seems to be something that and I think I've read in other contexts that your memory is incredible right so is this something that you just sat down without any this thing and just wrote it?

Ramachandra Guha:

This is just written from memory and except for the BCCI chapters where I had a diary, so I quoted from the diary and so on and so forth, but otherwise it was. I mean there is a little bit of how do I quit it scholarly cheating I mean which all of us do. I mean like we write a book and we draw from our research papers so here and there it draws from my newspaper columns you know, so paragraphs are reproduced from here and there. But it is written in that sense from memory.

Sharada Srinivasan:

And of course, in a structural postmodern world in academia, I don't think you would do badly in terms of scholarly merit, or this book would do any badly on scholarly merit compared to your other works.

John Harriss:

Okay well there we are. I am slightly embarrassed to say that I actually have a family commitment in a few minutes time so I personally will have to leave and I hope that the conversation will continue nonetheless. So once again, but this time sort of personally thank you thank you both Ram and Kanta for such a memorable occasion that will go along with other cricket memories of mine actually. And thank you for organizing it and for inviting me to chair bye now thank you all very much.

Sharada Srinivasan:

Thank you.

[End of transcript]