POETICS OF THE VANQUISHED:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON
INDIAN AND AMERICAN SPORTS LITERATURE

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
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Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis by Christeena T. Jose, entitled "Poetics of the Vanquished: A Comparative Study on Indian and American Sports Literature" is a bonafide record of original research work carried out by her under my supervision and submitted for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. To the best of my knowledge, this research has not been previously formed the basis of the award for any degree, fellowship or other titles. I hereby confirm the originality of the work and its critical evaluation represents the independent work on the part of the candidate.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that thesis entitled **"**Poetics of the Vanquished: A Comparative Study on Indian and American Sports Literature**"** is an original research work completed under the guidance Dr. Davees C. J., Associate Professor (Rtd), Department of English, St. Thomas College, Thrissur. I hereby certify that no part of this work has been submitted or published for the award of any other degree, diploma, title, fellowship or recognition.

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A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION

I, hereby, would like to acknowledge that documentation in this thesis is prepared in accordance with the style format suggested in *MLA HANDBOOK* (9th Edition).

ABSRACT

This thesis, “Poetics of the Vanquished: A Comparative Study on Indian and American Sports Literature” explores the complex narrative techniques used by contemporary American and Indian writers to depict the experiences of sportsmen and sportspeople who have failed. The goal of this research is to examine the various ways that failure is portrayed in sports literature, paying particular attention to how these representations affect gender roles, national identities, and the growth of individual characters. Eight novels and eight autobiographies in all have been carefully chosen to serve as the foundation for this comparative study. By means of a comprehensive analysis of specific literary pieces, the study pinpoints recurrent themes and motifs associated with failure and scrutinises their impact on the broader conversation surrounding masculinity, femininity, identity, and nationalism.

This study's comparative methodology enables a sophisticated comprehension of the social and cultural subtleties present in both Indian and American sports literature. Through an examination of writers' approaches to the issue of failure, the thesis sheds light on the intricate relationship that exists between sports narratives and larger socio-cultural contexts. It attempts to add to the body of knowledge on sports writing by shedding light on the function of failure as a literary device. This investigation illuminates the significant influence sports literature may have on influencing and mirroring societal perceptions, leading to a more sophisticated understanding of the complex interrelationship between sporting victories and the anguish of failure.

Keywords

sports literature, existential crisis, gender, nationalism

സംഗ്രഹം

പരാജിതരുടെ കാവ്യശാസ്ത്രം : ഇന്ത്യൻ, അമേരിക്കൻ കായിക സാഹിത്യത്തെ മുൻനിർത്തിയുള്ള താരതമ്യ പഠനം

പരാജിതരായ കായിക താരങ്ങളുടെ അനുഭവങ്ങൾ ആവിഷ്കരിക്കുന്നതിൽ സമകാല ഇന്ത്യൻ, അമേരിക്കൻ എഴുത്തുകാർ ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്ന ആഖ്യാന തന്ത്രങ്ങളെ കുറിച്ചുള്ള പഠനമാണ് ഈ പ്രബന്ധം. പരാജയത്തെ എങ്ങനെയാണ് അവതരിപ്പിക്കുന്നത് എന്നും ലിംഗ -ദേശ - വൈയക്തിക ഭേദമനുസരിച്ച് പരാജയ തീവ്രതയിലുള്ള വ്യത്യാസത്തെ കുറിച്ചും ചർച്ച ചെയ്യുകയാണ് ഈ പഠനം. എട്ട് നോവലുകളും എട്ട് ആത്മകഥകളും ഈ പ്രബന്ധത്തിൽ പഠനവിധേയമാക്കുന്നു.

ആധുനിക കായിക സാഹിത്യം കേവലം വിവരണം മാത്രമല്ല വളരെ നാടകീയവും ആകർഷകവുമായ അവതരണത്തോടൊപ്പം സാമൂഹ്യ പ്രശ്നങ്ങളെ കൂടി പ്രതിനിധാനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. പരാജിതരുടെ ജീവിതം പ്രതിപാദിക്കുന്ന കൃതികളിൽ പൊതുവായി കാണുന്ന ഘടകങ്ങളും പുരുഷത്വം, സ്ത്രൈണത, സ്വത്വം, ദേശീയത എന്നീ ഘടകങ്ങളും പരാജയം എന്ന സങ്കൽപ്പനവും തമ്മിൽ എങ്ങനെ ബന്ധപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നു എന്നുള്ള അന്വേഷണവും ഈ പ്രബന്ധം ലക്ഷ്യമാക്കുന്നു. വ്യത്യസ്തമായ സാമൂഹ്യ സാംസ്കാരിക തലങ്ങളുള്ള ഇന്ത്യ അമേരിക്ക എന്നീ രാജ്യങ്ങളുടെ സവിശേഷതകളുടെ സൂക്ഷ്മ വിശകലനവും ഈ പഠനത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമാണ്.

സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ മാറിവരുന്ന കാഴ്ചപ്പാടുകളിൽ കായിക സാഹിത്യം ചെലുത്തുന്ന സ്വാധീനവും കായിക സാഹിത്യം സാമൂഹ്യ മനോഭാവത്തെ എത്രത്തോളം പ്രതിനിധാനം ചെയ്യുന്നു എന്നതും ഈ വിഷയത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമാണ്.ജയ-പരാജയം എന്ന സങ്കീർണതയെ പല വീക്ഷണ കോണുകളിൽ നിന്ന് ഈ പഠനം അപഗ്രഥിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introduction: Poetics of Failure

Literature has been uniquely influenced by sporting competition, not only through the representation of professional athletes but also through the incorporation of amateur and fan experiences. It is no surprise that sports piques people's interest. When fans are engaged by the emotional sweep of a narrative, they are enthralled by the game or even the entire season. It is self-evident how sports journalism and sports literature accentuate the success aspect of sports due to the inherent nature of social expectations. They usually overlook and dismiss the failure aspects of the narrative. However, a comprehensive assessment of the human predicament, as well as the breadth and depth of human experience and meditation on humanity reveals that it is the failures that show mankind's genuine and permanent qualities. This observation is closely related to the Aristotle's aesthetics of tragedy, which declares the permanence of humanity through the protagonist's failure and even death. Failure has long been an underappreciated aspect of sports.

The purpose of this thesis is to fill a gap in the reading of sports literature that has always existed. In sports literature, stories of success and victory frequently take precedence over tales of failure. Failures are frequently minimized or overshadowed in favour of success tales. However, for athletes, failure is a necessary part of their journey, offering growth opportunities and valuable lessons. Therefore, a more comprehensive representation of athletic experience can be provided in sports writing by acknowledging and examining failure. Failure is usually accompanied by a sense of existential threat. Failure is the unexpected appearance of nothingness in the midst of everything. Failure causes one to see the flaws in one's own fabric of being, and

that is precisely when, properly digested, failure becomes a blessing in disguise. Because failure is this looming, persistent threat that should awaken one to the extraordinary nature of one's existence - the miracle that one exists at all when there is no reason for one to. Knowing this provides one with personality. Failure also has a particular therapeutic function in this role. Most of us, with the exception of the most self-aware or the enlightened, suffer from a chronic lack of adjustment to life; one compulsively imagine oneself much more important than one is and act as if the world exists solely for one's benefit. In our worst moments, one places oneself at the centre of everything and expects the rest of the universe to always be at our service. However, failure can often be a humbling experience. It forces us to confront our own limitations and to realize that we are not the center of the universe. Failure, which typically brings humility, could be a remedy for such arrogance and hubris. Sporting narratives are basically stunning admissions of failure, imperfection, and disgrace, though there does exist a lacuna in the critical analysis of this aspect in an academic context.

The present research attempts to look into the underrepresentation of failure in sports literature and how it impacts our perception of the whole athlete experience. This thesis seeks to bring out the poetics related to vanquished athletes and sportspersons. According to *Merriam- Webster Online- Dictionary*, 'aesthetics' aims to explain how individuals perceive and access the meaning, relevance, and purpose of art, whereas 'poetics' has been viewed as an investigation of the laws and principles that underpin a linguistic work of art, with normative and prescriptive overtones. 'Aesthetics' is the philosophy of art or the study of beauty. On the other hand, 'poetics' comes from the Ancient Greek word 'poietikos', which, according to the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, means both creative, productive, and related

to poetry. Likewise, this thesis focuses on the strikingly various ways in which modern Indian and American writers re-create sporting failure for their characters. Poetics is concerned with how a text's many aspects interact to produce specific effects on the reader, rather than with the meaning of the text. Even so, there is something restricting about our unwavering concentration on winning, our collective adoration for winners. Is it true that these vanquished athletes are undeserving of our praise since they came up just short? Are there any significant differences between the winners of the tournaments and the vanquished? Is winning everything it is said to be?

Our ability to fail is a necessary part of who we as a species are. This ability must be preserved, nurtured, and even treasured. It is vital that one remains inherently impaired, incomplete, and flawed beings; in other words, there must always be a gap between what one is and what one can be. All human achievements throughout history have been made possible by this empty space. Not that human beings have magically transformed into something better; we are still the same frail, imperfect nature. However, the sight of our flaws can be so painful that it occasionally shames us into doing something good. The struggle with our own flaws, ironically, may bring out the best in us. It is essential to understand how to appreciate a meaningful case of failure, how to notice and taste its complexity as it unfolds because failure is irreducibly unique. Successful individuals always manage to look the same, while those who fail, well, they fail in such distinct ways. Each example of failure has its own physiognomy and beauty, and it requires a subtle connoisseur to distinguish between a seemingly banal but spectacular failure and a noisy but poor one. What characteristics define a loser - someone destined for disappointment and denigration? Failure reflects our deepest fears despite the fact that nobody is born to lose. The loser is everyone's nemesis. The goal of this thesis is to uncover the admissions and

denials, naive expectations and broken faith, persistent issues and shifting social conditions of the losers. This study demonstrates how the personal struggle with failure is transformed by the globalised pursuit of achievement. This study will be relevant to the lives of the forgotten men and women who struggled with the label and experience of being a loser in an era when capitalism and globalisation are producing a wide range of victors. The purpose of this study is to comprehend why failure equates to oblivion.

Sport tells a tale, and people are naturally drawn to stories of many kinds. Sport is a fantastic platform for our most primal story-telling urges. English journalist Christopher Booker lists seven fundamental archetypal themes in his 2004 book *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. These stories include overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, trip and return, comedy, tragedy, and rebirth. The constant barrage of actual sports news stories that appear on our radio waves, social media accounts, and TV displays fits in perfectly with the theme of any of these categories. These core plots are followed by sports stories that satiate our need for drama. There is no limit to how these stories can conclude; every game or story's finale just opens up new options. A number of well-known cases come to mind right away. Consider the motif of defeating the monster with a travel and return element thrown in; which is exemplified in Mohammed Ali's (1942-2016) return from boxing exile. After refusing to participate in the Vietnam War, Ali's heavyweight title was removed and his boxing licence was cancelled. Ali returned to the ring three and a half years later, restoring his career and reputation. In the 1974 George Foreman vs. Muhammad Ali match, dubbed "The Rumble in the Jungle", he defeated the younger, more formidable, and undefeated Foreman to regain the world title. The "rags to riches" narrative is among the most common in sports. Few stories can be compared

to those of Umesh Yadav (b. 1987) and Munaf Patel (b. 1983), Indian pace bowlers, who rose from obscurity to success in Indian cricket. To support their families and fund their cricketing goals, Yadav and Patel had to work in coal mines and tyre factories, respectively. They moved from destitution to sporting glory with the Indian cricket team, despite these obstacles. These are triumph stories, but when the narrative is inverted and becomes a plummet from glory to destruction, the story takes on even more poignancy. Perhaps the tragedy is portrayed in an Aristotelian perspective. One such instance is the fall from grace of Oscar Pistorius (b.1986). The paralympian from South Africa overcame his amputations to run with specially made carbon fibre blades, making history as the first double amputee to qualify for and participate alongside athletes with normal legs in the 2012 London Olympics. Shakespearean tragedy meets fallen hero in the depressing chapters of his life that followed, culminating in the murder of his beloved, Reeva Steenkamp. In a similar vein, the story of Lance Armstrong (b. 1971), who fought testicular cancer while winning seven Tour de France titles, illustrates the frailty of a celebrity athlete. Armstrong's obsession with winning turned out to be his downfall. His titles were exposed as phoney after he was caught using performance-enhancing drugs throughout his career and had his previous honours stripped away.

Likewise an Indian example can always be sought in Vinod Kambli's downfall to obscurity. Kambli (b. 1972) burst onto the international cricket scene with a reputation that he could be a peer to the young Sachin Tendulkar, both in terms of age and talent. The early evidence seemed to validate this belief, as Kambli's initial performances in Test cricket were nothing short of extraordinary. He made an indelible mark by reeling off back-to-back double centuries in just his first five Test innings, followed by two centuries in his next three. During this period, it appeared as

if India had discovered another batting genius. However, Kambli's career took a sudden and dramatic downturn, and his decline was as swift as his rise to stardom. Kambli's on-field inconsistencies and his off-field endeavours may have contributed to a lack of discipline and determination, resulting in a confused personality who took things to heart too easily. Less than three years after his debut, he was no longer a part of the Test cricket setup, and by the age of 28, his international career had come to an abrupt end. Kambli's cricketing journey remains a tale of unfulfilled potential, marked by moments of sheer brilliance and undeniable disappointment. His story serves as a stark reminder of the demanding nature of international cricket, where talent alone is often not enough to ensure a long and illustrious career. It is a narrative that highlights the importance of perseverance, discipline, and mental fortitude in the face of challenges that can abruptly cut short what had once seemed like an all-time great career in the making.

All these sporting lives are fodder for writers to depict games in their literary works if sport offers such exemplary storylines. Sports supply all of the raw resources a storyteller needs to create tragedy, pathos or comedy. It is in these stories that we see athletes who once soared to great heights suddenly fall headlong, facing adversity, defeat, or personal struggles. The tragedy in sports stories can be especially moving because it highlights the fragility of success and the human capacity to overcome adversity. Athletes who were once celebrated champions can find themselves in the depths of despair, facing setbacks that redefine their careers and lives. Ultimately, sport serves as a canvas where these fundamental storytelling archetypes play out, often taking unexpected and emotionally resonant twists. It is this rich tapestry of narratives, from triumph to tragedy that continues to captivate and inspire audiences, reminding us of the enduring power of storytelling in the world of sports.

Since the word “sport” will be used a lot throughout this thesis, it is vital to provide a brief definition of it here. The term “sport” was originally used in England in 1440. The etymologies of the words “sport” come from Latin and French. Deportare, which means “to amuse oneself”, is the Latin source of the French term de(s)porter. With time, the definition of “sport” expanded beyond simply “amusing oneself” to include competition in games, individual physical feats, and hunting. This interpretation became widely used throughout England. Play is a domain that is wider than sport, so understanding sport requires understanding something about the nature of games and play. Even if it is possible to claim that all sports are plays, not all plays are sports. One of the pioneers of contemporary cultural history, Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, articulated the basic theory that play is pre-culture and permeates all aspects of existence in his 1938 classic *Homo Ludens*. According to Huizinga, play has a “significant function” (7), makes some sense, and defines what it means to be human and what culture is. Play is an integral part of human existence. To put it briefly, one of the things that make us human is our playful nature and desire for enjoyable activities. A “free activity standing quite consciously outside ordinary life as being not serious, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it”, is what Huizinga defines as play (13). Further refining these concepts, wellness and leisure advocate Joseph Levy contends that play contains three essential elements:

• Play has an innate motivation. It is not necessary to teach us to play; it is something we naturally want to do.

• Play entails accepting alternate realities while momentarily suspending standard, ordinary reality. We may become so engrossed in the “play experience” that we step into a very unique and intimate reality.

• A locus of control exists inside play. When we play in different ways, we think we have power over our choices and how things turn out. (48)

According to Levy, a game is just a more structured kind of play in which the structured and light-hearted aspects of the action are more obvious. The way the playful impulse is organised results in the concept of a game that follows: “A play activity has explicit rules, specified or understood goal, the element of opposition or contest, recognisable boundaries in time and sometimes in space, and a sequence of actions which is essentially repeatable every time the game is played” (54). A globally agreed definition of sport may not always be easy to come by when variables like religion, social class, and historical time are taken into account. For instance, historically, a person’s sport may have been another person's job, depending on their socioeconomic standing. While their people toiled to improve their hunting abilities in an effort to put food on the table and survive another day, kings and noblemen would frequently hunt in their private reserves for the pleasure of the sport. Another example of differing viewpoints as to how sport was conceived and practiced by the ancient Greeks is elaborated by Robert A. Mechikoff is his book *A History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Education* (2005). Historian and Olympic scholar Mechikoff contends that the Greeks aimed to attain arête, a distinctively Greek idea. Greek athletes trained hard under the close supervision of their coaches with the goal of achieving individual, not team, excellence. Perhaps most startling of all is the fact that team events were not encouraged by the ancient Greeks in any of the four major Crown Games (Olympia, Nemea, Isthmian, and Delphi), nor in regular athletics or the Olympic Games (35). Instead, the focus was on personal greatness and performance to glorify certain gods, families, and city-states.

To watch their favourite athletes compete, tens of thousands of fans would go to the great athletic festivals of antiquity. There have not been many changes from antiquity to the present in this regard. The concept in personal greatness was not as strong, if it existed at all, among the ancient Romans, who ultimately overthrew the Greeks in 146 B.C. If you can call it that, Roman sport was played out in enormous stadiums (far larger than any Greek arena ever constructed) that could accommodate up to 25,000 spectators. The spectators were treated to gory gladiatorial fights in which hundreds of animals and combatants would be killed in a single day. In front of 50,000 Romans and other spectators, unfortunate prisoners were either fed to lions, tigers, bears, and crocodiles or sentenced to other horrifying fates in the notorious Colosseum. While most Greeks found Roman entertainment repulsive, the majority of Romans found the Greek version of sport boring. A broad definition of sport for the purposes of this study will have the following elements: continuity, role separation, audience involvement, and assisting infrastructure. Long since lost to the passage of time, ancient cultures placed a strong emphasis on sport and physical activity. Individuals, communities, and countries still honour athletes now as they did ages before. The influence of sport on society and culture has been enormous as it is a worldwide concept. It is possible that, as the popular icon, sports in the twenty-first century have surpassed the significance of music, art, and religion. If sport is to be scrutinised as an art, one should judge and assess it for its aesthetic qualities. Cyril Lionel Robert James's 1963 essay, "What is Art" from his paean to cricket, *Beyond a Boundary* (1983) is a case in point. James, a celebrated Trinidadian cultural historian and cricket writer wants to establish an identity between sport and art and does so, on the ground that both have qualities that yield what he calls "aesthetic pleasure" (284).

In the philosophical literature, aesthetic pleasure is typically understood as the response to the experience of beauty. An object is beautiful precisely in that one experiences aesthetic pleasure upon beholding it. For James, sport and art are alike. They are created and performed to yield the experience of aesthetic pleasure and thus to be beautiful. James exemplifies his theory through cricket. The rules of cricket, like the rules of any sport, shape the possibility of the players' physical movements, albeit, for James, cricket realises this with unique subtlety (291).The movement of the bowler, constrained by the prohibition on straightening his arm during delivery, and of the batter, who while free to choose a range of shots is yet typically disciplined by the paradigmatic side-on stance of the coaching manual, are the conventional aesthetic workings on cricket. So in comparison with the freedom of our mundane movements, they are constrained and shaped by conventions adopted simply for the purpose of playing cricket.

Other critics offer more straightforward list for the appropriate aesthetic qualities of sport, such as R.K Elliot, a professor of philosophy at the University of London who concedes in his article "Aesthetics and Sports" the following qualities, "swiftness, grace, fluency, rhythm and perceived vitality"(112) and D.N Aspin, Faculty of Education, King's College, London, in his article "Sports and the Concept of 'The Aesthetic'," constitutes "grace and elegance" (126) as prerequisites of sports. Here it is to be inferred that the focus lies very much on the movement of the athletes and the formal patterns that they epitomise. While Joseph Kupfer, an academician and theoretician suggests in his article "Purpose and Beauty in Sports", a hierarchy from simple "linear" games, such as the 100 metres or javelin, in which quantitative distances or times alone matter, through "qualitative" sports, such as gymnastics, that are judged in terms of discipline and elegance of bodily movements, through to sports

that entail direct competition between individuals or teams, such as tennis or soccer. These are “dramatic” sports (89). The aesthetic possibilities become more subtle and complex as one moves up the hierarchy, and indeed the aesthetic qualities themselves, on this account, vary from sport to sport. The aesthetics of sport is then not merely a matter of the gracefulness of individual movements but of the dramatic development of the competition as a whole. There is a lengthy history of sports in the genre fiction. In one chapter of Charles Dickens’ *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), Mr. Jingle gives Mr. Pickwick a thorough description of a game involving two local teams. Twenty years later, Thomas Hughes added rugby and a memorable cricket match in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857). Novelists who have written about sports and games include Salman Rushdie, Jane Austen, J.M. Coetzee, and Thomas Hardy. Sports in fiction are not a distinctively American innovation, but they are notable for their importance and significance in American writing. Sports are not a major theme in any of the aforementioned books. Although it has a function, the stories do not revolve on it. It is not so much a full-fledged subject as it is a theme, aside, or chapter element. Europe has traditionally seen sports as unworthy of literary study because of a supposed difference between “high” and “low” culture. Though their stories blend class struggles into sports dramas, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959) by Alan Sillitoe and *This Sporting Life* (1960) by David Storey are instances of British sporting fiction, yet they are not considered canonical works. Even well-known writers who are passionate sports enthusiasts have refrained from employing sporting events or achievements as overarching metaphors. Although Albert Camus was a goalkeeper in his early years in Algeria, he seldom ever wrote about “the beautiful game” in his works.

Khalil Gibran (1883-1931), Lebanese-American poet, has wise words to offer that empower us and allow us to reconsider and change our attitude towards failure. In his poem "Defeat", the poet refers to failure as his self-awareness and defiance. Due to his setback, the speaker of the poem asserts that he is still youthful and susceptible to errors. It is in loss, one discovers that one still has a chance. One learns that he has a long way to go and that fame's transient nature should not enslave us, as he renders, "Defeat, my Defeat, my shining sword and shield/ In your eyes I have read/That to be enthroned is to be enslaved,/ And to be understood is to be leveled down,/ And to be grasped is but to reach one's fullness/ And like a ripe fruit to fall and be consumed" (lines 11-14). While the heroism and final fall of the athlete must be examined in initial discussions of this topic, this study also includes decline and defeat as more central and nuanced notions. Failure's significance appears to be an affront to our celebration of success. The most ambitious contemporary sports literature, on the other hand, seldom tends to represent loss and failure as paradoxical paths to self-affirmation.

This thesis focuses primarily on Indian and American sports literature's preoccupation with failure as a source of gender concerns, national identity, and personality development. Contemporary sports writing has taken the drama and story inherent in sporting competitions and applied it to questions of masculinity, femininity, identity, and nation. This study encompasses three critical theories: existential psychology, which delves into the impact of failure on personality; gender theory, which examines how failure influences gender concepts; and the examination of, how, sports particularly failure in sports contribute to the formation of nationalism. The research would make an attempt to analyse the ideas of identity, gender and nationalism exploring how failure has been weaved into these stories to reflect the

redemptive revelation that the protagonists undergo. The research focuses on the subsequent questions: What insights can be gathered from analysing the ways in which existential psychology examines the impact of failure on personality development in sports literature? How do gender issues and the representation of failure in American and Indian sports literature intersect? How does failure figure into the formation of national identity in sports literature? How is failure portrayed in Indian and American sports writing, and how does it affect identity, gender, and nationalism differently? The study would attempt to analyse the aforementioned issues in a comparative manner. To elaborate on the three critical theories employed:

1. The first theory to be employed in reading the chosen texts is existential theory discussed by Irwin D. Yalom. According to the existential perspective, anxiety results from coming face to face with the givens of existence. One's capacity for self-awareness and ability to live truthfully are diminished by these defences (Yalom 97). American psychiatrist Irvin D. Yalom specialises in existential psychology, which focuses on what he terms the four "givens" of human existence and explores the various ways in which an individual can react to these issues in a healthy or unhealthy way. He expounds his theories in the book *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980). Four "existential givens" or "ultimate concerns" that are frequently presented as dichotomies are at the centre of Yalom's understanding of existentialism: death vs. life, isolation vs. connection, freedom vs. responsibility, and meaninglessness vs. meaning (Berry-Smith, 2012; Zafirides et al., 2013). According to Yalom, humans are terrified of dying because they have a strong fear of non-being; but, being aware of mortality can also inspire conscious and genuine engagement in life. Existential isolation and death are

related. The awareness that one cannot eventually die with or for another person comes upon encountering death. Despite having strong connections with others, one is basically alone and dies as such. The ideas of freedom and responsibility suggest that people are accountable for both their behaviour in the environment and their perceptions and attributions about their experiences. This knowledge undermines the security of a conceptual framework or fate, which is both liberating and unsettling. Finally, the debate between meaning and meaninglessness brings these issues to a head. If there is no grand scheme of things, no ultimate destiny, and everyone is ultimately responsible for their own life, alone, and dying, then what might be the point of existence?

British therapists Neil Thompson and Mary Walsh, who are researching the crisis linked to trauma, characterise trauma as an existential harm that can lead to identity loss and the breakdown of conceptual frameworks that hold meaning. Thompson and Walsh address how trauma can impact a person's sense of self and interaction with the outside world in their article *The Existential Basis of Trauma* (2010). The concept of the abyss, which alludes to the existential emptiness one experiences upon realising one's own mortality and the finite character of existence, is the subject of their disagreement (380). They argue that trauma forces us to confront this chasm, leading to existential fear of dying. They assert that trauma can demolish a person's existential beliefs, such as the belief that the universe is predictable and under one's control or that life is just and fair. This may result in an existential crisis, a sense of groundlessness, as well as a loss of meaning and

purpose in life. These thoughts can be utilised to understand the plight of the sportspersons when they suffer failure and respond to its ensuing trauma.

A breakdown of the homeostatic management of death anxiety is how Yalom explains the dysphoria and series of defences that a person with traumatic life events suffers (207). This comment sums up many of the physical theories of trauma quite effectively. According to the results of numerous researches, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) entails changes in immunological and nervous system functioning that result in persistent dysregulation of these systems (Speer 116). A person who has encountered or witnessed a terrible event may acquire post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD in sportspersons can manifest with symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and avoidance of reminders of the traumatic event. These symptoms can significantly affect an athlete's mental health, performance, and overall quality of life. PTSD can have a profound impact on an athlete's performance. Flashbacks or intrusive thoughts related to the traumatic event can be highly disruptive during training and competition. Heightened arousal, hyper vigilance, and emotional numbing can interfere with an athlete's ability to focus, make decisions, and perform at their best. The fight, flight, or freeze reactions that are induced in traumatic events to save us from death in the short term but may cause nervous system dysregulation over time, resulting in trauma symptoms, are explained by the polyvagal theory (Gupta 94).

Dr. Stephen Porges proposed the polyvagal theory as a model of the autonomic nervous system. According to this idea, the nervous system reacts to threat and stress in an ordered manner, with various physiological and

behavioural reactions depending on the grade of perceived danger. The sympathetic nervous system, the parasympathetic nervous system, and the social interaction system are said to make up the three branches of the autonomic nervous system. The “fight or flight” (86) reaction is brought on by the sympathetic nervous system, which is engaged in response to perceived danger or threat. The body is calmed down and brought back to a condition of rest and relaxation by means of the parasympathetic nervous system. The social engagement system, which encourages social interaction and connection, comes into play when we feel comfortable and secure in our surroundings.

Essentially, the polyvagal theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how our autonomic nervous system responds to traumatic events, and how these responses can result in long-term trauma symptoms. This theory underscores the intricate interplay between our physiological and psychological responses to stress, shedding light on the complex nature of trauma and its effects on individuals.According to Porges’ theory, traumatic events might impair the autonomic nervous system’s ability to regulate itself, resulting in persistent sympathetic activation and/or a detachment from the social engagement system. Numerous mental and emotional problems, such as anxiety, depression, chronic pain, and social issues, can arise from this. Therefore, one might think of the physical reaction to trauma as a somatic reaction to death anxiety; the resulting dysregulation causes hyper- or hypoarousal, a persistent feeling of threat, and alterations to the brain structure that affect the control of mood and emotions. Sporting failures can be a psychologically demanding reaction that can lead to various types of

trauma, both acute and chronic. This study explores the impact of existential trauma on the personality of the sportspersons.

2. The second theory that has been chosen to explore the texts is gender theory. According to gender theory "...the distinction between 'masculine' and 'feminine' activities and behaviour is constantly changing, so that women who wear baseball caps and fatigues...can be perceived as more piquantly sexy by some heterosexual men than those women who wear white frocks and gloves and look down demurely" (Richter 1437). Gender is an experience that is social and personal, as opposed to sex, which is determined by genes and hormones. A person's internal perception of their gender as male, female, or non-binary is referred to as gender identity. The expectations that society has for activities based on gender are reflected in gender roles. Gender expression refers to a person's way of displaying his or her gender to the outside world, such as through clothes, hairstyle, and demeanour. The self-concept of who one is - the innermost sense of being a man, a woman, or something else entirely- is one's gender identity. Gender identification is consistent for some people with their sex assigned at birth. People with penises tend to identify as men, while those with vulvas tend to identify as women. Moreover, the biology of male and female gets increasingly complicated and ambiguous as knowledge about our genetic makeup increases: "…even the physical dualism of sexual genetic structures and bodily parts breaks down when one considers those instances - XXY syndromes, natural sexual bimorphisms, as well as surgical transsexuals - that defy attempts at binary classification" (Ritcher 1437).

Gender theory acknowledges that gender is a social construct influenced by cultural expectations, beliefs, and traditions. It questions the notion that gender is merely a biological reality and places the emphasis instead on how gender is expressed and embodied in daily life. According to gender theorists, gender is influenced by larger social, political, and economic structures as well as systems of power rather than just being an innate trait. One of the most significant figures in gender theory is Judith Butler (b. 1956). She was crucial in establishing gender studies as we know it today and her work has had a profound impact on how we view gender identity and expression. Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) is focused on the notion that gender is a social construct that is formed and reproduced through language, cultural norms, and social practises rather than a fixed or inherent trait of a person. Butler makes the case that gender is not something we are but rather something we do in her book. Butler asserts that we continually perform our gender through our acts, behaviours, and facial expressions. She contends that the distinctions between male and female are not rigid or innate, but rather flexible and ever-evolving. She also draws attention to the ways that gender is employed to uphold existing power systems, particularly in relation to matters of race, class, and sexual orientation.

Gender theory concerns with how people's behaviour, thoughts, actions, and perceptions are shaped by the gender norms of their culture. In other words, gender theory is interested in how we learn and perform gender roles, and how these roles influence our everyday lives (Disch 124). This results from a constructivist perspective of how gender is created and developed in social

interactions (Butler 73). Gender theory is essentially concerned with upending sexist systems and stereotypes and finding ever-new ways to be human in relation to any gendered performances of the self. It is acknowledged that gender is a social construct and that knowledge of it is necessary. Social scientists claim that humans progressively acquire masculine and/or feminine characteristics and that we act in a gendered manner for a variety of reasons depending on the situation. These traits and behaviours are acquired because of how they are perceived by others around us. According to gender theorists, an individual performs a mixture of various traits that, depending on the situation, relationships, and objectives, could be interpreted as either or both masculine and feminine (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 46). By examining gender performativity, Judith Butler deconstructs woman as a biological identity. Butler and other gender theorists contend that gender is more of a performative act than a characteristic of an individual. Language use is crucial to gender theory because discourse, in particular, has the power to construct what it labels, such as what normality and otherness are. According to Butler, "…performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise of power" (225).

Gender implies a past that extends beyond the individual who performs (or refuses to perform) the tasks expected of them based on their assigned category. Furthermore, experience valuation is seen by gender theory as crucial to its utility and as a springboard for further thinking and theorising about more important social, political, and economic processes. Interpretive

perspectives of otherwise numerous and different phenomena give rise to gender. Thus, gender is a component of epistemology; whether conscious or not, gender has a role in how we interpret the world and how others perceive us (Jule 204; Sheldon 231). Although there is a wide variety in how people show their gender and it may not fit into existing stereotypes, gender role expectations are subtle and strongly established. People who identify as transgender, for instance, believe they were born into a body where their physical sex and gender identity are incompatible. Many transgender people prefer to "live" their gender identity than their biological or physical sex (Cameron 84). Gender theory often involves two complementary objectives. One is to challenge the hierarchical classification of traits that are associated with the male gender, such as aggressiveness, competition, and an orientation towards public rules and laws, as superior to traits associated with the feminine gender, such as passivity, cooperativeness, and an orientation towards relationships. Reducing or eliminating compulsion will enable both sexes to freely express their femininity or masculinity as they see fit. This demonstrates how gender has plurality, multiplicity, and expected complexity. Furthermore, this research delves into the repercussions of failure on the gender perceptions of the athletes in the spotlight.

3. The third aspect of theoretical enquiry concerning this thesis is to investigate the influence of nationalism on sports. E. J. Hobsbawm (b.1917) wrote the notion about the nexus between sport and nationalism in his book *On Nationalism* (1990) as

> …what has made sport uniquely effective as a medium for inculcating national feelings, at all events for males, is the ease with which even the least

political or public individual can identify with the nation as symbolized by young persons excelling at something practically every man wants to be good at. The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people. (72)

Hobsbawm wrote extensively about the history of nationalism and its role in shaping modern societies. He argued that nationalism was a powerful force that emerged in the 19th century as a response to the rapid social and economic changes brought about by industrialization and modernization. Hobsbawm claimed that nationalism had a direct correlation with the rise of the nation-state, which is now the predominant system of political organisation in the modern world. The nation-state was based on the idea that there was a natural connection between a particular territory, a specific ethnic or cultural group, and a unified political community. This idea was used to justify the creation of new nation-states and the establishment of exclusive national identities. Hobsbawm argued that nationalism was a double-edged sword (179).

On the one hand, nationalism provided a sense of belonging and identity to people who had been uprooted by the rapid changes of modernization. On the other hand, nationalism could also be used to justify exclusionary and xenophobic policies, and to promote conflicts and wars between nations. Hobsbawm was critical of nationalism because he believed that it tended to obscure the complex and diverse histories of human societies. He argued that nations were not timeless and natural entities, but rather were created through historical processes that involved the interaction of different cultures, languages, and traditions. Overall, Hobsbawm's work on nationalism has

been influential in shaping our understanding of the role of nationalism in modern societies. His analysis highlights the complex and often contradictory nature of nationalism, and the ways in which it has shaped the political, social, and cultural landscape of the modern world (G. Elliot 167).According to Hobsbawm, sport is the best way to promote nationalism in people because it's easier to identify with eleven distinct players than with a large abstraction. In addition, he is subtly suggesting that the nationalism sparked by sports is gendered and has traditionally been exclusive to men. Hobsbawm uses the brilliant concept of "imagined community" (43), as articulated by historian Benedict Anderson, as an example. Since the 19th century, at least, the renowned political scientist Anderson has created a unique way to explain that a nation is not an objectively given reality but rather a subjective sense of political community ingrained in individuals. In his 1983 book *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, he emphasised this idea. According to Anderson, countries and national identities are social constructs that are "imagined" by their citizens rather than natural or objective truths (83).

Anderson's central thesis was that nations are imagined communities because they are made up of people who will never meet each other, yet they share a sense of belonging and identity. He argued that this sense of shared identity is created through the production and dissemination of "imagined" symbols, such as flags, anthems, and other cultural artefacts, that help to create a sense of common history and destiny (94). Anderson also highlighted the role of print capitalism in the development of national consciousness. He argued that the rise of the printing press in the 18th and

19th centuries allowed for the creation of mass-produced books and newspapers that helped to disseminate a common language and culture, and to create a sense of shared history and identity. Anderson's work has had a significant impact on the study of nationalism and has led to a greater appreciation of the role of culture and imagination in the creation of national identities. His emphasis on the importance of symbols and cultural artefacts in the formation of national consciousness has also helped to broaden our understanding of how nations are constructed and maintained over time. According to Hobsbawm, contemporary sport and media play a crucial role in this process of nation-building, which is based on imagination. It is implied by him that nationalism has a role in sport. It has been incorporated into the foundations of the country; it is not simply icing on the cake. The texts' interpretations would improve our comprehension of the defeated athletes' sense of national identity. Sports memoirs may contain expressions of nationalism, especially when the athlete has competed internationally on behalf of their nation. Athletes who have represented their country might reflect on their pride and sense of duty towards their country and express their personal experiences and feelings in autobiographies. Athletes may emphasize the impact their national identity has had on their lives and careers, as well as how it has influenced their priorities and decisions.

Hence, thirdly this research probes into the effects of failure on the nationalistic fervour of the protagonists. Is nationalism a taunting influence on the sportsperson's athletic performance? Or does it always inspire them to bring laurels to their community? Hobsbawm advocated for a nationalism that was distinctly Marxist and anti-primordial. He wrote that "any

sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a 'nation', will be treated as such" (G. Elliot 157). This is a constructivist concept of nationalism that asserts a nation is not defined by pre-existing, homogenous traits of a people group. Rather, it contends that the nation is legitimised by the identification of a link, a fabrication, and an artificial entity. He rejects the idea that there is a true people-to-people connection that gives rise to nations. He states that, "Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent ... political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality" (Hobsbawm 118). It is ludicrous to claim that a mythologized nation is innate to every human community. In his book *On Nationalism*, Hobsbawm argues that nations are inherently "located at the nexus of politics, technology, and social transformation" (312). Only within the framework of social and economic development can nations exist, and as a result of these advancements and a general uniformity of behaviour, they undergo change. They do not represent an innate connection between various groups of people. According to Hobsbawm, the nation must be studied from the ground up in order to comprehend it. Fahad Mustafa's perspective on Indian cricket is Hobsbawmian. Mustafa claims, "Cricket in India made nationhood a consumable entity" in *Cricket and Globalisation* (329). Since cricket is a team sport, it is a perfect fit for nationalist framing. David Gellner, an anthropologist, assists in understanding Mustafa's viewpoint. According to Gellner, team sports give full play to "…individual prowess while simultaneously allowing international competition and systematic, on-

> going, never-ending comparison. Whatever the past, there is always hope for the future. Whatever the dire state of the national team in the present, there are usually proud memories somewhere in the past" (127).

There would be a stark contrast between India and America if a review of the current state of the sport in these two nations were to be conducted. Sports, on the one hand, have assumed a much more important place in many classic literary texts in America. On the other, it has become an integral part of mainstream American culture. America's newly discovered passion for sports and competitiveness served a dual purpose as the country sought a literary voice. Sports provided a basis for national identity and became a rich source of previously unexplored literary material. When the English modernist writer Virginia Woolf discusses the success of Ring Lardner's baseball stories and the novel *You Know Me Al* (1916), she brings together these dual purposes. Sports "...has given him a clue, a centre, a meeting place for the diverse activities of people whom a vast continent isolates, whom no tradition controls", writes Virginia Woolf in her 1925 essay "American Fiction" that was published in the London Saturday Review. He receives from games what society provides for his English sibling (123). Sports that are uniquely American have the power to excite people and free them from the shackles of British colonialism and literary legacy. Sports fiction is a distinctly American genre in this way, focusing on the struggles faced by sportsmen and the desires of their followers against a background of deliberate cultural alienation. The American writers turned their attention to athletics in the middle of the 1960s and it was a big shift. A second explanation for this shift is a frequent feature of contemporaneity that is characterised by a blurring of boundaries-that is, a less obvious line between themes deserving of artistic excellence. Through intricately detailed and multi-layered works, authors were

able to combine the high culture of advanced literary skills with what was usually considered as low culture-sports, and especially sports fans. It took some time for the idea that American writers could draw from athletics in a way that European writers could not, notwithstanding Virginia Woolf's assertion a century earlier. Sports writing gained its own distinct place in the second half of the 20th century, when the cultural boundaries of high modernism in art made way to a Warholian integration of popular culture.

It is noteworthy that the rise in the commercialization and professionalism of sports in America and India accompanied this funnelling element of contemporaneity. The individual narratives component of this book goes into great detail about how sports in postwar America, particularly in the 1960s, experienced a dramatic metamorphosis in their identity. From its early amateurism and the nineteenth-century public view as a hobby and leisure activity, it developed into a vast capitalist enterprise. In this era, sports turned into a corporate commodity and team franchises became extremely valuable enterprises. American sports attracted larger audiences than ever before due to widespread cultural interest, which was fueled in part by the expansion of broadcast coverage and the ubiquity of print media reporting. As Genevieve Rail contends, "...in order to better constitute itself as an object of consumption designed for the citizens of post modernity", sports as a public spectacle did so by incorporating characteristics of postmodernism (147).

Rail has worked on the sociology of sports and is an Emeritus Professor at the University of Concordia. According to her assertion, the hyper-consumption that is so essential to the capitalist economy and social transformation has reinforced sport since the 1960s. India only established this type of shift in the first ten years of the twenty-first century. The popularity of American video games and the widespread

representation of sports in the media aided a movement that was more progressive. Professional sports' widespread appeal most directly mirrored and impacted political and cultural change by drawing attention to the changes in racial relations in the United States. Moments like Texas Western's 1966 victory over an all-white Kentucky team in a college basketball championship game, or the two African American athletes' black power salute on the podium during the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, have come to symbolise this era. The counterculture movement, along with indigenous and civil rights activism, elevated the significance of sports. This shift imbued athletics with unique narratives, moving it beyond mere entertainment, and positioning it as a focal point for current cultural issues and concerns. As a result, it became a platform for widespread public discourse and a wellspring of literary inspiration.

In the United States, writers who have delved into the realm of sports in the post-war era have introduced fresh and innovative approaches to portraying competition that stand apart from conventional literary genres. The sports narrative, in particular, serves as a versatile framework that grants authors the freedom to explore a distinct set of rules and conventions. This genre, encompassing a diverse array of texts, remains enigmatic and multifaceted. Yet, amidst this diversity, one prevailing theme remains consistently intertwined within the tapestry of sports literature: the theme of loss. Over the course of the past fifty years, this motif has traversed numerous literary styles and narratives, making it an inescapable facet of the genre. Narratives of decline and the characters' fatal sense of inadequacy are fascinating themes in sports fiction, and they have been called clichés before. If these books, autobiographies, and tales have anything in common, it is the insightful ways in which the writers have depicted a sportsperson's failure. America's "national illness",

according to William James, is the country's sole worship of the bitch-goddess success (260). America's obsession with success and victory has long been a defining feature of the national mindset, but it also gives rise to a great deal of unease due to its relentless pursuit, which frequently disregards justice or morality. When only unadulterated success is celebrated, failure becomes all the more inevitable, and when failure is viewed solely in terms of duality, its consequences are amplified and presented without context. In actuality, massive setbacks frequently lead to enormous obstacles being faced and overcome, resolve being strengthened, and incredible discoveries being made. When Christopher Columbus found land in 1492, he was unable to establish trading links with the East. However, failure is still portrayed as the ultimate tragedy in America on a regular basis.

However, *The Harvard Business Review* released a special issue on failure in April 2011. This was a reflection of the phenomenon's societal interest, a sort of "failure chic". This look expresses a broader trend in culture. It should come as no surprise that failure was no longer only associated with shame in the corporate sphere, as success was frequently predicated on an initial setback. In general, failure studies are receiving more and more attention from academics, and this attention is illuminating. Three of the most interesting books on the issue with an American perspective are *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* by Scott Sandage (2005), *The Queer Art of Failure* by Judith Halberstam (2011), and *Failure and the American Writer: A Literary History* by Gavin Jones (2014). These critics demonstrate how the mechanics of failure have given academics and artists the opportunity to take a fresh look at a variety of subjects, including literature, gender, history, sexuality, and post-humanist theories of subjectivity. Judith Halberstam, an American academic, in her book, *The Queer Art of Failure* reframes failure as "a way

of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognises that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities" (88).

These reworkings challenge the dominant order and offer insight. The mythic underpinnings of cultural subtexts that uphold normative norms at the expense of polysemous narratives can be revealed through an examination of failure. Equally important, the voices of those who are considered to have "lost" become an intriguing absence deserving of scholarly examination if history is written by the winners. Expanding on this idea, it is assumed that the outsider, the lone hero, and the unsuccessful protagonist have received an extraordinary amount of attention in American sports fiction. In America prior to the 1800s, the meaning of failure was somewhat different from its current meaning, which is deeply ingrained in our perception of value. As Scott Sandage (b. 1964), an American cultural historian points out, the term 'failure' was predominantly applied to abhorrent or unmoral behaviour, particularly by men, displaying unchristian values linked to acts of corruption or vice (Sandage 48). This idea contributed to a bigger story about honourable people going astray because of poor decisions they made for themselves. Failure during this time was perceived as an event or "an incident, not an identity" (Sandage 11), which means that it wasn't a mark against a man, but rather a circumstance that could happen in the absence of proper diligence and extra attention to the powerful but still-emerging American ideals. Failure was a prevalent term at this period to describe hubris and bad luck. French political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville emphasises the importance of ambition and hard work as hallmarks of American identity in *Democracy in America* (1835), a book that carried significant cultural weight during the nineteenth

century. A man who does not invest the proper work ethic that is considered in line with American norms in the constitutional "pursuit of happiness" will fail. (137).

The progressive concepts of capitalist development, westward expansion, and exceptionalism have all been praised in American public discourse, but they have been pitted against the danger of the fear of unmet promise. "The United States are destined either to surmount the gorgeous history of feudalism, or else prove the most tremendous failure of time", declares American polymath Walt Whitman (1819–1892) in *Democratic Vistas* in 1871 (930). Whitman's proclamation forbids compromise or uncertainty from tarnishing the nation's goal. The only two options available to people in that era's mindset were glory or failure. This kind of language both encouraged and reflected larger cultural tendencies. The idea that failure is a sign of human insufficiency was integrated into the capitalist narrative of entrepreneurial success as the US economy grew. The origins of the failed individual concept may be traced back to the myths surrounding the American Dream and the idea that success is attainable for those with the moral character and perseverance to seize the chances the nation presents. Since failure is the antithesis of the American Dream, it has a special resonance. Failure is viewed in the prevailing narrative of American culture as a wholly disparaging indictment of lack. But as Sandage notes, the phrase "American Dream" was only created in response to a spectacular failure. After the 1929 financial crisis, the phrase gained popularity. It was first used by author James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book The Epic of America (44). In this instance as well, the emergence of "the self-made man" became a widely acknowledged phenomenon (Sandage 237). This talk reaffirmed that a person's decision to be a "winner" or a "loser" should be made on the basis of their own initiative and morality rather than their circumstances

or privilege. Power and wealth became the primary determinants of success in a capitalist economy, and this is still the case in modern neoliberal societies.

Failure is by no means a problem exclusive to Americans, but as Gavin Jones, Professor of Humanities at Stanford University, notes, "…it takes especially provocative forms in a nation with such a self-conscious and fraught relationship to success" (Jones 158). During the nineteenth century, Jones notes that failing had changed from being "incident" to "identity,"(11) and the concept of failure, "a difficult, even taboo idea that often becomes hidden in the culture at large" (159). A study of failure reveals a distinct worry that is unique to America: a psyche plagued by success and failure that permeates society norms to a crippling degree. The link between failure and a lack of riches and power was deeply ingrained in the national psyche by the end of the nineteenth century. But the oversimplification that success and failure are objective or contingent on an individual's capacity to push oneself and put in a lot of effort hides a complex structure in the United States.

In the US, a person's inclination to work is undoubtedly less important than other factors-race, class, and gender, to mention a few. Success, according to Halberstam, is more of a "result of the tilted scales" (3) of the American system. The simplistic perpetuation of the binary of "winning" and "losing", as Sandage and Halberstam have so eloquently demonstrated, maintains the delusion that the American Dream is a goal that every citizen can achieve. By presenting the idea that everyone can easily realise the American Dream and that it is a self-sustaining system, such an ascendant narrative upholds the status quo in the economy and serves as a protection mechanism for the established order. Aspirational myths are promoted and hope is offered by tales of extraordinary ascents to fame and money. The cliché of the "rags to riches" story of a sports star is the best example of this. These kinds of tales

mask the impossibility of such a beautiful conclusion occurring. People see failure as a sickness and a vulnerability that can only be cured by human resourcefulness.

The global capitalism accentuates these dichotomies of success and failure. Sports cost a substantial amount of money; hence the capitalists consider how to augment the financial revenue from sports arenas. They thereby emphasise the importance of success and the consequences of failure. Since one person's success is inextricably linked to another's failure, it is important to consider how the defeated party is portrayed, as well as how they are abandoned and even punished for any faults or deficiencies they may have felt they had. Failure anxiety is a peculiarly American obsession in fiction. Characters in European novels from the nineteenth century, for instance, frequently make socially incorrect decisions. In contrast, characters in "the harsher world of the American novel...don't make mistakes: more radically, they fail", according to Jones (14). This study examines how writers react to the dynamic of failure in American fiction, if as Jones contends, both in terms of the lives of their protagonists and their own artistic vision. Upending the concept of failure and reframing its fundamental implications to show why it merits deeper consideration and how it might be applied to examine the paths of fictional sports figures would undoubtedly be intriguing. This study will demonstrate that failure, on the contrary, can be a regenerative experience, providing not only catharsis in a Nietzschean sense, but also the opportunity to gain strength from adversity, along with newfound clarity and insight.

Red Sanders' famous adage, "Winning is everything", has long been a contentious point of discussion in the world of sports. Red Sanders was a successful American football coach who led the UCLA Bruins football in the 1950s. Sanders is most remembered for his catchphrase, "Winning isn't everything", which perfectly

captures his straightforward training philosophy and the absolute value he placed on winning. That is everything (Overman 77). Sanders' famed and exaggerated remarks highlight the significance of athletic achievement in American culture, both inside and outside of sports, and have struck a chord with many Americans over the years. Sanders' maxim was adopted as the campaign slogan by the team assembled in 1972 to help Richard Nixon win re-election (Overman 89). The campaign's winning at any costs mentality, disregarding the moral ramifications of dishonest tactics, was further highlighted by the events that followed, particularly the Watergate incident. The phrase has grown to be one of the most frequently used in American sports culture; it is associated with teams of all ages and levels of competition's locker room bluster, pep talks given by coaches prior to games, and encouraging remarks made during halftime.

In contrast to more equitable sporting etiquette, there was no response to Sanders' overall concept until the counterculture revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s. Although it is indisputable that winning is an important component of sports, it is important to keep in mind that sports are about more than just the winning score. Sports are a representation of human ability, tenacity, and the quest for greatness. Regardless of the result, they impart to us important knowledge about discipline, sportsmanship, and teamwork. The value of winning, however, was never fully challenged and continues to be a fundamental component of the American culture. Sport is frequently the means by which these ideas are perpetuated.

It offers some background for contrasting Red Sanders' statement with the well-known Olympic slogan credited to French educator and historian Pierre de Coubertin, who is known as the founder of the modern Olympic Games. The Olympic creed states, "The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to

take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well" (Toohey and Veal 64). The iconic remarks of Sanders encapsulate the mainstream American sports mentality, which is completely at odds with the ideals of the larger sporting community. More accurately, American sporting traditions typically view anything that the sporting world praises as a cause for shame. Sanders would later distance himself from the quotation, arguing he had said or meant something else; regardless of his regret, the power of those words encapsulates a popular worldview (Overman 84-85). The British appreciation of the brave and honourable loser, as well as the self-deprecating idea that "character-building defeat" or "the taking part" are worthy in and of themselves, is not deeply ingrained in American culture. The positive aspects of games and sports, especially the opportunity for physical activity and team bonding, as well as the values of athletic honour and dedication, are almost completely absent from mainstream American sports discourse. Success, the exaltation of winning at all costs, and the ensuing generation of popularity and enormous financial rewards are the driving forces behind American sports.

India's relatively limited success on the global sports stage can indeed be mystifying, especially when one considers its massive population. The stark contrast between India's population and its Olympic medal count is hard to ignore. One plausible explanation for this disparity may be attributed to India's post-colonial history. The legacy of British colonial rule left a lasting impact on the country's approach to sports. During the colonial era, sports in India were often organized and promoted primarily for the benefit of the colonial rulers, with limited opportunities for the native population to excel in sports. Even after gaining Independence, India struggled to overcome the effects of this historical baggage. Investment in sports

infrastructure, coaching, and athlete development took time to materialize. Additionally, there were challenges related to bureaucracy, lack of funding, and mismanagement in sports organizations, which hindered the growth of sports in the country. Moreover, India's focus on traditional sports like cricket, which has achieved remarkable popularity, has sometimes overshadowed other sports. While cricket is undoubtedly a source of national pride and success, it has sometimes diverted resources and attention away from sports with Olympic potential. However, it is important to note that India has shown improvements in recent years, with the emergence of talented athletes in various disciplines, increased funding, and better facilities. Efforts to diversify sports and nurture talent from a young age are gradually yielding results. India's underwhelming performance in global sports can be partially attributed to its historical legacy, but the country is making strides to overcome these challenges and is gradually enhancing its presence in international sports competitions. The future holds promise for India as it continues to invest in sports development and nurture its athletic talent.

In India, sports literature predominantly comprises memoirs and biographies, with a relatively limited presence of fictional works. Despite the immense attention and celebration that sports garner in the country, the incorporation of sports into literature remains notably scarce. The market for sports literature in India has been slow to develop. One possible explanation for this scarcity is rooted in India's historical context. For a long time, Indians seemed somewhat apologetic about their own identity and achievements, which may have influenced the relatively modest representation of sports in their literary works. However, a significant shift occurred with the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s. This transformation brought about a notable change in how Indians perceived themselves and their

capabilities. Despite this profound internal shift, the representation of this newfound confidence on a global stage through sports literature remains somewhat lacking. It is a fascinating aspect to explore - how a nation's evolving self-perception is yet to find a robust voice in global sports literature. While sports hold a special place in Indian society, the incorporation of sports themes into literature has been limited, with a predominantly non-fictional focus. The slow growth of the sports literature market in India might reflect historical factors, but there's potential for a broader representation of India's evolving self-image on the global literary stage in the future.

Sports in India are mostly associated with one significant sport, cricket, which has achieved cult status in the country and gained popularity over time due to commercialization and economic concerns. Cricket has a large and active following. Indians, who acquired the sport during British rule, have remained exceptional fans of the game. In fact, the popularity and magnificence of cricket have reached entirely new heights since the launch of the wildly famous Indian Premier League (IPL) in 2008. Every victory is praised, applauded, and adored by all. However, when the Indian team loses, supporters march to the streets, burn effigies, and attack the players' homes. Winning is mandatory and this alludes to the American yearning for success in sports. The current thesis investigates the idea of redemptive failure in sports literature in an effort to refute this very constrained construct, which portrays failure as a humiliating or totally shameful experience. The chosen works utilise the negative effects of failure, such as hurt, disappointment, rage, disenfranchisement, and anxiety, as motivation for a range of creative endeavours.

The very sardonic or aphoristic idea that one can learn lessons from failure or from cornfy anecdotes of people overcoming hardship through straightforward moral instruction is not examined in this study. Archetypal sports storylines of this kind

typically convey the sweet and endearing tale of courageous underachievers who overcome all obstacles to become champions. Rather, this study utilises deeper concepts of failure as they are portrayed in literature, which might eventually be healing or reconciling in and of themselves. Its goal is to reveal what failure really means and, more significantly, who gets to define and define what failure is. Is failure such a well-established term that there is no room for interpretation? Is it possible for a person to define their own failure, or is failure necessarily a socially manufactured phrase with no liberating alternatives? The current thesis contends that some sports writing have given writers permission to explore a paradoxical reimagining of a particular kind of failure in post-World War II literature. Authors and characters who accept failure are common in modern Indian and American sports fiction. They search for methods to transform their unpleasant experiences into distinct and genuine literary forms.

Halberstam claims in *The Queer Art of Failure* that there are situations in which failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, or not knowing can actually lead to more inventive, collaborative, and unexpected ways of existing in the world (249). If failure is given the chance to be rethought, then its greatest potential is to offer different ways of assessing the most taboo parts of experience. Halberstam finds freedom in reevaluating things: “We can break free from the punitive standards that control our behaviour and steer human growth to get us from chaotic childhoods to predictable and orderly adulthoods through failure” (271). Halberstam’s views provide a critical analysis of the socio-political systems that are widely used to oppress and subjugate the weak and disadvantaged. Halberstam’s quote is especially fitting because it implies a level of maturity where failure moves us beyond playfulness and towards artistic expression. This study examines the idea

of redemptive failure in accordance with Halberstam's thesis and suggests rereading texts where a nadir can be reframed as an exercise of self-discovery and comprehended through empowerment. Failure should not be dreaded in any manner, but rather welcomed as a necessary step towards alternative success. There is also the counterintuitive idea that achievement and success are only meaningful when they are realised via failure.

Structured into many of the works under the scope of this study is the defeated opponent lying battered on the battlefield, a space that becomes a metaphor for the sports pitch. When the victor's faint victorious cries twist the knife a little further, he experiences the grief-stricken clarity of the unattained reward in defeat. Because he has defined himself in relation to failure, he, like the individuals examined in this thesis, is more enamoured with success. By placing the idea of failure in an American context, this kind of argument highlights a conception of failure that is specific to the West. As a counterweight, English author Ivan Morris (1925–1976) traces the evolution of Japan's literary tradition of adoration for the tragic hero, starting in the fourth century, in *The Nobility of Failure* (1975). Failed heroes are quite popular in Japanese culture, especially those whose morality is maintained while making decisions that would ultimately bring them to ruin. Morris cites other instances, such as the story of Saigo Takamori (1828–1877), a Japanese samurai and aristocrat who battled against overwhelming odds for a cause that was hopeless and ultimately committed Seppuku (suicide) after his uprising against Meji failed. Morris notes that there is a popular yearning to draw inspiration from valiant failure and he notes:

> The submissive majority, while bearing its discontents in safe silence, can find vicarious satisfaction by identifying itself emotionally with those individuals who waged their forlorn struggle against overwhelming odds; and the fact that

> all these efforts are crowned with failure lends them a pathos and characterizes the general vanity of human endeavour and makes them the most loved and evocative of heroes. (2)

Japanese culture has celebrated the act of failing against crushing probabilities. Indian cultural models are heroes glorified in epic, lyric, and tragic poetry; in many respects, their narratives epitomise the human experience, reflecting on worries about the hardships of mortal existence, even for twenty-first century audiences. Likewise, the traditional Indian puranas, which played a significant role as sources of social discourse during their time, are replete with stories of failure. Despite India's rich history of celebrating greatness and achievements, it does not cast aside failure as a mere source of embarrassment. Instead, it embraces failure as an inherent facet of life, recognizing it as a potentially ennobling struggle capable of making or breaking a hero. In contrast to avoiding or downplaying the concept of broken heroes, Indian mythology is deeply intrigued by the aftermath of their tribulations. It encourages all audiences not only to sympathize with these characters but also to glean valuable lessons from their experiences. Among the pantheon of legendary figures, there are several notable representatives of doom and failure, such as Ajamila, Jatayu, Bharat, Bheeshma, Karna, Yayati, Pareekshit, Rishabadeva, Drithrastra, Chithraketu, Gandhari, Viswamitra, and Durvasa. These characters serve as potent reminders that failure is an intrinsic part of the human journey, and their stories resonate with the broader themes of resilience, redemption, and the enduring human spirit. In the intricate tapestry of Indian mythology, these tales of downfall and subsequent redemption offer profound insights into the complexities of life, and they invite us to not only empathize with the characters but also to draw inspiration from their experiences.

In the Western tradition, heroes are typically depicted as courageous and victorious, with less empathy extended to those who finally fall short. Even the anguished and rebellious Byronic hero finds that his acts of defeat characterise him less than his inner battle. Similar to this, a variety of well-known classical works, such as Odysseus's quest and Ishmael's journey in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), use the monomyth, or hero's journey, as a model. In these stories, the protagonist overcomes obstacles along the way to return home. This cultural gap is crossed by the protagonists found in modern Indian and American fiction in a way that promises redemption. They falter in an array of significant ways. Their failures do not conform to the tragic heroism of the Japanese past, nor do they conform to the typical Western or Eastern ideals of victorious warriors returning home from a voyage.

To understand failure, a perspective on achievement should be developed. This refers to the reality that one is not whole or whole at first, and that striving is in our nature. Our striving indicates our desire to embark on important projects and see them through to completion. There is pleasure in such endeavours; the act of striving itself is pleasurable since it involves the extension of the self. The human being has an incomplete nature, but power, the power to desire wholeness, is crucial to our given being. 'To strive' means imagining a desired goal and pushing oneself to achieve it. One becomes more focused in her endeavours and channels her energies towards the goals she chooses when one transcends her constraints. The scar line of limitation that has been crossed is inscribed into success. But, rather than surmounting a barrier, such surpassing has a self-reinforcing effect. One becomes aware of herself, aware of her capabilities, and proud of her newfound abilities. Success instils a sense of self-worth. The adage goes, "We grow in our own sight". In the sight of others, one also matures. Success brings self-esteem as well as other people's respect. One has a high regard for

each other. One sees subtle adjustments in the eyes of others, all of which corroborate one's new self-perception. Not surprisingly, one gets deceived into believing that fate is safely tucked in one's palm as a result of the resultant self-assurance, whereas, failure entails many hard lessons. As William Desmond emphasises in his article "Philosophy and Failure" (1988), any failure implies three aspects: the threat to the self's wholeness, its being subjected to a strain beyond its limit, one that may break or shatter its integrity; the "downing," that is, the decreasing, the diminishing of the self's energy, its existence; death which is the extreme of such diminishment. Three types of "breakdown" can be distinguished, each corresponding to three dimensions of our complex being. This can be categorized as bodily breakdown, psychical failure, and purpose failure (291). These may remind one of Plato's still useful tripartite articulation of the psyche in terms of epithumia, thumos, and logistikos, but they do not quite reduplicate it. Physical failure is a term that refers to our state as a physical entity. The body has its own integrity and wholeness, which one refers to as health. When illness strikes, this completeness is tested and disrupted. The body is depleted of energy and fights to reclaim it. The body, in response to this threat to its existence, heals itself. All medical knowledge, when correctly understood, is really a by-product of this self-doctoring.

When one remarks that someone has lost their nerve, one is implying the second type of loss, psychical failure. The body may be in great health, but unless the mind can conjure a sense of excitement or verve, it is impossible to begin, much less complete, difficult endeavours. The ego is flat, dull, and listless without this emotional excitement. When action gets tiresome, a bored apathy sets in. These two types of breakdown, namely bodily and psychical failures occur below the level of self-awareness at first. Above these categories, the third kind, namely the lack of

purpose, arises. It is the specter of the previously mentioned success. Desmond claims that one has a clear vision of an objective or goal in mind while encountering failure of purpose, but gets frustrated instead (293). Failure of purpose is defined as a failure to plan, calculate, and be rationally self-aware as a planning, calculating, and rationally self-aware actor. One sets goals for oneself and works to achieve them as self-determining beings. However, the objective goes awry, the plan falls apart, the agent lacks the necessary resources, and the goal is unable to be achieved. As this occurs while the self is aware of its shortcomings, failure of aim is perhaps the most easily named.

The current rhetoric of success may be tempted to dismiss such egregious failure as merely a lack of significance, a meaningless void. Nonetheless, this negativity must be confronted. Is not the inability to be aware of failure the true failure? The question is essential because, at least in collective consciousness, the modern world seeks to erase or taboo the reality of such failure. This cult has a tendency to divert attention away from failure. Failure has no meaning, thus people who are labelled as failures are pushed aside. The nameless ones are surrounded by a web of stillness. A failure is a non-person. A failure is refuse: what is rebuffed and denied. It is hardly surprising that criticism of major works on sports fiction has focused mostly on the representation of traditional heroics.

Over the past 25 years, the field of academic studies in American sports writing has expanded. *The Sporting Myth and the American Experience: Studies in Postmodern Fiction* by Wiley Lee Umphlett (1974), the first academic study to give American sports writing specific academic attention in its own right, marked the beginning of a serious critical investigation of the genre in the 1970s. Wiley Lee Umphlett, a renowned writer on American sports culture, lived from 1931 until 2005.

The breadth and depth of critical analysis have adjusted to mirror the increasing representation of American sports in "highbrow" American literature. Sports literary criticism was firmly established by the early Eighties with three thorough and substantial works: Christian Messenger's *Sport and the Spirit of Play in American Fiction: Hawthorne to Faulkner* (1981), Robert J. Higgs' *Laurel and Thorn: The Athlete in American Literature* (1981) and Michael Oriard's *Dreaming of Heroes, American Sports Fiction 1968-1980* (1982). *Aethlon: Journal of Sports Literature* was founded in 1989 and is currently the most well-known publication devoted exclusively to American sports fiction. Its founding was undoubtedly influenced by these works.

The early 1990s saw the publication of several noteworthy follow-up works that furthered the critical knowledge of sports literature. For example, American scholar Messenger expanded his research by focusing on the post-war period in *Sport and the Spirit of Play in American literature: Hawthorne to Faulkner*. *Sporting with the Gods: The Rhetoric of Play and Game in American Literature* (1991), a study of the significance of sporting language in American culture over the last 200 years, by former American football player and professor of American Literature and Culture Michael Oriard, furthered his analysis while slightly revising his thesis. Through two centuries of athletic rhetoric, the author's project reveals the episteme of American values. Literary and non-literary sources are presented side by side, supporting Oriard's theory of the strength of sporting analogy. However, only a few literary texts-from both American and Indian sports literature-are the subject of this study. The examination of these pieces remarks on how they relate to conventional storylines and shows how a subgenre of sports writing has found such success in failure.

The protagonist of a lot of American sports writing is primarily concerned with his or her own physique. Messenger argues, "…in essence, the sports hero begins in free play, delighting in the freedom and self-mastery of his body" (15). Robert J. Higgs, another American academic, goes one step further when he contends that "the athlete is not merely the body performing but a self, engaged in heroic transcendence of the body" (6). This thesis aims to investigate if the heroism found in modern sports writing differs greatly from that found in its early forms and even from how these critical works are interpreted. Sports heroism today owes more to the existential anti-hero, who is full of uncertainty and self-loathing, than it does to the historically heroic heroes who were enthralled with their own physical prowess. While transcendence can still be sought after, the path to its benefits is significantly less conventional and arises from failure rather than from it. This examination of the works explores the difficult circumstances that characters, despite being unable to change their circumstances, must overcome in order to reconstruct personal value. For many authors, bravery appears to be a bygone era of self-expression. The sports fiction anti-hero seeks liberation through distancing himself or herself from conformity or affiliation. Steering away from hollow forms of integration, they have desires that go beyond spatial chimaeras and "temporal dreams", and they are both drawn to and wary of biological heroics (Messenger 245).

These recent developments in the dominant philosophical structures of continental thought provide background to this thesis. This research attempts to comprehend how athletes and sportspersons confront failure and at times rewire their brains through their loss. The emphasis on sporting failure and redemption unifies a collection of strikingly distinct novels from India and the United States and offers a novel contribution to knowledge by exploring this important component of sport

fiction. A fresh area of critical interest for sports fiction is outlined by contemporary sports writing. It accomplishes this by focusing on the complex interactions between sport's spectatorship, media coverage, advertising, and amateur experiences rather than just the athlete's experiences. This study highlights how, as seen from the viewpoint of the sports enthusiast, contemporary sports fiction can use themes such as play, masculinity, femininity, identity, country, and memory to manifest itself within the dynamic domain of athletic definition.

The topic of failure depictions in American sports literature is broad, thus in order to maintain the thesis as a focused investigation rather than a comprehensive survey, some boundaries have been set. The parameters of evaluation have to be drawn around the four main American sports, which are baseball, tennis, wrestling, and swimming. The selected sport, baseball, can, nonetheless, rightfully claim to be the "most American" and is thus especially instructive in the cultural setting of failure at the heart of this theory. In addition to men's sports writing, this study encompasses sections dedicated to the examination of women's sports writing. The significant gender bias that still exists in sports should be taken into consideration for the reason why there are still relatively few female writers portraying American and Indian sports. The groundbreaking book *Crossing Boundaries: An International Anthology of Women's Experiences in Sport* (1999), written by Susan Bandy and Anne Darden, marked the beginning of the protracted process of rebalancing the critical reading of women's sports fiction. The fascinating book *Women Characters in Baseball Literature: A Critical Study* by Kathleen Sullivan from 2005 offers a feminist framework to analyse the sometimes unfavourable portrayal of women in writing about America's favourite pastime. However, a small number of female writers in the final decades of the 20th century dealt with sports in America.

The dearth of sports literature in India is a notable gap in the country's literary landscape. While India has a rich and diverse sporting history, the literary representation of this heritage is comparatively limited. In India, sports literature has primarily revolved around non-fiction, particularly autobiographies and biographies of athletes and coaches. While these accounts offer valuable insights into the lives and experiences of sports personalities, they often dominate the genre, leaving little room for fictional works or in-depth historical analyses. The demand for sports literature in India, especially beyond cricket, has historically been limited. As a result, publishers and authors may be hesitant to venture into this genre, fearing limited readership.

A few histories of sports by sports historians stand out of the ordinary like, Ronojoy Sen's *Nation at Play: A History of Sport in India* (2015), Ramachandra Guha's *Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of a British Sport* (2002) and Boria Majumdar's *Lost Histories of Indian Cricket: Battles off the Pitch* (2005). Ronojoy Sen's work is a significant contribution to the understanding of sports in the Indian context. Sen's work provides an in-depth exploration of the historical and cultural dimensions of sports in India, offering readers a comprehensive look at the evolution of sports in the country. One of the strengths of this book is its historical depth. Sen takes readers on a journey through the centuries, from ancient Indian sports and games to the impact of British colonialism on the sporting landscape. By examining this historical context, he effectively highlights how sports have been intertwined with India's social, political, and cultural fabric.

Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of a British Sport by Ramachandra Guha is a thought-provoking exploration of the complex relationship between cricket, colonialism, and India's own journey as a nation. He skillfully weaves together historical accounts, anecdotes, and personal narratives to create a

compelling narrative that captures the essence of cricket in India. He explores how cricket served as a means of resistance against British colonial rule and how it gradually transformed into a symbol of national identity and pride. The Bombay Pentangular, the preeminent tournament in pre-partition India, had its origins in the Presidency matches of the 1890s. Initially contested between the Europeans and the Parsees, these matches laid the foundation for what would become the Pentangular tournament.

As time progressed, the Pentangular tournament evolved to include a broader spectrum of communities. In 1907, the tournament was expanded to incorporate the Hindus, followed by the Muslims in 1912. The final addition was the 'Rest' team, predominantly composed of Christians and Anglo-Indians, in 1937. This tournament's historical evolution reflects the complex societal dynamics of pre-partition India. It served as not only a platform for competitive cricket but also as a reflection of the diverse communities and communal relations of the time. The inclusion of various religious and ethnic groups in the tournament mirrored the intricate tapestry of Indian society during that era. In his work, *Lost Histories of Indian Cricket: Battles off the Pitch*, Boria Majumdar sheds light on the socio-cultural impact of cricket in India, touching on issues like nationalism, identity, and gender. Majumdar's exploration of these themes adds depth to the narrative and underscores the significance of cricket in the broader context of Indian society.

In order to assess the field of sports fiction, a selection of eight novels has been curated for this comprehensive study. These chosen texts undeniably fall within the realm of sports literature. While the authors featured in this study employ diverse approaches to portraying sports in their writing, it is noteworthy that certain specific traits and themes are consistently present across all of their works. Within this genre,

writers often venture into experimental forms of storytelling, pushing the boundaries of conventional narrative structures. They ingeniously harness the spirit of play, a fundamental element in the world of sports, as a powerful metaphor to explore the boundless creativity and potential inherent in the realm of prose fiction. It is important to recognize that, while sports literature was previously a relatively niche field, it is in the process of establishing a bona fide canon. This canon represents a growing body of work that not only captures the essence of sports but also enriches the world of literature with its distinctive blend of athleticism and artistic expression. The selection criteria employed in the process involved choosing only those sources that addressed the theme of failure. Athletes who have achieved success would also have discussed their past failed endeavours to achieve accomplishment. This study has carefully chosen texts that address the issue of failure since its objective was to theoretically evaluate literary texts that encompass the two distinct genres of fiction and autobiography. The novels selected with men protagonists are Moti Nandi's *Striker* (1973), Aravind Adiga's *Selection Day* (2017), Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* (1952) and Chad Harbach's *The Art of Fielding* (2011). While it would be befitting to write about American sports fiction with referencing classic texts such as Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* (1952) and Chad Harbach's *The Art of Fielding* (2011), this research endeavours to cover new ground on Indian sports fiction written by Nandi and Adiga.

Despite the fact that *The Natural* was Bernard Malamud's first published novel, it was not well acclaimed. With Malamud's gradual emergence as an important American writer, the work has begun to receive critical acclaim. The novel's plot revolves around the protagonist Roy Hobbs, a left fielder for the New York Knights. Malamud (1914-1986) has compared baseball heroes to fabled figures from the past.

The work has numerous allusions to the tale of the Holy Grail, highlighting its mythological theme of a hero's quest, ordeal, and final redemption. It chronicles the story of a baseball player infatuated with the game, and the novel's brief "Pre-game" chapter introduces us to Roy, a nineteen-year-old hopeful pitcher; then, fifteen years later, "Batter Up!" resumes the narration of Roy's life and career. When the mysterious lady, Harriet Bird, fires silver bullets from her gun into Roy's abdomen at the end of the "Pre-Game" portion, both his life and baseball career appear to be finished. The second section picks up fifteen years later, with no explanation for Roy's enigmatic survival. Roy receives a bribe from his team's owner, who is ominously titled as 'the Judge', in order to gratify a voluptuous woman named Memo. The Judge appears to have wagered against his own Knights team. Hobbs has resolved not to throw the game in the final game, but he swings, misses, and strikes out. His destiny has passed him by. Hobbs has little chance of proving that he did not intend to throw the game. He disapproves of himself. But it is only after a humiliating setback that he begins to develop moral awareness: he flings the bribe money in the face of the Judge. Memo tries, but fails, to shoot him in a re-enactment of the shooting in "Pre-Game". He walks out of the stadium a broken man, his career cut short by betrayal of the heroic ideal.

Chad Harbach (b.1975) is a writer and editor for the *n + 1* journal in the United States. *The Art of Fielding* (2011) is his first and only novel, and it follows shortstop Henry Skrimshander through his college baseball career with the fictional Westish College Harpooners. Henry tries to set a record for the most consecutive errorless games by a shortstop, but his throw goes awry and hits his roommate, right fielder Owen Dunne, who is seated in the dugout. The injury sends Owen to the hospital, which has a negative impact on Henry's self-esteem. He loses his fielding

quickly enough to be unable to make a basic throw to first base. Henry starts exhibiting symptoms of the Steve Blass sickness, in which a talented player loses his ability to throw a baseball accurately, suddenly and permanently.

In the case of Indian authors, Moti Nandi (1931- 2010) is the first to include sports as an integral aspect of any fictional work. Nandi is a Bengali writer who worked at *Anandabazar Patrika* as its sports editor. He is known for his depictions of sporting events in his novels, and many of his heroes are athletes. Nandi possessed an unparalleled understanding of the Maidan that few could match: the intense club rivalries, the contentious battles for star players, persistent accusations of match-fixing, and, particularly during the era he chronicled, the plight of the players- most of whom hailed from underprivileged backgrounds. His deep knowledge also extended to the hardships endured by these athletes, including illnesses, injuries, and the pervasive specter of malnutrition that shadowed their lives. This understanding gives all of his sports fiction a stark, unflinching reality, a feeling of the constraints and difficulties of the real that contrasts with humorous confidence or sporting triumphalism.

In Nandi's *Striker* (1973), a teenage football player, Prasoon Joshi, is entirely side-lined after his father, a former top scorer in the Calcutta League, is accused by the club he played for of purposefully throwing the winning goal. Prasoon is pitted against many odds to excel in his dreams. He must not only combat the merciless exploitation of football clubs, his family's straitened financial conditions, and his own development as a player as a young player attempting to make his mark, but he must also exorcise his father's demons. *Selection Day* (2017) written by Aravind Adiga, on the other hand, is a multi-voiced novel about modern India as seen through the lens of Mumbai cricket culture. Mohan, an immigrant miserable chutney-seller in Mumbai

gears up Manju to be the world's second-best batter after his slightly older brother, Radha, at the start of the novel. Mohan is a crazed cricket father who devotes his entire life to his sons' 'dreams' of becoming professional cricketers: sport as Mohan sees it, will be their ticket out of poverty. Cricket is a meal ticket for starving youths from Mumbai's slums, as well as a sport for English gentry. This novel also depicts and challenges the ideals of Indian masculinity.

To compare and contrast the portrayal of women sportspersons in Indian and American fiction, the present study has chosen Jenifer Levin's *Water Dancer* (1982), Carol Anshaw's *Aquamarine* (1992), Moti Nandi's *Koni*(1975) and Prajwal Hegde's *What's Good About Falling?*(2018). A concentrated attempt is being made to bring in writers who have not received enough attention from the academic community, especially Jenifer Levin and Carol Anshaw, and to a lesser degree Moti Nandi and Prajwal Hegde. Jenifer Levin (b. 1955) and Carol Anshaw (b. 1946), two of the most ambitious and creative female writers of contemporary fiction, were the authors selected for analysis. Jenifer Levin is a former American Masters swimmer and women's running coach who has contributed to magazines such as *The New York Times*, *Ms. Rolling Stone*, and *The Advocate*.

Water Dancer, Jenifer Levin's first novel, explores female courage and human endurance through the hardships and tribulations of the protagonist, Dorey Thomas, a marathon swimmer who aspires to conquer the San Antonio strait. The next American writer picked to analyse is Carol Anshaw whose *Aquamarine* won her the Carl Sandburg Award and the Society of Midland Authors Award. In her first novel Anshaw presents Jesse Austin, 17, who loses the 100-meter freestyle to an Australian swimmer at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. That moment, frozen in time in the aquamarine of the Olympic pool, will haunt Jesse for the rest of her life. Carol

Anshaw portrays Jesse Austin in 1990, when she is about to turn forty, and she is living three alternate lives at the same time. Each of Jesse's lives is a result of the decisions she took after Mexico City, and each possible life bears the scars of the vanquished past.

It is quite rare for Indian authors to use female athletes as protagonists. Female athletes are rare in Moti Nandi's stories as well. When Soumitra Chatterjee (1935-2020), veteran Bengali actor played the maverick swimming coach in the film adaptation of one of these stories, it became extremely famous. Nandi's *Koni*, published in 1973, depicts a little girl from Kolkata's ghettos competing in the National Championship against metropolitan girls. Prajwal Hegde, the Tennis Editor of *The Times of India*, is another writer who has featured a female athlete in her novels. Hegde has been awarded the Ron Bookman Media Excellence Award in the 2021 ATP Awards. She covers the four Grand Slams – Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon, and US Open – as well as ATP and WTA season-ending tournaments in Asia, including Dubai, Doha, Beijing, and Shanghai. *What's Good About Falling* (2018) is her debut novel, which follows Arya Ashok on her journey to become a formidable force in global tennis. The texts that were selected for inclusion are distinctly modern in nature, with both tragic and humorous components. These are also works that address failure and loss in a number of creative ways, but they also provide intricate and frequently confusing interpretations of what it means to lose. This study examines how the narratives of Anshaw and Levin enable experimental sports writing to highlight shortcomings in conventional representation. Modern sports literature departs significantly from realistic renditions that sought to mimic every aspect of the game in letters. Rather, every one of the iconoclastic writers this research examines has created original texts whose strength comes from their

rejection of sports writing mainstays like a true representation of womanhood and, most importantly, conventional interpretations of athletic heroics.

The approach that will be used is to provide examples, offer commentary on these stories, and demonstrate how concepts of failure and loss have been ingrained in these sports writings. The stories of these sports have mirrored shifts in culture and turmoil. This study demonstrates how they were reinterpreted in the late 20th and early 21st centuries to reflect evolving notions of America's and India's respective self-concepts. Every chapter has the same format, first outlining the literary background and storyline of each genre before delving further into the works of four different authors. It is intended that readers read the chosen pairings of writers side by side. Their contrasts and commonalities offer avenues for additional research. The thesis focuses on how the works challenge conventional sports writing in similar ways, how their portrayals vary, and how they all point to the positive aspects of various kinds of failure. It examines how these writers use the stories of each sport as a starting point for their analysis, but they also use themes of failure to arrive at unique moments of self-realization and atonement. This discussion focuses on the idea of redemption in failure in these writings, where tragic events are reframed as opportunities for inspiration or as means of gaining newfound insight that might lead to revitalization. This conversation also looks at how American conceptions of success and masculinity are entwined with the cultural importance of athletic pursuits.

This study has not confined to examining one literary genre. Hence it also intends to examine autobiographies as well as novels. This thesis will further examine the development of sports memoirs, biographies and autobiographies in twentieth and twenty - first centuries in India and America. Focusing particularly on the twenty first century autobiographies of both male and female in sports such as shooting, boxing,

tennis, athletics and cricket, the intension behind this study is to probe the potential highlights sports autobiographies offer into the mental conflicts of the sportspersons, the nerve- racking tension of performer and audience, the private and public sphere and the self and society. Scholars' disregard for athletic autobiographies is understandable in many respects. As a result of the modern monetization of culture, the self-advertisement industry has grown remarkably, enabling celebrities to profit from the memoir boom. Yet the selected handful of memoirs about sports are noteworthy for highlighting the dehumanising hardships faced by the participants.

For scrutinizing these concepts the following eight seminal works have been chosen : P T Usha's *Golden Girl* (1987), Mary Kom's *Unbreakable* (2013), Martina Navaratilova's *Being Myself* (1985), Serena Williams' *On the Line* (2009), Rahul Dravid's *The Nice Guy who Finished First* (2005), Abhinav Bindra's *A Shot at History* (2011), Muhammed Ali's *The Greatest: My Own Story* (1975) and Andre Agassi's *Open* (2009). Numerous broader gender, political, and societal concerns are raised by this research, such as racism, national identity, citizenship, the mental preparations athletes undertake before competing, and the experience of failing. Devendra Prabhudesai's biography of Rahul Dravid, born in 1973, provides a comprehensive exploration of the life and journey of the legendary cricketer. This in-depth account delves into the highs and lows, victories and defeats, and pivotal moments that have shaped Dravid's illustrious cricketing career. Titled *The Nice Guy Who Finished First* (2005), this biography paints a vivid portrait of how Rahul Dravid emerged as a role model for countless young and aspiring cricketers. Dravid's unwavering commitment to the sport, his embodiment of grace and modesty, and his refusal to rest on his laurels are showcased as qualities that continue to inspire generations of cricket enthusiasts. The book pays homage to Dravid as a paragon of

enduring dedication, emphasizing his preference for long-term solutions over short-term gains. Throughout his career, Dravid consistently focused on the 'here and now' technique, demonstrating his unrelenting pursuit of excellence. Even in his current role as a coach, he remains as dedicated to achieving perfection as he was during his remarkable career as a cricketer.

Abhinav Bindra (b. 1982) walked out of the range unhappy after shooting 100 out of 100 in practise six times in a row. He's a perfectionist who once soled his shoes with Ferrari tyre rubber because he felt it would aid. If an idea struck him suddenly, he would get up at 3 a.m. to practise at his home range. Greatness emerges from this kind of obsession, discerns Bindra. Abhinav Bindra's journey to become the first Indian to clinch a gold medal in an individual Olympic Games and the first Indian to secure a gold medal in a World Championship is a story of unrelenting dedication. His *A Shot at History* (2011) is an insightful and visceral journey of a passionate young man that is masterfully written and researched. This biography narrates the values of perseverance, tenacity, and self-belief that fuelled Bindra.

Muhammad Ali (1942-2016), on the other hand, is the only person who knows how he lived his life. Ali's life story is told in *The Greatest: My Own Story* (1975). He collaborated with Richard Durham, a gifted writer, for six years, travelling and talking with him, and the outcome is enthralling in its brilliance, drama, humanity, and sheer enjoyment. This work is not a thin confection of locker room jokes, nor is it a well-documented scrapbook of triumphs and defeats interspersed with anecdotes. Like Ali, who has elicited every emotion except indifference, this book hits right to the gut. When the twentieth century's history is eventually written down, it will have to include the Ali.

Open (2009) by Andre Agassi (b. 1970) is far more than a colossal work on professional tennis' highest levels; it is the captivating story of an extraordinary life. Before he left the crib, Agassi had a strategy set for his life charted by his stoic father. By the age of twenty-two, Agassi had won the first of his eight grand slams and acquired fortune, recognition, and the game's top awards, thanks to his gloomy and demanding father, who groomed him to be a tennis champion. Off the court, though, he was often unhappy and confused, as he shows in this probing autobiography, unfulfilled by his remarkable achievements in a sport he had come to despise. Agassi candidly shares his experiences with early success and his complex relationship with fame, his growing dedication to philanthropic efforts, and, in painstaking and thorough fashion, recounts the peaks and valleys of his career.

Born in 1964, P.T. Usha stands tall as one of India's most accomplished athletes, earning the endearing monikers of the "Golden Girl" and the "Payyoli Express". Her remarkable career has spanned nearly two decades, during which she achieved numerous remarkable feats, etching her name into the annals of sporting history. Her journey serves as a profound source of inspiration, transcending borders and resonating with girls worldwide. Her autobiography *Golden Girl* (1987) exudes an air of humility and unwavering honesty. Through its pages, it imparts a powerful message, igniting the dreams of countless ordinary girls who dare to aspire to become world champions. P.T. Usha's story is a testament to the indomitable spirit and unwavering dedication that can propel individuals to greatness, irrespective of their background or circumstances.

Chungneijang Mary Kom Hmangte, well known as Mary Kom, is an outstanding Olympic boxer who was born in Manipur in 1982. Her incredible career has made a lasting impression on the sports world. She stands as the sole female boxer

to have achieved an unprecedented six victories in the World Amateur Boxing Championship. Moreover, Mary Kom holds the extraordinary distinction of securing a medal in all seven editions of these prestigious world championships. Mary Kom's historic accomplishments reached their zenith when she clinched the gold medal at the 2012 Olympics, etching her name in history as the first Indian woman boxer to achieve this remarkable feat. Her triumphs continued as she seized gold at the Asian Games in South Korea in 2014, solidifying her status as a true trailblazer in the sport. In yet another groundbreaking achievement, she became the first Indian woman boxer to seize gold at the Commonwealth Games in 2018. Her autobiography, *Unbreakable* (2013), narrates the incredible journey of a village tomboy who ascended to become an international athletic sensation. Mary Kom's story serves as an inspirational narrative of relentless determination, breaking through barriers, and redefining what is possible in the world of sports.

Martina Navratilova, born in 1956 in the Czech Republic and now residing in the United States, stands as a former professional tennis luminary and esteemed coach. Regarded as one of the most illustrious figures in tennis history, she boasts a remarkable track record that includes 18 Grand Slam singles titles, a staggering 31 Grand Slam women's doubles titles, and an additional 10 Grand Slam mixed doubles titles. Her awe-inspiring tally of 59 Grand Slam titles established a new standard in the Open Era, exemplifying her unparalleled prowess on the court. In her autobiography, *Being Myself* (1985), Navratilova delves into the intricacies of her personal and professional experiences. The narrative not only captures her journey but also weaves in a rich tapestry of historical context pertaining to the region of her upbringing. Renowned for her outspoken stance on political and societal issues, the book thoughtfully tackles these subjects, shedding light on Navratilova's deeply-held

beliefs and convictions. The pages are also adorned with anecdotes showcasing her unapologetic approach, which has occasionally led her into contentious situations. Unlike conventional tennis biographies that might focus solely on matches and scores, *Being Myself* diverges from the norm. Navratilova opts to spotlight those individuals who have left an indelible mark on her life, employing a refreshing absence of name-calling or sensationalism. Instead, the book paints a portrait of a tennis icon whose narrative transcends the sport, offering readers a glimpse into the multi-dimensional aspects of her extraordinary journey.

Serena Williams, born in 1981, shines as one of tennis' brightest stars, boasting an impressive array of major titles to her name. Her journey from the challenging and gritty neighbourhood of Compton, California, where she grew up, to her early days of tennis practice on public courts littered with broken glass and drug-related paraphernalia under the guidance of her father, is a remarkable testament to her unwavering determination. Despite facing a myriad of setbacks, including injuries, the heart-wrenching tragedy of her older sister's shooting, and criticism for her unorthodox tennis technique, Williams has consistently risen above adversity. Her resilience and tenacity have propelled her to the pinnacle of women's tennis, securing her position as the world's top player. In her memoir, *On the Line* (2009), Serena Williams offers an inspirational and introspective glimpse into her extraordinary life. The book not only chronicles her incredible journey thus far but also looks ahead to the promising chapters yet to be written. It is a captivating and poignant account of a sports icon who continues to defy the odds and inspire countless fans of all ages with her unwavering determination and indomitable spirit.

Sport provides the starkest contrast between the ardours, cravings, self-deceptions, passionate self-denials of lone competitors who struggle and fail, and a

ruthless, mechanised, bureaucratic order that simultaneously produces and consumes the individual. The unsuccessful athlete's response to himself as a person is likely to be a feeling of embarrassment: a sense of unmet expectations and a corresponding sense of discomfort. Failure entails the display of a moral deficiency; therefore to fail is to be viewed as being outside of the normal and not fitting in. This study uses a comparative analysis of Indian and American sports literature to look into the recurring subject of failure as a means of analysing gender issues, the building of national identities, and the evolution of personalities. This study seeks to shed light on the complex relationships between one's identity formation and athletic failure by referencing existential psychology, gender theory, and nationalism studies. The portrayal of the vanquished ones, those who simply fall short of society's expectations, is examined in the following chapters. The forthcoming chapters of this thesis embark on a comprehensive analysis of the previously mentioned works, both fiction and non-fiction. They closely examine the lives and challenges faced by the sports-oriented protagonists through the lenses of existential psychology, gender theory, and perspectives on nationalism.

Chapter two focuses on the male protagonists in Indian and American sports fiction. It delves into their narratives, exploring how existential dilemmas, gender dynamics, and expressions of nationalism shape their experiences within the sporting world. Chapter three shifts its attention to the female protagonists featured in Indian and American sports fiction. It scrutinizes their stories, considering the nuanced intersections of existential psychology, gender theory, and the manifestation of national identity in their athletic journeys. Chapter four delves into the autobiographies of Indian and American sportsmen who candidly document their struggles, failures, and the immense pressures associated with the life of a

sportsperson. This chapter aims to decipher the existential crises they faced, the gender-specific challenges encountered, and how these factors interplay with their sense of national belonging. In Chapter five, the thesis widens its scope to analyze the lives of Indian and American sportswomen. This examination is conducted within the framework of existential psychology, gender theory, and the notion of nationalism. It seeks to uncover the complex layers that define the experiences of female athletes as they navigate the realms of identity, gender, and patriotism. By employing these critical frameworks, this thesis endeavours to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of the lives of sportspersons, shedding light on their existential struggles, gender dynamics, and their roles as carriers of national pride. The concept of ultimate failure takes on a particularly unforgiving tone as it brands those who are not selected for salvation as losers. Even though the vanquished sportspersons lack agency, many still strive for worldly success, hoping that it will validate their position as one of those favoured by destiny. Failure, a socially problematic phenomenon, has received little consideration in the context of sports. This research focuses on how failure affects the sportspersons' sense of self, their gender perception and their nationalistic feelings.

Chapter 2

MEN IN INDIAN AND AMERICAN SPORTS FICTION:

STRIKER, SELECTION DAY, THE NATURAL

AND *THE ART OF FIELDING*

A sporting event is never only a game - never simply a pleasant respite from reality, never a contest transpiring in some alternate, adrenalin-infused universe. At every level, sports are played by and watched by people with fervent desires. Its process and outcome hold deep meaning, well beyond the literal contest on the court or field. Sport is something to be seen, so there is a tension between the sportspersons and the spectators. Sport is also full of risks and surprises, goals during the last second or unexpected victories for the underdogs or not foreseen collapses of the champions. This creates the drama of sports. Those people who perform in the middle of these narratives are quite often glorified as heroes. Sports hero is not something that can be inherited nor bought. It must be earned. The drama of fighting or the drama of winning is vigorously represented and celebrated. Sportspersons have gained increased respect and popularity for their sporting feats.

In line with this, one of the most common pastimes in modern society is sports. The groundwork has been established throughout the previous century, and academic interest in sport has grown in acceptance and popularity, even if the study of sport is still relatively new. One question cuts across all disciplines: why do sportspersons engage in competitive sport when they have probabilities of defeat? How do the vanquished players view defeat? Sport involves seeking a well-defined physical challenge, but more importantly, it also involves the serious risk that the

athlete might fail in this endeavour. An inherent risk of sports is failure. This chapter examines the male protagonists in a selection of American and Indian sports fiction in order to provide a succinct overview of how failure impacts their identities, gender conceptions, and sense of national identity.

By the 1920s, with the onset of the golden age of American sports, athletes such as Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney, Bobby Jones, Bill Tilden, Red Grange, and Babe Ruth became the focal point of much sports writing, which mostly took the form of sports journalism. The most talented and successful of all these sportswriters was Ring Lardner (1885-1933). Lardner must stand as the foundation of any discussion of sports fiction. Sports fiction not only met the public's need for escape from the anxieties brought by the Great Depression but also valorised characteristics of the typical male American hero. According to Wiley Lee Umphlett, author and editor, these things were accomplished mostly through juvenile fiction or presentation books that offered didactic objectives, as he concedes in his substantial book on American Sports, *The Sporting Myth and the American Experience: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*; "…to teach young readers manly virtues such as fair play and the rewards of hard work in meeting a challenge and/or achieving a goal, to create a healthy respect for authority" (12). In serious writing from the 1920s and 1930s sports showed up as a small but significant part of novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Sinclair Lewis. Sports fiction held much the same status until after World War II.

During the 1950s, sports became an even more accepted subject for serious fiction. With baseball as its subject, 1950s sports fiction exerted its greatest influence on American culture. Bernard Malamud continued what Lardner began. Since Malamud recognised that the central issues of sports actually mirror the fundamental

beliefs, legends, and traditions of the American people, *The Natural* became a seminal work in the history of sports literature. Sports became as the most significant repository of American culture by the 1950s.Another important change in the sports-fiction landscape during the 1950s occurred with the advent of television. Viewers could see the athletes for themselves and make their own judgments about their personalities and characters. There was also a shift from baseball and basketball as the focus of the fiction and the dominant metaphor.

John Updike's *Rabbit Run* (1960) put basketball on the map as a major backdrop for sports fiction. Moreover, Robert Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc.: J. Henry Waugh, Prop*. (1968) caused readers to think differently about playing sports versus caring about sports. Coover's novel is as much a story of a man's mental disintegration as it is a mirroring of the social disintegration of the country. During the 1970s and 1980s, the genre continued to reflect larger societal issues with the rise of interest in sports for women and the wholesale inclusion of African American athletes. However, even though by the 1970s, African Americans were full participants in every major sport, they had yet to appear as sports heroes in major sports fiction. Their heroism on the field had not yet translated into heroism in fiction.

One of the famous sports novels of the 1970s was Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel* (1973), a novel that dares a humorous treatment of serious matters such as racism, sexism and mental illness. By the 1980s sports fiction was beginning to be studied by scholars, marking its acceptance by the academia. In its beginning, sports fiction created heroes and myths that reflected the fantasy of Americans. It offered a myth of the aspirations and frustrations of what it meant to be an American. However, as the 21st century arrived, new titles in sports fiction became fewer, as

sports films multiplied. For the player-protagonists in each of these stories, the game itself is the only source of transcendence, purity, and peacefulness. They experience transcendent moments and catharsis when they are in the diamond.

Renowned American sports philosopher R. Scott Kretchmar uses the term "distancing" to characterise a process in which "being human is unavoidably to be immersed in the physical world and its curtailed temporo-spatial realities, but it is also to gain, in selective fashion, a distance from this milieu", in his essay "Distancing: An Essay on Abstract Thinking in Sports Performance". It is possible to bring "...safety, human affirmation, dignity, power, leisure, and rational observation" (7) with one to this place of enhanced consciousness and experience. As Kretchmar suggests, "...the athlete has to give himself to the contest, become committed to the game, fully live the activity, if he desires to understand some things about himself and his sport world", players can experience a state of synergy or "oneness" with the game (9). Athletes who compete in sports have the chance to venture beyond the bounds of everyday life, and the main characters in the above mentioned novels have, in different degrees, the capacity to take advantage of this chance.

The typical type of hero is someone who battles evil as the "other", according to American Jungian psychologist Mary Lynn Kittleson in her introductory address to *The Soul of Popular Culture*, an analysis of the role of modern icons. Thus, he or she continues to be excessively strong and, in a sense, "naïve about himself or herself". However, it seems like the age of the soulful hero is here, one whose goals are not just dominating the world but, rather, living a meaningful life and following a path of spiritual enlightenment. This is a person who can travel through the "second half of life", as Jungians refer to it, or go on a soul journey (49). In this instance, the hero

does not always triumph over evil. This type of hero needs to be aware of enough evil in both the external and internal worlds.

Merely intelligence is insufficient; neither naïve purity nor muscles will do. It is perspective and humility that matter most. An aspect that is all too evident in the lives of the protagonists of the above novels is that sporting legends frequently stand alone against a world of opponents. However, the dismal careers of the vanquished heroes are somehow impacted by this characteristic of solitude, particularly as it relates to the nature of their chosen vocation. According to Virginia Apperson, a writer and Jungian psychoanalyst, "most stories told in our culture feature boys or men as protagonists and present human dilemmas through the masculine ethic" (98) in her 2009 book *The Presence of the Feminine in Film*.

In his essay "Is Our Admiration for Sports Heroes Fascistoid?", Swedish philosophy professor Torbjorn Tannsjo advocates a fascist interpretation of our relationship with these sporting stars, arguing that our admiration for their actions stems from the fundamental elements of fascist ideology: "...admiration for strength and contempt for weakness" (29). It implies disdain for the loser to show praise for the winner. Admiration for the victor is mainly limited to acknowledging his own accomplishments, separate from any assessment of the attributes of the vanquished. A real-life athletic experience can no more be summarized as 'only a game' than a work of art can be dismissed as 'only a play' or 'only a novel', for serious writers create literature that shines an unrelenting light on who we are as a species, forcing us to see the world anew. The best athletes may be seen as artists as well- artists who have disciplined their instruments (their bodies) to perform in stunning and oftentimes unprecedented ways. Sports can matter, then, in the way art can matter. Heywood Broun, an American journalist made this connection when he argues that "…the

tragedy of life is not that man loses but that he almost wins" (132). The athletic contest, clearly and emphatically underscoring the distance between victory and loss 'between rapture and abject misery' often allows for a profound understanding of the sublime and tragic inflections of being human.

A study on Indian novels would conclude that *Striker* (1973) may have been among Moti Nandi's most popular novella featuring football, but Nandi wrote many more championing the sport that has been an obsession and passion with Calcuttans for generations now. During the colonial era, football developed a devoted regional following in villages, small towns, and large urban centres. It also began to be played in accordance with a seasonal calendar that was linked to the sporting cycle itself. Partha Chatterjee, anthropologist and Indian political scientist makes the case that there are close connections between football, politics, and collective identity in colonial Calcutta, particularly during the time leading up to and immediately following the Mohun Bagan Club's historic victory over the East Yorkshire Regiment in the 1911 Indian Football Association Shield final, which they won by a score of two goals to one (72). Football may have initially offered itself for transformation in India in this fashion, but its reputation as a colonial past time was largely fleeting. Early histories of the most prestigious clubs in Calcutta point to some degree of middle-class and aristocratic sponsorship (94).

Undoubtedly, the 1911 Shield victory was viewed as some sort of nationalist success. However, by the 1930s, football on the Maidan ("the Field"), the main open area in the centre of colonial Calcutta, had split into rival regional and communal affiliations of religious and ethnic groups, and it could no longer carry the hopes of a nation. Football was introduced to India by the inferior foot soldier and adopted by the poor commoner, but it eventually came to represent the struggles and

disappointments of labour and the working poor, who crowded the stands and stood in line for match day tickets, bringing with them fervour, indiscipline, and sectarian violence.

Unlike other works of the era, Nandi's fiction captures the intense devotion of the urban poor to football as a source of aspiration for its players and a source of agonising pleasure for its spectators. Before satellite networks brought the greatest of international football to their living rooms and before middle-class houses in Calcutta in the 1960s obtained televisions, Bengalis spent their lives witnessing the victories and setbacks of the Maidan, the fervour of East Bengal, Mohun Bagan, and Mohammedan Sporting fans, and the triumphs and sorrows of the Maidan. The grounds were unbearably bad- rock hard in the summer and a sea of slick mud in the rains. Brawls and stampedes were frequent in the rickety, old wooden stands; sixteen spectators were killed in one at Eden Gardens in 1980 as a result of one such stampede. Because of their home team's lack of international success individual neighbourhoods chose Brazil or Argentina as "their" teams and continued attending league games. Although football did significantly boost the fortunes of some of its players, it was also governed by corruption and the authoritarianism of trustees and managing bodies. The kind of football strategies and club dynamics depicted in Nandi's stories are no longer seen in Indian football, where the game has changed greatly- though not as much in the rest of the world. But the spirit of the sport remains unchanged.

The 1973 Bengali novel *Striker* tells the tale of young football player Prasoon Bhattacharya, who battles the cruel exploitation of his local football clubs while trying to make his mark. The challenging financial situation his family finds themselves in troubles him. In addition, he bears the disgrace of being the son of

someone who was allegedly involved in an intentional throwaway goal that ended a match a long time ago. The story captures the heady highs and crushing lows of Indian football. It poignantly describes the heroism and the ignominy of sport at large. When it comes to his game, Prasoon is a tenacious learner. He has long realized life was much longer than a few football seasons. He is quite serious in his application to the game, but he has bigger ambitions. He appropriates Pele's bicycle shot, since most football players appropriate fragments of other players' styles, and thus develop their own. When he talks about football, he speaks with authority, explaining himself much as a man of experience might do in discussing a profession. He states in the beginning of the narrative, "Instead of power, however I tried to demonstrate skill- outswingers, chips, volleys and a couple of attempted but unsuccessful bicycle shots. I had tried to copy them from photographs of Pele, only to realize later on that you couldn't perfect techniques like that without some natural gymnastic ability and a coach to guide you"(10).

Prasoon tries to build his life by setting up and going after a series of goals, all centred on success in football. He knows that Shobhabajar Sporting would not pay him but he wishes to learn more about the game. With the exposure to games and new techniques, he aspires to climb the ladder of success. He plans to get a transfer to bigger teams like Mohan Bagan, East Bengal in the coming seasons. He confronts the vicious and paralysing system of fraud and money laundering that runs the football scenario in India. He is asked by his head coach at Shobhabajar, Bipin-da to tank the games and stay with team for another season so that he might earn a place in the junior Bengal team. He firmly believes that staying in the lifeless club would seriously harm his game. But if he accepts the offer he will reap gains in a year. This is how the smaller teams survive and stay afloat in the league by having agreements

with associations. But he undoubtedly remains steadfast with his decision to quit the club. Nevertheless, he is tormented by uncertainty and doubts. His self-doubts are manifested in statements throughout the narrative. He comments, "The ground beneath my feet started to quake. The blow had come. A voice within me said, 'Prasoon, you're on the pitch now. The opponent has scored first. Be ready, striker- you not only have to equalize, you also have to score the winning goal. You *have* to'" (38).

In-depth depictions of the existential complexity of the traumatic experience can be found in Nandi's treatment of Prasoon while he was out of Shobhabajar and was struggling to find a team in mid- season. According to the existential viewpoint, anxiety is caused by confronting the realities of life. These defences reduce one's capability for self-awareness and capacity to live honestly (34). Yalom's interpretation of existentialism is centred on four "existential givens" or "ultimate concerns" that are typically presented as opposites: death vs. life, isolation vs. connection, freedom vs. responsibility, and meaninglessness vs. meaning (Berry-Smith, 2012; Zafirides et al., 2013). Humans fear dying because they have a deep fear of not existing, but Yalom argues that accepting one's own mortality can encourage conscious and sincere engagement in life. Death and existential loneliness are connected.

Experiencing death is a profound realization that underscores the inherent solitude of the human journey. Despite the close relationships we form with others, each individual ultimately faces death on their own. This concept is deeply intertwined with the philosophical notions of freedom and responsibility. According to these principles, individuals bear the weight of their actions in relation to their environment, as well as the way they interpret and attribute meaning to their

experiences. The understanding that there is no predetermined fate or structure to the universe can be both liberating and terrifying. It leaves individuals like Prasoon, in charge of their own lives, responsible for navigating the complexities of existence alone and ultimately destined to face their mortality. This existential dilemma gives rise to the age-old dispute between meaning and meaninglessness.

Thomson and Walsh (2010) propose the idea of trauma as an existential wound that can lead to a loss of identity and the breakdown of the frameworks that give life meaning. They introduce the concept of "the abyss", which symbolizes the profound emptiness one encounters when confronting their mortality and the finite nature of life. Trauma, as they argue, compels individuals to confront this abyss, resulting in existential death anxiety. In the context of this study, it is evident that all the sportspeople involved have experienced some degree of existential shattering. This shattering has dismantled their defences against the harsh realities of meaninglessness, freedom, isolation, and death. Similarly Prasoon, undergoes a complete breakdown when he is forced to decline an offer and leave Shobhabajar club. He becomes socially withdrawn, cuts ties with his friends, practices in solitude, and takes on a job at a petrol station to support his family. However, he eventually gets a chance at redemption, showcasing his talent in front of the Calcuttan crowd. The sportspersons' exploration delves into the fundamental human condition of grappling with isolation, responsibility, and mortality. It highlights the profound impact of trauma on their existential framework, leading to a confrontation with the abyss of meaninglessness and death.

Prasoon's story exemplifies the struggle many individuals face when their lives are upended, and the potential for redemption in the face of adversity. Prasoon leaves Shobhabajar for Shonalibagh, a lesser team which had the reputation of playing

to a plan, he finds himself amidst serious players training with dedication. He gets his chance to use modern technique and hone his skills under the watchful eyes of the coach Dashu-da. Prasoon exemplifies the rare combination of integrity and honesty that can be found in sports arenas. He remains candid and never gives in even when he is pressed down by financial constraints. Existential psychology can be applied to help athletes cope with the inevitable challenges and setbacks they will encounter in their athletic pursuits. By developing a sense of personal responsibility and a greater understanding of his own values and purpose, Prasoon develops resilience and mental toughness to overcome obstacles and setbacks. He returns the bribe that Bipin- da hands him for joining back with Shobhabajar and subsequently shuts out Daku- da when he offers bribe to tank the game against Juger Jatri. Daku – da involuntarily praises his talent, "You're the one we're scared of Prasoon. All the big clubs fear- Mohun Bagan, East Bengal, Mohammedan, all of them. Just don't score tomorrow, please" (57).

Finally, his perseverance and drive bring him success. He wins the game and acquires back his father's honour. He demonstrates the combination of beautiful play and dogged persistence in the face of adversity that people often admire in athletes. He recollects his attempts to score in the final against Rangoon United,

> It was too late. Before I had even taken five paces, it was obvious that if I half-volleyed the ball it would sail over the cross-post. Suddenly a voice within my breast said, 'Striker, you must strike now, strike with all your might'. Commanding all the energy at my disposal, I lunged from four yards out, not removing my eyes from the ball for one second. Feeling it touch the right-hand side of my forehead, I struck at it like a sledgehammer with my head- before falling flat on my face. It became strangely quiet all round-almost silent. My

> nostrils were filled with the scent of grass and moist earth. I raised my eyes and saw the most amazing of sights- the Rangoon United goalkeeper retrieving my black- and- white world from his net. (78)

Nandi's *Striker* uses the traditional sports literature cliche of a triumphant conclusion. In manipulating crisis and tragedy, despair and eventual success, his work falls under the popular genre and may be referred to as sports narrative clichés. However, Nandi's stories most often depict a moment of fulfilment rooted in the text of suffering rather than extraordinary triumph. Hobsbawm asserts that sports, with their easily identifiable teams of eleven players, provide a more tangible and relatable means of nurturing nationalism in individuals (167). In the world of *Striker*, Prasoon harbours a fervent ambition: to secure a spot on the national squad following his remarkable performance in the domestic league. He envisions that such an accomplishment at the national level would finally expunge the shame that has haunted his father for years. For individuals like Prasoon, who find themselves in challenging circumstances, representing their country as part of the national team is the pinnacle of success.

The character's shortcomings have a profound impact on their perception of their own gender. Prasoon, following his departure from the team, undergoes a transformation, becoming more introverted and avoiding contact with Nilima, the person he deeply loves. In the past, he had often relied on Nilima for financial support to ensure he could enjoy nourishing meals. However, after his plans falter, he begins to distance himself from her, immersing himself in his work and training. It is as if he fears that Nilima might view him as less masculine due to his failures. Despite these setbacks, there are hints of a burgeoning career and success in football for Prasoon.

He has endured the harshness of life and society, carving his path in the world of sports.

The second work of Indian fiction selected for study is *Selection Day* (2017) a fictitious novel by Aravind Adiga, an Indo-Australian writer and journalist, which is a mockery of one of India's favourite pleasures, cricket, and a stunning satire that deconstructs the deep-rooted ironies of India's post-modern culture. The novel opens with a brief prologue in which a little kid describes the many flavours he encounters throughout his life, including his elder brother's sweat, which is the sweat of dread, and informs the narrator that his brother has been at cricket practice with his father. The scenario then skips forward three years to the day before selection day, when new players for professional cricket teams will be recruited. Manju shares a single room in Mumbai with his elder brother Radha and their cricket fanatic father, Mohan. They are impoverished, and their mother abandoned the family shortly after they relocated from a tiny town in Karnataka to the metropolis. Radha loves playing cricket, "Radha loved everything to do with the game: the three rounds of jogging around the maidan to warm up, the jumping jacks, the stretches, even the chastisement that followed a dropped catch" (98). Yet his calibre as a batman is noted by his father, when he describes Manju's abilities with the bat, "Manju did not practise half as hard as Radha. But Manju caught with his left hand as well as with his right, and could hit with just one stump to aim at. On the run" (98).

Moreover, Manju remains a 'complex boy' for his father, "Manju knew how to read other people's minds. It had come to him like those special things that some children can do…If he let himself still, Manju could tell what other people wanted from him. And he could complete their sentences for them" (23). The boys excel to the point where they are able to attend Ali Weinberg International School and play on

the school's cricket team. There, they catch the attention of Tommy-sir, a Mumbai Cricket Association talent scout. Thirteen of Tommy- sir's discoveries have made it into the Mumbai Ranji Team including T. O Shenoy, fastest bowler in the city's history and two in Tamil Nadu State Team. Later Javed Ansari, Manju's friend takes him to see T. O Shenoy, a once famous cricketer now in a hospital ward for rehabilitation. Shenoy stands for all those sportsmen who have savoured initial success but were unfortunate to retain their stardom for longer period of time. When they are shunned from the limelight, too soon, too fast, they often slip to substance use and alcoholism. It is a disconsolate picture that the reader receives of Shenoy when Manju tries to figure out the lost hero,

> …when he looked inside that door Manju had his first glimpse of the pile of human debris that was growing under Mumbai cricket. A tall bony man with a goatee stood at a window, looking down on Horniman Circle. 'Got anything for me, buddy?' he asked…Ex- Speed Demon Shenoy struck a match and glanced sideways at Manju, who recognized the look: fatigue, the fatigue of meeting people all day, every day, who want more from you than you want from them. (168)

Radha's dreams take an unforeseen hit when he encounters a weight-transfer issue that disrupts his ability to maintain balance. His body has undergone a rapid growth spurt, leaving him struggling to adapt to its newfound momentum. Radha's transformation into a striking young man happens so suddenly that his body seems out of sync. As time goes on, Radha becomes increasingly suspicious of Manju's apparent discomfort with matters of intimacy, eventually spreading rumors that Manju might be gay. These emotional tumults take a toll on Radha, both personally and as a cricketer, as reflected in his inner monologue,

> Is the world's second-best batsman a homo? And is the world's best batsman, the one with a secret contract, not going to be selected for Mumbai? ...weight transfer issue. What I wouldn't give you, ocean, to make this problem go away. See, sometimes I have to drink a beer to go to sleep. And when I wake up, the eyelids do not want to open, and a voice in my head says, 'What does the morning have to do with a man like you, who can't even hold a bat?' And then the voice says, 'Your little brother is a homo, and you can't hold a bat anymore'. (176)

In addition, Manju cherishes a hidden passion for pursuits beyond the realm of cricket. He confides in Javed, sharing his aspiration to become a scientist. Their friendship deepens, and Manju opens up to Javed about his personal challenges, inadvertently making Javed a philosophical influence in his life. During the trials, it is Manju who shines brighter than Radha. Mohan had wanted Radha to be selected and Manju to be considered as a potential player in the long run. The pathos and glory involved in the process is aptly brought out in the lines,

> Players can try out for professional teams and potentially launch their professional careers on selection day. Manju, although not being interested in cricket, performs well, whereas Radha, who wants nothing else in life, cannot put aside his fury and bitterness and performs poorly. Manju is talented and he plays like a natural-Manju knew he was becoming good: frighteningly good. He was a natural. He could play easefully like running downhill. (130)

Manju, overwhelmed and distressed, seeks refuge in Javed's apartment when he discovers that his brother has assaulted another player. In his moment of despair, he makes a solemn vow never to play cricket again. Javed provides solace and support

to Manju during this tumultuous period, and their bond strengthens. Javed repeatedly assures Manju of his unwavering presence, saying, “You are not alone, Manju; remember that. You’re never going to be alone ever again” (132). Manju is gripped by fear, not just of the consequences of his brother’s actions, but also of the societal disdain, his father’s helplessness, the financial crisis looming over his family, and the uncertainties of living with Javed. When examining Manju’s situation through the lens of existential psychology, it is evident that he is undergoing a breakdown in his ability to manage the anxiety surrounding mortality, as described by Yalom, leading to dysphoria and a series of defense mechanisms, typical responses in individuals who have faced traumatic life events (207). This situation can also be interpreted in the context of physical theories of trauma. Manju’s brief escape from his father’s domineering grasp and his flight to the Ansari’s for refuge align with the concept of dysphoria. The fight, flight, or freeze responses that are triggered during traumatic events are designed to protect us from immediate danger but can lead to nervous system dysregulation over time, resulting in trauma symptoms, a phenomenon explained by the polyvagal theory (Gupta 2013).

Hence, one could consider the physical response to trauma as a bodily reaction to the anxiety surrounding mortality. This reaction leads to dysregulation, resulting in either heightened or diminished arousal, an enduring sense of being under threat, and structural changes in the brain that impact the regulation of mood and emotions. After Radha violently injures a teammate and escapes to their hometown out of frustration for not making the state squad, Manju undergoes a profound transformation. The incident leaves a lasting impact on him. Manju lives in constant fear of society discovering his true sexual orientation, compelling him to tether his life to cricket as

the sole means of supporting his family. His distress to be caught in the serpentine flux of realities is beautifully exemplified in the following lines,

> …he felt himself fall through the rusty grid and down through the well's darkness into something deeper-into fear, all the fear that had ever been born on earth, his brother's fears, his runaway mother's fears, Mohan Kumar's fears, the fears of his village, fears of the time before he was born- and then, instead of turtles, Manju saw the faces of Mohan Kumar, Radha, Tommy Sir and Anand Mehta merge into one collective animal- and this animal bellowed at him: 'Do you know what name we'll give you if you stay with Javed?...He could see already that years from now, he might look back at this moment and these steps, and think of them as the last moment and the last steps when he still had a choice; but he would know in his heart that there had been no choice and no selection to make…the helmet was waiting-of all the masks you will have to choose from, it asked, why not take me as your own? (255)

Indeed, *Selection Day* contains explicit references to nationalism, particularly through the aspiration of the protagonists to join the national cricket team, a feat associated with immense prestige and honour. Manju's father proudly boasts about his sons potentially making it to the national squad, highlighting their status as the best and second-best batsmen globally. Within the narrative, there are noteworthy moments that underscore the importance of this national identity in cricket. One such instance involves Sachin Tendulkar, a cricket legend, congratulating the Kumars for their exceptional performances in the Harris Shield Trophy. Tendulkar extends an invitation to his home and gifts Radha his gloves when Radha breaks the local record for the highest number of runs scored. In this context, Tendulkar's gesture of giving his gloves could symbolize the power of such artifacts in fostering a sense of

nationalism. This aligns with Benedict Anderson's assertion that the creation and use of "imagined" symbols, such as flags, anthems, and cultural objects, play a crucial role in shaping a shared identity. These symbols evoke a collective history and destiny, contributing to the development of a sense of national unity and pride. Tendulkar's act of passing on his gloves exemplifies how such cultural artifacts can embody and promote nationalism.

However, in *Selection Day*, Manju's struggles transcend both his cricket career and his personal life due to his inability to come to terms with his own gender identity. Manju grapples with his homosexuality and finds himself drawn to Javed, yet he remains reluctant to commit to his true feelings. He is haunted by the potential repercussions his actions may have on his father's dreams and their life in the bustling metropolis. Fears of societal judgment and prejudice force him to stay hidden within the confines of the closet. The novel also delves into the corrosive impact of hyper-masculinity on young men, especially within the competitive sports arena. Both Manjunath and Radha are compelled to conform to rigid gender roles and expectations, resulting in destructive behaviours and a dearth of emotional awareness. *Selection Day* underscores how entrenched notions of masculinity can prove detrimental not only to men but also to women. In this narrative, the novel probes the intricate challenges and intricacies of gender and identity in a society that imposes stringent norms on individuals based on their gender and sexual orientation. The character of Javed serves as a poignant example of these complexities, highlighting the still-prevailing stigma surrounding homosexuality in Indian society.

In the novel, it becomes evident that the characters are living out a harsh reality where the pressure to pursue paths they never truly desired, combined with their bottled-up anger, has ultimately resulted in mediocrity. As he long prophesied,

Manju remains in this 'Obbane Obbane, Kattale Kattale' ("Alone Alone, Darkness Darkness"). He is crushed by regret, shame, despair, resentment, passivity, escapism, self-hatred, withdrawal, bitterness, defeatism, and loneliness. However, as one minor character puts it, "Without understanding what capitalism means, we have vaulted straight to post-capitalist decadence" (199). Ironically, Adiga portrays one of India's national glories – its world cricket performance – as a symptom of capitalist decadence in its external splendour, interior disarray, injustice, prejudice, and a heap of shattered aspirations. Manju's thoughts on the game are almost always about success or failure, "his contract with God was not fool-proof, and he might not prove to be the best batsman in the world" (63) – or about his father, brother, or Javed – rather than the sweetness of a perfectly timed cover drive or the moment when the world fades away and all that is left is the mental and physical contest of bat versus ball. But maybe that is the point-the world's noise does not go away for Manju. It is always present, drowning out all other sounds, including love.

Chief among the most memorable characters of American fiction is Roy Hobbs, the protagonist of Bernard Malamud's classic *The Natural* (1952). Still smarting from a tragic career setback fifteen years earlier, Roy finally gets his chance with the big-league New York Knights. Armed with an Excalibur-like bat called Wonderboy, he leads the team out of a long losing drought to the verge of a World Series berth. Unfortunately, Roy ruins himself by continually falling prey to sexual desires, greed, and the drive to be the best ever. In the end, banished from baseball for accepting a bribe to throw a pennant-deciding game, Roy glumly realizes the sad truth when he says, "I never did learn anything out of my past life, now I have to suffer again" (230). Though written in the post-World War II era when a number of writers questioned the moral superiority of the United States as it became a global

superpower, *The Natural* continues to resonate because of its existential themes, in its imaginative exploration of an individual trying to steer an original course through the romance and commerce of professional sports, and its decadent celebrity culture. In Malamud's Roy Hobbs, the existential theme of solitude can be witnessed. Existential isolation, according to Yalom, is the unbridgeable gap between oneself and all other people as well as between oneself and the outside world. Roy is unable to build fulfilling relationships with anyone in his life inside and outside of the baseball diamond. According to Yalom, isolation is normally concealed behind the "everydayness" curtain (358); it is only during traumatic or exceptionally difficult situations that one is able to peek behind the curtain and recognise our fundamental aloneness.

Roy and Manju both grapple with a profound sense of loneliness, which hinders their ability to establish fulfilling relationships. The process of healing from this loneliness, as described by Yalom, involves a journey of sharing solitude, ultimately leading to the acceptance of one's own solitude. In Roy's case, had he accepted Iris and her genuine companionship, they might have built a stable and fulfilling relationship. Unfortunately, Roy's misguided attempts at bonding, such as his infatuation with Memo Paris, can be viewed through an existential lens of isolation. These interactions primarily revolve around survival rather than personal growth, highlighting the detrimental effects of seeking shallow connections as a means to cope with loneliness. Similarly, for Manju, had he been able to stay with Javed, it is likely that he would not have grown bitter toward the world and, of course, cricket. The absence of a genuine connection and emotional support can lead individuals to develop negative perceptions of the world around them.

In *The Natural*, Bernard Malamud skillfully weaves the theme of nationalism into the narrative by consistently drawing symbolic parallels with the concept of the American Dream. Throughout the novel, we encounter references to club affiliations and monumental World Series triumphs. These elements collectively convey a powerful representation of the American Dream, which asserts that success can be achieved through individual effort and hard work. Roy, the protagonist, harbours an incredible aspiration to become the greatest player of all time and dedicates himself tirelessly to carve out his place in the world of baseball. He firmly believes that his exceptional talents can propel him to success, and he relentlessly strives not just once, but twice, to achieve this dream within the narrative. This narrative alignment with the American Dream assimilates with the ideas put forth by historian Eric Hobsbawm, who contends that sports can be a pivotal component of nationalism. In *The Natural*, sport is utilized as a vehicle to propagate and reinforce nationalistic ideals and beliefs, showcasing the profound connection between sports and the concept of national identity.

To delve into the exploration of gender dynamics in the novel, it is imperative to analyze how the failures experienced by the protagonists reshape their perceptions of their own gender roles. Notably, *The Natural* portrays its female characters in relatively minor roles, often positioning them as objects of desire for their male counterparts. One such character is Memo Paris, a striking woman who captures the infatuation of Roy Hobbs. However, Memo's character is portrayed with limited agency or depth, primarily defined by her physical appearance and her relationships with men. Similarly, Iris Lemon, the proprietor of a bar frequently visited by Roy, is depicted as a sexually liberated woman, but she lacks a comprehensive backstory or a multifaceted personality, being predominantly defined by her sexuality. Within the

narrative, Roy invests considerable effort into courting Memo, believing that she would desire him because of his pivotal role in the team's journey to the World Series. Memo had recently lost her lover, the star hitter Bump Bailey, whose untimely death on the baseball field led to Roy taking up his position. Roy, in an attempt to start anew with Memo, makes the life-altering decision to forfeit a crucial game. Similarly, he is drawn to Iris Lemon but recoils from her due to her status as a mother. To prematurely end a game, he intentionally fouls a pitch, an action he later regrets. This decision is rooted in his desperate pursuit to demonstrate to Memo that he can provide her with a lavish lifestyle, leading him to compromise his moral values. Throughout these interactions, Roy's attitudes and actions towards the female characters in the novel are influenced by his deeply ingrained ideals of masculinity. He demonstrates insensitivity to Memo's grief and exhibits excessive cruelty towards Iris, further reinforcing his preconceived notions of gender roles and how they should manifest in his life.

The Art of Fielding (2011) by Chad Harbach is the story of Henry Skrimshander, a prodigy of a shortstop, who is recruited to play baseball for the Harpooners at Westish College, a small school in Wisconsin. Schwartz, a budding baseball Svengali, while playing an amateur game, immediately discerns a 'transcendent talent' in Henry and decides to bag him for his college. The novel pictures a nostalgic innocence where all the characters are inherently virtuous and hardworking individuals. It has one of the most idyllic opening lines of college life,

> Henry had never felt so happy. Fresh person year had been one thing, an adventure, exhilaration, all in all a success, but it had also been exhausting, a constant struggle and adjustment and tumult. Now he was locked in. Every day that summer had the same framework, the alarm at the same time, meals

> and workouts and shifts and SuperBoost at the same times, over and over, and it was that sameness, that repetition, that gave life meaning. (113)

This set routine is life for Henry. His consciousness rejects the messy world outside. He is also perilously blind about reality. He is fixated by his dream of becoming the best baseball player ever. Things go wrong just as he is ready to break the record held by the great Aparicio Rodriguez for the most straight college games played without making a mistake. He is smitten with self-doubt and he makes an errant throw that hits his team mate who is reading in the dugout. From then on he loses his psychic balance and he can no more throw. He falls into Steve Blass Syndrome which is inexplicable. But unlike Malamud's Roy, Henry is not haunted by any personal demons. So eventually he takes a pitch on the head for the sake of the team and wins the tournament, though still desperately in search of his Midas touch shortstop skills. It is a significant American novel of the old school in its optimism and lack of cynicism, in its appreciation of the great open expanses of the Midwest and its faith in the profound inner significance of baseball. The American Dream is embodied in both Schwartz, the self-made man from south central Chicago, and Henry, the exceptionally gifted son of a metalworker from Nowheresville, South Dakota. Similarly, the Harpooners, a cohesive group consisting of prep school boys, Jews, Asians, Latinos, and African Americans, represent an idealised microcosm of the country.

Henry steadfastly adheres by Aparicio Rodriguez's quasi-philosophical tome called *The Art of Fielding*, wherein he gets to read quotes like "Death is the sanction of all that the athlete does" (57). Henry initially retreats from baseball after his tackle causes serious injury to his teammate and friend, Owen during an inter-collegiate match. His fielding rapidly declines to the point that he is unable to make an easy

throw to first base. It makes perfect sense that Henry's overanalytical state would set off a crisis because it prevents him from acting naturally. From a literary perspective, this is significant and plausible from a sports perspective. Herein lies Hamlet's dilemma. Harbach's accomplishment is to bring the immobility of the thinking man to the playing field, where every hesitation is magnified and every mistake is evaluated by a brutal, discerning audience. Affenlight muses, “We all have our weaknesses and doubts, but poor Henry has to face his in public at appointed times, with half the crowd cheering for him to fail and the other half anxiously counting on him” (313).

Existential psychology teaches one to embrace uncertainty and to accept that life is inherently unpredictable. It helps sportspersons to cope with the inevitable setbacks and adversity they will face in their athletic careers. By developing resilience and mental toughness, Henry learns how to overcome obstacles and persevere through difficult times. Henry eventually realises the ebbs he is going through and gets himself back up. He regains his sense of agency and is focussed to comprehend the change that has occurred in his life. He makes the decision to stay at Westish College and continue studying under Schwartz while accepting the possibility that he may no longer be a shortstop. Employing existential psychology, Henry accepts personal responsibility and accountability. This philosophy helps him to take ownership of his successes and failures, and to work towards continuous self-improvement. In line with Halberstam’s theory, Henry has the chance to explore the idea of redemptive failure and he improvises his skills to back his team. He exemplifies the point that a low moment can be reframed as an opportunity for empowerment and self-discovery.

The American Dream is incorporated into Harbach’s story, bringing in nationalism, much like Malamud did. In *The Art of Fielding*, Henry and his colleagues dream of being picked by minor or major league clubs after their Westish College

team's meteoric run in the national championship. However, the "American Dream" and the idea that success may be achieved by one's own endeavours are strongly implied in the plot. Henry comes from an impoverished family in South Dakota and plods hard to break the record of Aparacio and earn a place in the big leagues. He exemplifies the American Dream to succeed and prosper irrespective of one's birth and class. Hobsbawm's idea that sport is uniquely effective as a medium for inculcating national feelings is evident in Harbach's *The Art of Fielding*. The novel's plot, which culminates in a pivotal scenario where everything hinges on a single play, may adhere too closely to the basic clichés of the team sports genre of literature. The characters-the compassionate female protagonist, the heroic mentor, the eccentric, intelligent friend, the incredibly giving and open college president-tend to be on the wish-fulfillment end of the spectrum. *The Art of Fielding* has an intelligent, unaffected directness similarly in line with the post-postmodern, post-ironic traits. Harbach writes of the game,

> You loved it, because you considered it an art: an apparently pointless affair, undertaken by people with a special aptitude, which sidestepped attempts to paraphrase its value yet somehow seemed to communicate something true or even crucial about the Human Condition. The Human condition being, basically, that we're alive and have access to beauty, can even erratically create it, but will someday be dead and will not. (302)

Failures the protagonists go through also alter how they view their own gender. In the novel, when Henry is obsessed with baseball, he almost seems to be an asexual. He is not interested in anything except baseball. He ends up sleeping with Pella when he loses his groove and repeatedly fails to make a flawless throw. When he engages in a physical relationship with Pella, his asexuality momentarily

disappears. His relationship with Pella is not defined by traditional gender roles or expectations, and their dynamic is portrayed with sensitivity and nuance. When Henry drags himself out of his 'existential abyss', he moves out of Pella's apartment. Another intriguing element in the novel is the inclusion of a gay athlete in college playing nine and his budding romance with the College President. Guert Affenlight is the president of Westish College and the father of one of the main characters, Pella. However, he also grapples with his sexuality and his attraction to a younger student Owen, which is a source of tension and conflict in his life. Overall, *The Art of Fielding* offers a nuanced and multifaceted perspective on gender and sexuality. It celebrates the diversity and complexity of human experience, challenging readers to question their own assumptions and biases about gender and identity.

The brilliant shortstop Henry is related to Roy Hobbs from Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*. In the same way that Henry names his mitt Zero, Hobbs names his bat Wonderboy. When Henry first gets to Westish, he makes a list of Aparicio's koans that he understands, mostly related to the physical talents needed to play shortstop. However, Henry is not familiar with all of Aparicio's techniques in *The Art of Fielding*. When he begins working with Schwartz and gains personality and athletic growth, he gradually begins to understand the satirical Aparicio. Sports competitions provide a sense of absolutism and purity by presenting seemingly clear rules, giving participants a chance to escape the messy realities of daily life. Every sport has a distinct beginning and finish, good and terrible. Fans and players alike frequently bring ideological baggage to the pitch, challenging the pure experience of sports, so it seems that both participants and spectators want for this clarity. Key narrative concerns in sports writing are corrupting factors that subvert this purity, from drugs to politics. These pressures result in a baseball player getting shot in *The*

Natural. The player-protagonist in these books can only find transcendence, purity, and tranquilly within the game itself. It implies that in the end, the game itself can reject corrupting influences and offer a safe haven for enhanced experience and consciousness-even if only briefly. R. Scott Kretchmar describes how the promise of transcendence and a pure experience within the game coexists with the unavoidable ideological associations-such as nationality, race, and politics—that players and fans attach to sports in "Distancing: An Essay on Abstract Thinking in Sports Performances" (11).

Through play, writers honour and even venerate a particular conception of purity. But human imperfections undermine this innocence and provide diversions, making it harder for the characters to immerse themselves in the game and reach transcendence. This transcendence takes the player to a new place within the game and tests space, time, and all human bonds. Even after being shot by an admirer and losing fifteen years struggling, Roy Hobbs remains a 'natural' and squanders away his glory in achieving the wrong girl, wrong dreams and success. He soils the purity of the game with shallow desires. He is a natural talent but he is also natural in his moral responsibility. Roy is obsessed with a sense of mission which keeps himself aloof from the real world. Roy's lack of any values outside the heroic proportions and his refusal to think in any terms other than those of baseball have the symbolic significance of a kind of oedipal blindness.

In all the cited American novels there are traits of the Horatio Alger story that works as a heroic myth's democratic offspring.

1. The hero is from unremarkable parents and comes from a rural background;

2. His father teaches him to play baseball, maybe realising his own unfulfilled boyhood dreams;

3. The hero is found by a dedicated scout in his rural haunts;

4. The hero is brought to the city and finds life frightening and confusing; he struggles to persuade the team brass that he has the necessary talent;

5. The hero finally gets his chance and displays prodigious talents (longest home run, fastest fastball);

6. The hero becomes famous, has his day at the stadium, and humbly expresses his gratitude;

7. Everything after the hero's day seems a bit of a letdown, his talents gradually deteriorate, and he eventually retires.

This tragic vulnerability is found in the fact that all of the protagonists, to differing degrees, live and find significance only within this narrative. Their objective, which is nothing less than to fulfil the heroic dimensions that the pattern sets for all who would follow it, is what drives them to obsession. One of their biggest weaknesses is that they have no values outside of the story. Their insistence on thinking solely in terms of baseball makes them the archetypal jock athletes immortalized in literature. At times the inability of the hero to see outside the myth is comical but often to witness such great talents who have given their lives for that myth behaving too immaturely would disturb the reader. Because myth needs a hero to fully defend it—it cannot be defended from within.

The positive psychology movement highlights human qualities that result in enhanced performance, enhanced quality of life, and disease prevention. It seeks to

highlight the good parts of the human experience rather than pathology. Hope, wisdom, creativity, courage, spirituality, responsibility, perseverance, laughter, and mental toughness are just a few examples of positive human traits. Gordon L. Flett and Paul L. Hewitt in their essay "The Perils of Perfectionism in Sports and Exercise" discuss the multidimensional aspects of perfectionism. They argue that sportspersons with self-oriented perfectionism is associated with negative thoughts and reactions to mistakes when they experience failure. Their research on maladjustment and perfectionism has been largely influenced by the basic thesis that perfectionism makes people more susceptible to unfavourable consequences, such despair, should they encounter personal failure (15). Consequently, successful perfectionists are less prone to feel distressed. Gaining flexibility is a crucial part of these athletes' coping mechanisms, enabling them to modify their objectives in response to changing circumstances and their current states of functioning. Furthermore, perfectionistic athletes who defensively focus on errors and exhibit excessive self-doubt and dread of failure are more vulnerable to these inherent hazards.

Garry Whannel claims that people still have high expectations for sports to create heroic role models, and when these expectations aren't met, it fuels criticism of sports for being corrupted. The heroic role entails idealising a man with superior traits or virtues and might be interpreted as requiring extraordinary bravery and self-sacrifice (Whannel, 2005). Whannel goes on to say that metaphoric allusions found in heroic tales serve as a rich source for representations in sports, which in turn draw from these links to the conventional and legendary. The idea of the hero is central to our cultural thinking; heroes are not only enjoyable, but also important. Heroism is a vital part of human activity and endeavour (Korte and Lethbridge, 1977). Numerous

instances of young athletes exhibiting exceptional talent but falling short of professional league standards may be found throughout history.

The exploration of the American novels leads to the argument that there are several common characteristics that are evident in their plots. These characteristic features are artistically manipulated by the writers to bring out the pathos of the fallen heroes and also to heighten the cathartic effect that the readers would experience while reading. This mythical and folklore interpretation of sports has grown in significance as a means of illustrating the ups and downs of interpersonal relationships. One could argue that, similar to sport, sports literature can offer insights into the human condition as a whole. The fact that all three novels are about baseball is significant. Christian K Messenger suggests that of all the major American team sports, "…baseball in its passages has always been perceived as the sport that teaches, that provides lessons in art and life" (49). Henceforth this study elaborates on the common traits that are present in these chosen Indian and American texts.

1. The protagonists of Indian and American novels are lowly born heroes and they are confined and constrained by the harsh and grimy rural environments they are born into. But from the very beginning of the narrative it is made clear to the readers that these heroes are extraordinarily talented sportsmen who are destined to make a mark in history. The only difference is that there is no or little reference to the family backgrounds of the American heroes since they are yet to embark on the journey to their sporting glories. Likewise when one discovers nineteen-year-old Roy Hobbs in Malamud's *The Natural*, he is traveling by train to Chicago with his manager Sam to try out for the Chicago Cubs. There are constant allusions to Hobbs' father who had taught him the basic lessons of the game. Apart from that there is no rendering of Hobbs' childhood and his past life. Similarly in Harbach's

The Art of Fielding, Henry Skrimshander begins the novel as a 17-year-old playing on a Legion baseball team in Lankton, South Dakota. His family can afford to send him to college only if he could find a part time job. The negligence from the part of the writers to completely skip the childhood days of the protagonists cannot be treated as a drawback. Since their aim is to cover the hurdles and successes of these sportsmen, the writers might have found it convenient to better start the narrative after the protagonists land in a major/minor league team.

On the other hand, in Indian novels the families of the protagonists are ever present in the narrative. Prasoon's father, Anil was a fearsome left-in for Calcutta's top club, Juger Jatri. But he gave up the game after his left-knee was injured during the Rovers Cup in Mumbai. His injury was never treated. He could not afford the treatment and the club did not offer any assistance. He has to walk with a torn cartilage. The club forced him to play with the injury in the IFA Shield final. With three minutes to go for the final whistle, Anil almost six yards from the goal, takes the shot which goes too wide. He is accused of having tanked the game for a bribe. He is manhandled and his forehead splits under the blows of the crowd. One understands the pain of the yesteryear footballer who gave everything humanly possible for the game and is still bearing the brunt of humiliation and hurt of a crime he did not commit. Prasoon desperately tries to succeed as a footballer to provide a better life for his parents. Likewise in *Selection Day* Mohan, Manju's father is a cricket fanatic who has been coaching both of his sons since they were very little. He had a pact with the God of Cricket, their family deity, Kukke Subramanya to make his boys the world's best batsmen. Mohan believes that his sons' success in cricket is the family's ticket out of poverty. He teaches the youngsters in odd and unusual ways that he has devised himself. Radha is Mohan's

favourite, and he wishes for him to become the greatest cricket batter of all time, while Manju is to become the second-best.

2. Protagonists are immensely talented: The protagonists of these four novels are always identified as an emerging talent. Even while athletes are endowed with extraordinary natural skill, this talent is meaningless without intentional practice, encouragement, drive, and knowledge-not to mention possibly some excellent coaching along the way. These sportspersons are about to venture out and find true coaches who would help them reach their full potential. The novels begin where these heroes are recognized for their raw talent by expert coaches and are in the process of joining a major team. Roy Hobbs is shown traveling to Chicago to try out for the Chicago Cubs but is mysteriously intercepted by Harriet Bird who disastrously shoots Hobbs.

In *The Art of Fielding*, one discovers Mike Schwartz being bowled over by the amazing skills of Henry Skrimshander as a shortstop and proposing him to join the Westish College, Wisconsin. Likewise, in *Striker* Prasoon is a tenacious learner. He has long realized life was much longer than a few football seasons. He is quite serious in his application to the game, but he has bigger ambitions. He tries appropriating Pele's bicycle shot, since most football players appropriate fragments of other players' styles, and thus develop their own. When he talks about football, he speaks with authority, explaining himself much as a man of fifty might do in discussing a profession. As he states in the second chapter of the novel,

> Instead of power, however I tried to demonstrate skill- outswingers, chips, volleys and a couple of attempted but unsuccessful bicycle shots. I had tried to copy them from photographs of Pele, only to realize later on that you couldn't

perfect techniques like that without some natural gymnastic ability and a coach to guide you. (10)

Similarly in *Selection Day* Tommy-Sir is bewitched by the continuing evolution of Manju's batting as he sat watching the match,

…it occurred to him that this boy, who was switching at will between classical and contemporary footwork, between 'good' technique and 'bad', was fusing his two cricketing personalities into something new and flawless-and unprecedented in the history of Bombay cricket…two techniques, good and bad, and two cricketing personalities, traditional and maverick, and produce the right one on the right occasion. (107)

3. Coaches are unsuccessful heroes: The life buoys of these talented sportspersons are exceptionally gifted coaches. Great coaches understand that success is a moving target, and to remain relevant, athletes must commit to lifelong learning, honest self-assessment, and continuous improvement, both personally and professionally. In *The Natural*, the grizzled manager Pop Fisher was once a famous player who is remembered for his crucial error in his game after which he couldn't ever improve. But he completely understands Hobbs and supports his pursuits to win the pennant. Mike Schwartz in *The Art of Fielding* ambitiously trains Henry, plods unwittingly with him and ultimately when Henry suffers his final humiliation, is broken hearted and inconsolable.

However, in Indian novels, trainers stand in for the destructive cycle of capitalism and sports that eats away at the competitive spirit of the game. Prasoon at the start of the narrative is keen on working on his excellent dribbling skills and hoping to lure the attention of the head coach, Bipin Sinha. Nevertheless he is

crestfallen when he learns from Bipin-da that skills are not needed to be in a team like Shobhabajar. Bipin-da informs Prasoon that he can easily join the junior Bengal and junior India team if he does not score and let his team lose. This has to do with the illegal contracts between teams in club football. Parimal Bhattacharya, the club secretary, is part of a clique within the IFA that controlled all the committees. It had conspired to put a halt to all promotion and relegation. The clubs stood to gain as they would no longer be obliged to spend large sums of money on good players capable of helping them climb to a higher division or preventing them from being relegated to a lower one. There were at least two or three Shobhabajar players who got into junior Bengal team every year. Tommy Sir, in *Selection Day* is a typical scout- insensitive, self- conceited and excessively proud of cricket. His columns on the yester years of Mumbai cricket is syndicated in sixteen newspapers around India. He introduces the Kumars to Anand Mehta, a wealthy businessman. Mehta believes the boys would go on to be major stars in cricket and promises to financially support the family in exchange for a royalty on their future profits if they become professional players.

4. Protagonists' excruciating inability to think apart from their game: Roy has an intense sense of purpose that is nothing less than to fulfil the heroic role that the pattern portrays for those who choose to follow it. One of the main reasons Malamud has been able to give the story a tragicomic quality is Roy's lack of any values outside of the myth. Roy's insistence on thinking exclusively in baseball terms is humorous in the first place, and he goes on to become the archetypal goon athlete that Lardner and James Thurber have immortalised in American literature. When he converses with Harriet Bird, who will shoot him afterwards, there is in his words an obvious oblivion for objective reality. After fifteen years and

countless sufferings, Roy remains ensnared in the myth and refuses to think or behave in any other way. Roy's unwillingness to look past the myth is now tragic rather than humorous. This is the case because mythology requires a hero who can see both inside and outside of it in order to be fully defended. It is also the result of witnessing the spectacle of a man giving his life in defence of that myth. However, Roy still has a chance to preserve the myth if he accepts Iris Lemon's love. Such an acceptance would keep him committed to baseball's myth—Iris is in the real world, but she believes in heroes—while also preparing him to face the world of objective fact. Here, Roy's rejection of Iris' love ensures his unavoidable downfall. This time, Roy's vision has become rather Oedipal blind, so when he confesses his tragic limitation to Iris in a chat, it is no longer amusing. The compulsive pursuit of a single thing, or "monomania", is one of Herman Melville's central themes in Moby-Dick. In the case of Henry Skrimshander, he is lost in the world of reality. All he is capable to do is to play baseball. He comes alive in a baseball arena and his world view is restricted to the game. To quote Henry,

> He'd never been able to talk to anyone, not really. Words were a problem, the problem. Words were tainted somehow… Only on the field had he ever been able to express himself. Off the field there was no other way than with words, unless you were some kind of artist or musician or mime… Talking was like throwing a baseball. You couldn't plan it out beforehand. You just had to let go and see what happened. You had to throw out words without knowing if anyone would catch them… It felt better to talk with a ball in your hand, it felt better to let the ball do the talking. But the world, the non-baseball world, the world of love and sex and jobs and friends was made of words. (119)

He breathes and pitches exactly how his role model and prophet Aparicio Rodriguez imparts in his book *The Art of Fielding*. Overanalyzing causes Henry to become paralysed by thought and unable to simply act (or respond), which sets off Henry's crisis. That becomes his biggest flaw. He is caught up in his thought and is forced to live too much in his head meditating on Rodriguez's words. This is Henry's quandary; paralyzed by his musings on the words in his baseball Bible. He is numbed in the sporting arena, every hesitancy magnified, every mistake evaluated by a discerning, rapacious crowd.

The Indian heroes, though, are highly aware of the world outside of their game. Prasoon continuously brings to mind his impoverished home, where his family is driven insane by hunger, heat, humiliation, and hopelessness. After leaving the Shobhabajar Club, he works at a fuel station to support himself and have time for training. Similarly Manju is a kind, intelligent, and sensible schoolboy who plays cricket to assist his family. His father wants him to take up cricket seriously since it would help them escape the filth and poverty of their slum, despite the fact that his genuine interests are in science and academia.

5. Driven by an internal quest to savour success: All of these protagonists cannot contain their dreams and are sweating it out in practice sessions to achieve them. Roy in *The Natural* is meticulously planning to be the greatest ever base baller. He is at the top of his game, when he is beset with his passion for Memo and decides to tank the game. Likewise in Harbach's *The Art of fielding* Henry is a supremely gifted shortstop chasing records in his junior years at Westish College. Henry nearly lives up to his promise under Schwartz's guidance, inspiring the Westish Harpooners baseball team to their best-ever record and recording the longest run of flawless games with the legendary Aparicio Rodriguez. Prasoon engages in serious

practice even when he has quit the club. He trains by kicking the ball in a particular rectangular target he had drawn on an abandoned factory wall. Manju is the only exception in that he trains to appease his father and support his brother. Yet Manju eventually breaks Radha's record for the highest score in Mumbai school cricket in the Harris Shield tournament.

6. Doomed forever- Apart from Prasoon none of the protagonists have a chance of redemption and resurgence. They are completely helpless at the end of the novels. Manju continues to lead a closeted life and retires prematurely from his mediocre game. Roy is expelled from the game and all of his records removed which makes his fall all the more tragic. On the other hand, Henry appears at last about to find his groove again. He might not be the same maestro, yet he can carry on playing professional baseball.

In the case of Henry, he is free of all malice yet shows signs of burn-out. Most of the time, people believe that having a strong desire to compete in sports and succeed is a positive thing. On the other hand, being overly motivated is conceivable at times. However, motivation becomes pathological when it results in burnout and overtraining, or when athletes jeopardise their health in the name of sports greatness, such as when they lose weight quickly. Herbert J. Freudenberger (6) was the first to describe the phenomena of burn-out. It can occur in any situation when people overwork as a stress response; it is not exclusive to sports. Its symptoms include emotional weariness (feeling tired and resigned), depersonalisation (being emotionally cut off from other people), and reduced performance and satisfaction. Athlete burnout has not received much scientific attention. Young tennis players' burnout has been investigated by Gould et al. (1996) in their study "Burnout in Competitive Junior Tennis Players: II.

Qualitative Analysis". They came to the conclusion that young athletes face a lot of pressure to perform, and that those who take on too many responsibilities in an effort to satisfy others are more prone to burnout. In *The Art of Fielding*, Schwatrz stands out as a particularly important contributor to burnout. Therefore, burnout is not just the physical outcome of overtraining and competition; it is also the psychological fallout from stress.

Perfectionism is a psychological trait that is linked to burnout. Of course, in order to continue being motivated to perform at an exceptional level, one must exhibit some degree of perfectionism. Henry attempts to achieve flawlessness and perfectionism by following Aparacio's baseball bible. Perfectionism does seem to come in numerous forms, though, and not all of them are good. Frost et al (1993) distinguish between positive achievement strivings and maladaptive evaluation concerns. Positive achievement aspirations are linked to organisation and high personal standards. They serve as a general representation of perfectionism's advantages. Maladaptive evaluation worries, on the other hand, are linked to excessive self-doubt, worry about making mistakes, and worry about receiving criticism from parents. Manju is also vulnerable to maladaptive assessment issues related to overbearing parental oversight and criticism. It seems that burnout is linked to maladaptive evaluation worries.

Baseball is claimed by some to be an 'American experience' in that it epitomizes the 'American Dream' in which wealth, popularity, and 'American' success are earned most visibly through individual effort. Similarly in the Indian works, sports are sought after by the urban poor to escape the clutches of poverty and filth. Sports hold opportunities to instant success and money for the gullible city dweller. The protagonists' experiences of transcendence via sport and through

everyday challenges and tribulations are not presented as definitive solutions to achieving peace and order in their lives. Understanding what the characters are attempting to transcend is essential to comprehending the transcendental moments. Every protagonist lives in an extraordinarily cruel environment. As Roy Hobbs, Henry Skrimmshander, Prasoon and Manju strive to develop a unique identity and direction via sports, their vices encircle them and cause them pain both on and off the pitch. With the exception of Prasoon, all of them succumb to worldly temptations and eventually reject anything that is not material. When the athletes' weakness taints their purity, the game's mythological proportions are undermined. When Prasoon brings home the championship for his team and gets the opportunity to play for the Indian team, he manages to carve out a niche for himself.

The sports protagonist is, as Kent Cartwright and Mary McElroy argue, "…a kind of Americanized tabula rasa upon which the novelist can essay an enormous range of controlled encounters" (52). In the game, Roy Hobbs represents the type of protagonist who chooses to pursue the path of the wicked, giving up his potential to transcend for the sake of pursuing human wants. However Henry Skrimmshander is a naïve youth who wants to be one of the greatest baseballer ever but fails to understand the philosophical undercurrents of perfection. Somehow, he partially recovers from Steve Blass disease and is able to find his groove again. He has this innate perseverance instilled by his captain cum life coach, Schwartz. Among the American protagonists, only Henry has encapsulated the shades of redemption and resurgence destined only for a few vanquished ones.

Scott Kretchmar contends in his essay "Competition, Redemption and Hope" that it is futile to claim that the pursuit of victory, rather than the actual achievement of victory, is what makes an athletic deed fundamental. In actuality, both winners and

losers can and do share a great deal of advantages (111). These benefits, he claims are idealism, epistemology, artistic aesthetics, greater motivation and personal development. Consequently sport becomes, “a mutual quest for excellence, a collaborative search for knowledge, a cooperative journey in search of riveting drama, an inclusive laboratory for human development” (109). Yet he eloquently approves that sport’s essence lies in its realization of having won, in the possession of victory and to have been ahead at the end of process. Usually, the weight of the loss and the inability to achieve victory outweighs any potential gains. The idea of transcendence experienced by both the vanquished player and the winning champion is another significant idea he presents in the essay (114). Athletes who have lost can be given the opportunity to improve their circumstances by playing again in the future. Repetition and replacing a poor result with a better one are the paths that lead to an activity’s redemption. This redemption is accessible to Prasoon and Henry among the protagonists under study.

Robert Butcher and Angela Schneider argue that one needs to take into consideration the motivation behind playing a game through an analysis of both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivation will include enjoyment, pure satisfaction and yearning for excellence. Whereas extrinsic factors motivates sportspersons to participate in sports for external reasons such as material rewards, publicity, and money (11). The Indian protagonists are all driven by external factors while American heroes are inspired by intrinsic motivation. Indian protagonists make an effort to climb out of poverty by excelling in sports. Roy is motivated to achieve global influence and achieve world-class excellence. Henry, on the other hand, starts out with an intrinsic motivation, but when the paparazzi show up and the media’s

attention increases, he starts to go off course and employs external motivation. But the division between intrinsic and extrinsic goods in sport is not clear-cut.

However, Mike McNamee contends that it is preferable to view an activity as a whole, taking into account both its inherent characteristics and the immediate results that involvement in it brings about. Competition inevitably produces winners and losers. But winning is not everything. There is the effort and excellence achieved by trying to win (14). As David Shields argues, "Within true competition, winning and losing are required because these outcomes enable the process. Winning is significant because it allows striving to win" (137). The opposite of competition is 'decompetition' (207), which according to Shields is 'competition that has devolved into something that is really the antagonist of the original'. In decompetition, winning becomes everything. True competition maintains a balance of seriousness and play, the process and the outcome, the intrinsic and extrinsic. Shields thus contends that whilst the decompetitor is driven by the pursuit of goods external to the game, the true competitor is driven by values inherent to the game (214). For Roy has infinite improbability to ever make it again to a baseball game. He is by the end of the novel an infamous culprit who has thrown away the final game of the Knights. He is dropped from the team and all his records are revoked. For him the prospect of playing again tomorrow is not realistic. He might succumb to the savages of time.

These two American novels emphasize the negative impacts of sports on individuals or on the culture. Surely it is more than curious that a genre born out of the cloying positivism of Frank Merriwell should reach its maturity in works that can be largely classified as excessively grim. The baseball player is an individualist; he is a man who must rely on his own resources; he is separated from his peers and visible to the outside world. Compared to other team sports, he is a member of a team, but

only to the extent that timing coordination is vitally necessary. Michael Oriard begins his seminal work, *Dreaming of Heroes: American Sports Fiction* by describing the concept of an athlete hero; "…the hero who is both a natural and self-made man, the character from humble small town origins, comes to the city with his ability, his humour, his deserved good luck and his breezy confidence" (43). He finds the origin of this stereotypical character in the Frank Merriwell stories (1896-1915) of Gilbert Patten and points out its persistence in all that was to follow, from the formulae of juvenile sports fiction to the complex and ambiguous works of contemporary novelists. Beyond the concept of a stereotype, this athlete-hero is, to Oriard, a representative American figure- "America's fondest self-image"(92)-who plays out, in the arena of the sports novel, his nation's obsession with the problems of urbanization, aging, sexuality, history, and myth.

There is a hint of meekness in Henry and Manju's personalities, which strikes the reader as distorted. However, Henry and Manju (forced by his father though) commend our compassion because athletes do not lead balanced lives because they typically forgo all other pursuits in order to maximise the amount of time they can devote to practising their sport. One of the secrets to success in the athletes' battle with themselves is a training routine that calls for a nearly unfathomable amount of repetitions. Therefore, Henry's meekness is not a symptom of stupidity; rather, it is the product of extremely repetitious training meant to replace thinking with a nearly entirely physical response to a particular scenario. The ability to perform by feeling what cannot be done by thought is developed by daily practise of hitting thousands of strokes. Manju too is stuck with cricket and he has to forgo his studies to train and play cricket. But his heart is not in cricket, and his performance is mediocre. He is finally transferred to the celebrity league and subsequently sacked at the age of 27. To

play a highly masculine game of cricket and support his family, Manju tries to supress his homosexuality. Henry and Manju play mechanically and with seemingly little of the human feeling that can prevent players from realising their potential since they devote most of their life to repetitive training, but they inevitably lose some of their humanity in the process.

The vanquished baseball player is at least given the status of a non-person if not exactly that of a dead man because they are physically present and legally allowed to be there but lack social recognition from their peers and are therefore interactionally absent (Goffman 1959). Both Roy and Henry have to endure the pains of exclusion in varying degrees when they lose their game. They may also be recognised as a social object but not as a social other. The deadman and the non-personage are two characterizations that both indirectly and overtly represent twin themes in a professional baseball player's response to defeat. They could be considered extreme examples of degradation. As Edward Gross and Gregory P. Stone notes, "It's funny what happens to a guy when he's released. As soon as he gets it he's a different person, not a part of the team any- more. Not even a person. He almost ceases to exist" (12). Although he uses pathological language, it would be more accurate to describe his actions as non-personage. This kind of altercasting involves treating the alter as though they are invisible and isolating them from society. Put another way, rather than just cooling off, the baseball failure is shut out. His sense of self is diminished or debased; it is merely disregarded, handled "as if" it had ceased to exist and was hence unimportant. Poise, futures, positions and roles all become problematic. He may skulk and he may slink, but before his others he is likely to stumble and slip. Deadmen and non-persons are prone to have these experiences and behaviours. This context can be extended to all the sports and the sportsmen

experiencing defeat and loss. The four protagonists in this study have undergone in varying extent the pain of isolation and abandonment when they lost their game and succumbed to the pressures of defeat.

The examination of four selected novels featuring sportsmen as their central protagonists offers a compelling avenue for the exploration of the complex theme of vanquished heroes. Through this analysis, the study has gained insight into the profound impact of failure on these athletes, leading them into intricate existential crises. While Prasoon ultimately achieves victory, he does so only after navigating the treacherous labyrinth of existential turmoil without external support. In contrast, Manju, in *Selection Day*, succumbs to this crisis, distancing himself from his camaraderie with Javed. He lives a shadowed existence, unable to embrace his homosexuality. To conform to societal norms and support his family, he assumes a facade of a 'respectable' life. Meanwhile, Roy finds himself condemned to a life of ignominy after departing from the sport, while Henry is offered a shot at redemption despite encountering existential threats.

The concept of gender is boldly addressed in *Selection Day* and *The Art of Fielding*, whereas in *Striker* and *The Natural*, it is woven thematically into the narrative. Homosexuality, a facet of gender identity, is approached in these novels with contrasting perspectives. In *Selection Day*, characters vehemently reject the idea of homosexuality, while in *The Art of Fielding*, it is explored with openness and nuance. Prasoon's reluctance to meet Nilima and Roy's loss of Iris due to their preoccupation with notions of masculinity exemplify the struggles these characters face. In addition to these individual character journeys, the American novels subtly expand upon the concept of the American Dream to unveil the nationalistic sentiments nurtured by their protagonists. In contrast, the Indian novels spotlight the aspirations

of underprivileged protagonists, who aspire to make it to the national teams. Through their pursuits, these characters embody and exhibit the idea of nationalism within themselves.

By delving into these novels and scrutinizing the experiences of their sportsman protagonists, this study uncovers a rich tapestry of themes related to failure, identity, gender, and nationalism. These narratives not only provide a window into the psyche of athletes but also offer profound commentary on the human condition and the societies in which they exist.

Chapter 3

WOMEN IN INDIAN AND AMERICAN SPORTS FICTION:

KONI, WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT FALLING, WATER DANCER

AND *AQUAMARINE*

The world of athletics appears to be best suited to exemplify equality. After all, in sporting competitions, competitors compete under seemingly comparable conditions. The same regulations apply to all and all athletes' performances are measured using precision timing devices and consistent distance markers. However, a closer study reveals that this is not the case. Differences in race and sex, social class, handicap conditions, nationality, and religious belief, among other factors, can all contribute to inequalities. In sports, sex-based inequalities are plainly visible. Women are routinely denied the right to compete on an equal footing with males. Women's sports are expected to operate with less sophisticated facilities and budgets than men's sports. Many women's sports laws limit their participation to a scaled-down version, requiring them to traverse less distance, use a smaller ball, or play fewer sets or minutes, often on a smaller field. Women are frequently paid less prize money than their male counterparts, even when they compete under the same conditions as males.

This chapter exerts to compare and contrast how women are portrayed as sporting heroes in Indian and American sports fiction. It attempts to study the Indian and American sports fiction traditions of imagining and perpetuating fictional women athletes. Since sports fiction in India is still in its infancy, the Indian and American histories in constructing this image of sportswomen are bound to differ. Despite the presence of various sports authorities like Board of Control for Cricket in India,

Indian Olympic Association and Hockey India, India's sports law is still underdeveloped in comparison to the United States, France, China, or Canada. Women's participation in international sports and athletics has increased dramatically in the seven decades since India's Independence, despite the fact that women's sports in India have received little attention. They must overcome gender stereotyping, a large wage disparity, and societal prejudices in order to build a name for themselves in their chosen sports. Surprisingly, Indian women have made their mark on the international stage. P. T. Usha, Anju Bobby George, Karnam Maleswari, Sania Mirza, Mary Kom, Anjali Bhagawat, and Mithali Raj are just a few of the athletes who have brought honor to the country. Predictably only a few authors, such as Moti Nandi and Prajwal Hegde, have written novels about women in sports in India.

The first and obvious choice to study under Indian women protagonists of Sports Fiction would be Moti Nandi's *Koni* (1974). Moti Nandi remains one of the few authors in the world who has written a complete body of literature about sports. This former Sports Editor at Ananda Bazaar Patrika and Sahitya Academy Awardee has written over 25 Bengali novels for adults and nearly as many for children and young people. In sports ranging from football to cricket, tennis to swimming, athletics to boxing, his novels—almost all of them set in Kolkata—capture the life, suffering, and triumph of the underdog. In *Koni*, he tells the tale of a fourteen-year-old girl who, in spite of all the obstacles, fights her way through adversity and humiliation to navigate a crucial lap. In 1985, *Koni* was made into a movie that starred Soumitra Chatterjee and took home the National Award for Best Picture. Dawn Fraser, about whom Khida-Da, Koni's maverick coach always alludes to, was an obvious source of inspiration for *Koni*. Moti Nandi had just finished reading a biography of the Australian swimmer. Fraser is one of the rare athletes to win three Olympic gold

medals in the same sport (100-metre freestyle). Fraser, like Koni, came from a low-income family. She was born into a working-class family in Sydney's suburbs and, like Koni, was found at the age of fourteen by her coach, Harry Gallagher, while swimming with boys at the local beach. Fraser would go on to win eight Olympic medals, six Commonwealth medals, and set 39 world records during his career.

Competitive swimming is nearly forced upon Koni (or may be viewed as a stroke of pure luck) - it was not a choice she made on her own. Koni is observed swimming across the Ganges by an eccentric instructor who lives in his world of idealism. Seeing the potential in her he asks the teenager – "Do you want to learn swimming?" (16). Koni, self-assured in her abilities, makes it very obvious to him that she did not need to 'learn' to swim. She had enough knowledge to get her through. The initial swimming scene in the novel is perhaps the most engaging picture of Koni one can draw as a reader. In the opening chapters of *Koni*, the narrator's godlike voice explains a scene to the audience. It shows a bunch of young lads swimming over the Ganges. Following a number of rituals, people are shown worshipping the Ganges' sacred waters and respectfully tossing mangoes into the water. The young boys see the wastefulness of this act of veneration because they are impoverished. To collect the mangoes, they swim over the river; afterwards, they sell them along the banks of the Ganges for a lower price. Kanakchampa Pal, whose pet name was Koni, was one of these 'little boys'. To collect the mangoes, they swim over the river; afterwards, they sell them along the banks of the Ganges for a lower price. Kanakchampa Pal, whose pet name was Koni, was one of these little boys. She loses her femininity completely and blends into this homogenous mass of men because of her short hair, limb strength, physical prowess (she is faster than most of the other boys scampering for the mangoes floating on the water body), and

aggressive spirit (she is shown fighting one of the boys who tried to hold her back, costing her a mango). The reader is already led to wonder how Nandi's portrayal of Koni challenges the popular perception of feminine bodies participating in sports due to the roughness of her body and her remarks, which challenged traditional notions of femininity and were seen by the perceptive coach. Similar to Judith Butler, Nandi aims to refute essentialist conceptions of gender, or the notions that male and female bodies should execute the roles of femininity and masculinity respectively and that these concepts are inherent or biological.

The reader is nearly compelled to exclaim that this girl 'can'. Unlike other ladies who have to fight to acquire a certain degree of physical consistency, she is practically a natural athlete due to her strength, adrenaline rush, and physical structure. Koni is again seen competing in a local swimming tournament by Kshida-Da on another occasion. She is vanquished by a competitor who is perhaps more capable than she is. Kshiteesh informs Koni that Hiya, a young girl from a wealthy family who had studied at a prestigious swimming institution, had the technical know-how that allowed her to win the tournament. For Kshida-Da, swimming was not a talent that could be learnt, but rather one that needed to be mastered. Koni makes up for her lack of technical knowledge with her sense of self-esteem. Koni is bold, headstrong and strong willed. When she fails to make elder brother, Kamal proud and perhaps win a cash prize she considers her setback to be terribly embarrassing, and for the first time, she perceives a gap in her knowledge. However, the audience watching the race notices Hiya's physical appearance more than her competence in swimming. Hiya's flawless complexion and endearing appearance capture the attention of the crowd that had gathered around the Rabindra Sarobar lake to watch the one-mile swimming competition. She is almost like a "wax-doll" (56), the crowd's favourite.

Koni, who hails from an impoverished slum, lacks Hiya's entrancing physical features. In the binaries he builds, Nandi is blatantly stereotyped. These portrayals validate binary, heteronormative views of gender. Then Kshiteesh turns to Kamal, who confesses that he had once dreamt of being a swimmer and that, if the coach was inclined to instruct her, he would live that dream through his sister. Naturally, the family was unable to reimburse him for his services. Kamal provided for his family by working in a city industry and earning about Rs. 150 a month.

Despite having his fair share of personal, marital, and financial problems, Kshiteesh takes Koni under his wing. His marriage to Lilabati, a strong-willed woman who fills in for her husband by wearing the proverbial 'pants in the home' (67), is deteriorating. He is in his mid-forties or early fifties and childless. He is virtually forgetting about his other obligations because he is so preoccupied with the club where he instructs young boys and girls in swimming. In this Frakensteinian world of modernity, his idealism is constantly put to the test. It seems as if the innocent, idealistic, and diligent have no place in this murkier world of Calcutta. His students despise his autocratic behaviour. Jupiter Swimming Club's owners chastise him for his audacity and honesty. They make fun of him in a meeting and insist on his departure. He places a higher emphasis on his principles than the hypocrisy that passes for sports in the club. He views swimming, or any sport, as a form of meditation, and he thinks that hard work and dedication are necessary for success in any field. To defeat the Goddess Success, sacrifice, hardship, patience, penance, and abstinence are necessary. Koni's effort to rise above the ashes and build a name for herself is closely related to Kshiteesh's fight to clean up sports and create an ideal, utopian atmosphere for young athletes. Kshiteesh is not hesitant to persuade an unsuspecting individual, Bishtu Dhar, who is contemplating a run for the MLA office,

to provide him with minor support in exchange for Koni's sponsorship. He agrees to write idealistic and sarcastic speeches for Bishtu-babu in order to further his dreams of winning the elections.

Koni is also known for being conceited; she has no problem asking her coach for money in return for all of the work he has her do. Naturally, her broken pride and low self-esteem are the root causes of her ego. She feels uncomfortable, if not angry, at the continual beating she gets from the perilous world of strong and resentful individuals. She is obviously in need of financial assistance from her coach because she cannot afford to buy food for her family. Kshiteesh gives her a monthly allowance of about Rs. 50 and eventually secures her employment in his wife's Shyambazar apparel store. Naturally, Kshiteesh takes advantage of Bishtu babu's self-doubts and anxieties to woo gulliable citizens of Calcutta for the greater cause of athletics.

Nandi seems to be making the case that the ends do, in fact, justify the means. Additionally, by depicting the characters as real, flesh-and-blood people, they are shown to be fallible, not perfect, not impeccably clean, but fundamentally good people at heart. Both his Koni and Kshid-da err; they succeed and fail. Nevertheless, they are basically good individuals with a few small imperfections who are kind and working for a good cause. The readers may relate to these individuals because, despite their flaws, they are courageous and faithful to their goals, which helps to concretize the identification process. From the standpoint of this analysis, the seamless transition from "her and him" to "they" in reference to Koni suggests that Nandi is acknowledging the significance of the young protagonist by having her share the spotlight with another man and integrating Koni's struggle with Kshiteesh's.The story focuses so much on Kshid-da and his battles with the Swimming Clubs' legendary nepotism and complacency that it overlooks Koni's hard work and personal struggles.

She appears to be the ward that Kshid-da raises in order to prove his enemies incorrect. She appears to lose control over her own body and mind since she is obligated to follow her coach's stringent regimen. One doubts whether Koni would have persisted in his tutelage if she had been a little richer. Often he is visualized chastising, demeaning, and inhumanly torturing Koni to tame her body and swim faster. As the narrator remarks,

> He said, 'Learn your strokes and I'll buy you a nylon costume'.
>
> 'I don't want one'.
>
> Koni heaved herself out of the pool. Kshitish knew that arm twisting would not work with her- she needed a bait to enthuse her.
>
> 'Hey, why are your leaving the pool? Hungry?'
>
> Koni walked away silently towards the gate.
>
> 'You must be hungry. I'm thinking we should organise two eggs, two bananas and two slices of toast'.
>
> Koni came to a stop. 'But I'll take the food home'.
>
> 'Then you have to spend another half-an hour in the pool'.
>
> It broke Kshitish's heart to say those words. It was inhuman to dangle a carrot to make a starving Koni work harder'. (37)

Even when the rest of Calcutta stopped from taking baths in the Ganges and swimmers quitted to practice in the pools of the swimming clubs, Kshid-da forces Koni to continue her swimming practise. His idiosyncrasies are made evident in these lines,

> It was winter. The water level had dropped in Kamaldighi. Sweater-clad people now used the park for their walks. No one swam. But Koni's training continued without a break. A number of people had protested. But Kshid-da had said, 'If she can do it, why shouldn't she?'
>
> Kshitish screamed in rage, 'You have to do it, you have to! I'm not listening to any excuses'. He picked up a stone and flung it at Koni.
>
> 'Please, Kshid-da, I can't anymore'.
>
> 'I will break your skull…die, why don't you die?' Kshitish looked around but couldn't find another stone to lob. (43)

He even prevents Koni from developing a friendly relationship with Hiya Mitra, despite her kindness and care for Koni. He had concluded Hiya would be Koni's future adversary, and it wouldn't be appropriate to ease Koni's resentment of Hiya. He allows her to develop it so that when she is in the middle of a competition, it will energise her and propel her ahead of Hiya. He appears to be interfering with Koni's relationships with everyone, attempting to bribe her with food to get her family to work harder in the pool, and possibly with herself by keeping her unaware of her own timings in order for her to break all records.

Amiya was a member of her club and won awards at the State level. The only reason she left Jupiter and joined Apollo, the rival club, was because of Kshid-da. He had intended to shave their heads. He insisted that they do dumbbell exercises like the men swimmers. He is always bothered by the clothes they wore and the make-up they applied. The image depicted of Amiya, who has been the Bengal Champion for three years, demonstrates the transience of sporting accomplishment once more. Her fellow

swimmers adored her since she was the captain of the swimming team. However, her strength is fading, and Hiya outsmarts her, and Maharastrian Rama Joshi defeats Hiya. Koni will finally win them all over. The narrator proclaims in the final lap of the nationals,

> A flabbergasted Amiya looked for support among the others. No-one responded; Bela, too, had buried her nose in a mystery book. The girl who had reigned as an empress over the Bengal women's swimming charts realized instantly that she had lost her crown to Hiya. Now she would be the centre of all attention, the recipient of all their adulation. Her own heydays are over. (89)

Koni is fighting for both herself and Kshiteesh. Even in the narrative, Nandi demonstrates that some of the difficulties she faces are due to her being under Kshid-da's supervision. The owners of Jupiter, who had harshly thrown Kshiteesh out of their portals, refuse to accept Koni despite her evident potential because she is Kshid-da's protégée. Koni is obstructed by these bullies, who use sports as a money-making venture, more so as a warning to Kshiteesh than as a personal victim. Kshiteesh advises her to tune in to her body's signals and let them be her compass. He instructs her, "Another 50 metres to go, Koni, let the agony hone your body. You'll see how it surprises you, this body of yours, how it will make the impossible possible. What's a gold medal-just a disc. It's what it symbolises that's important - human beings can do anything, everything" (70). Koni is so strong-willed that she defends herself when cornered by the Bengal contingent's other swimmers in the national championships. She is suspected of stealing a large amount of Bela's facial cream. Hiya, however, was the one who messed with the cream. Koni slaps Hiya across the face for bringing disgrace to her family. Koni needs to stand up for her class's rights instead of her own

gender. By the 1980s, women were regularly participating in competitive swimming. She receives money from Kshiteesh in exchange for eggs, milk, butter, and bananas. The body's build, endurance, and physical attributes are crucial in sports. But as his wiser wife Leelabati notes, Kshiteesh's allowance of Rs. 50 is not enough to purchase all those foods high in protein. In actuality, Koni spends her allowance on necessities for her family. She becomes the provider for the family with the death of her elder brother Kamal.

Yalom suggests that the intense fear of death in humans stems from a profound anxiety about the prospect of non-existence. Paradoxically, this awareness of our mortality can serve as a catalyst for fostering a more deliberate and authentic participation in life. Koni has tenderly cared for Kamal in his final moments, unwaveringly at his side as he approached death. Yalom's body of work highlights the intricate relationship between the fear of death and the possibility of a deeper appreciation for life. While the fear of mortality is an inherent facet of human existence, it possesses the remarkable capacity to propel individuals toward a more profound and authentic engagement with their own lives. Having confronted death firsthand, Koni's motivation surges. She develops a sincere passion for swimming, dedicating herself to improving her performance, and willingly allocates her pocket money to support her family. Her younger brother gets to work at a factory to stabilise the financial dearth faced by them. While Koni's rival and co-competitor, Hiya can afford to toss chocolates at Koni given that she has the financial means to do so. Koni has to fight for her and her family's survival. Koni's foes are actually Kshiteesh's foes.

The Jupiter Swimming Club's top brass try all out to keep the young girl from rising. Conversely, Koni suffers at the hands of other young girls from wealthy homes

who are also swimmers. They pick on her, criticise her, harass her, accuse her of stealing, slap her, or just plain ignore her. Her name is usually kept out of events. But in the end, she overcomes each of these obstacles. Due to an injury to another member of the official squad, they ask Koni to help them in a crucial relay swimming competition in Chennai. Koni does the impossible, leading Bengal to victory over the defending champions and popular favourite, Maharashtra. Even if Koni's teammates are encouraging her and Kshiteesh's rivals at Jupiter Swimming Club are rooting for her, she still has a long way to go before she can call herself established. The book ends with a positive tone. Now that she has had some of the acceptance she has always wanted and deserved, Koni will probably be able to let go of the bitterness that was such a big part of her life and go on to become an even better swimmer and person. Koni embraces her coach and hugs him tightly when she finally meets him after her feat: "A number of people turned around at the sound. They saw the girl who had just displayed such extraordinary swimming skills holding on to a crazy-looking man. She was sobbing into his chest, while his teardrops fell on her head" (95).

The narrative of the novel delves deeply into Koni's odyssey as she navigates the intricate web of challenges entangling female swimmers within a society that steadfastly imposes limitations upon their participation in sports. This literary work thoughtfully examines the pervasive themes of gender inequality, the formidable barriers erected by society, and the indomitable flame of individual ambition. At its core, the novel shines a penetrating light on Koni's unwavering determination to dismantle the suffocating straitjacket of gender stereotypes, resolutely striving for triumph within the realm of female swimming. Moreover, the novel intricately explores the symbiotic relationship between sport and one's identity, as Koni's ardour for swimming organically fuses with the very essence of her being. As one traverses

the pages of this narrative, Koni emerges as a potent symbol embodying the multifaceted struggle against gender bias and societal constraints, illuminating the arduous path women tread in pursuit of their passions while endeavouring to dismantle the barriers that obstruct their ascent.

While the work may not explicitly engage with themes of nationalism, it subtly touches upon the profound role of sports in forging bonds of unity and shaping collective identity. Koni, initially oblivious to the laurels achieved by renowned Indian swimmers, gradually weaves her passion for swimming into the rich tapestry of national pride and identity. Within the narrative, the climax unfolds at the Nationals, a fiercely competitive arena where each state vehemently asserts its prowess, manifesting intense rivalries. Paradoxically, amidst the intense competition, there lies a silent consensus among the states - the unspoken acknowledgment that the pursuit of having the finest swimmer to represent India supersedes regional hostilities. In the exploration of the novel, it becomes evident that the narrative serves as a compelling lens through which to scrutinize the multifaceted interplay of gender dynamics, societal constraints, and the evolution of individual identity, all set against the backdrop of a nation's aspiration for excellence in the global sporting arena.

The second Indian sports novel under this analysis is Prajwal Hegde's *What's Good About Falling*. Since 2005, Prajwal Hegde has been with *The Times of India*. She is the Tennis Editor for *The Times of India*. In addition to athletics and cricket, she has covered a variety of other sports. Moreover, she was a state and national tennis champion. So it is no surprise that her protagonist is a world-class tennis player. The novel begins with the life of Arya Ashok, an Indian tennis player who, at the age of twenty-seven, is ranked among the top ten players in the world. She is, however, hampered by a breathing problem, and a Grand Slam title remains elusive.

When Arya is courted by Arvind Ram, a cricketer, the narrative incorporates the game of tennis with the game of cricket. Arvind Ram, who is only twenty-five years old, is cricket‘s most exciting newcomer. After a difficult childhood with little love and much less money, the fast bowler is achieving remarkable success on the field. When Arya is becoming bored of always being on the move, Arvind’s reign at the helm is only beginning. With two power players of world sports, one encounters how both of them improve and excel in their chosen fields in spite of all odds. At the start of the story Arya is portrayed as someone who had ventured out into excellence beyond par with her compatriots. According to the narrator, “Arya’s answer to the oft-asked question of why she didn’t pursue a high-performance physical regimen that would help her take the next step, break into the top five of the women’s ranking, put herself in contention for a slam, was that she was asthmatic. Speed was Arya’s ally but staying in power had always been a little out of reach for her” (25).

Arya’s approach unwittingly established a rather modest benchmark for herself, one that she seemed resolute in not surpassing. Consequently, as the intensity of a match extended, especially during the later stages of a significant tournament where the stakes were high and the players were closely matched, Arya often found herself succumbing to the pressure. This recurring pattern manifested in her consistent inability to advance beyond the quarterfinals in any major event. Curiously, Arya continued to exhibit hesitance when it came to fully embracing rigorous fitness regimens that could potentially elevate her game. Arya reveals her pride and staunch professionalism when she exerts, “Afraid? She? Of committing to a training programme? ...there was no truth in that question, she decided. She was a path-breaker. No one from her country, man or woman, had done better on a tennis court.

She wasn't going to mope around for losing in the quarter-finals of a Grand Slam" (29).

Her fitness levels had been ridiculed and her inability to rise above the obstacle had been criticized in international press. It spoke heavily on Arya's inability to break through in the latter stages of Grand Slams. The international media had dubbed her the "eternal quarter-finalist" (43), "the most famous quarter-finalist in tennis" (43), but she seemed unmoved by the insults. Arya's nonchalant demeanour extended its influence not only onto the tennis court but also to her dining habits. She exhibited an unrestrained approach to her culinary choices, asserting that her diet was inherently balanced. This assertion, however, appeared to overlook the possibility that certain foods might be contributing to respiratory issues, potentially hindering her athletic performance. Arya continued to indulge her palate without much consideration for how specific dietary choices could affect her overall well-being.

For Arvind, who grappled with a sense of incredulity, Arya's casual attitude was difficult to fathom. He couldn't help but ponder how a world-class athlete could appear to squander her prodigious talent with such apparent disregard for the consequences, both in terms of her health and her athletic achievements. He concedes his doubts about Arya in these lines: "There was an equanimity about Arya, not a common feature among athletes. She took her losses well, too well maybe. It didn't shake her core…" (89). When Arvind questions on her training and diet, she is uncomfortable. Arvind tells her to give her best but she doesn't want to know what her best is. Arya suddenly misses home, the protective cover her family threw around her. They were always there, preparing her, shielding her from everything. She fears that she would never be as good as people thought she would be. She thinks that she would never match up to the image of World No. 1 standard. To quote Aravind, "How

could he make her see that if she ever came to the end of her career without having tested her limits, it would be an unfinished job?" (99). Arvind found himself deep in contemplation regarding Arya's approach, particularly her apparent lack of rigorous preparation. Unlike Arvind, who had forged his own path to success through self-reliance and determination, Arya was constantly enveloped by the protective cocoon of her family. This supportive circle included a devoted father, a nurturing mother, and a reassuring sister. Within this familial embrace, Arya seemed shielded from the weighty pressures of elite competition. The fears of potential failure and vanquishment, the ambiguity surrounding her sporting future, and the looming specter of international media scrutiny were all effectively filtered and muted by the steadfast presence of her family.

Arya's father, in particular, emerged as a vital source of motivation, steering her journey with well-calibrated plans and unwavering guidance. His role in keeping her on track was both instrumental and defining in shaping Arya's path within the realm of sports. Arya acknowledges her father's contribution to her sporting life in the following realization, "He was a fantastic dad. He had coached her for as long as he could, but when he realized Arya had outgrown him, he had hired professional help. Although fiercely protective of his daughters, full of plans- personal and professional- for both of them, he was mindful of not stepping on their toes" (47). Arya has grown up with so many restrictions, ideological and logical- curfews, early morning practice sessions or flights- that it made it impossible for her to have any kind of social life, let alone a relationship outside of her family. This actually cripples her as an individual and more as a sportsperson. Pete, Arya's coach was getting increasingly frustrated by Arya's refusal to up her training levels. She does not want to up her fitness levels, because in her head she has already lost the battle. At the start of every season, Arya

told herself she would focus on endurance, but as the season stretched, she would move away from it bit by bit while keeping with the routine she most enjoyed. After her Wimbledon loss, Arya promised herself that instead of just getting stronger in areas where she was already proficient, she would shore up the weakest part of her game.

The plot well incorporates a closer look at what goes on in the psyche of a sportsperson, how they deal with pressures, insecurities, the role of the media, and specifically social media. For Arya, fitness was a fleeting experience; she wants it done in minutes. She does not know to take it slow. She has to actually conserve her energy and go on for longer. She has to last in a game; she is to be the one standing at the finish. The longer her matched lasted, the less of a feature she became in it. It was her stumbling block to greater success. Arvind reminds her of this flaw early on in their relationship, he reminds her of a better regime, he says, “Instead of upping the speed every two minutes, try staying for five and then ten minutes before increasing” (83). By the middle of the narrative Arya confronts a serious crisis in her career and this investigation witnesses the transformation she undergoes to stand again on her feet and win world titles. She tears her ligament during a fourth- round match in the Australian Open and has to pull out. In the narrator’s words, “The pain had been excruciating, but Arya had held up bravely. She took charge, doing whatever needed to be done. She didn’t complain, never once asked, why me?” (179).

Thereafter she wholeheartedly embraced the process of taking the lengthier road to recovery. She opted for a conservative treatment, without surgery. The recuperation becomes more burdensome for Arya when her father is diagnosed with testicular cancer. Yet she slowly appears to cope with her situation. She busies herself with a lot of activities to tire out her emotions and train her mind of perseverance and

determination. As is noted in these lines, she gets motivated to restart her career with endurance and renewed energy:

> A month after her return from Australia, Arya had exhausted the must-watch collection on her hard drive, read a bunch of books, a couple of which she had closed halfway…even tried her hand at computer games…she was itching to play tennis again. She wanted to make those split-second decisions when facing breakpoint. She missed walking out onto a court, carrying that weight of expectation and the drive of going for the prize. (189)

With a resolute dedication, Arya meticulously adhered to her exercise regimen, focusing intently on fortifying her upper body. Yoga became a staple in her routine, complemented by a disciplined diet that eschewed sugar and deep-fried fare. This concerted effort had a discernible impact on the improvement of her respiratory function, yet the pace of her recovery seemed frustratingly sluggish, testing her patience. During this convalescent period, Arya began displaying telltale signs of existential turmoil. Her once fervent engagement in physical activities waned, replaced by incessant worries about the trajectory of her career. She found herself burdened by self-loathing for the impulsive contemplation of quitting tennis, a notion that had crossed her mind in moments of despair. Yalom's exploration of existential themes, including the human fear of death and the impact of mortality awareness on our lives can be applied in Arya's recuperation. Yalom posits that humans possess a deep-seated fear of death, often referred to as 'death anxiety'. This fear arises from the existential awareness of our mortality, the realization that we, like all living beings, are ultimately bound to die. This fear of non-being, or the idea of ceasing to exist, can be a powerful and unsettling force in our lives. It can lead to various psychological defense mechanisms and existential dilemmas as individuals grapple

with the inevitability of their own mortality. Nevertheless, Yalom underscores that this awareness of mortality can have a profound and positive effect on individuals. When people confront the reality of their finite existence, it can serve as a catalyst for them to live more consciously and authentically. The awareness of the limited time we have can inspire individuals to engage more fully in life, pursue meaningful goals, nurture deeper relationships, and seek personal growth and fulfillment. In this sense, the fear of non-being can become a motivator for living a richer and more purposeful life.

As Arya grappled with these profound shifts in her perspective, her father's ongoing battle with illness cast a long shadow over her psyche. Witnessing his enduring suffering and emotional anguish compelled her to confront profound questions about life and mortality. Just as Yalom's research highlights the intricate relationship between the fear of death and the potential for an enhanced appreciation of life, Arya begins to perceive life through a fresh perspective. While the fear of mortality is a fundamental aspect of the human condition, it also has the capacity to propel individuals towards a more profound and genuine engagement with their existence. These sober reflections caused her to re-evaluate the concept of time and the preciousness of it. Gradually, Arya's perspective underwent a transformation. She began to perceive her injuries and the gruelling process of rehabilitation not as setbacks, but as invaluable lessons. In conversations with her sister, Arya shared her newfound understanding, "…recognizing that, despite the excruciating pain, the side effects of medications, and the unrelenting discomfort, this hiatus from her sport was a necessary pause, one that was teaching her profound lessons about herself and her relationship with tennis. For her mind more than for her body. It was an education more than a break" (190). She embraces the fact that she had held herself back in

training and she finally abandons her fears. She goes on to play the Australian Open semi-final, Eastbourne Trophy, Cincinnati Series and finally wins the Wimbledon title. She tries to be more expressive on the court, to embrace the emotion, face the fears. To quote the progress she makes, “In every match she played, she was coming out of the shell a little more, emoting on the court, which resulted in her being more aggressive with her shot-making” (270).

Arya’s journey is a testament to her ability to transcend the psychological and physical constraints she had imposed upon herself throughout more than a decade of international competition. She not only confronts her weaknesses head-on but also exhibits unwavering determination to restore her health following a debilitating injury. Through sheer resilience and relentless effort, she rises from the ashes of her former self, rekindling the fire within her.

As we compare and contrast these two Indian sports novels, both featuring female protagonists as athletes, it becomes evident that Koni and Arya share common traits. They are characterized by their indomitable willpower and unyielding tenacity in the pursuit of their athletic dreams. These protagonists evolve into fully-rounded characters, sculpted intricately within the rich and impassioned narrative canvases of their respective stories. Their journeys serve as poignant reminders of the remarkable resilience that can be found within the human spirit when faced with formidable challenges. Indeed, the influence of the male figures in Koni and Arya’s respective narratives is palpable and multifaceted. In Moti Nandi’s novel, Koni’s journey is often overshadowed by Kshid-da’s troubles, with the narrative focusing predominantly on his struggles, relegating Koni to a secondary role. It is apparent that Koni’s rise to the public spotlight, including her participation in the national championships, owes much to Kshid-da’s mentorship and support. In Nandi’s narrative, Koni’s survival, growth,

and success are intricately intertwined with Kshid-da's presence in her life. Similarly, in Prajwal Hegde's narrative, Arya finds herself enveloped by the love and guidance of her father, who plays a central role in meticulously planning various aspects of her career. Arya's commitment to enhancing her fitness regime is reignited, in part, by her breakup with cricketer Arvind Ram. Early in the novel, Arya even contemplates retirement, but the breakup and a near-career-ending injury serve as catalysts that prevent her from bidding farewell to tennis. Her family's economic circumstances also add a layer of complexity to her journey, highlighting the real-world pressures that influence her decisions.

In Koni's story, survival and the desire to improve her family's circumstances are her primary motivators, with nationalism and gender being abstract yet recurrent concepts. Her initial engagement in swimming is driven by the need for food, with the sport becoming a means to secure a better life for her loved ones. On the other hand, Arya's character exhibits normative qualities in terms of her femininity and her heterosexual relationship with Arvind. However, she also possesses subversive feminist characteristics, which make her a noteworthy figure admired by both national and international media. Her status as a champion athlete and a trailblazer in her sport is accompanied by significant media attention, including headlines about her victories and rumours about her personal life in the realm of tabloids. Arya exhibits distinct nationalist traits as she exudes an overwhelming pride in her identity as a champion athlete. She revels in the recognition of her significant role in inspiring countless young girls to choose sports as a viable career path. Arya is exuberant in acknowledging her profound contribution to Indian tennis, marked by her illustrious decade-long international career, which she views as a source of immense national pride and accomplishment. These comparisons highlight the multifaceted nature of

the female protagonists' journeys in these novels, where their relationships with influential male figures, societal pressures, and personal motivations all contribute to shaping their paths in the world of sports.

For a long time, the United States has been a global sports powerhouse. Sports are a vital element of American culture, and they take tremendous satisfaction in their achievements. For more than a century American writers especially women writers like Margaret Gallaher, Julia Augusta Shwartze, and Edith Bancroft have been enfolding and recreating the image of intriguing sportswomen in literature. Over the last century, women's athletics has undergone a dramatic transition in colleges, high schools, and recreational leagues across the United States. The initial drive for this transition came from gradual changes in the realms of physical education and amateur sport in the late 1950s and 1960s. The remarkable enhancements in opportunities for women in sports and the evolving perception of female athletes were set in motion by the resurgence of a grassroots feminist movement during the late 1960s and 1970s. The acceptance of feminist concepts into broader popular culture cemented the belief that athletics can help girls and women achieve their goals. With the passing of Title IX of the 1972 Federal Education Amendments, a legislation prohibiting gender discrimination in educational settings, political campaigners for women's rights institutionalized this mentality, ensuring women's legal entitlement to an equitable share of athletic opportunities and resources.

Though a sea change in American women's sports can be seen in schools, the media, and on local playing fields, experts are currently investigating the causes and consequences of this historic shift. Interestingly, women have been completely neglected in American sports literature. And few women have written sports novels in America, owing to the fact that they were mostly barred from what appeared to be a

predominantly masculine world of sport from the 1920s to the 1970s. They were not excluded from sport per se, but from the sporting culture in which sport was seen as more than just a means of physical fitness, where sport was seen as a training ground, where sport was supposed to teach vital life lessons, and where sport embodied a cultural myth and ideology. In this society, boys and men not only played athletic games, but men also authored books for boys to read that clarified the moral teachings learned on the field, and every now and then, a male author translated these macho athletic experiences into a novel that the world accepted as 'literature'. Women did not play the same game as men, nor did they write about them in the same way, if they wrote at all. This chapter further looks at the fiction they did write and how it helped to establish a new genre of women's sports fiction in the United States. Women have been adjuncts to hero's achievements at best, major barriers at worst: a basic antagonism between the athlete and his women has been a mainstay of American male sports fiction for a century, from Jack London and Ring Lardner to Malamud, Coover, and Roth and beyond. Women simply have not built a literary tradition of their own. Women have only contributed one or two percent of this genre's works. Girls' athletics presented a potentially rich subject for fiction prior to the 1920s. At the turn of the century, when describing sports competition at women's universities, Lefkowitz Horowitz has written that "college women played rough, competed keenly, and cheered passionately" (159).

In Margaret Gallaher's *Vassar Stories* published in 1899 and Julia Augusta Shwartze's *Vassar Studies* published in 1899, the rivalry between female athletes is great, the emotions are unladylike, and the player's ethics are not always exceptional, according to us. But competition between girls and women ended in the 1920s, and women writers lost their chance to develop a mythology around feminine sports. After

the publication of series books about female athletes by Jessie Graham Flower, Gertrude Morrison, and Edith Bancroft in the 1910s, women appeared to disappear from the scene until the 1940s and 1950s, when Amelia Elizabeth Walden and a few others revived the genre. Although Bancroft wrote five Jane Allen novels between 1917 and 1922, none of them addressed sport seriously. Instead, she went into greater detail with the topic of female sports. The books depict a time when women struggled for the right to vote, won it, and then strangely retreated to become glorified moms once more. In the early women's sports fiction rivalry is reduced, personal achievement is minimised, traditional virtue and decorum hang over the works. While the boy hero in men's fiction is separated from his family to dominate the sporting globe, the girls of these women writers might physically move away from their families for competitive sports, but never abandon them emotionally or psychologically.

However, the heroines' sporting ambitions were gradually relegated to dating and other interests in these novels. The literary scene remained stagnant until the 1970s. Unlike the boys' literature, which articulated a myth of achievement in a competitive environment, female authors did not offer an alternative until the 1970s. Eleanor Clymer and Marion Renick, for example, wrote about boy protagonists and placed a larger emphasis in their works on family, moral values, and gender relations. Other female authors used male pseudonyms in order to pique the interest of young readers. All of these authors went against the boys' sports fiction formula of competition and individualistic achievement. Remarkably, they made the masculine readers imagine a universe of heroic possibility where the weaker political figures could find a place. The 1970s saw the introduction of Betty Frieman's brand of feminism into juvenile sports fiction thanks to writers like R.R. Knudson (1932–

2008), publishing houses like Boslopper and Hayes, and Bettie Lehan Harragan's books like *Games Mother Never Taught You: Corporate Gamesmanship For Women*, which argued that girls' exclusion from competitive team games as girls disadvantaged women in the corporate world.

In his essay "From Jane Allen to "Water Dancer": A Brief History of the Feminist (?) Sports Novel", Michael Oriard points out that Knudson's feminist literature offers a compelling alternative to the traditional masculine sports narrative (17). Knudson recasts the sporting environment as a welcoming and progressive cultural setting. In order to develop a different perspective on sport in American society and to build a place for women in sport literature, Knudson's works focus upon twentieth century concerns surrounding gender and athletics. Her writings offer a feminist sporting myth of the first kind, which makes a distinction between two forms of feminism: one that aims to provide women with equal chances, and the other that imagines a different kind of femininity. She believes that girls are capable of achieving whatever feat that guys are capable of. Men have authority, and women are entitled to and capable of having an equal part of that power. According to the alternative, male dominance is fundamentally damaging, and one should reject it for good. In this mode of feminine way of being, death-dealing power is foregone in favour of something more life-giving. Jenifer Levin imagines this kind of image in her *Water Dancer*, and Carol Anshaw explores it in her *Aquamarine*.

Water Dancer by Jenifer Levin was published at a time when women writers were engaging with sport for the first time, more or less by accident. The majority of these female writers have acknowledged the centrality of sports in American culture, but mainly to parody or criticise it. *Water Dancer* stands out in the midst of this debunking, adapting the sporting arena to women's experience in a whole new way. It

is a novel with a female heroine as well as one that‘s very much about sport and gender. It is the story of Dorey Thomas, a marathon swimmer who trains with a male coach, Sarge Olssen, to swim across the still-unconquered San Antonio Strait in Washington, a long, hazardous swim that claimed the life of Sarge’s own son two years prior. Levin assembles a variety of representative types in her interest in sport and gender. Sarge, the coach and a former world-class marathon swimmer, is a tough competitor who must conquer and control whatever he touches, whether it‘s the water or the people in his life. Sarge’s feminine polar opposite is Iiana, a cliff diver who has given up her own public life to be wife, mother, and godmother to the young men Sarge has coached since his own swimming career ended.

The dominant Sarge and the loving Iiana had been crushed by their son’s death, driving them apart until Dorey Thomas shows up at Sarge’s swimming camp, begging to be trained. Dorey is a young woman who appears neither masculine nor feminine, less androgynous than asexual, a young woman who appears uneasy on land but attractive in the sea. In the beginning of the story, Iliana observes Dorey’s essence in the lines:

> Sometimes Matt stood in the doorway, a mixture of pride and confusions to which he lent his own noise, but more often than not he‘d seemed to her physically set apart from the rest and not just because he was her son. It was something about his way of standing, arms folded across the chest and eyes waiting. Always waiting, alertly. To those who didn’t know he’d seemed to have Sarge’s sureness, a total confidence of roots firmly planted. In reality he’d been much less sure, but this he’d camouflaged magnificently with a sharp cutting edge of defiance so there was something steely about him. Except for the question mark around the eyes, anticipation, bravado,

> wondering. And there was absolutely nothing about this woman across the table that reminded Ilana of him or of those summers or of those brisk, gleaming young men. Perhaps it was only the contrast. (33)

Sarge's more sensitive male friend, Tycho, Anne Norton-a woman swimmer who is both more 'feminine' and 'masculine' than Dorey, a combination of cheerleader and tomboy, as she's called, and Anne's weaker, more 'feminine' lover complete the major cast. It is a deliberate move of Levin's to refuse to define 'male' and 'female' in absolute terms. Dorey is portrayed as androgynous in many instances in the narrative. Anne Norton also plays a vital part in conveying to the readers what it means to be vanquished and unceremoniously continue living as is presented in the lines, "I said to myself, Norton, you had better listen, you needed to do this more than anything in the world and you didn't get to succeed at doing it and this need of yours is unfulfilled and maybe, maybe it will never be fulfilled, understand? And if you want to live, lady, then you will have to live with that" (312).

Both Rita Mae Brown in *Sudden Death* and Patricia Nell Warren in *The Front Runner* (1964) have positioned homosexuals as the sporting world's outcasts; Levin goes beyond this obvious conclusion. Dorey discovers her lesbianism during the course of the narrative, while Anne is categorically heterosexual. Levin makes no attempt to equate female athleticism with homosexuality. Iiana finds nurturing rather than erotic pleasure in their relationship: "What these sensations aroused was not erotic-the feeling was for her a vast and pleasing tenderness" (192). Throughout the story, Levin emphasizes that masculinity and femininity are not gender-specific features, and that sexuality is more than passion. Individual beings in Levin's world must each find their own element. In the water and in bed with Iiana, Dorey appears to be at ease. What is natural to some is not natural to others. On contrast to this, Jesse

Austin in *Aqamarine* is not apparently homosexual. Her friendship with Marty Finch cost her the Olympic gold medal. Heather Love in her book, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007) laments the pervasive historical trend within Western representation, where gender and sexual deviant characters frequently meet tragic ends, leaving their narratives appearing as if their deaths were without purpose. The term "same-sex desire" has a long history of being associated with failure, impossibility, and loss (Love 127). Levin clearly presents an alternative to the male sporting myth in the perspective of these bigger concerns. To begin with, Levin writes about marathon swimming as a sport in which men and women compete on an equal footing. She depicts men beating women and women beating men, but she is interested in much more than the equality of competition in the sport.

For one thing, Levin makes the sport of swimming painfully tangible to non-swimmers. After reading the story, no reader can dispute women's 'toughness' or 'courage', those pre-eminently 'male' sporting traits, as they endure twenty-four hours or more in freezing water, tossing waves, opposing currents, boredom, chafing, swelling, stinging, vomiting, begging, and surviving. Dorey encompasses the child, the adolescent, the woman and man in her body. When Sarge watches her swim in the pool in her swimming gear, he realizes, "The only indication of life her breath clouding out consistently, dissipating in air. Breasts and hips hidden, she looked to be of indeterminate sex. Looked small to him, like a preformed adolescent, or a child" (148). She eludes the grace and rootedness of a woman when she removes her gear as Sarge explains, "while she eased out of her cap, gloves, coat…She was suddenly female…all stretched and corded and branched out, like some amphibious tree still growing. Her hair fell thick and loose around her face, down the neck" (149).

Dorey is confident and completely self-absorbed. Even when Tycho examines her medically, she remains unaffected by the results on paper as is admitted in these lines, “Psychotic episode, depressive personality, borderline, schizoid. Schizoid with repressed homosexual tendencies. No, she wanted to tell them, no, uh-uh, don’t you know none of that matters. Crazy, they said. Well maybe. Maybe. Still they said that on land. Had they ever been inside a wave” (241).

When Dorey finally realizes her homosexuality, she is overcome with grief that it had led to tensions between her coach, Sarge and Iiana. She runs away from their home and abandons the city, only to be rescued by Tycho. Yalom’s idea of the abyss, which refers to the existential emptiness one feels when one acknowledges one’s own mortality and the finite nature of existence, is argued for in existential psychology. It asserts that trauma can destroy a person’s existential beliefs, such as the belief that the universe is foreseeable and under one’s control or that life is fair and equitable. Trauma forces us to confront the abyss, leading to existential death anxiety. She suffers from insomnia and is plagued by nightmares. The following lines from the novel underline her trauma undergoing training, alienation and sexuality, “Sometimes what woke her these nights was this feeling of sand in her clenched fingers. She’d swear it was the salt, salt and the sun that had made her so thirsty and nearly crying for water. Then open her fists to see the sand had sifted clean away, only her palm’s flesh glowed back in the dark. She hadn’t reached there yet. Not yet” (146). Tycho, a medical professional and astrologer who supports Dorey during the healing process, helps resolve her issues. Finally she is able to appreciate herself in her element and restart her training.

However, Levin is not interested in a grown-up version of R. R. Knudson’s all-powerful heroine. Rather, she puts competition itself to introspection. Dorey had

felt the desire to be a “giant” (153) in her previous swimming career, she is described as, one who commanded the water and was invincible in it. “I’d worked up an image of myself,” she explains to Iiana, “…big, bad giant, taller than the men and taller than the waves” (194). She eventually experiences nothingness as she concedes,

> But in a practice swim one day, her world changed: I was doing well, I felt fine. Then there was one wave and I caught it right at the critical point and I just stopped. Everything seemed to stop. All I felt was my body, all of the sudden it wasn’t much of a giant’s body for sure. ... I got very small. Very human. And I felt that if, I kept moving, I’d disintegrate and crack apart into the wave, and all these millions of pieces of me would go swirling around and disappear. (186)

Dorey leaves the sport after this devastating revelation, only to return as the novel begins to try to make a comeback. Dorey, on the other hand, has changed. In her conversations with Anne, she notices that they have opposing views about competition. Dorey competes simply against the ocean, whereas Anne is driven to win by her desire to defeat men. However, in the novel’s climactic swim, she also relinquishes her last competitive feeling. She gives up attempting to be a giant forever at the moment where the swim becomes the most difficult, perceiving herself instead as a “water dancer” (221) Dorey gives up on time (she had always counted her strokes as a way to distract herself), gives up thinking about the distant shore as her goal. She learns the little facets of life as well as sports when the narrator says, “The only goal left her—if it could indeed be called a goal—was the rhythmic continuation of strokes through water” (349). Dorey discovers a different type of strength, an intense feeling of being alive, when she surrenders herself to the water, when she dances in her element. At the end of the story, Sarge is able to forgive himself for his son’s death,

whom he had trained and saw drown in the waves. He lets go of the ghosts of his past after seeing Dorey fight the same waters with the lessons he had taught her. He says, “Was this water special water. Different from any other water. Was it separate from all other water on earth because it had his son’s heart thumping faintly through it and a piece of him along with it. There was no San Antonio Strait in the absolute. It changed by the day, by the hour” (358).

Surrender, rather than competition or mastery, becomes a new sort of freedom. This submission, claims Patricia Vertinsky (1994), however bears no resemblance to “masochism”, the ostensibly typical feminine neurosis that feminist psychoanalysts removed from the psychiatric lexicon decades ago (14). To be a water dancer is to exist in one’s body in the world, not to dominate or to be ruled. Levin does not characterize this alternate worldview as ‘feminine’. This novel offers a strong challenge to the traditional sporting ethos of competitiveness, mastery, and control by demonstrating how masculinity and femininity were equally feasible for both sexes. After all, Anne competes in the same manner that Sarge has, and Levin’s viewpoint has been embraced by a number of masculine authors, ranging from Henry Thoreau to Robert Pirsig. However, in light of the male sporting myth and contemporary feminist discourse, it appears reasonable to label this image as feminist. As a result, it is the only unique work of American sports fiction that has made a niche of its own. This is not to say that *Water Dancer* is the only book that has cracked the code on gender in America, that it describes the feminist perspective, or that it lays the groundwork for the development of women’s sports. This work articulates a realistic alternative to the masculine sports myth, which has been almost the only sports myth in American sports fiction. Another alternative has been vividly imagined for the first time.

The examination of sportswomen in American fiction turns its focus to Carol Anshaw's *Aquamarine*, a refined postmodern novel and the second work under scrutiny in this study. Jesse Austin, 17, nearly loses the 100-meter freestyle to an Australian swimmer at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. That moment, frozen in time in the aquamarine of the Olympic pool, haunts Jesse for the rest of her life - or, more accurately, lives. Carol Anshaw shows Jesse Austin in 1990, on the eve of turning forty, occupying three equally plausible lives, with astonishing creativity. Anshaw tells each of these three stories with appealing naturalness, delicate delineations of friendship and love between women and predominately portrays a woman as athlete with grand empathy. As is confessed in the these revealing lines, "And in this split second of finding out she has lost, Jesse realizes she was utterly convinced she would win, that all along she hadn't really given any weight to the possibility of losing. It won't take a scaling down of expectation to accept this defeat, but rather a substantial reconstruction of her notion of herself" (94).

Jesse's bid for the Olympic gold took an unexpected turn as she lost to the Australian athlete Marty Finch, with whom Jesse had once shared a brief yet intense romantic connection. Leading up to the nationals, Jesse had been at the pinnacle of her performance, emerging as an unquestionable sensation in the hundred-meter event. Her remarkable talent had led many to anticipate a new Olympic record under her name, and to achieve this, Jesse tirelessly devoted herself to grueling endurance laps and intense sprint training. Her dedication knew no bounds, with her trainers often having to intervene and pull her out of the pool when her back began to turn a bluish hue due to her exhaustive efforts. Then out of nowhere, Marty was eulogised by the international media as "Australian Water- Eating Machine" (17). Jesse suddenly felt snubbed. Over time, Marty evolved into Jesse's greatest source of

anxiety. Their relationship had initially blossomed when they were both in the Olympic City. At the time, Marty was eighteen but exhibited a maturity that belied her age, giving the impression that she had her life well-mapped. This was a novel experience for Jesse, as it marked her first-ever encounter with love. Her entire adolescence had been consumed by the pool, governed by the precision of stopwatches and the calculations of protein intake, leaving little room for matters of the heart.

Jesse had never been ready for love, never ventured into the territory of heartaches and emotional turmoil. Certainly, she had never anticipated that it would happen with her chief competitor, Marty. To Jesse's surprise, she found herself easily drawn into Marty's allure, her infatuation growing stronger by the day. In contrast, it seemed that Marty had a cunning strategy all along. Perhaps she believed that it would be simpler to best Jesse in the pool if they were entwined outside of it. Jesse, smitten by Marty, found it increasingly difficult to maintain her ruthless competitive edge, and her burning desire to vanquish Marty began to wane. Even when the final results were announced, Jesse clung to a hopeful vision of a future with Marty, her romantic yearning overshadowing her fierce drive to triumph in the pool. The reader feels the naivety of young Jesse in the these lines: "Jesse feels they have attained a great height, as though glory is a wide, flat place they will inhabit forever, rather than a sharp peak that will quickly slide them down another side, to ground level. But she isn't looking down now, only out, toward the limitless possibilities implicit in having attained this one" (7).

A striking aspect of the narrative is the strained relationship between Jesse and her mother. Their interactions are marked by a palpable emotional distance and insensitivity towards each other. Jesse's father, a small-town druggist, had passed

away, leaving Jesse to grapple with lingering resentment toward her mother, who, in her eyes, always carried an air of superiority. Frances, Jesse's mother, was a high school English teacher who displayed little interest in her daughter's achievements in the pool. To her, all sporting endeavours seemed trivial and unworthy of attention. Furthermore, their family dynamics were further complicated by William, Jesse's mentally challenged sibling, who required a significant portion of their attention and care. Jesse, as the 'normal' child, was expected to excel, given what appeared to be a privileged advantage. Through the lens of Jesse's perspective, it becomes evident that the foundation of her character is in part shaped by the emotional rejection she has experienced from her mother. This dynamic adds depth and complexity to her character as she navigates her journey in both the swimming pool and her personal life. As she admits to her girlfriend Kit,

> She always just dismissed my swimming, always made sure to point out to me what a waste of time she thought it was for anyone with brains. She never even came down to Mexico City. So you figure this out. Of course she's very tricky in giving approval and holding it back. She gives just enough so you understand the other ninety-nine percent is being withheld. (92)

Each of Jesse's lives is a result of decisions she took after Mexico City; each is marked by the pain of past loss; and each is defined by love lost and found. She has a constant feeling of incompleteness and is always far from being content about her life. She is ridden with doubt and delusions. She cheats on her unsuspecting husband Neal just for some adrenaline rush with her boyfriend. In the second and third stories likewise, Jesse's decisions after her fateful participation in Olympics have led her to marry, divorce, and remain single, to love both men and women, and to live in and out of her hometown of Missouri. But the moment she cannot get back to "…the time

concealed behind the aquamarine" (47) has always tormented Jesse. *Aquamarine* seamlessly weaves together three scenarios connected by the emotional ties that bind Jesse to the people in her past, who are also part of her tormenting present: her eccentric godmother, her adoring retarded brother, her hard-hearted mother, and the elusive, seductive Australian, Marty Finch, Tom Bellini, a rich businessman who flirts with her in the first story and whom she divorces in the third story.

Aquamarine plays exhilarating variations on the theme of lost love and examines the unlived lives running parallel to the one could choose for Jesse. So the reader gets to explore three versions of what her life could be after that pivotal moment. In the first story, she is married to a guy and still living in her hometown in Missouri, but she is miserable. She is expecting her first child and has an unlawful relationship with Wayne, a teenager who works as a skywriter. Wayne is the final guy who can bring back memories of her athletic days. He reminds her of her blunder with Marty as she recollects her loss,

> All of this so that her hand, when it slaps the tile at the end, will do so the smallest increment of measurable time after Marty's. Taking the biggest moment of her life and blowing it off. For love. Making a spectacular gesture Marty would never know about, and if she did, would probably feel more contempt for than appreciation. The definition of folly. (190)

Despite the fact that she recognizes it as a horrible love, she continues to deceive her trusting husband. Jesse is not married in the second story, but she is dating a lady and works as a Professor of Literature in New York, and she is still sad at times, though in a different way than in the first. For the first time as a couple, she and her girlfriend, Kit, travel to New Jerusalem. She ponders her relationship with her

hometown on the way to Missouri, “Feeling far above and beyond New Jerusalem, and at the same time romanticizing it like crazy. Longing to be instantly away, and alternately to stay forever…” (88). When she returns to her hometown in this ‘second’ life, her thoughts are also on her Olympic vanquishment. She is afraid that Kit will abandon her and that their relationship will fizzle out quickly. She is unsure how she feels about Kit. Kit makes her feel lighter, and their risky connection is exciting. This aspect of thrill is what keeps her tethered to Kit, despite her suspicions that Kit will not reciprocate. Swimming has taken away from her the sense of fulfilment, yet the excitement she used to get from it lingers. The fact that she needs a tinge of excitement in her now mundane life is the only reason she wants to live with Kit. Yet she is doubtful whether Kit will stick to her till the end. Kit is from a rich uptown family and an aspiring actress. When Jesse’s mother decides to marry, she hands the responsibility of William to Jesse. Jesse disquieted by the fact that her finances would not be enough to support the medical expenses of William. She has foreboding that Kit would leave her as it would be impossible for her to endure William’s abnormality. Yet Kit does not sound shallow and frivolous, unlike a soap opera actress. She saves William from a mischief that the high school boys play on him. She grabs the cherry cracker from William and in the process blows off her fingers. It means that Kit is someone quite other than Jesse has been able to imagine. Her vacation to her homeland brings out homophobia in an explicit way. Her mother is hostile and inconsiderate to her, and her childhood friend Laurel is horrified to see her with Kit. These sentences vividly highlight how she recalls the shame and disgrace she feels when people write her off,

> Sometimes this still happens. Because of the life Jesse lives, and the tolerant strip of territory she inhabits, she almost never runs into it anymore. When it

> does happen, it's always in surprising ways, from unexpected directions. A cleaning woman who quit in burst of Spanish Jesse didn't understand, but of course did. The new poetry instructor who made a dinner date to "network" with Jesse, and then, a few days later, called to cancel with some excuse peculiar enough that Jesse got the drift. (128)

Judith Butler's work revolves around the concept that gender is a social construct, shaped and perpetuated by language, cultural norms, and social practices, rather than being an inherent or unchanging aspect of an individual. According to Butler, gender is something we do rather than something we are. She claims that through our actions, attitudes, and facial expressions, we constantly perform our gender (522). She argues that the boundaries between male and female are fluid and constantly changing, rather than set or inherent. Butler and other gender theorists contend that gender is more a function of what one does or performs than of what one is. Gender theory frequently challenges the idea that features associated with the feminine gender, such as passivity, cooperation, and a focus on relationships, are subordinate to traits associated with the male gender, such as aggression, competitiveness, and a focus on social norms and laws. Only under her lesbian character has Jesse comparatively been able to establish the life she desires after the Olympics, a life of continual challenge and achievement, according to Anshaw. Lesbian Jesse, unlike her heterosexual counterparts, continues to direct her physique and drive toward her own goals.

Aquamarine does deal with themes of personal identity and self-discovery. In terms of gender representation, the novel offers a nuanced and multifaceted perspective on womanhood. The novel challenges traditional gender roles and expectations, portraying women who are independent, self-sufficient, and sexually

confident. At the same time, it acknowledges the societal pressures and limitations that women face, particularly when it comes to issues of sexuality and motherhood. Through these characters and their experiences, *Aquamarine* offers a complex and nuanced portrayal of womanhood that acknowledges both its joys and its challenges. The novel celebrates the diversity and complexity of female experience, challenging readers to question their own assumptions and biases about gender and identity. Jesse expresses her opinion in the following lines while being very aware of how the public perceives her. “Even with so much time passing between these sorts of events, they always clip her, and then make her sorry for herself, and then the person locked in place against her and then for everyone, for the benighted planet” (128).

Finally, in the third version, Jesse is leading a life that is somewhere in the middle of the first two narratives. She is not married or in a relationship, but is living with her children in Florida. She at one point in her third life, in which she is a single mother raising two children and managing a swimming facility in Florida, expects her young daughter to take up swimming, and she reminiscences about her heydays in the pool. Yet she withdraws from pursuing the dream to train her daughter as she is struck by a thought that the narrator elaborates as: “The only thing she could have been wishing for, really, was a replication of her own chance, one she could this time not blow, an erasure of her own vanquishment with her daughter’s success. When she realized this, it made her feel terribly small” (148).

A line about Jesse's son, Anthony, in her third alternative life is mentioned near the end of the novel, explaining Jesse's own life: “Sorting through all the ways he can be until he gets to whom he’s going to become” (151). This line best encapsulates *Aquamarine*. Her life jostles indeterminately because of that single episode of mystery and illusion in the Olympic Games. Her vanquishment unhinges her life and she is

clueless about where it would take her. In all three of her possible lives, no one ever cares about her performance at the Olympics. Whereas Jesse deeply feels the pangs of failure she encountered two decades ago. The finishing times they had set 1968 Olympics have long since been passed by the newer, faster girls. She is so entangled in her life that she apprehensively considers whether she may have concocted this sexual relationship with Marty as a means to alleviate the pain of her defeat. As she reveals her thoughts in these lines:

> What happened that afternoon is something no one even cares about anymore. Except me, and I'm tired of caring. Sometimes I even think I've made up most of Marty Finch, invented this big betrayal to transform my own plain loss into something complicated. For sure, I've changed her in my mind over these years. Aged her, made her more sophisticated. It's like I keep translating her into whatever I need to keep the anger going. (62)

She is troubled immensely by that incident and she persistently questions herself: if she had not met Marty, her destiny might have been different. The excruciating sense of loss and vanquishment is accentuated in the following lines, as Jesse is overpowered by self-pity as is found in these lines, "The question of what if. The idea that somewhere out in the multi-verse there's a world where I turned right instead of left, said yes instead of no" (146). Although Anshaw only hints at the events that changed Jesse's life in each of the stories, her vanquishment and its reasons are definitely evident in the narratives.

The readers are intrigued by the possibility of what *Aquamarine* provokes about the nature of the individual and her power to determine the course of her life. Some of the same people appeared in all three stories or two of them and it is

fascinating to see how Jesse's interaction with them changed in each story, not to mention how they changed too. Applying Yalom's existential philosophy to Jesse reveals a wide range of possibilities for introspection. Yalom's existential psychology emphasizes the four "givens" of human existence: death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness (34). He believes that these givens are fundamental aspects of the human condition and that individuals must confront them in order to achieve personal growth and fulfilment. Jesse undergoes what Yalom calls "the abyss" which refers to the overwhelming sense of groundlessness, emptiness, and despair that individuals may experience when they confront the fundamental givens of existence, such as death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness. The abyss represents a state of existential crisis, in which individual feels as if she life lack purpose, direction, or meaning. This can lead to feelings of depression, anxiety, and despair, as individuals struggle to find a sense of significance or value in their lives. Unable to sleep and struck with indecisiveness, Jesse speaks of her state of mind, "No, it's my past…My aquatic past. Something about that nerves me up. Gets me to thinking old thoughts…I worry I was my best self then, my best version of me. And I can never get back to her" (67). After her Olympic failure, she becomes a lesser being because she loses esteem in her own eyes and the eyes of the world. Jesse seems to have lingering sense of this crisis in all her presumed lives in *Aquamarine*. The third narrative ends with a sad note which connotes her uneasiness and loss of will:

> She should pry herself away from here, light out for the territory, wherever that might be. Sometimes, particularly on windless days like this one, she thinks she might truly die with longing for something to get her out of here, something to at least point her in some direction. Instead she sits here on the

> hood of her car, or lies on the sofa late at night, watching TV for clues…just leaves her sitting here all turned around, looking forward to the past. (191)

This study posits that these women authors, namely Jenifer Levin and Carol Anshaw, weave stories in an unconventional dimension without mimicking the ways of male authors who borrow hugely from myth and concepts of masculinity. Both Levin and Anshaw well aware of their positions about gender; theirs is a more humane approach. Levin is rather philosophical and metaphysical in engaging with her protagonist while, Anshaw is comparatively more worldly and pragmatic in perceiving three parallel unsatisfied lives for Jesse. Vanquishment is dealt in a metaphysical way by Levin wherein her protagonist, Dorey learns lessons of life when she comes upon her vanquishment while double crossing the Catalina Channel. She had rolled onto her back and refused to continue. It was an easy swim, everything was supportive of her effort but she suffered a mental block and she could not continue. Under Sarge's tutelage, she learns and unlearns philosophies about life and swimming.

Nations' social customs have been laboriously manufactured through the printing press and media, as well as in educational institutions, religious institutions, and several kinds of popular culture. They have also been enacted in trade unions, funerals, protest rallies, and uprisings. As it is ritualistically enacted in Olympic extravaganzas, large rallies, military demonstrations, and flag-waving customs, nationalism both creates and performs social difference, making it a part of people's identities. Sport-induced nationalism is androcentric and historically has been an all-male communion. The rights and resources of the nation-state are not equally accessible to women and men in any country in the world. Women's access to the resources of the nation-state is restricted and justified by contentious systems of

cultural representations. In order to justify their inclusion in national rights and eventually citizenship, women who were marginalised and denied access to the resources of the state had to contend with their perceptions of them as being subhuman and abnormal as well as evoke sources of information, symbols, and experience that could help them overcome their stereotypical representations in nationhood. The authors of these American novels have made a concerted effort to steer clear of the masculine eulogy of the American Dream. The American dream, which is characterised by riches and fame, has been dislodged by Levin and Anshaw, who have painstakingly used their intricacies to convey their stories in an original manner. These female narratives downplay nationalistic sentiments since these sportswomen aspire for higher ideals of self- fulfilment and assimilation.

Anshaw uses the available space for sportswomen's achievement by focusing readers' attention on lesbian athletes, a norm that most following writers of book-length women's sport fiction have adopted. Women's sport literature published in the U.S. since Title IX encourages readers to join sportswomen on their varied quests. The novels, in particular, provide for an analysis of how it feels and what it means to be feminine and physical, ambitious, competitive, disciplined, and skilled in situations that allow for partial opportunity for women. Their authors allow readers to take sportswomen seriously and learn as much as one can about oneself, athletics, and what women are like when they choose to compare and contrast themselves with one another. Their art moves female athletes' depiction away from cheesecake worries and negative or servile male analogies. The readers might analyse the difficulties of achieving competence in the company of other women while also publicly displaying female strength and self-definition in front of eyes that are often restricted by sexist, classist, racist, and heterosexist expectations. Significantly, despite the presence of

both sensuality and sex in *Water Dancer*, Dorey is portrayed as a fully embodied person, a real, breathing human being in her own right and defiantly not an object to be used for others' amusement. Levin gives readers with the impression that women's participation in athletics is both empowering and significant, and that this fact can help athletes - and those affected by their life - to be full.

Indeed, the four female characters in these narratives appear to undergo what Irvin D. Yalom would term the 'abyss' after encountering setbacks in their careers and facing personal challenges. This abyss represents a profound existential crisis, characterized by feelings of groundlessness and emptiness. What distinguishes these female characters is their early and acute recognition of this existential crisis, which they confront more directly and transparently than their male counterparts in sports fiction. They grapple with the complexities of their personal and professional lives, demonstrating a heightened awareness of the internal turmoil and existential questioning that accompanies such experiences. This heightened introspection and self-awareness contribute to the depth and complexity of their character development in these narratives.

Koni stands forth as a powerful symbol, encapsulating the intricate battle against gender bias and societal limitations. Her journey sheds light on the challenging path that women traverse as they chase their passions, all the while striving to break down the barriers that stand in their way. Conversely, Arya's character aligns with normative expectations when it comes to her feminine attributes and her heterosexual relationship with Arvind. Arya unmistakably displays pronounced nationalist characteristics, radiating an overwhelming sense of pride in her identity as a champion athlete. She takes great joy in being acknowledged for her pivotal role in motivating numerous young girls to pursue sports as a viable

profession. Arya enthusiastically embraces the recognition of her substantial impact on Indian tennis, as evidenced by her illustrious decade-long international career, regarding it as a source of immense national pride and achievement. Within the context of American novels, there is a heightened emphasis and exploration of gender concepts. In the course of the narrative, Dorey comes to a self-realization about her lesbian identity, while Anne's orientation is unambiguously heterosexual. Levin skilfully underscores the notion that characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity transcend gender boundaries, and that sexuality encompasses more than just passionate attraction. Within Levin's world, each individual is challenged to discover their own authentic self and find their unique place or element. According to Anshaw, it is primarily through Jesse's lesbian identity that she finds the capacity to create the life she envisions after her Olympic career. This new chapter in her life is characterized by on-going challenges and personal achievements. Anshaw suggests that lesbian Jesse, in contrast to her heterosexual counterparts, maintains a strong sense of agency over her physical prowess and ambition, channelling them toward her own individual goals and aspirations.

Compared to novels with male athletes as protagonists, those featuring sportswomen often place less emphasis on themes of nationalism. Works such as *Koni, What's Good about Falling, Water Dancer*, and *Aquamarine* concentrate deeply into the intricate and personal struggles of their female protagonists. In these narratives, the focus tends to be on the individual journey and the unique challenges faced by women athletes. Conversely, in the Indian narratives as compared to American novels, there is a recurrent theme of national pride and the glory associated with being a national champion. The characters in these Indian stories frequently reference their nation and the prestige attached to representing it as champions in their

respective sports. This contrast highlights the cultural and thematic differences between these literary works, with the Indian narratives often intertwining personal journeys with a strong sense of national identity and achievement.

CHAPTER 4

AUTO/BIOGRAPHIES OF INDIAN AND AMERICAN SPORTSMEN:

THE NICE GUY WHO FINISHED FIRST, A SHOT AT HISTORY,

THE GREATEST: MY OWN STORY AND *OPEN*

Writing a sport autobiography is about representing the self, confessing the self, and perhaps even discovering the self. Lately, the purpose sometimes becomes exposing the self, sensationalizing the self, and certainly in our celebrity culture marketing the self-all recurring motifs in the chorus of the books that chronicle sportsperson's history as variable versions of 'Song of Myself'. Some sport autobiographies are written in a mechanical way-a technical account of public events and on-the-field accomplishments, with the 'as told to' professional writer using seemingly few personal contributions from the sportsperson.

However, many of these individuals transcend being merely a patchwork of outstanding moments culminating in "that championship season". The fact that athletes who display such bravery often come from the world's most impoverished social and economic regions adds to their attractiveness. In fact, it's easier to think of sports icons as "one of us"-men and women who, via their successes and setbacks, serve as a constant reminder of our shared humanity. This chapter investigates the select autobiographies of Indian and American sportsmen to analyse the impact of vanquishment on their personality, gender conceptions and nationalistic pride. The top sports autobiographies use a distinct selection procedure that provides an interpretation in addition to facts and figures to present the story in a richer and more comprehensive manner. The sportsperson might study the various bits and pieces of

his experiences until he comes upon a design, a pattern. Whether this pattern is the Horatio Alger rags-to-riches or a trajectory of rise, fall, and recovery punctuated by a trauma that provides the occasion for the triumph of the human will or spirit, the shaping energy is what Roy Pascal in his classic study of autobiography calls "…a certain power of the personality over circumstance" (184).

The power of personality articulated in autobiographies is intimately intertwined with subjectivity. However, sports literature, especially autobiographical accounts penned by athletes, has often overlooked this crucial dimension. In his book *Sporting Lives: Metaphor and Myth in American Sports Autobiographies* (2008), James W. Pipkin illuminates how sports autobiographies offer a tangible insight into an athlete's construction of identity and the broader implications of their subjective encounters with sports. This research endeavours to closely examine the rhetorical strategies and figurative language, including metaphors and other imagery, employed within sports autobiographies. These literary devices offer a concrete window into how athletes shape their sense of self and the profound ramifications of their subjective involvement in sports. This chapter utilizes autobiographies as primary sources to decipher the subjective expressions of athletes' experiences, which provide a unique perspective on sports distinct from that offered by journalists, historians, and sociologists.

The central focus of this chapter is to explore the athletes' mind-set as they prepare for competitions and how they react to both success and failure, with a particular emphasis on the latter. While it is a common belief that many athletes may not be inherently introspective, this study seeks to unearth the value of their autobiographical accounts. It recognizes that the essence of compelling sports autobiographies lies in the stories athletes choose to recount, the specific moments

they extract from their reservoir of memories. These narratives, akin to great storytelling, prioritize personal experiences over mere facts. While factual accuracy and historical truth remain pertinent aspects of autobiographies, they pale in comparison to the profound and distinct truths athletes unveil when narrating their personal and intimate experiences.

People who embark on the journey of writing their life stories often do so with the underlying belief that they possess a special or unique quality. However, there is a nuanced dimension to this notion: despite the autobiographer's assertion of their distinctiveness, their life narrative often carries a broader social significance and resonates with universal themes. Roy Pascal's perspective aligns with this idea, contending that the more distinct and individual a personality is, the more it tends to encapsulate and reflect wider social trends, entire generations, or even specific social classes (255). In essence, extraordinary individuals often serve as microcosms of the societies or eras from which they emerge. Contemporary historical viewpoints have evolved to encompass a more comprehensive understanding of history, extending beyond traditional narratives to include the private sphere, gender dynamics, and the emotional dimensions of life. This shift underscores the recognition that cultural influences and societal pressures profoundly shape the way we represent and perceive personal and private experiences. It highlights how personal narratives can serve as mirrors reflecting the broader cultural and social contexts in which they unfold.

Assumptions about various aspects such as the body, childhood, and play-central themes in sports autobiographies-are fundamentally shaped by cultural influences. Sporting lives are not written in cultural isolation. Writers create their stories by combining a few chosen events into a coherent narrative, but they are also limited and directed by the prevalent autobiographical writing standards. In his book

Media Sport Stars: Masculinities and Moralities (2001), Garry Whannel shows how the media arranges and crafts sports stars' lives into narrative form, continually rewriting and altering them over time in accordance with shifting presumptions and prevailing concerns. Whannel lists the two primary structural types of sports biography that he believes exist (126). The first of them, known as the "golden success story", is frequently recounted following a significant victory in sports. It follows a conventional chronological path through life and profession, with the triumphant moment usually serving as the book's introduction and conclusion. The less well-known sports figure, on the other hand, favours the so-called "ups and downs" narrative, which oscillates between success and failure without culminating in victory. In one of its variants, the "rise-and-fall" narrative, it contrasts an initial ascent to glory with a subsequent diminishing of talent, inspiration, and success.

Whannel emphasises the significance of these techniques as guides, models, or maps for narrating future sporting lives, while acknowledging that the stories produced within these fundamental structures are, of course, influenced by shifting notions of masculinity and morality (167). Rarely are sports autobiographies conceited. A lot of them exhibit modesty and self-effacement. Readers are interested in learning what goes on within these athletes during the decisive competitive moments that set them apart from regular people, and they will purchase these books to learn the facts. Sports autobiographies, on the other hand, are almost always badly written and fall short of their promise to expose the athletes' inner struggles. One can infer that their ability to play without thinking about it is the basic foundation of their success. They have the power to silence all internal distractions. So it makes sense that when probed about their experiences and abilities as athletes, they would become startlingly inarticulate. Even the most accomplished athletes appeared more

comfortable speaking about the abilities and methods, as well as evaluating the character traits, of others as writers. The memories of individuals were often intermingled with the narratives of rivals, groups, contests, and the society in which the life was lived, often straddling the line between autobiography and biography. Thus, not many athletic lives may be considered journals of introspection and revelation.

The primary focus of this chapter revolves around how athletes and sports figures perceive and grapple with failure and defeat in their athletic careers. It seeks to understand the strategies and coping mechanisms they employ to surmount these challenges in their pursuit of, or endeavour to maintain, glory in their respective sports. It is important to note that this study refrains from making judgments about the literary quality of the autobiographies used as examples. Instead, its aim is to analyze how sporting autobiographies weave the theme of vanquishment into their narratives. These autobiographies are presented as instances rather than as models of exemplary writing. The increasing pressure on athletes to attain peak performance often gives rise to a heightened fear of vanquishment. Therefore, there is a need for further research into the phenomenon of the fear of failure in the realm of sports.

Indian sports autobiographies accessible include those of athletes in team sports, particularly cricket. Several cricket autobiographies have been published in the country in the last decade. Cricket is India's most popular sport, practically regarded as a 'religion', yet most of the individual athletes' challenges go unrecognised as a result. The fundamental difference between players who participate in individual sports and those who participate in group sports is that in individual sports, success and failure are completely carried individually by the athlete, but in group sports, success and failure are shared among the players. As a result, the focus of this

research is on autobiographies published by individual athletes, with a focus on how they portray themselves to their audience. This thesis contends that Indian sports autobiographies are expressions of the athlete's personal decisions, athletic identity, and family narrative, and that these elements remain at the forefront of their minds as they write their autobiography. Rahul Dravid is an outstanding Indian cricketer, a prodigy in his own right, a model of limited flair completely aware of his limitations, who based his game on platonic purity of technique — and paradoxically became enormously successful by adhering to the fundamental ideals of virtue. From the beginning of his tenure at Lord's in 1996, he was consistent, recognised, and appreciated. His game, on the other hand, was far too flawless, correct, and tidy to have an everlasting public appeal. He was overly reliant on technical accuracy rather than the heady natural aptitude that Indians have always admired.

The Nice Guy Who Finished First (2005), a biography of Dravid, is a melancholic, philosophical work that follows his illustrious cricketing journey from 1996 to 2004. Rahul's cricket displays an instinctive sense of discipline. His accomplishments were never emphasised. He only came up in writing and remarked about when other players were not as consistent. In sports as in life, individuals who are more flamboyant attract more attention than those who quietly carry out their duties. His place in the team was not guaranteed, and his slow rate of scoring was one of the reasons why he did not have the same level of popularity as Ganguly or subsequently Sehwag. The shorter version of the game was definitely not designed for him. To be selected for ODIs, Rahul has to regularly demonstrate his worth. Talks about Rahul's one-day career being over would frequently follow a run of abject performances. Even his ardent supporters lost confidence as a result of his poor ODI performance. Rahul regularly encountered what Yalom refers to as "the abyss" as a

result of surpassing his limitations in an effort to demonstrate his ability. He may have become fixated on the idea that all of his accomplishments would be for naught if he failed to pass the most difficult test in the world, an assured berth in the Indian ODI line-up. This might have unintentionally given him failure anxiety. Rahul's issue was not so much with technique or talent as it was with a mental barrier that prevented him from playing his natural game. The best defence against vanquishment is not to adopt a defensive mindset. Those were trying times, but he chose the pragmatic course of acknowledging that others had the right to be picked ahead of him since they had consistently outperformed him in one-day cricket. Rahul became increasingly apprehensive about his future in international cricket as the charges and insinuations mounted. In his biography, he mentions seeking the guidance of B. P. Bam, a sports psychologist whose support since 1997 has helped him navigate the additional pressures. Bam encouraged him to focus on his abilities and strengths.

A less determined individual would have given up and focused on the five-day game instead. However, the steel in the soul eventually shone through. In his biography, he describes an instance in which he is unduly gloomy. In test matches, he was also having problems converting his high scores into centuries. When he was nearing a landmark, his psychologist helped him realise that it was totally normal for a batsman to think about it. Mr Bam, though, reminded him that he needed to return to his immediate goal, which was to confront the next delivery. Dravid gradually regained his mental equilibrium under Mr Bam's guidance. Before long, massive wins were on the horizon. Dravid's batting suffered a similar dry spell during the Indian tour to Australia in 1999. Rahul was jabbing and pushing at deliveries on that tour. This could have stemmed from a strong desire to excel, coupled with the assumption that proving oneself as a successful cricketer required a stellar performance in

Australia. Dravid had enjoyed a successful run in international cricket for the preceding 12 months, so the downturn might have been attributed to a temporary slump. However, Dravid himself might not have been at his peak. It was likely one of those rare occasions when Dravid's astute judgment backfired. He seems to have become fixated on the idea that all his achievements would be in vain if he could not pass cricket's most challenging test. This could have led to an irrational fear of accidental failure.

His issue was not one of skill or talent; rather, it was a mental block that prevented him from playing his natural game. No one knew this better than Dravid, that a defensive mindset is not the best remedy for failure. He had studied biographies of athletes other than cricketers. He was particularly interested in learning how various sport personalities mentally prepare themselves prior to games. He reminiscences about his days at Kent to play in county cricket in his biography: "With his continued hard work in the nets and a change of scene to play county cricket for Kent helped him overcome this lean patch. I really admired the way they were able to switch off after their innings or after the game. They'd go out to the pub, have a drink, and socialise - things I was never doing as a Ranji Trophy player because I'd just go back and still keep thinking about cricket" (1094).

The fact that Dravid kept wickets in ODIs because the team needed him to, rather than because he enjoyed it or was the best at it, exemplifies his dedication to Indian cricket. With the exception of the occasional one-day international, Rahul had not held a wicket in competitive cricket for several years. His acceptance of a new and potentially dangerous role won him the admiration of his teammates and supporters. He did not moan about the additional physical labour or worry that keeping wickets would endanger his career or put too much of a strain on him. Both Rahul Dravid and

Team India had a fantastic time in Australia in 2003-04. Dravid was chosen Player of the Series, and India retained the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Dravid was adamant about not repeating the technical and mental errors he had made in Australia in 1999-2000. Mr Bam claims that Dravid had mastered visualisation and self-talk by that time.

Self-talk is a debate with yourself in which you are two lawyers debating a case in court, as well as the judge. The defence lawyer inside of you must establish a strong enough case to persuade the judge inside of you to issue a 'verdict' in your favour (Vygotsky 2012). Visualisation entails recalling past experiences, forecasting future events, and picturing scenarios. The sportsperson must take command of and regulate this process through regular practise. He should refresh his memory by recalling the proper action and strengthening his muscle memory. His reactions will become more natural as a result. The bat then begins to strike the ball in the intended direction. Furthermore, if he has already made a mistake, he attempts to imagine how he would have fared if he had not made that error. If he uses this method constructively, he will remember the one time he did not make that error while forgetting about the other times he did. Visualizing the future is a difficult task. Dravid writes in his biography about the technique that saved his game,

> It all comes down to increasing your dedication, focus, and signal response. Due to a setback in the preceding match or series, a batsman playing at the international level may be under pressure. He is familiar with his opponents as well as the location of the next game. He should think and visualise himself performing in such environment. This will allow him to develop appropriate responses to the signals he will encounter at the venue. (1932)

Dravid discussed failure and the sense of being vanquished at a recent conference organised by GoSports Foundation Athletes Conclave for young athletes,

> When you fail, you tend to brush a lot of things under the carpet. You try to blame someone, find an excuse. But it is a really good opportunity to learn about yourself. The greatest players I played with looked at it (failure) as an opportunity. So you need to learn to fail well. But such attitude costs you an opportunity to fail well and understand what your weaknesses are. It robs you the chance to understand at that stage what are the skills that you have and what's lacking. Unless you're one of the privileged few, you're always going to fail more than you succeed. As sportsmen, we all feel that and feel the pain of it. (GoSports, Lecture)

According to Dravid, the finest athletes harness the power of failure as a catalyst for growth. They achieve this by maintaining an unwavering honesty with themselves and by astutely identifying areas that require improvement. Vanquishment, for these individuals, serves as a valuable benchmark against which they measure their progress and success.

It is important to comprehend Abhinav Bindra's background and the events that led him to the pinnacle of his sport in order to fully appreciate his accomplishment as the 2008 Olympic champion. A reading of his autobiography will convey his single-mindedness and incredible attention to detail. His beautifully crafted autobiography, *A Shot at History: My Obsessive Journey to Olympic Gold* (2011) provides greater depth of insight into his exhilarating work schedule. He confesses, "I'd overtrain, become restless after dinner, and go back to the range. This perfectionism hurt me because I was always unsatisfied, yet it also helped me" (28).

While recounting his initial exploits as a shooter, Bindra recollects how experts denied him early success. When he earned perfect shots without losing a single mark in his first appearance in District, State, and National Championships, the officials were taken aback, and they refused to accept his results. What their eyes had seen was beyond their comprehension. They claimed that his pellets, which had a round rather than flat nose, were illegal. He illuminates the inner struggles of a sportsman when he endures conflicts within the institutional system and within himself; he exclaims, "Doubt shadows the sportsman. Stalks him. Affects him. Doubt goes with me everywhere-to the arena, to the practice range…doubt is my enemy because it unnerves me, makes me overthink, but it's also, in some weird way, my friend because it helps me become a sharper shooter" (40).

As he freely admits, Bindra is completely fixated on all facets of his shooting-his gun, his approach, his diet, his body, and his mind. He was one of the favourites in the 19-meter air rifle final at the Olympics in Athens. He had been in great form in practice. After qualifying, he placed third out of 47 competitors vying for a spot in the eight-man final. He came within a hair's breadth of a gold medal, and much closer to a third. Then, in the final, he finished seventh out of eight shooters. Recollecting his vanquishment in Athens, he writes,

> All my life didn't matter anymore, because now, on this Athens afternoon, I was nothing, a sporting irrelevance. Only sport can do this to you, strip you naked in an instant in public, step on your dreams, make four years of practice incidental. In this, sport can seem absent of grey: you triumph, you fail. Shooting is worse, you can't even blame anyone, cannot excuse failure as a rival's inspired day, a referee's error, a lucky bounce. Only one person is responsible for defeat. You. (14)

He further confesses, “But it was more than that, for losing I had known, losing I didn’t like, but losing I wasn’t scared of. This had a different taste, this was a collapse of talent precisely when it was supposed to bloom. I didn’t want to speak to anyone, see anyone, say anything. I was mystified by my own incompetence” (15). In his loss at Athens, Bindra experiences what Yalom calls existential crisis. We give our lives significance by participating in endeavours that we value and that serve a purpose greater than ourselves. Since our own efforts are what provide meaning to the world, meaninglessness and a lack of purpose are threats that surface through breaks in our routines and existential angst. He has to cope with this inevitable setback and adversity in his athletic career. By developing resilience and mental toughness, Bindra learns to overcome obstacles and persevere through difficult times. Moreover, this failure can be read as a mythic component with moral and instructional overtones within the nationalistic story. When a sporting vanquishment is presented in the context of nationalist rhetoric, it can be used as an example of perseverance, hard work, and the never-give-up mentality—all of which are highly compatible with the state’s idealised culture.

His approach to preparation is a perfect example of covering all three slices of the performance pie–skill, physical conditioning, and psychological readiness which he integrates imaginatively into a varied range of activities (Karageorghis & Terry, 2011). One can argue that consciousness can never be fully presented through language. Subjectivity, power, and desire influence how people talk about their lives and current circumstances. However, Bindra’s autobiography offers a transparent glimpse into his resolute and intensely preoccupied inner self. It took him countless hours to train his mind and body to achieve the necessary differential muscular tension—no stress in the neck, little tension in the shoulders, just enough in the legs to

lock the knees, relaxed feet. Bindra employed an ultrasound equipment to "see" his muscles as he attempted to contract them, which helped him learn how to regulate such intricate muscle movements. He ruminates about failure and defeat because he believes these are the episodes that make or break a sportsman. According to Bindra, the sense of being vanquished requires answers as he admits, "Great shooters in my event might win only ten major medals in ten years, if they are lucky, and definitely not all of them win gold, so the shooter must understand defeat, not befriend it but learn to walk with it…but for shooters, defeat is often a pure failure of the self. To stay sane, defeat requires bizzare justification" (62).

Bindra is totally absorbed in his pursuit for perfection that he reflects immensely on failure. He is contemplating on failure and improvising on how to tackle it. According to Bindra,

> It was defeat but also a tutorial. It was a week when I was reminded about patience. I learnt I had to work through nervousness and absorb pressure, rather than just quickly pulling the trigger. Anxiety is horrible, it corrodes the insides, it interrupts and confuses decision-making, it authors a feeling of helplessness. But you can't fight it, you say 'come, friend', you learn to let it sit inside you and shoot well in spite of it…It was an embarrassing, painful, mocking defeat. But sometimes you need to lose, painfully for a weakness to become a strength. (86-87)

Furthermore, conquering the occasionally severe psychological obstacles incorporated into his physical training established a sincere conviction that he would triumph in Beijing. Bindra describes the breathtaking experience of having to face his worries, put his trust in his safety harness, and take a leap of faith while standing atop

a 40-foot pole during his commando training in Munich. This harrowing experience bolstered his self-belief and in his words, “Winning a medal, I told myself, cannot be tougher than this, it cannot be scarier” (159). To work with sport psychologist Tim Harkness in South Africa was arguably his biggest mental training endeavour. Bindra completed about 150 hours of neurofeedback training, where Harkness monitored EEG, muscle tension, skin conductivity, and respiratory cycles to help Bindra learn to generate the psychophysiological state associated with his best shooting (Terry and Cei 19). In addition, he practiced shooting under pressure and learning how to ignore distractions like flags appearing in his field of view, rattles rattling before a shot, or Harkness yelling “miss, miss, miss” as he readied himself for Beijing. However, Bindra made history at the Beijing Olympics by becoming the first Indian to win an individual gold medal. In his autobiography, he candidly discusses the overwhelming sense of purposelessness that engulfed him immediately after his triumph. It is a phenomenon observed in many top athletes who can become disoriented once they achieve their long-cherished goals. He reflects on how the euphoria of winning the medal and its afterglow faded within mere hours. His introspection reveals a critical mistake he made during his Olympic journey - he fixated excessively on a single sporting objective. The most significant error, as he now acknowledges, was his misconception that winning a gold medal equated to happiness. This profound insight sheds light on the complexities of an athlete’s emotional journey and the realization that success in sports does not necessarily guarantee fulfillment or lasting happiness. Bindra concedes in his book; “I had a long career in sport, with many ups and downs. It’s ironic my biggest mental crisis in life came when I actually succeeded. A lot of people talked about dealing with failure, but for me, dealing with success was

probably the hardest time in my life" (132). Likewise in an interview in *The Hindu,* he admits his tough battle with success,

> Up until Beijing where I had my greatest victory, I had trained for 16 years of life with a singular goal and singular obsession that I wanted to win gold medal at the Olympic. One fine day, this dream, the goal was achieved but it created a very large void in my life. I think to me that was very challenging. I was depressed and was lost. I did not know what to do with my life and what to do next. That was probably the toughest moment of my life. (Bindra "Dealing with Success")

Rahul Dravid's approach is marked by a deep focus on his failures, driven by the belief that these setbacks are the crucibles in which he can uncover valuable insights into his shortcomings. He meticulously dissects his weaknesses, providing intricate accounts of the rational strategies he employed to conquer them. Dravid does not shy away from delving into the vulnerable, human facets of his cricketing journey. In contrast, Abhinav Bindra adopts a philosophical and ascetic stance towards vanquishment. The prominence of nationalistic sentiments in these autobiographies is noteworthy and often gratifying. Dravid and Bindra, while not directly discussing nationalism in detail outside their victories, consistently place it at the forefront of their minds whenever they represent their country. They take immense pride in achieving glory for their homeland. Autobiographies offer personal windows into the lives of sports celebrities, whose accomplishments are frequently viewed through the prism of pride and aspiration for their country. These sections provide reflections and personal tales that weave together a rich tapestry of learning about national identity construction and performance on a global scale. Furthermore, autobiographies offer a distinctive behind-the-scenes glimpse into the challenges of fulfilling a country's

expectations, navigating popular adoration or disappointment, and facing one's own shortcomings in the face of societal standards.

According to Bairner (2001), sports can serve as a potent vehicle for national representation, allowing people to express, negotiate, and affirm their sense of national identity. Athletes who wear the colours of their country's flag enhance this connecting component by turning individual competitions into collective stories. Dravid's habit of acknowledging spectators by raising his bat and kissing the Indian crest on his helmet when achieving milestones became an endearing gesture that endeared him to the nation. Bindra, too, fondly recalls the profound sense of pride he experienced as the flag bearer for the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi. It was a symbolic and honourable moment that left a lasting impression on him. The overwhelming reception and enthusiasm that greeted him upon entering the stadium, with Indian athletes gravitating towards the flag and people clamouring for photos with it, moved him deeply. Bindra cherished his affiliation with the Indian team and was profoundly touched by the adulation and fanfare that accompanied his Olympic triumph. The outpouring of support through letters, telegrams, and people waiting for hours in the streets just to shake hands with him left an indelible mark on his sense of national pride. To quote Bindra,

> This was foreign to me, even unsettling. Cricketers constantly feel the connection between athlete and nation, between success and worship: they taste it daily. Even when they look out the world, it's hard not to hear the murmur of a nation praying. But shooters rarely perform in grand arenas, nor do we peel off our shirts to show off pale chests in victory. We're never sure who watches, who cares, who reads the stories of our deeds in the sports

> pages. But now, for once, I could feel India's response, and it was beautiful and staggering. (164)

When they fail, they are more worried about failing as athletes than they are about failing their country. As Bindra writes, "I never felt the burden of a nation waiting, but I appreciated how long it had been waiting…I guess I had the power to alter that, I presume people believed I had the power to change that. Now I'd failed" (14). These Indian men's autobiographies give little consideration to gender. They never discuss gender issues and do not delve too deeply into how their failures have affected how they perceive gender. It should not be surprising to discover outstanding athletes completely avoiding the subject of gender since social and cultural conventions in India rarely allow for discussion of it.

Few athletes in American amateur or professional sports history have achieved the level of renown and cultural significance that heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali does. As a young adult who appeared to be a byproduct of the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and the protest cultures that both produced the urban riots, Watergate, and the resignation of an American president, Muhammad Ali had an impact on a number of social and political events throughout his early adulthood. Ali often visited the gym because he was sure he could succeed as a boxer. Despite the fact that he lacked exceptional abilities in his early years, he was incredibly determined. Ali quotes his first trainer, Joe Martin in his autobiography *The Greatest: My Own Story*,

> 'When he first began coming around, looked no better or worse than the majority....He was just ordinary, and I doubt whether any scout would have thought much of him in his first year. He was a kid willing to make the

> sacrifices necessary to achieve something worthwhile in sports. I realized that it was almost impossible to discourage him. He was easily the hardest worker of any kid I ever taught.' (43)

Ali was determined to succeed and worked hard to earn a name. As Ali remarks, "I do everything to make the fight come out my way, but if I'm defeated I have to get up and come back again, no matter how humiliating the loss" (59). He is positive in his outlook and remains pepped up for the matches. According to him, he analyses his fights minutely,

> I have gone through the most important fight of my life, and I can sense that somehow it will help me regain the World Heavyweight Title. It was also the most dangerous, and one that could have destroyed me altogether. It was the fight that left me looking inside myself, where before I had been looking on the outside, talking outside, and thinking outside. I had not regarded the loss to Frazier as a defeat. I left believing that I had outpointed him, that I should have gotten the decision. But no matter how close the fight with Norton was, a broken jaw has a way of convincing a fighter that he lost. It showed me that a long line of victories can destroy a fighter's sense of what is real. I will draw on this when I fight George Foreman. (87)

Ali went on to win six Kentucky Golden Gloves championships, making him one of the best amateur fighters in the country. In 1959 and 1960, he was the national Amateur Athletic Union champion, and at the 1960 Rome Olympics, he earned a gold medal as a light-heavyweight. Ali's boyish good features, outgoing attitude, poetic gimmicks, and good-natured bravado helped him maintain his celebrity beyond the Olympics, as he garnered far more media attention than most amateur boxers. During

his time, there were numerous misconceptions regarding physical regime and sportsmen feared to have sexual contacts with women prior to their matches. To quote Ali, “Then one day I got whipped by Jimmy Ellis, my only amateur loss in Louisville, and as I sat the next morning nursing my wounds I realized I had been with a woman the night before that fight, too” (162).

Following his return from Rome, Ali entered the business world and was overseen by William Faversham, the head of a syndicate of eleven Louisville merchants. When he was first given Archie Moore, the light-weight champion, as a coach, the two men did not get along. Then Ali faced up against his trainer, Angelo Dundee. With the assistance of Dundee, a very experienced boxer who did not attempt to modify Ali's unique style, Ali was able to win all of his early battles. Unlike other fighter-trainer relationships, Dundee’s with Ali was unique in that he never spoke on behalf of the fighter, never prepared press releases, never provided personal coaching, and never seemed to offer boxing advice. Ali, in fact, has always given the impression that he trained himself, handled himself, and created himself throughout his career. This was undoubtedly true in terms of fame and public reach, as well as building his own character and expressing his own opinions. In Ali’s words, “A true champion can never forget a real defeat. It’s like losing a good and lovely woman. It drives you crazy until you really learn why. Perhaps Patterson had never learned the “why”. It was the other way around with me. I’d had my baptism, my heartbreak losses, and each defeat had only convinced me that I could avoid defeat” (295). He was never the crowd’s favourite, while he fought his opponents, he also had to subdue the emotions raging against him in the stadium. According to Ali, “Every time I stepped into the ring, at least half the audience was so anxious to see me slaughtered, they would cheer and scream and stomp for every punch an opponent hit

me with. So much so that they became hysterical when I frustrated those dreams and hopes" (133).

Standing six feet three inches tall and weighing over 200 pounds, Ali amazed sportswriters with his rapid reflexes, his refusal to take a close-quarters hit to the body, and his ability to defend himself with his hands at his waist. Before Ali, no heavyweight had ever possessed Ali's speed, quickness, or grace. When he had to divorce his first wife, Sonji Roi, due to religious differences, he is clear in his assertion to win upcoming matches to gain the hand of another woman, "I had to whip Sonny Liston first. I didn't want to lose to Liston and lose to you, too. That would have been too much loss. I told myself, I gotta come out of this fight looking good. I got to keep my heavy weight title so I can still be The Champ while I try to find me another woman" (236).

All of this brilliance came to a stop on February 25, 1964, when he fought Charles Sonny Liston. Against the hard-punching Liston, the young Ali had no chance. He had been tormenting Liston for the majority of the time leading up to the fight, teasing him with the nickname "the Bear". Ali's actions appeared to be a ruse to obtain a psychological advantage over his opponent. Even more concerning were rumours that Ali had joined the infamous Nation of Islam, which was arguably the most dreaded and misunderstood religious group of the time. Despite the fact that Ali astonished the athletic world by handily vanquishing Liston, the boxing establishment, sporting press and the general public were hostile to his conversion to Islam. The Nation of Islam was widely regarded as an anti-white hate group, which was incorrect. Ali was the first athlete to be publicly chastised. No black athlete has so enraged white people since Jack Johnson (1908–15), the first black heavyweight champion, with his opinions and the way he chose to live his life.

The Selective duty changed Ali's draft status from 1-Y (unfit for military duty due to a low score on army intelligence exams) to 1-A (fit for military service due to a low score on army intelligence tests) (qualified for induction) while he was competing in fight matches abroad. Numerous people perceived this change as a direct reaction to the general public's indignation regarding Ali's political beliefs. However, Ali declined to enlist in the military since it conflicted with his Islamic beliefs. His argument for exemption was that his local draught board was not representative of the community because, at the time of his status change, it contained no Black members. For example, Ali was hesitant to enlist because he thought he would be killed by a very patriotic white person (which was a possibility because Ali's opposition to military duty and involvement in the NOI had generated a lot of racial animosity during a period when prominent people were often assassinated). He also saw the battle through a racial prism, and he was not persuaded that he should put his life in danger to fight against the Vietnamese, who, to the best of his knowledge, had done nothing to him or his country. Ali was found guilty of violating the Selective Service Act in federal court in June 1967 and sentenced to five years in prison and a $10,000 fine. He was promptly stripped of his boxing titles, and his boxing licence was revoked by every state sports commission. Ali was barred from boxing for the next three and a half years while his case was being appealed.

He is definitely plagued by anxieties about his career, whether he would be able to compete again, would there be imprisonment, would his banned be revoked. He undergoes what Yalom calls the existential crisis of isolation. He is denied his participation in games; he is alienated from the Christian White public and has the fury of the government. Our lives are inherently relational and that our lives are intricately entwined with the fates of others. At the same time, certain aspects of who

we are and what we have experienced are secluded and out of reach from others. We are also aware that there are aspects of other people's life experiences that we will never be able to directly understand. Our lives include both social interaction as well as private time. Ali is able to overcome this isolation by getting increasingly interactive with the public. Halberstam's theories offer a critical analysis of the most deeply entrenched and oppressive socio-political systems. These systems are often characterized by their exploitation and disempowerment of vulnerable and impoverished individuals (88). As Halberstam opines when failure is given the chance to be rethought, its greatest potential is to open up new ways of assessing the most unusual aspects of experience. In line with Halberstam's theory, Ali explores the idea of redemptive failure and identifies in his pursuit to protest against the establishment, a low moment that can be reframed as an opportunity for empowerment and self-discovery.

He spoke on college campuses, became a hero of the anti-war movement for sacrificing the prime years of his athletic career for his convictions, and Harry Edwards and other African American athletes were inspired by him to attempt to plan a boycott of the 1968 Mexico Olympics. He found happiness in his interaction with the public who were not hostile to him especially children. As Ali states,

> Of all the glories of being World Heavyweight Champion, the greatest was the recognition and acceptance by children wherever I went. To be known by them, to be allowed to love them in return, was often worth all the blood and bruises, the years of being ostracised, the heavy years under threat of imprisonment or the abuse and denunciation hurled by those who hated me for what I was and for what I said. (135)

According to Ali, he was deeply concerned of the image of him that was being projected to the fans, “But the ‘loss’ was not all there was to it—the time would come when I’d take real defeat and feel no shame or guilt about it. What disturbed me was what I saw and heard all around me from the people” (326). In 1970, with the public strongly opposed to the Vietnam War and black political strength growing in several southern state governments, Ali was authorised to fight in Georgia. He entered the ring again in October and triumphed over Jerry Quarry. The lengthy break had sharpened his skills to the point where he was taking more punches in the ring than before, even though he was still an incredible fighter. In 1971, he was defeated by Joe Frazier, the guy Ali detested the most during his career and his fiercest opponent. After the violent altercation, both men were admitted to the hospital. This time, Ali fractured his jaw late in the fight and lost to Ken Norton. In spite of this, he recovered his poise and went on to win the title in Zaire again in 1974 by defeating Frazier. Known as the “Rope-a-dope”, Ali employed a novel tactic in this battle by leaning against the ropes and let Foreman to keep punching at him until he was exhausted (394). In here, Ali frequently exhibits stereotypically masculine characteristics like stoicism, assertiveness, and resilience in the context of his sports. His setbacks are usually portrayed as obstacles to be surmounted in route to ultimate success. This is often reflected in this autobiography, which reframe failures as opportunities for growth and learning as well as challenges that test his macho strength.

When Ali was too indolent to train, he would utilize this strategy in his latter fights. Ali was hailed as a hero in the United States after reclaiming the title, and he received international fame. He became the most well-known Muslim in the United States, as well as the most well-known Muslim in the world, and the most well-known black man in history. A significant proportion of the adoration and acceptance derived

from a widespread shift in attitude among white sportswriters and the general public. In addition, as he grew older, Ali's political and religious views became less dogmatic. He was always sociable and amusing, which helped to temper some of the white public's animosity toward him, even when he was the most reviled. To quote Ali, "They know I always talk after a victory. Now I've got to talk after a loss. Let them hear how I lost. Let the people who believe in me see that I'm not crushed, that I've had a defeat just as they have defeats, that I'll get up and come back again, just like other people do" (436).

It is impossible to overestimate Ali's importance in American popular culture—not just as a phenomenal athlete who dominated his sport for almost two decades and contributed to the multibillion-dollar television industry, but also as a political and religious icon. He changed how the general public and the media saw black athletes. He was also a distinct kind of black figure for his era: the swaggering, trash-talking black athlete who defies efforts by the outside world to bring him down and muzzle him. American essayist and culture critic Gerald Early contends in his piece "Muhammad Ali: Flawed Rebel with a Cause" that Muhammad Ali saw athletics as a theatrical act in addition to a vehicle for self-promotion. Ali served as a prime example of how black people were redefining themselves and their relationships with white people during the 1960s and 1970s. Ali came to represent youthful vigour, religious commitment, and pride in race.

However, he also represented something else, something less positive. He painted the athlete as a self-absorbed dramatist and a sullen teenager. Throughout his career, Ali did little to help those in his industry. He never even brought up the idea of a boxers' union or tried to organise one. His dismissive attitude toward his opponents, particularly his black opponents, demonstrated a lack of sportsmanship. Ali was also

not just obnoxious, but also incredibly superficial. Ali was a complex individual, strong and attractive in certain ways but weak and unappealing in others. Because his qualities and shortcomings are so strongly tied to the time period in which he was born, this is what makes him such an interesting person to consider and examine. It was a time of black pride, resistance, and heroism, as well as self-indulgence, immaturity, and dishonesty. No one looked to have squandered his prospects outside of the ring as much as he did in the ring under duress. His persona, which was a mix of transcendence and failure, fits his age perfectly and that makes him the extraordinary man that he is.

Tennis legend Andre Agassi embarked on his professional tennis career at the tender age of 16 in 1986. After playing in 21 consecutive US Open tournaments, he retired 20 years later. Agassi reached his first and last US Open finals in 1990 and 2005, respectively. He won eight Grand Slam tournaments and the Golden Slam, totalling more over 60 trophies. This includes victories at the French Open, Wimbledon, the Australian Open, and the United States Open, as well as an Olympic gold medal. He is one of only five men who have won all four major championships. Based on this research, Agassi has been portrayed in the media as a rebellious young person and teenage dreamer, a Generation X slacker, and lastly an anti-slacker hero. He is deeply philosophical when he recollects his life as a world class tennis player. He states at the very beginning of his poignant autobiography, *Open*,

> One thing I've learned in twenty-nine years of playing tennis: Life will throw everything but the kitchen sink in your path, and then it will throw the kitchen sink. It's your job to avoid the obstacles. If you let them stop you or distract you, you're not doing your job, and failing to do your job will cause regrets that paralyze you more than a bad back. (6)

Andre Agassi describes how he overcame numerous challenges to become one of the greatest tennis players of all time in his 2009 book *Open*. Agassi is the fourth kid born to immigrants from Iran. Andre Agassi's parents have never participated in any tennis-related activity. His father Emmanuel Agassian, maintained the clay tennis court near the American Military base before the revolution. Back then he decided that he was going to make sure his children learned this game and became good at it. Andre and his family lived in Las Vegas. Not in the flashy strip but rather in the poor outskirts. Joining a tennis club was not an option. So his father built an asphalt tennis court in the back yard. He purchased hundreds of used tennis balls from the local country club and made sure Andre hit one thousand balls every single day even when it was hundred degrees outside. His son asked him once, "Why one thousand?" He replied, "Because if you hit thousand balls every day, in three years you will have hit one million balls and nobody can beat a man who has hit one million balls!" (94) And he was right. Andre Agassi became the first male tennis player to win all four Grand Slam tournaments on three different surfaces. He won the Olympic gold medal in Atlanta in 1996 and led team USA to 3 Davis Cup championships. To this day, he is considered by many tennis gurus and other professional players to have the best forehand and be the best returner of all time. In his autobiography *Open*, Andre Agassi speaks about how his father forced him to play a sport he never liked and how mortally fearful was he of failure. He reminiscences about his game in a local teenage tournament when he had suffered a loss in the final:

> For once I'm not afraid of my father. No matter how angry he is with me, I'm angrier. I'm furious with Tarango, with God, with myself. Even though I feel Tarango cheated me, I shouldn't have put him in a position to cheat me. I shouldn't have let the match get that close. Because I did, I'll now have a loss

> on my record—forever. Nothing can ever change it. I can't endure the thought, but it's inescapable: I'm fallible. Blemished. Imperfect. A million balls hit against the dragon-for what? (76)

The overarching challenge that posed a significant threat to his career, and which felt like an inheritance from his father, was the burden of perfectionism. He always tried to be perfect, to hit a winner on every ball and when he falls short, and it meddles with his head. The essay "The Perils of Perfectionism in Sports and Exercise" by Gordon L. Flett and Paul L. Hewitt explores the various facets of perfectionism. They contend that athletes who are self-centered perfectionists have negative thoughts and responses to failure due to errors. Their research on perfectionism and maladjustment has been based on the core idea that perfectionism makes people more susceptible to unfavourable outcomes, such as despair, when they encounter personal failure (16). Gaining flexibility is a crucial part of these athletes' coping mechanisms because it allows them to modify their goals in response to changing circumstances and their existing levels of functioning.

Agassi gradually learnt that just being steady and consistent would be enough to win ninety percent of the time. He was also feared of embarrassment – he thought a lot while in the middle of the game for his mind kept working. He recounts that it was only lately in his career when his wife Steffi Graf who taught him to act intuitively that he picked up the secret and started forbid thinking while in the middle of a game. As he remarks, "After years of hearing my father rant at my flaws, one loss has caused me to take up his rant. I've internalized my father—his impatience, his perfectionism, his rage—until his voice doesn't just feel like my own, it is my own. I no longer need my father to torture me. From this day on, I can do it all by myself" (97). Agassi thinks he was never able to enjoy the sport he overexerted because of the

strain to become (and remain) the best. One of the four existential givens or ultimate concerns that are frequently presented as dichotomies that are at the centre of Yalom's understanding of existentialism is freedom vs. responsibility (97). According to the concepts of freedom and responsibility, individuals are responsible for both their behaviour in relation to their surroundings and their perceptions and attributions of their experiences. It is both exhilarating and frightening to know that a philosophical framework or fate cannot be trusted. Midway in his career, Agassi encounters this issue. Despite being exhausted, he must play a game of tennis because it is the only thing he can do as an adult. He is hesitant to accept responsibility for his life and career. He finally understands that people share a basic feeling of freedom and accountability. At the same time, one may be constrained by ingrained behaviours of which we are frequently only dimly conscious or oblivious to and that societal institutions and political influence (in his case his father's strict regime) restrict the options one perceives to be available. In every life, Agassi comprehends, people occasionally have to struggle to decide what they want and need to do.

Agassi's *Open* is a frank and genuine rendering of a tennis career ridden with self-doubt, injuries and fiery glory. But it was not an easy path to contentment, as he lays bare in this accomplished, moving book. He was born with spondylolisthesis, a condition in which one vertebra was out of sync with the others. With the nerves and muscles crowded in a want for space thrown in between herniated discs, his physique always challenged and rebelled against him. Agassi states that often his body was at war with itself. In the middle of a match when his body rallied against him, he used to alter his game plan altogether. It was extremely painful and claustrophobic since he had to take cortisone shots to relieve the affliction. He concedes philosophically before his final match, "I'm a young man, relatively speaking. Thirty-six. But I wake

as if ninety-six. After three decades of sprinting, stopping on a dime, jumping high and landing hard, my body no longer feels like my body, especially in the morning" (3).

He grows mournful when he recounts how he lost all his boyhood days in the residential school that he was sent to by his domineering father. He hated the game since childhood but had to continue playing as a means of living. In this case it is not an exaggeration to say that in the pursuit of success the notion of childhood has been destroyed. He had not picked up anything apart tennis lessons, so he had to take up tennis though he mortally despised it. He narrates how his father constructed a ball launcher machine on his own so that his son could beat even the speed of the balls that defied the laws of physics. Agassi named it 'the dragon' (22). Metaphorically and literally he had to stun the dragon before he won the world with his brilliance. The way Agassi responds to his setbacks in these chapters demonstrates the performative character of gender. Male athletes who openly address emotional anguish and vulnerability, topics that are typically associated with femininity, can defy stoic stereotypes. The athlete's presentation of his shortcomings in a way that defies gendered standards indicates a conscious or unconscious engagement with gender performativity.

Steffi Graf, Agassi's wife, also had a bossy father who played a significant role in her career. However, it was her genuine passion for tennis that served as her driving force to pursue her dreams. Amidst the whirlwind pace of his life, Agassi finds only occasional moments of clarity, redemption, and hope. Much of his existence unfolds within the confines of hotel rooms, far away from home. Each time he makes his entrance into the sports arena on those pivotal match days, Agassi's internal anxiety becomes palpable. It is a dilemma that every athlete must confront

when they step onto their respective fields of competition. On these days, the odds are always balanced, teetering between victory and vanquishment. A formidable opponent can be brought to their knees on a good day, just as an unknown adversary can shatter one's prospects on an off day. This constant labyrinth of pressure, where one is perpetually expected to perform at their peak, inevitably takes a toll on the psyche. Agassi, it appears, grapples with the weight of this mental burden. According to him, losses can make one do unhealthy and hideous acts: "I chew tobacco, hardcore weed like Skoal and Kodiak, soaked in whiskey. After losses I stick a plum-sized wad of chew inside my cheek. The bigger the loss, the bigger the wad. What rebellion is left? What new sin can I commit to show the world I'm unhappy and want to go home?" (126).

At the outset, Agassi comes across as shallow and a playboy, seemingly lacking a deep understanding of himself. However, as one progresses through the autobiography, there is a compelling transformation in our perception of him. Over time, he undergoes a profound maturation and begins to distinguish himself among his peers. Despite enduring personal setbacks, he demonstrates a remarkable resilience, shouldering the burden of perpetual torment and adversity with unwavering determination. He writes about the perilous losses he met in his career and remarks,

> I've always had trouble shaking off hard losses, but this loss to Pete is different. This is the ultimate loss, the über-loss, the alpha-omega loss that eclipses all others. Previous losses to Pete, the loss to Courier, the loss to Gómez—they were flesh wounds compared to this, which feels like a spear through the heart. Every day this loss feels new. Every day I tell myself to stop thinking about it, and every day I can't. The only respite is fantasizing about retirement. (194)

Steffi Graf, his wife, plays a pivotal role in Agassi's journey of self-discovery as both a man and a player. She offers him empathetic insights into his disappointments, contributing to his personal growth. Agassi's motivations, challenges, and character are beautifully encapsulated in his perspective on the woman who would later become his wife. His narrative is remarkably personal and poignant, illustrating how his experiences in the world of tennis have imparted invaluable lessons about the sport and life in general. As he remarks, "I feel, in fact, as if I've been let in on a dirty little secret: winning changes nothing. Now that I've won a slam, I know something that very few people on earth are permitted to know. A win doesn't feel as good as a loss feels bad, and the good feeling doesn't last as long as the bad. Not even close" (229).

Engaging with these autobiographies has proven to be a source of great satisfaction, especially in light of the study's primary objective, which was to explore deeper into these narratives to gain a profound understanding of the underlying pathos accompanying the episodes of loss. Many autobiographical works that enjoy popularity among the masses tend to adhere to a formulaic and often qualitatively deficient structure. They typically commence with an account of the sportsperson's most iconic triumph and then proceed to narrate how sports served as a lifeline through an uneventful or difficult childhood, culminating in their meteoric rise to stardom. However, the athletes examined in this study exhibit a remarkable degree of introspection and curiosity. They display a tenacious determination to not only confront but also learn from their failures and vanquishments. Rahul Dravid, for instance, meticulously dissects his performance and devises strategies to surmount setbacks. He approaches his narrative with unapologetic honesty, openly discussing

his flaws and limitations as a sportsperson. In doing so, he emerges not as an infallible deity but as a relatable human being, making his journey all the more compelling.

Abhinav Bindra, on the other hand, adopts a philosophical stance when it comes to dealing with defeat. He underscores the tendency of people to perceive athletes solely as performers in their respective sports, often overlooking the inherent humanity behind their endeavours. He emphasizes that athletes are much more than their rankings; they are participants in a profoundly human pursuit. Within this pursuit, there are bound to be numerous failures in terms of outcomes, given the exacting standards demanded, but there are also countless human successes. Bindra contends that these personal journeys may be challenging for some to grasp, as they lack the ostentation and glamour associated with standing atop an Olympic podium. Nonetheless, they remain profoundly significant expressions of the human spirit within the realm of sports.

In the select American autobiographies, there is a strong emphasis on failure and vanquishment, a notable departure from the conventional narrative of celebrating victories. Muhammad Ali, for instance, does not just boast about his triumphs but also elevates his defeats. While he may be troubled by losses in the boxing ring, Ali skilfully portrays his opponents as potentially less skilled or even just regular folks. He taunts his rivals through his songs and theatrical antics. Similarly, Andre Agassi dedicates considerable space in his autobiography to recounting his tennis losses, understanding that the anguish and embarrassment of defeat often overshadow the happiness derived from success. Muhammad Ali's transformation after converting to Islam in 1965 is a prominent aspect of his autobiography. He embraced devout Muslim beliefs and, at times, imposed these religious principles on his wife, Sonji Roi, who had reservations about Islamic dress codes and rituals. Ali's behaviour and

discourse frequently exuded extreme masculinity, and he relished the notion of violence. To him, participating in a brutal contest was a demonstration of profound manhood. He also took pleasure in disparaging his opponents before fights to intensify the stakes and attract media attention, finding a peculiar kind of stimulation and exhilaration in being in danger. These traits collectively underscore his hyper-masculine mindset.

American sports figures often use their careers as a means to explore their notions of American exceptionalism and the American Dream. In the case of Andre Agassi, the narrative downplays overt nationalistic sentiments. However, Muhammad Ali, each time he clinches a title, delves into his unique conception of America. Ali's treatment of the myth of American exceptionalism is characterized by a tangible grandeur. He initially competed for his country in the 1960 Olympics with the belief that winning a gold medal would make him an exception. However, the stark reality of segregation quickly shattered this illusion when he encountered a segregated diner in downtown Louisville. Yet, Ali, by proclaiming himself as the greatest, effectively turned the exceptionalism myth on its head. Through his raps and rhymes, he crafted a form of poetics that bordered on the edge of borderline minstrelsy, deliberately transforming himself into a nightmarish caricature of white Americanness. He openly and unapologetically engaged in religious expressions rooted in racial supremacy. *The Greatest* is a prime example of the intricate connection that exists between an athlete's identity and the national geopolitical context. During a turbulent time in history, Ali's resistance, extraordinary achievements, and highly publicised setbacks challenged not just boxing conventions but also American racial and political narratives. His biography demonstrates how an athlete's career may serve as a stage for the perception and fighting of social justice and national values. On the other

hand, Agassi's father held a strong conviction that wealth was the most expedient route to realizing the American Dream. He believed it was his son's responsibility to achieve this dream on behalf of the entire family. Consequently, he steered Andre towards a tennis career and meticulously mapped out his life to manifest their version of the American Dream. *Open*, chronicles the life of a sports celebrity who has gone through major personal low points as well as professional highs, provide an insightful look at the relationship between the story of the athlete and the idea of the character of the country. In light of the unrelenting pursuit of greatness, this contemplation of failure can provoke a sense of collective introspection about the larger national ethos, raising issues with values, goals, and the very concept of success in a national framework. Likewise, Bindra's *A Shot at History* describes the strain of having to bear the aspirations of a country in addition to personal records. Such pressure has the potential to either build an athlete's steelier determination, reflecting a national narrative of perseverance.

The narratives presented in *The Nice Guy Who Finished First*, *A Shot at History*, *The Greatest*, and *Open* dive deeper than the athletes' personal expressions to explore their understanding of their national identity and society's expectations of them.

Chapter 5

AUTO/BIOGRAPHIES OF INDIAN AND AMERICAN SPORTSWOMEN:

THE GOLDEN GIRL, UNBREAKABLE,

BEING MYSELF AND *ON THE LINE*

Autobiographies are a way to establish, identity, assert ego in an insecure society, and a desire for personal strength when one fears the eclipse of the person. It is also an implicit admission of helplessness, because one only makes everything into personal history when they are afraid of being left out of some bigger common history. But in the modern world, it adopts any form that fits it best-an entire culture is distinctly autobiographical. Writing an autobiography can help one understand, convey, and get to know oneself. Discourse, behaviour, self-perception, and political activity are all influenced by it.

People in all positions and roles believe that speaking their own stories is critical to fully realising their identities. It is a written account in which a person recounts the significant events of his past life, usually in chronological sequence, including phases of development, crises, turning moments, and successes. Rather, the phase refers to any contemplative effort aimed at providing or restoring meaning, purpose, and worth to one's life. In a broader sense, autobiographical self-expression scarcely appears thoughtful at all, contenting itself with a list of sensational or entertaining aspects of the subject's life. It is sufficient to reflect, speak, or act with a purpose that is generally self-narrative or self-revealing in order to engage in the autobiographical mode. Of course, for such intent to be judged at all, it must manifest itself in some symbolic form, particularly in language and gesture.

Throughout the 1970s, feminists who believed that sexual stereotypes in children's literature and school textbooks perpetuated and reinforced gender inequality led the charge against these clichés. After the turn of the 20th century brought about upheavals in the areas of politics, labour, and sexuality along with inconsistent progress towards gender equality, sports have begun to progressively change in terms of inclusion, diversity, and equality. As such, it is appropriate to reconsider how men and women are portrayed outside of stereotypes. The objective is to gain fresh perspective on the problem by using the novel concept of gender, rather than to assess whether or not progress has been made in this area. It is unlikely coincidental that sociologist Ann Oakley created this idea to differentiate between social and physiological sex during the time when the aforementioned stereotypes were being questioned. Oakley opines, "'Sex' is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female. 'Gender', however, is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into 'masculine' and 'feminine'" (16). This chapter examines the autobiographies written by Indian and American sportswomen namely *The Golden Girl* by legendary athlete P. T Usha, *Unbreakable* by boxer Mary Kom, *Being Myself* by tennis icon Martina Navratilova and *On the Line* by the incredible Serena Williams.

Without utilising the concept of gender, it is difficult to explain observed differences or investigate systems of value-laden, regulated, and hierarchical relations between the masculine and feminine in their social and cultural dimensions. Previously, there was a widespread assumption that women's autobiographies lacked structural cohesion and each persona's supposedly futile search for herself. As a result, these fundamental distinctions between men's and women's autobiographies were widespread. First, as according to Wayne Schumaker, acknowledged

autobiographies (more usually published by men) seem to be a "summing up, a review of the whole life" (134) and as Karl Weintraubs proposes the writers seek to "assign meaning to experience" (840). These objectives result in a well-defined organisational structure. The organised nature of men's autobiographies, according to Estelle Jelinek, can also be ascribed to men's "primary socialisation toward achieving the goal of a successful career" (238). Men's tales are often chronological and linear because they "concentrate on the public goal rather than private experiences" (273).Women's autobiographies, on the other hand, prefer to have a more flexible format, which, according to Euzanne Juhasz, is compatible with a search for the self and a form in which to articulate this search (419). Furthermore, Jelinek claims that the "multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles" is what gives women's autobiographies their open-ended nature. Men's autobiographies, on the other hand, have a more rigid structure, indicating the drive to ascribe rather than find meanings in experience, whilst women's autobiographies have a more loose structure, suggesting the desire to define rather than proclaim the self (291). The autobiographies under investigation, on the other hand, do not have such highbrow elements. These are the works of strong and dedicated female athletes who have excelled in their chosen sport. Through breathtakingly difficult exploits, they have revolutionized the perception of sportswomen in their subtle ways.

In the past, male athletes have dominated Indian sports, and female athletes have had few opportunities and resources. However, there has been a positive change in recent years, with more Indian women participating in and excelling in several sports. Initiatives supporting gender equality, more funding, and improved infrastructure have made this achievement possible. In India, female athletes frequently deal with prejudice, traditional gender norms, and a lack of familial

support, among other societal challenges and stereotypes. Their ability to access opportunities, resources, and training may be hampered by these obstacles. Additionally, societal opposition to some sports may exist because of preconceived conceptions of modesty and femininity. Numerous women's sports leagues have emerged in India in an effort to advance gender equality and boost female participation. Women's Hockey League, Women's Kabaddi Challenge, and the Women's Indian Premier League (cricket) all attempt to give female athletes a stage on which to demonstrate their abilities and acquire respect.

In Indian sports, women have taken a daring path towards sporting greatness in athletics, badminton, and wrestling with or without female coaches to safeguard them. But, not everything is lost for Indian women athletes. Nonetheless, it is uncommon to find an Indian athlete who has not experienced either overt or covert gender prejudice. Sania Mirza, an Indian tennis star player, remarked in an interview with Akshay Sawai for *Outlook*, "Though I do believe things are improving, what we have to address and accept is that we are living in a man's world more so than in an equal world" (9). Mirza recently retired after a path-breaking career in which she reached world No. 27 in singles and No. 1 in doubles. She was not subjected to the socio-economic hardships that Indian female athletes from rural backgrounds must go through because she was raised in a middle-class, metropolitan family. But, she did encounter some resistance from conservative groups over issues like the propriety of her tennis attire. Playing in the internet age also meant being judged for her appearance and being made to feel guilty for how little time she was spending with her son. She adds, "Patriarchy is present and it needs to be acknowledged. If you are asking me where my child is when I'm sitting at a press conference after winning a tennis match, then do the same to my husband. And if you are not asking him, then

don't ask me" (6). Sports have historically served as a venue for the celebration and reinforcement of a particular heterosexual masculine identity focused on physical dominance, aggression, and rivalry. Males are treated better, paid more, and given more attention than women. Women have not received enough support from the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s around the world, including India, but laws like the US's Title IX law, which forbids gender-based discrimination in any educational programme or activity, have made it possible for more women to participate in sports and its many facets, including administration.

There is no denying that women are now more prominently represented in the highest levels of sport. The first all-female referee team in the history of the men's World Cup was led by France's Stephanie Frappart (1983) at the most recent football World Cup 2022. Claire Polosak (1988) of Australia was the first woman to work in a men's Test match of cricket. During the third Test match between Australia and India in early 2021, she served as the fourth official. In February 2023, Vrinda Rathi (1989), Janani Narayanan (1985), and Gayathri Venugopalan (1979) were the first female match officials for the men's Ranji Trophy. One of the rare Indians who have established themselves as officials in an international sport is tennis gold badge referee Sheetal Iyer (1979). She initially struggled to win over the players' confidence. She and other prominent Indian women officials are now regulars in international competitions. With increased enthusiasm, Indian women have started to pursue sport and hence women's inclusion is no longer just out of tokenism anymore.

This chapter focuses on autobiographies by sportswomen, with an initial discussion on P.T. Usha, renowned as the "Golden Girl" and "Payyoli Express", who stands as one of India's most accomplished athletes. Over nearly two decades, this agile athlete dominated the track, securing numerous accolades and serving as an

inspiration to young women worldwide. P.T. Usha left an indelible mark on numerous tournaments. Throughout her illustrious career, P.T. Usha amassed an impressive tally of 102 national and international medals and commendations. Among these, she boasts an incredible 33 international medals, including 13 gold medals from the Asian Championships. Her exceptional achievements did not go unnoticed; in 1984, she was bestowed with the prestigious Arjuna Award and the Padma Shree for her outstanding contributions to athletics. The following year, in 1985, she earned the title of the best female athlete at the Jakarta Asian Athlete Meet.

In 1986, at the Asian Games in Seoul, the Indian Olympic Association honored her with the Adidas Golden Shoe and acclaimed her as the Sportsperson of the century. P.T. Usha's incredible journey began in 1979, catapulting her to the zenith of achievement, ultimately establishing her as a living legend. Usha's early life was marked by adversity and illness, which only served to fortify her resolve. After securing a scholarship of Rs. 250 from the Kerala government, she developed a deep-seated passion for sports during her adolescence. Usha subsequently enrolled in a sports school in Cannanore (Kannur). It was at the National School Games that this swift young lady first caught the attention of athletic coach O.M. Nambiar with her exceptional performance. This pivotal moment proved to be a turning point in her life as she found the perfect mentor for her talents. After diligent preparation, P.T. Usha made history as the first Indian woman to compete in the Olympics, representing her country in the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Her journey of success continued as she clinched a silver medal at the 1982 Asian Games held in New Delhi. From that point on, there was no looking back for P.T. Usha. The zenith of P.T. Usha's illustrious career came in 1985 when she achieved an astounding feat at the Asian Meet in

Jakarta. She secured five gold medals in the 100m, 200m, 400m, 400m hurdles, and 4x400m relay, along with a bronze in the 4x100m relay.

However, her quest for Olympic glory in the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles was marked by heartbreak. She missed the bronze medal by a mere 1/100th of a second, a moment that was deeply disappointing for both her and her fans. P.T. Usha made a triumphant comeback at the 1986 Seoul Asian Games, where she earned four gold medals and one silver, rightfully earning the title of Asia's "Sprint Queen". Following her remarkable victories in Jakarta in 1985, there was a noticeable transformation in P.T. Usha's demeanor and appearance. The once unassuming girl who had brought so much pride to her nation now appeared more poised and sophisticated. In an effort to enhance her image, the Arjuna Awardees Association arranged for a fashion designer, Ravi Sant from New Delhi, to provide her with a new wardrobe. Additionally, the beauty parlour at the Oberoi Hotel offered its services to give her a fresh hairstyle and facials. P.T. Usha reflects on this transformation in her autobiography, *The Golden Girl* (1987),

> Initially, I found sitting in a beauty parlour with a hair dryer, bigger than a helmet over my head, quite funny. It really amazed me that so many women could sit in the parlour for hours and hours with hair pulled back by rollers and clips, idly flipping through magazines. Yet, I was excited because it was a novelty for me. Never before had I bothered about my looks. I had only cared about how I ran. For many years I had worn a tracksuit more often than any other dress. My hair had always ran down my shoulders in a loose plait. Neither had I ever noticed my high cheek bones, which the beautician at the Oberoi beauty parlour said must be given prominence. (141)

Sreekumari Amma, a contemporary athlete of Usha, won the 100 and 200 metres at the 1981 Inter-varsity meet at Gwalior, when Usha was suffering from achilles heel tendon discomfort. However, the records did not last long. Usha easily vanquished an unfit Amma at the inter-state competition in Bangalore a month later. To quote Usha, "I was disappointed only to the extent that Sreekumari beat me to the national barrier. I felt that if she could do it then I could do it better as I had always beaten her. Otherwise, I was actually happy for her. Even for myself. Now there was somebody to push me. She kind of gave me a goal" (49). Usha describes her plight of participating in several events in a string of tournaments to win medals for her employee. It was an excruciating task for her since it was physically daunting. The psychological fallout from failure is a common theme in sports memoirs, as athletes openly discuss their struggles with melancholy, self-doubt, and the intense pressure to win back the public's respect (Weinberg & Gould 201). As she notes in her autobiography,

> The Bangalore meet was also the beginning of a very difficult period. At Ajmer I had run the 4x400 metres for Kerala. This time too the officials insisted that I must run. I didn't fancy the idea at all as I was feeling very weak…This has always been a problem. Even now and then my employee expects me to run five or six events in the inter-varsity and Open meets…I cried but still everybody insisted. (96)

It is worth noting that, in 1982, the average Indian athlete spent almost 200 days in coaching camps, effectively losing out on the most crucial component of athletics: competition. Few people have had the opportunity to compete in international competitions. The concept of extensive tutoring without adequate competition is unique to India. As a result, our athletes are never actually exposed to

competing demands and only give their best in the trials. Kurt Krueger, a professor at the California Institute of Sports Psychology, offered a striking observation on the current state of affairs. “The majority of the athletes at the camps at NIS Patiala are afraid of the Asian Games. They are psyched out. They require some competition” (104), he comments on the plight of the Indian athletes in *The Golden Girl*. Usha was also affected by this issue because she spent the most of her days in these camps. Her instructor, Nambiar, on the other hand, demanded her work on her strength and endurance. Recalling her memory, Usha writes,

> After the second loss, initially the reaction was one of disgust. I had put in four or five years for this day and when it came I couldn’t win. It is not meant as an excuse but I feel it is important to say that I had not fully recovered from the post-viral-fever weakness…I felt better after sleeping over my loss. Why should I fret, I told myself, when the factors responsible for it were beyond my control (67).

P.T. Usha’s ability to reflect on her vanquishments with remarkable composure and a candid perspective is truly admirable. It is expected of athletes to possess particular traits like determination and confidence, but when they fail, they reveal a vulnerability that contrasts sharply with the image they project to the public. This dichotomy has the power to challenge readers’ ideas of athletes as unbeatable characters and encourage stories that recognise the complexity and humanity inherent in sports (Schaaf & McManus 220). When analyzing her setbacks, Usha displays a logical and honest approach. By the conclusion of the 1982 Asian Games, it became apparent that if Usha aspired to win on the global stage, she needed to transition to the quarter mile – the 400 meters. Her intrinsic sprinting speed, while exceptional in Asia, was lacking on the world stage. Embracing the exhausting discipline of the quarter

mile demanded a substantial increase in effort compared to sprints. This transition was not without its challenges. Rigorous sand and hill training became essential to refine her running style and build the necessary endurance.

However, even with her meticulous training, setbacks were inevitable. In the 1983 Asian Track and Field Meet in Kuwait, Usha encountered a major setback. A poor start led to her defeat by Lydia de Vega in the 200 meters final, leaving her devastated. The 400-meter dash was scheduled just 40 minutes later, but Usha was reluctant to participate. She feared that this meet would mimic the disappointing outcome of the Asian Games, casting doubt on her prospects of victory and the prospect of all her hard work going to waste. It was her mentor and coach, O.M. Nambiar, who stepped in with unwavering support. He implored her to return to the athletes' tunnel, urging her to run for her faith in Lord Krishna. This motivation drove her to not only compete but to win the race comfortably, marking their first victory on the global stage. Nambiar's astute decision to transition Usha into the 400-meter hurdles proved to be prescient. This event was relatively new, introduced at the 1983 World Championships in Helsinki. Given its recent introduction, the world standard in the event was comparatively lower than other track events. With this in mind, Nambiar and Usha meticulously devised training programs tailored to this new discipline with the Olympics just six months away. Usha faced the daunting task of mastering the intricacies of hurdling while simultaneously enhancing her endurance, speed, and strength. Preparing for a new challenge like the 400-meter hurdles can feel like stepping into Yalom's abyss, a metaphorical term referring to the unknown and potentially daunting aspects of a new venture. Yalom's abyss can symbolize the psychological challenges associated with a new endeavour. Mental preparation is key. Athletes should work on visualization, confidence-building exercises, and strategies

to stay focused during the race. The 400-meter hurdles is a demanding event that requires exceptional endurance. Training routines often include rigorous aerobic workouts to build the stamina needed to sustain a strong pace throughout the race. Athletes need to focus on their hurdle clearance technique, stride patterns between hurdles, and efficient transitioning over the barriers. Indeed, P.T. Usha must have faced an immense amount of pressure when she had to swiftly adjust her running style and compete at an international event with limited notice. Moving from sprinting to the 400 meters hurdles, a completely different event, posed a considerable challenge. She had to quickly adapt her training, technique, and race strategy to excel in this unfamiliar discipline. With such a rapid transition and limited time for adjustment, there was a genuine fear of failure. Usha knew that any misstep or subpar performance would be magnified in the international spotlight, potentially tarnishing her reputation. Embracing the unknown and addressing it with determination and preparation is the essence of conquering Yalom's abyss in sports. This bold move ultimately set her on a path to achieving international recognition and solidified her status as an icon in the world of athletics. She admits in her book,

> Though I was glad that it was all over there was a certain feeling of remorse deep inside me. It is different to lose when you have no chance. But once you are in the reckoning and end up a hair's breadth away from a medal then it hurts. Tears were swelling in my eyes but I didn't let them flow out. There was no point crying in front of the entire world. Racing is a game. You win some races and lose others. I shook hands with the winners, who said in mock concern, 'bad luck'…the race wasn't a total loss. In purely personal terms I did gain something from it. It gave me the confidence for future competitions. (82)

By an agonizingly narrow margin of just one-hundredth of a second, P.T. Usha found herself trailing the victor in the 400 meters hurdles event at the Olympics. She engaged in a fierce battle, giving her all in an attempt to secure victory, yet the elusive win slipped through her grasp. Her near-miss at the finish line was marked by three key factors that contributed to her loss. Firstly, the event itself was a new challenge for Usha, as she lacked prior experience with the intricacies of the 400 meters hurdles. This absence of familiarity meant that she had to adapt swiftly to the event's demands while competing on the grand stage of the Olympics. Secondly, her positioning in the first half of the race proved to be a crucial factor. Experiencing an early setback placed her in a challenging position, making it difficult to recover. The gruelling nature of the 400 meters hurdles required an impeccable pacing strategy from the very start, and any lag in the initial stages could prove detrimental to her overall performance.

Thirdly, a moment that could have been decisive was her miss at the finish line lunge. This seemingly minor detail could have made all the difference between victory and vanquishment. The milliseconds lost during this critical juncture further emphasized the incredibly fine margins that separate triumph from defeat in elite athletics. Ultimately, as Usha dissected the reasons behind her loss, it became apparent that her struggles with the initial few hurdles significantly impacted her overall performance. The race demanded not only endurance and technique but also an impeccable balance between speed and precision. Amidst the heartache of this vanquishment, the resounding admiration and support from her homeland served as a balm for her wounded spirit. The athlete's experiences, as described in her autobiography, are more than just personal stories; they are imbued with the expectations and sentiments of her fellow countrymen. The bravery in the face of

failure becomes a story of group resiliency or mutual disappointment, depending on the cultural narrative she is seen to follow. The public's constant support and belief from back home were crucial in helping her cry less and reinforcing her status as a cherished sports legend. This first-person narrative sheds light on how athletes navigate national identity when faced with hardship (Edensor 2002).

Mary Kom's *Unbreakable* (2013) is a down to earth account of her total surrender to boxing. Her grit and determination, spanning from childhood to the London Olympics, radiates from the pages in this account of achieving in a male-dominated arena. Mary is a member of the Kom tribe. The Kom are a Tibeto-Burman ethnic group residing in the state of Manipur in north-eastern India. The problem of the North East is unique in that, as opposed to other differences like language, caste, or religion, the issue is almost exclusively defined in terms of race. Stated otherwise, because Northeast groups belong to a demographic component characterised by a racialized physical appearance, they are usually portrayed as existing outside the limits of the Indian nation. In *Unbreakable*, she comments on her appearance, noting, "Because of our oriental looks, people from the Northeast are often mocked in other parts of India. We're called Nepalis or Chinkies, and peope call us names like ching-ching chong-chong…When I used to say I am from Manipur, people didn't even know where it was" (16). According to Benedict Anderson, a nation is an imagined political community, and stories are essential to creating these relationships. By narrating her achievements, setbacks, and aspirations, Kom strengthens this imagined community and validates Hobsbawm's claim that tradition plays a significant part in forming national identity. Furthermore, Anderson and Hobsbawm provide complimentary frameworks for evaluating the effects of these customs. While Hobsbawm's analysis of tradition clarifies the methods via which these narratives

advance the idea of a nation, Anderson emphasises the importance of creating a shared narrative as a cornerstone in the nation-building process. According to Hobsbawm, traditions are more than just ingrained customs; they can also be more recent creations that have been given the appearance of antiquity, supporting particular norms and values among a community. They frequently portray themselves as upholding consistency with a relevant historical past. This idea is especially pertinent to the world of sports, where customs take the form of stories, symbols, and rituals that represent a people's pride and shared history. Analysing Kom's autobiography from Hobsbawm's point of view, reveals how sportsmen actively participate in these made-up customs, influencing both the story of their triumphs and the importance of their setbacks.

Language becomes a problem as well, and Mary says she became "acutely aware of my inability to communicate effectively in either English or Hindi" (74) as she travelled more widely. Despite confronting racism and being questioned on her nationality, she continues, "Whether or not I took 'Indian', I am Indian in my heart. Often, when I travelled abroad, the Chinese, Korean, Mongolian, Vietnamese or Thai athletes would mistake me for one of their own. Each time, I would explain I was Indian. But you look like us, not like them, they would say, pointing at my teammates" (62). Mary is unmistakably identified by the nation as a national athletic icon. Mary, for one, is ecstatic to be representing India. Through her words and symbolic actions, like holding the Indian flag during the Olympics' closing ceremony, she fervently conveys the pride in her country. After the Olympics, Mary obtained sponsorship deals from a number of businesses, such as Herbal Life and the National Egg Co-Ordination Committee, and was elevated to the post of superintendent of police. She also received property for the establishment of a sports academy in

Manipur. Gender and colour are mentioned interchangeably when discussing Mary's interest in boxing and her prowess in it. As a lady from a region of north-eastern India that has a longer history of resisting foreign pressures and distinct gender relations from mainstream India—that is, one that is less patriarchal and more egalitarian—Mary is the embodiment of the mythologized strong woman from the region. When ethnic differences produce unusual gender relations, they are seen positively, especially when these gender relations result in sporting achievement.

She has gained the label of "supermum" for her achievements in the male-dominated sport of boxing while simultaneously fulfilling her responsibilities as a wife and mother. She has also served as an inspiration to other Indian women who aspire to succeed in male-dominated fields without sacrificing their preference to procreate. The Indian boxer in her *Unbreakable* explains how she overworked herself in training sessions without knowing that it would adversely affect her health. Still she doesn't complain about the physical stress she underwent: "But the rigorous exercises and training did not dull my enthusiasm one bit. I learnt fast" (31). She maintains a great decree of forbearance and rectitude which stuns the readers. She is a farmer's daughter so she is not new to hard work and pain. She tells us that her acceptance of this very lesson had empowered her to become resilient. In a sport that chews up and spits out human flesh, her longevity is nothing short of phenomenal. Doctors have been amazed at her extraordinary gifts of recovery. But Mary Kom is more than a genetic aberration. She has dealt with multiple challenges - she started to exercise just six months after delivering twin boys, she has been constantly prone to hamstring and shoulder injuries and she is the only Indian fighter from the inaugural edition of the women's world championships in 2001 to still be competing. Since then she's out trained, outfought, out-thought and outlasted at least two generations of fighters. Even

after being the World Amateur Boxing champion five times, and having a biography and a movie made on her, she has not let the success get to her head.

This ‘never say die’ attitude of hers is what has prevented her from hanging her boots. She has skipped national championships and Asian Games yet she managed to add another feat to her already illustrious medal cabinet by becoming the World Champion for a record sixth time. That Mary Kom has managed to stay one step ahead is because she has been able to reinvent herself over the years. She has seemingly got faster and stronger-defying age. To compensate for slowed reflexes, she has sharpened her technique. Jonathan Selvaraj stated the rigorous training session when he visited Kom shortly before the World Championship: “In the training hall, Mary Kom’s yells as her physio stretches her tight post work out muscle groups attest to the effort she’s putting in. It is painful business but it works” (Selvaraj). Kom is a sober and down- to-earth sportsperson who calculates the risks and designs her game plan. Her success and longevity has to do with her perseverance and work ethic. There are not many instances narrated in the autobiography that could reflect her per perspective on defeat. Only sporadic episodes of defeat in a few bouts of boxing are depicted in the autobiography. While preparing for the first Asian Women’s Boxing Championship Meet in 2001, Kom had her passport and entire luggage stolen during her train journey to Hisar. She was devastated and ended up sobbing aloud. Since a huge sum of money had gone into the documentation, she was anguished to trouble her poor parents with more troubles. When she finally received the passport in a few days’ time, she threw away the talisman her father had tied around her arm. It occurs to her that believing in charms is contrary to her belief; she suddenly discarded the talisman which would have warded off evil. She feels that with the talisman gone, her run of bad luck ended. However, the strain and anxiety eventually caught up with her,

and she lost her first fight in Bangkok. She was the least confident she had ever been. She writes, “When I saw my opponent- bigger than me, with well-formed muscles- I became nervous. She looked strong and confident and had the support of the home crowd. I went down tamely” (58). The significance of putting self-kindness above self-judgment, accepting one's shared humanity over alienation, and engaging in mindfulness exercises instead of giving in to over-identification was emphasised by N.D. Neff (97). These principles are discernible in these autobiographical narratives where athletes candidly recount their challenges and coping strategies.

Mary Kom’s journey to become a boxing legend was filled with challenges, and her confrontation with what Irvin D. Yalom terms “the abyss” was a deciding moment in her life. But she quickly absorbed her lesson. Mary Kom faced significant opposition from her parents, especially her father, when she expressed her desire to pursue a career in boxing. Their concerns were rooted in traditional values and societal norms. They feared that her involvement in a combat sport like boxing might jeopardize her marriage prospects, as it was not considered a conventional path for young women. Kom’s initial losses on the international stage took a toll on her psychologically. The world of boxing is fiercely competitive, and facing defeat, especially on a global platform, can be emotionally devastating. Her struggles to secure victories may have made her question her abilities and the path she had chosen. Kom’s journey was made even more challenging by the absence of support from her family. Without their encouragement and understanding, she faced her battles largely on her own. This isolation can be mentally taxing and make one feel like they are navigating uncharted territory. In Irvin D. Yalom’s terms, ‘the abyss’ represents a moment of existential crisis and self-confrontation. For Mary Kom, this abyss was a critical juncture where she had to reconcile her aspirations with the expectations of

her family and society. It was a moment of profound inner conflict and self-reflection. Kom's ability to confront the abyss and emerge stronger is a testament to her determination and resilience. She didn't allow societal norms or her initial losses to define her path. Instead, she chose to pursue her passion relentlessly, proving her mettle in a male-dominated sport.

She promised herself that she would fight with both her body and mind, and that she wouldn't ever give up so easily again. Kom's sights were already fixed on the World Championships in the US in the near future. She made a self-promise to herself to leave her mark there. She advanced to the finals after her teammates each lost one after the other. She came to learn that the foreign fighters were not invincible. However, she was vanquished by Turkish Hula Sahin in her last fight. Her appetite loss was the biggest setback for her. The meal there was nothing new to her. Despite her best efforts, she was unable to consume the food and began to lose weight. Recalling that she weighed only 46 kg prior to her last match is encouraging. She most likely lost out on her chance to win gold because of this. She was furious with her father right before she departed for Pennsylvania, and she thought that was why she was being punished. It might sound silly and trivial to find her equating this vanquishment as a side effect of her quarrel with her father. But it is often natural for a sportsperson to find reasons for her defeat. Yet she works rationally to make her vanquishment as a time to grow up and tries to turn it into a positive and constructive occurrence as it leads her to reflect and look for information and help in identifying a solution. When she resumed her games after her pregnancy at the Asian Women's Championship held in Guwahati in 2005, she had to convince her parents that it would not lead to any health complications. She managed to reach the final, but had to settle for silver. And this for her parents is a proof that their doomsday predictions

were coming true. But she is convinced that she has lot more to offer and decides to carry on with her boxing dreams. She was resolved to prove everyone wrong.

When she travels to London for the 2012 Olympic Games after qualifying her sixth World Championship, she is ecstatic. She had been practicing hard with her coach and was leaving no stone unturned in her attempt an Olympic gold. It was not just physical training but she also mentally calculated her moves according to the opponents she assumed she would face in the games. By this time, she had grown as a sportsperson and had the mental equanimity to accept her vanquishment in the semi-finals against Adams. She fought desperately and knew that she could not have worked harder. She had given her best and she was being honest with herself. This marks the transformation of Kom who was aggressive all along her career to have converted herself into a balanced and mature personality. Startlingly, Kom presents herself as a typical Indian who would consent to a marriage arranged by her parents to accentuate her reliance on conservative norms of the Indian society. Sports autobiographies provide a unique space where gender performativity is emphasised. The personal narratives of athletes reveal how they conform to or defy social standards in how they constantly embody their gender. As she admits, “My parents want me to get married after the Seoul Olympics. One sister younger to me has already got married and my parents think that I should get married before my other two younger sisters. I’m a simple girl and I believe it is my duty to obey my parents. Our’s is an orthodox Indian family and I quite like it that way” (87).

Leigh Gilmore, Professor Emerita of English at Ohio State University, *Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (2001) notes that women writers are able to portray their own lives and identities while constructing themselves as a “representative subject” standing for others. This makes women’s autobiographies

particularly important to study because they draw from discourses regarding truth and identity and map debates over what a woman is and should be (34). According to Gilmore, women have questioned the existing quo by using their life writing to highlight oppressed experiences-for example, sexual and familial abuse-or by chronicling the “suppressed histories” of people who don't fit into the dominant, masculine society. (57).The notion of failure regularly connects with gender performance in these autobiographies. For example, when a female athlete talks about her experiences with vulnerability or failure, it might unsettle conventional ideas of femininity that associate women with weakness and hence undermine deeply ingrained ideas about gender roles. Interestingly, P T Usha’s autobiography does not mention the struggles and bouts she might have had to face in an extremely patriarchal society. Kom, on the other hand, talks about her early falling out with her father and her struggle to be heard in a sports administration that was dominated by men. The boxer is shown in her autobiography as an active agent who deftly navigates her place within the gendered sports milieu, rather than just a victim of gender biases. These memoirs by Indian sportswomen demonstrate how female athletes are starting to make a name for themselves in the sports industry when old gender preconceptions about women in the 20th and 21st centuries are contrasted. These autobiographies demonstrate their capacity to dismantle discriminatory obstacles and constrictive ideas regarding women’s physical attributes, athletic prowess, and sports involvement. However, Kom and Usha emphasis and demonstrate their femininity, with Kom claiming to prepare her native dishes and Usha adhering to social mores.

P.T. Usha is extremely proud of her achievements and representation of India. Her ability to adjust to various sporting events and training regimens makes her happy. She is extremely driven to modify her training schedule in order to succeed

internationally and win more medals for her country. *Unbreakable* exhibits a strong nationalist bent because Kom emphasises her core Indianness. She writes fervently about the cruel treatment of North East Indians by mainland Indians. As a result, she always makes it a point to assert her Indian identity. It is intriguing to discover that these women perceive themselves as significant assets to their country's sporting ambitions.

Martina Navratilova's autobiography *Being Myself* (1985) is the first work to be examined in American women's memoirs. Navratilova encountered a number of obstacles as she made her way onto the international stage. Martina Navratilova was born on October 18, 1956, in Prague, to an athletic family. Navratilova's maternal grandmother competed in national tennis competitions in Czech Republic, while her mother was a professional ski instructor. Despite the fact that life under the Communist dictatorship was difficult in many ways, she and her half-sister, Jana, enjoyed a wonderful childhood. Her family had suffered tremendously under the communist regime, losing land, property and the yester year's splendour. To quote Navratilova, "Sometimes when I was little, I'd see my mother looking off into space with a sad look on her face and I would guess she was daydreaming about the time when she was little, before the war. I think my mother and my grandmother carried a sense of litost, a Czech word for sadness that I picked up, a feeling of loss at the core of their souls" (15).

Jana senior and Martina's stepfather, Miroslav, were both recreational tennis players who raised the two daughters (Martina's birth father died when she was nine), and Navratilova's first recollections are of watching them play on the Czech red clay courts. Early lessons from her stepfather when she began playing at the age of six, which she continued under the watchful eye of tennis pro George Parma, as well as

the Communist government's general support for sports, created a favourable environment in which the young girl's obvious talents could be nurtured. Jan Kodes, a Czech tennis legend, promptly took Navratilova under his wing. She claims that her father was a demanding teacher who stayed upbeat because he knew she was having a good time playing the game. Miroslav was not like the American and European tennis fathers who seem to live their lives through their daughters. Martina is a very intelligent and insightful person when it comes to life. She is wise and conscientious beyond her years.

Reading her early childhood years, this study identifies her putting forth a lot of effort in tennis and slogging through her schoolwork. She studied German, French, physics, and grammar in order to be reasonably active for life. She realized she could not keep playing tennis indefinitely. She recollects passionately her childhood in her mother country and how it was to be a child at Czech Republic, "I don't think most Czech children start noticing the limitations until they get older. Then they start developing a morose acceptance of what they can do and what they can't. I think I was a little different; I always had a sense that something was not quite right" (53). Navratilova draws a parallel between her people's servility and her rebellion and sense of independence in her autobiography with 'The Good Soldier Svejk', a fictional character. Jaroslav Hasek, Czech humourist and writer created the fictional character Svejk. To survive war and peace, he acts like a moron. He is a scumbag soldier who always managed to avoid jail time by lying and conspiring. She believes she got a nagging feeling in Czechoslovakia that things were not quite right. They devolved into a despondent civilization. The public was worried for the future. There was no joy in the air. People have a defeatist mentality on what they can and cannot do. She could not be a Svejk, obeying the sergeant's orders and living a restricted life.

According to her, “Fairness, that was always the main thing to me. I didn’t care how good they were as long as they were fair” (53). For the first time, Navratilova visited the United States in 1973. She had a curious mix of contradictory characteristics from the start: guarded and suspicious at times, blatantly emotional at others. Despite the fact that everything was new and intimidating at first, the teenager rapidly grew to adore America and its innate freedoms. The charm of American fast food enchanted the young Czech, and she gained twenty pounds in the first six weeks. Navratilova was enamoured with almost everything about her new home. She writes in her 1985 autobiography, “This country was waiting for me. It would give me the friends and the space and the freedom and the courts and the sneakers and the weight machines and the right food to let me become a tennis champion, to play the best tennis any woman ever played, which I think I have done in the past few years” (16).

Martina Navratilova’s decision to defect from Czechoslovakia to the United States in 1975 after losing a tennis match to Chris Evert at the U.S. Open indeed aligns with Irvin D. Yalom’s concept of “the abyss”. In Yalom’s framework, ‘the abyss’ represents a moment of existential crisis and self-confrontation. The discourse within sporting autobiographies regarding the theme of failure plays a crucial role in unveiling the athlete’s internal resolve and the restoration of their self-efficacy. For Martina Navratilova, the decision to defect from her home country was undoubtedly a profound existential moment. It was not just a sporting decision but a life-altering choice with immense personal and political implications. Navratilova faced substantial societal and political pressures in Czechoslovakia. While her country had supported her early development as a tennis prodigy, as she rose through the ranks, the government began to exert control over her life. They dictated her travel, associations, and claimed a significant portion of her earnings. This intrusion into her

personal and professional life created a growing sense of confinement. The decision to defect was not just about pursuing her tennis career; it was a fundamental choice between freedom and security. Navratilova had to weigh the allure of personal freedom and the opportunity to pursue her passion in the United States against the security of her homeland, as well as the potential consequences for her family. She delves into the tension between individual aspirations and national allegiance, providing a candid examination of the challenges associated with performing for a collective identity. After defecting, Navratilova grappled with intense fear and isolation. She was constantly accompanied by the FBI in the days following her decision, fearing capture by Communist agents and forced return to Czechoslovakia. This fear extended to the potential risks her family faced due to her actions. Navratilova's rapid rise in tennis had shielded her from significant adversity until this point.

Losing her status as a citizen of her home country and struggling to establish herself in the U.S. tennis scene was a tremendous blow. It challenged her identity as a tennis player and as a person. Navratilova's struggle with monophobia, or the fear of being alone, reflects the emotional toll of her decision. When an athlete's athletic identity is faced with obstacles like failure, Erikson's psychosocial development phases provide a useful framework for understanding how they handle crises like identity vs. role uncertainty and closeness versus isolation (195). Athletes who write autobiographical narratives describe how failures force them to reflect and reassess their relationships, values, and aspirations on a personal and professional level. The representation of these setbacks, woven into the open and personal tales of autobiographical writing, explores the universal human experiences of hopelessness, tenacity, and despair in addition to offering a window into one person's athletic path.

These autobiographies' portrayals of failure capture the psychological journey of the athlete and serve as a testament to both the transformational power of sports and human nature's intrinsic resilience.

The transition from a familiar environment to a foreign land was emotionally taxing. It took her years to adjust, both professionally and personally. This devastated her, so she sought the help of Sandra Haynie, a professional golfer. Haynie aided her in dealing with the challenges that come with being a professional athlete. She took her to the gym to work out on the equipment, emphasizing the importance of sticking to a strict diet. Martina was encouraged to focus her energies inside and to be angry at herself by Haynie. Nonetheless, she worked on her body and mind, and with Haynie's help, she was able to recapture her game. She went on to win Wimbledon in 1978, ending Chris Evert's four-year reign as world champion. Navratilova's journey embodies the essence of "the abyss" as described by Irvin D. Yalom. Her decision to defect from Czechoslovakia and confront the challenges of starting anew in the United States was a profound existential crisis. She faced political pressures, fear, isolation, and the need to redefine her identity in the face of adversity. Navratilova's remarkable resilience and determination allowed her to not only overcome these challenges but also become one of the greatest tennis players in history, demonstrating the transformative power of confronting "the abyss" in life's journey.

For four years, Navratilova was barred from meeting her family until 1979, when they defected and joined her in Dallas, where she had purchased her first house. She did not return to Czechoslovakia until she returned home triumphantly as a member of the United States Federation. With her pioneering physical training regime, Navratilova has revolutionised the game of tennis for both women and men. The International Tennis Hall of Fame named Navratilova 'one of the greatest female

athletes of all time' after she won 74 straight matches in 1984, a record that stands to this day. She won 167 singles titles (and 177 doubles trophies) during her career, more than any other woman or man in history. Navratilova's longevity is maybe her most impressive statistic: she played her final professional match on the tour with renowned doubles specialist Mike Bryan (twin brother of Bob Bryan). Navratilova was 49 years and 11 months old when they won the 2006 U.S. Open mixed doubles title in Flushing Meadows in New York City. Due to her Eastern European origins as a Communist behind the Iron Curtain, she was already certain to be seen as the "Other". Navratilova was the polar opposite of Chris Evert in terms of presenting the perfect package to the Americanized global market. The obese young Czech was the quintessential outsider, dark and moody, at times distrustful and prone to excessive emotional outbursts. As commentator Johnette Howard put it, "They were reduced to broad caricatures: Evert the so-called Ice Maiden versus Navratilova, or Navrat the Brat, shouting, head-clutching, blunt-to-the-bone" (164). Martina, the lesbian stranger, vs. Chrissie, the girl next door, Chris America vs. Navratilova, the iron curtain, Amazon whose forearm veins popped out in bas-relief, a Communist defector.

All of these apparent flaws would be difficult to overcome in the best of circumstances, but Navratilova was concealing a personal burden that was becoming increasingly burdensome and difficult to conceal: her actual lesbian orientation. Navratilova always knew she had particular feelings for other girls and women, which she only later learnt to classify as "gay" or "lesbian". After defecting in 1975, Navratilova felt a fresh freedom to explore her affections for other women as she began to travel widely on the international tennis circuit. Individual activity, rather than communal activism, dominated the years 1974–90. Identity markers rose to the

top of the priority list. Chris Evert's feminine style of play, Martina Navratilova's unbridled masculine athleticism, and Renée Richards' reinvention of gender reified contested concepts of femininity. The public outings of Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova in 1981, as well as Margaret Court's anti-homosexual backlash, brought lesbian culture in women's sport to the forefront.

Navratilova, like Evert, had a string of high-profile relationships over the years, including socialite and former beauty queen Judy Nelson, a married mother of two with whom she lived for eight years until 1991, and a three-year relationship with acclaimed writer and gay icon Rita Mae Brown, author of *The Rubyfruit Jungle*. When she was preoccupied pursuing her tennis career, she had kept that part of herself untapped for a long time. When she began a relationship with Rita Mae Brown, a well-known activist and writer, she came out publicly about her sexuality. They were dating, and she began to feel like the prodigy of the previous decade. She did lose the single-mindedness she had had when she initially joined the circuit. Rita Mae made her believe that her work was merely a game and not a life or death scenario. She gradually began to feel conflicted about tennis, about herself, and possibly about her career. Her romance was becoming too much for her. Both of them had jobs to do, and they were serious about their work. Martina seemed to have flung a piece of her career to the side, as if she had given up a piece of herself. She tried to move on and ended their relationship since she could not restore her tennis touch. In 1981, the partnership came to an end. Navratilova was also linked to famous athletes such as golf legend Sandra Haynie, an older woman who coached her for a time in the late 1970s; however, it was her 1981 meeting with basketball star Nancy Lieberman, a friendship whose personal dimensions continue to perplex, that transformed Navratilova from a rather good tennis player into a superstar who would rewrite the

books on what a female athlete could achieve and be. Navratilova was simply being too polite, according to Lieberman. If she wanted to be a winner, she'd have to learn to develop a 'killer instinct'. She explained to her new charge that she couldn't have a friendly lunch or supper with arch-rival Chris Evert and then go out on the court and smash her, as she needed to do. For several years, Lieberman effectively ruined Navratilova's connection with Evert by emphasising that Navratilova had to put on her "game face" whenever she was in public, especially when she was with Evert.

In order to recreate Navratilova, Lieberman devised an all-encompassing fitness regimen for her that included not only traditional tennis drills and practise sessions, but also weight, speed, and agility training, as well as cross training with other sports such as basketball. She also emphasised a holistic approach to competing, which included sports psychology and later ground-breaking food and sports ideas. Navratilova became the prototype for the new female athlete as a result of the plan's success. To help with this massive task, Lieberman enlisted the help of a number of professionals, including ophthalmologist Dr. Renée Richards, a transsexual who was already well-known and controversial for her professional tennis career. The newly formed squad was instantly dubbed 'Team Navratilova' due to widespread media coverage. They drew a lot of attention, the majority of it negative. Navratilova was constantly stigmatised as the lesbian with the ridiculous entourage in tow. Her companion was a divorced Texas beauty queen and mother of two for eight years. Renée Richards, a six-foot-two ophthalmologist, was one of her coaches. The media excessively drew an intimidating picture of Navratilova for the public.

Navratilova was converted into a haughty, untouchable juggernaut who dominated the women's game for years via physical, mental, and emotional work. Evert still gets irritated when she remembers how arrogantly Navratilova would

swagger around the court, slapping her thigh angrily if she missed a shot, even if it was an impossible get. Navratilova developed the mentality that any match, on any surface, against any opponent, was hers to win or lose, which was not seen again on the women's tour until the Williams sisters made their debut years later. On the other side of the net, the tennis player was almost insignificant in the equation. She confesses that she is terrible at handling emotional problems. She would avoid a conflict at all cost. Things would then add up and get worse. She claims that she was like her mother who hated problems. In Navratilova's words,

> I'm the same way. I'm terrible. When it comes to conflict, I try to avoid it at all costs. I just let things build up and get worse. One of the reasons my career started to go down the tubes in the late seventies was because I let other people make decisions for me, and I couldn't say no. I wanted to please everybody, but I was the only one out there on centre court getting beaten love and love by Chris Evert. (29)

Americans, in particular, appear to have an odd fascination with bringing superstars to abnormal heights and then tearing them down. Navratilova, as a young homosexual woman, attempted to keep her concentration on tennis in the midst of the turbulence, but she was swept up in it all, and her sexual orientation cost her dearly in the marketing world. Nancy Lieberman, her coach, was also soiled by association, and her career suffered as a result. On the endorsements front, Navratilova was an orphan. Commerce was and still is a fan of Evert. In fact, Navratilova did not truly put the incident behind her until after she retired, which is when she started collecting her past years as a professional,

> My image definitely hurts me at times. It was no accident that I was never on the cover of Sports Illustrated until I won the 1983 US Open. I had already won everything else in tennis, but the corporate big shots would rather have a model … Or take *Sports Illustrated*'s Sportswoman or Sportsman of the Year honour. In 1983 I won three of the four events in the Grand Slam, losing only one match all year, but they gave the top award to Mary Decker. (63)

Later she notes, "In 1982, I was used in a *Time* magazine cover story about the new concept of femininity- the idea being that today's women are in shape, not just shapely, that having muscles is all right. There I was, forearms and all" (62). Navratilova has written at length on gender and how it is constructed. She discusses how gender conformity was not strictly enforced in the Czech Republic. Her mother was athletic, and totally into sports, and she pushed her daughters to play and get dirty after a rough game on the court. She also raised a family without having any reservations about the gender roles she had to follow. To quote Navratilova,

> In Czechoslovakia, nobody ever put me down for running around with the boys, playing ice hockey and soccer. From what I've been told, people in the States used to think that if girls were good at sports their sexuality would be affected. Being feminine meant being a cheerleader, not being an athlete. The image of women is changing now. You don't have to be pretty for people to come and see you play. At the same time if you're a good athlete, it doesn't mean you're not a woman…Being a good athlete carried no stigma for me growing up, but I was always aware of not having a feminine body. I liked being able to do things with my body, though, and I'd gladly sacrifice the looks- what the feminine type looks like- to be able to do what I do. (57)

Navratilova also frequently mentions the men and women tennis players on the tour. Women players, she believes, are companions and hang around after matches, but men are aggressive and not on friendly terms on and off the court. According to Navratilova, "The boys seem worse off than the girls. There is a degree of socialization on the women's tour- and not as much as in the past, but we still play cards or gossip or have a meal together once in a while. Most of the men seem like little boys, very childlike, living in a shell, not caring about growing up or finding out if there's life beyond the fuzzy balls. They start making so much money, so fast" (36). Furthermore she remarks,

> The women tended to be on a first-name basis with each other. Sure, they were all out there to win and make money, but there was none of the hard feelings and impersonality that you get on the men's tour. It's funny, the way people always say women are the foxes, the ones who'll stab you in the back. In tennis, the men are much worse. We women speak our minds, and we have our arguments, but there's none of the backstabbing you see with the men, nothing like the way Connors and Lendl go at each other. (102)

She holds her opponents in high regard and views the game as the ultimate test of character. She improves her match strategies and physical regimen with each loss. She is a fierce competitor who would meticulously prepare and groom herself in order to fully participate in the game. When she is emotionally depressed as a result of her losses, she will embark on a buying binge, which she later abandons in order to maintain her discipline. She concedes,

> I was fascinated by the gladiators in the arena. I think of them sometimes when I'm waiting to go into the great bowl at the US open or the old green

> stadium at Wimbledon. It's the same idea: the two warriors, the fight to the death, the crowd rooting for its favourite. I always accepted that notion of winning and losing, of surviving on your wits and your courage and your skill. (53)

She has a habit of analysing her opponent and learning from them. In Navratilova's words, the competitors were dependent on each other, "Being on the court with an opponent is a strange business. You're totally out for yourself, to win a match, but yet you're dependent on your opponent to some degree about the type of match it is, and how well you play. You need the opponent; without her you do not exist" (146). Navratilova is perceptive and up to date on the latest developments in tennis and sports in general. She is now a broadcaster and has been working on trans-athletes admittance into elite sports. She writes in her autobiography about the next best lady tennis player, she is on target because she inadvertently predicts Serena Williams' entry, "It wouldn't surprise me if the next great female tennis player was a black woman who started her tennis lessons at nine and ten like me" (286).

It is possible that charting the growth of African American tennis superstars Venus and Serena Williams is an exercise in myth-making, since the Williams family's unusual story has taken on the ring of an urban legend. The sisters rose to prominence in tennis from relative obscurity. Serena Williams, the fifth daughter of Richard Williams and Oracene Price, was initially home-schooled, nurtured as a devoted Jehovah's Witness, and trained by their father from an early age. The tennis prodigy showed exceptional talent at an early age, competing in her first competition at the age of four. In 1999, Serena Williams became the first of the Williams sisters to win the US Open, a Grand Slam competition. Ironically, she defeated Martina Hingis to win the title, vanquishing Venus in the process. Serena Williams, who was five feet

eleven inches tall, was noted for her on-court confidence, power, athleticism, and dominance. Serena, on the other hand, was not without her critics. The perception she is haughty, aloof, and anti-social with their tennis opponents is a hot topic in the locker room. In a sport that has historically been dominated by white, upper-class individuals, she has also found success. As Karen Duda delineates, "While Venus and Serena have not been as vocal about the issue, they contend that racial prejudice still exists on the courts". This notion aligns with what sport sociologist Jay Coakley refers to as the "often subtle racial ideology at work" when it comes to sports performances. 'Whiteness' is ruled out as a factor in success (36). Regardless of where they are from in the globe, whether black athletes succeed or fail in a particular sport, many search for genetic explanations that align with racist ideologies. Rather than using experience, strategy, desire, or intelligence, they try to attribute the strengths and failings of black athletes to innate or inherent traits. When athletes have "dark" skin tones, the conversation quickly shifts to racial issues, and people start looking for the physical characteristics that those athletes possess. This is true even though it is obvious that success requires a combination of physical, psychological, and cognitive skills from a variety of sports, and even though the athletes are diverse in size, shape, and ancestry. In the process, many have a tendency to downplay, disregard, or minimise the impact that social and cultural variables have on the lives of people of colour.

Serena has experienced discrimination in both overt and covert ways. Overt racism is the term for ideas, opinions, and spokespersons who are in the business of distancing themselves from an overtly racist argument or attitude that receive favourable and transparent media coverage. Inferential/implied racism, on the other hand, is concerned with the widespread use of seemingly naturalised portrayals of

race-related events. There have been instances of clear racial slurs directed towards her. There is verbalised jeering from sports supporters who show fleeting or long-term dissatisfaction with athletic performance. Possibly the most overt vocal proof of racism directed at Serena took place in March 2001 during a tennis tournament in Indian Wells, California. Because Venus and Serena would almost certainly meet in the quarterfinals, there was a lot of expectation surrounding this match. The crowd was incensed when Venus pulled out of the match just minutes before it was scheduled to start because of tendinitis in her right knee. They assumed that Venus's withdrawal was planned by their notorious coach and father, Richard Williams. When Serena Williams was announced, the spectators' booing grew louder, sounding more like a cynical boxing audience than a polite tennis crowd. Richard and Venus Williams were booed as they took their seats. The boos were accompanied by a barrage of violent racial epithets. As Williams remarks in her autobiography *On the Line* (2009),

> I was crying when I left the court, but I didn't want anyone to see so I kept wiping away my tears. I was tired and sweaty, so that helped. The tears just blended in with the anguish of the match…but the whole time I kept thinking of Althea Gibson and how she had to deal with some of the same vitriol. I remembered reading that Althea had to sleep in her car when she was out on the road traveling to these tournaments, because she couldn't stay in the hotels. (40)

In accordance with the literature on stigma and identity, failure has the potential to elicit feelings of shame or social ostracization. Nevertheless, within sports autobiographies, the act of documenting these moments serves as a means to reclaim and reshape the narrative, effectively mitigating stigma and cultivating a sense of

normalcy around the vulnerability inherent in competitive sports (Goffman 141). Despite the fact that racism is not explicitly condemned, as Sally Jenkins points out, the subtext may be, "that no white player would have received such a raft of criticism for being different from- or the same as- everybody else" (Jenkins). She chooses as well not to respond to their opponents' jealousies at all. It is as though she is preoccupied with other, more serious issues; player complaints are dismissed. Serena's apparent lack of court decorum and regard for the game has been criticised by numerous other players, pundits, and sports writers. On the other side, what is seen as haughtiness can actually be a black woman's public display of survival strategy-a "mask" that represents resistance to racial and gender oppression. One has to assume that Serena Williams' perspective is based on racial identity in the examination of her discourse. Her experiences as a well-known athlete must always highlight the significance of familial, racial, and gender influences. Serena Williams' rhetoric is focused on the sometimes erroneous assumptions that others have about her, rather than on what she does and says.

Delia Douglas in her critique on *Sociology of Sport,* an online magazine offers a scholarly perspective on Serena Williams. According to Douglas, mass-media portrayals of Williams focus on her racial "differences" (263). Her physical appearance, athletic style, and attitude have all been described through mediated imagery. In conclusion, Douglas thinks that prevailing power dynamics based on gender, ethnicity, and class are connected to the myriad interpretive issues surrounding Serena's portrayals on the tennis circuit. There are innumerable books and articles about her in the popular press. Most of the books were written to bolster the claim that they highlight the specific accomplishments of successful African American women, such as Wilma Rudolph, Althea Gibson, and Alice Coachman.

These authors frequently explain how these women used sport to advance in society or to express their "natural" physicality or lack of femininity. In fact, a survey of current biographies of Serena reveals a trend of emphasising her lowly, bigoted upbringings. Despite racial hurdles, she achieved success in tennis as a result of hard work and parental vision. Although the underlying, natural aptitude concept has been debunked, the surge in social mobility has been clearly documented. Williams' unusual determination is perceptible in her view of failure. As she remarks:

> At the same time we must be careful not to invest too heavily into any one situation, in case it doesn't work out the way we've planned. We get disappointed from time to time. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't look forward to anything, or even that we should keep our expectations reasonable. Not at all. What it means for me is to aim high and to know that if I fall short of the mark it was still worth doing. Whatever it happens to be, if it's worth looking forward to it, it's worth doing. (14)

There are excerpts from her autobiography where she defines her transformation from an untethered athlete to an empowered unstoppable phenomenon. As she comments,

> Pressure comes in all shapes and sizes. For me, it's been about the never-ending pursuit of perfection, and making room for the realization that I might never get my game exactly where I want it to be- meaning I'd never be firing on all cylinders at precisely the right time. I never really worried about the component parts of my game, I'd always had my shots, and the killer instinct, and the fiery competitive streak, but I'd never had to put all those aspects of

> my personality together on such a public stage, so it took a couple of stops and starts. (59)

She appears to have a range of views about being vanquished and facing loss. She believes that if you want to compete in the long run, you must use hardship to your advantage. This difficult lesson cannot be taught, coached, or predicted. It takes a rough period to make you realise this. As she admits,

> Tennis is a mental game. It has everything to do with the mind-set you take to the court and the personality you carry off of it- the mental toughness that gets talked about into the ground. Technique, fitness, muscle memory…those are a given at the professional level, but it's what you do with your particular skill set and how you respond to the bad patches and regain your footing that sets you apart. (88)

Serena Williams endured a period of intense emotional turmoil when she tragically lost her elder sister, Tunde, in a heart-breaking shootout. This devastating loss was further compounded by a significant injury to her left knee, necessitating surgical intervention. Unbeknownst to Serena, these harrowing experiences led her down a path of deep despair, marking a pivotal phase in her life and career. The loss of her beloved sister in such a violent and senseless manner undoubtedly left Serena emotionally shattered. Coping with the grief and trauma of losing a sibling to violence can be an overwhelming and isolating experience. In addition to the emotional trauma, Serena had to contend with a physical injury to her left knee. This injury required surgery, which not only posed a physical challenge but also disrupted her training regimen and competitive schedule. Serena's inner turmoil became evident in her daily routine. The once-eager athlete found it increasingly difficult to motivate

herself to practice and train between tournaments. The very act of getting out and hitting the tennis court became an arduous task. She felt “aching sadness” (97), “an all-over weariness” (98), and “a sudden disinterest in the world around her” (98), she writes in the chapter describing Tunde’s death.

She later confesses, “But after that I lapsed into a serious downhill mode. My knee was fine, but looking back I think my head wasn’t in the game…I couldn’t quite rededicate myself to my game…it was like every competitive bone in my body was broken- only I didn’t have the self-awareness or strength of character to see that anything was wrong” (106). Yalom uses the idea that meaninglessness is an existential problem as a starting point to examine the function of meaning-making. To live a genuine and satisfying life, one must create and discover meaning in our own unique way. He makes the argument that when we see the world regularly, we see it as a place where meaning already resides (97). Our involvement in daily chores that are tied to our goals helps us comprehend them. Existential anxiety, on the other hand, is a state of mind that interferes with our interaction with the well-known symbols of the outside world and destroys the intelligibility we take for granted. It also brings meaninglessness to our attention. In this approach, existential anxiety encourages us to re-evaluate our priorities and commit to activities that give our lives new meaning. . This is precisely what occurred to Serena as she gradually lost interest in tennis, went through depressive episodes, and felt burned out. She was down, miserable, and striving desperately to please her family, her sponsors, and regain the commitment she once had for tennis.

She cures herself by reconnecting to her African roots. In 2006, she went on a goodwill tour to Ghana and Senegal to educate herself of her roots. This trip back to her origins lifted her out of the depression that had been plaguing her since Tunde’s

death, as well as the accompanying professional funk. She held tennis clinics, provided medical help, and paid a visit to Elmina Castle, where slaves caught in the interior of Africa were held for weeks and starved before being shipped to North America. This experience and realisation had given her a tremendous amount of power. She returned believing she was a part of the most powerful race in human history. Serena challenges gender norms by documenting her psychological and physical resilience in the aftermath of defeat, asserting qualities traditionally associated with masculine perseverance.

While delving into her autobiography, Serena grapples with the public response to her failures, contending with relentless and unforgiving scrutiny from both the media and the public. This external examination, intricately linked with national pride, occasionally casts athletes into the role of scapegoats for national disappointment. Serena reflects on how she has navigated the potential ostracization, working her way back to redemption, not solely for herself but in the eyes of her compatriots. Serena has taken the harsh criticism of the media for not conforming to the constrictive sexual conventions. She is muscular, despite the fact that on the tour, slender, elegant forms are preferred as representations of femininity. Her on-court outfit is regarded as implying a deviant sexuality, in addition to highlighting her muscular physique. This contrasts her with the conforming sexuality that is emphasised in journalistic and promotional representations. But the most important difference-which is sometimes brought up-between Serena Williams and other female professional tennis players is that she is black and they are white. Vertinsky and Captain (1998) looked into the ways in which black female athletes' bodies have been understood through the ideological coding of masculinity concepts. They expound,

> …the dominant male, white culture drew a direct correspondence between stereotyped depictions of black womanhood and 'manly' athletic and physically gifted females. Their racialized notions of the virile or mannish black female athlete stemmed from a number of persistent historical myths: the linking of African American women's work history as slaves, their supposedly 'natural' brute strength and endurance inherited from their African origins, and the notion that vigorous or competitive sport masculinized women physically and sexually. (545)

The comment on Serena Williams's muscles, classifies her as not just unfeminine but also nearly hypermasculine, despite the fact that scholars previously noted that muscularity in female athletes is frequently interpreted as a male attribute. Serena encapsulates America in many ways- race, economics, stardom, culture, fashion, in all kinds of great, enraging and complicating ways. She is both American and not American. She has a large fanbase that loves her game and attitude and a minority audience that continuously jeers and harasses her for being black and subversive. Similarly, Navratilova struggled to gain both popular favour and citizenship in the United States. While she was a player, she always was pictured as a person who had fled 'beyond the iron curtains'. In terms of appearance and stature, she was un-American.

In the Indian sportswomen autobiographies, P.T. Usha does not explicitly probe into the challenges they likely faced in a highly patriarchal society. On the contrary, Mary Kom is vocal about her contribution to making the Indian boxing scene more accommodating for women. Further, they emphasize elements that highlight their femininity. For instance, Mary Kom mentions preparing traditional dishes, while P.T. Usha adheres to societal norms. Nevertheless, both athletes subtly

exaggerate these aspects to underscore their cultural identity and femininity. In Mary Kom's autobiography, *Unbreakable*, there is a notable emphasis on her Indian identity. She passionately addresses the issue of discrimination faced by North East Indians in mainland India, portraying herself as a staunch Indian. She takes every opportunity to assert her Indian identity, reflecting her strong sense of nationalism and her desire to combat the mistreatment of North East Indians. P.T.Usha and Mary Kom became symbols of national pride when they represented their country in international competitions like the Olympics or World Championships. Their performances evoked strong patriotic sentiments and united people across various backgrounds. They inspired a sense of patriotism and pride in their fellow citizens. When they achieved victories their victories are often seen as a collective achievement for the nation. Analyzing these autobiographies reveals the lesson of failure as an integral component of the national narrative. The collective empathy for fallen heroes/heroines often cultivates a deeper sense of patriotism—one that embraces vulnerability and the spirit of perseverance (Anderson 138). Consequently, these narratives of setback and recovery intertwine with the broader fabric of the nation's identity, offering a template for national resilience and adaptability.

When comparing the autobiographies of Indian and American sportswomen, a noticeable contrast emerges. Indian athletes often appear hesitant to investigate deeply into their existential crises, while American icons like Martina Navratilova and Serena Williams unreservedly explore the mental and emotional hardships they faced throughout their careers. These American athletes openly discuss their struggles without a second thought, offering readers valuable insights into their mental and emotional journeys. In contrast, Indian sportswomen seem more reserved in sharing such personal aspects of their lives in their autobiographies. Similarly, American

sportswomen are outspoken about the gender lens through which society and the media had critically viewed them while Indian sportswomen are less vocal about the gender concerns they had to deal with while pursuing sports. Moreover, the way athletes narrate and surmount their failures often reflects Butler's concept of gender performativity. In recounting their experiences, athletes actively reshape both their personal and athletic identities. The retelling of their struggles and vanquishments becomes a performance in its own right, possessing the transformative power to redefine the parameters of success in athletics beyond the rigid confines of gender norms.

The readers seldom have unmediated access to sportspersons experiences. According to Paul Eakin, Professor Emeritus, Indiana University Bloomington, these testimonies are mediated by available cultural models of identities: "How much of what autobiographers say they experience is equivalent to what they really experience, and how much of it is merely what they know how to say?" (94).These cultural models invalidate being vanquished and hence one finds meagre explanations regarding failure and loss. Today's capitalised economies and globalised markets revere victories and successes. Needless to say these successful and popular sportspersons shrink away from reflecting on their failed games and bad days on field. They largely concentrate on translating their visible achievements, talents, work ethic and quantifiable success. They do not provide meaningful insights into the sportspersons perspective on defeat or how do they manage pressure and stress, on the least how they pick up courage to play further even after succumbing to losses in games. There are very little ruminations on disillusions and disappointments.

Therefore, one cannot infer infinitesimal distilled wisdom from reading these autobiographies. For this study on the autobiographies of sportswomen, the works

included are not ideal (Navratilova's is an exception) or perfect models that should be imitated in an uncritical manner. Yet this research provides with evidence and rationale that is convincing and counters the general negativity associated with failure in the life of real sportspersons. According to Bale et al. (2004), Overman (2003), Pipkin (2008), and Whannel (2002) these works include the following: limited in their expressive form, predictable in their plot, formulaic in nature, superficial in content, banal and cliché-ridden, dominated by anecdote and gossip, lacking in analysis and short on human insight, and economically driven by the youth market.

Howells et al (2015) suggests all this combined together is likely to influence the "length, depth and specific content of the stories told, which will dictate the inclusion and relevance of the psycho-social related content" (148). Another problem they identify is that the accounts provided in sporting autobiographies are "influenced by the writer's motives and biases, their ability to recall events and experiences, and others' expectations and potential judgments" (149). Yet, it was motivating to observe a growth in self-assertion, self-confidence, and literary sophistication as this study proceeded through these select women's autobiographies, focusing on their subject matter, narrative formats, and the self-image that is portrayed.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

One wants to avoid failure at all costs—always. It is an awful feeling. It is a repulsive, unpleasant experience that crushes motivation and dreams. But is failing as horrible as people make it out to be? It is difficult to comprehend that setbacks, errors, and defeats offer insightful information. Failure serves as an example of what went wrong and what should never be done again. Even more, failing will draw attention to one's shortcomings. Why does that seem so good? In sport, one cannot become stronger, faster, more proficient, or more adept without being aware of their flaws and negative behaviours. Every time someone loses or fails, they have the chance to up their training intensity in one or more areas. Utilising one's experience is entirely up to the individual. There are instances wherein loss, frustration, embarrassment and endurance yielded results. James Salter, American writer and screenwriter is also of the opinion that loss and failure can substantially increase self- awareness and character. As he remarks, "Perhaps it was true that through defeat men were made, and victors actually lost, with every triumph, the vital strength that found exercise only in recovering strength. Perhaps the spirit grew greater in achieving the understanding that was first confused and then exquisitely clear after having lost" (153). Although there is a gap in the critical consideration of failure in an academic setting, this investigation has found sporting narratives as essentially astonishing admissions of collapse, imperfection, and dishonour.

This thesis specifically examined the poetics accompanying defeated sportspersons in Indian and American sports literature, with a focus on gender issues, national identity, and personality development. It provided insightful information

about the complexity of failure narratives and their wider societal importance through in-depth textual research and theoretical engagement. The initial part of this thesis examined how sports convey classic narratives. The real-life examples of Lance Armstrong, Tiger Woods, Oscar Pistorius, and O. J Simpson demonstrate athletes at the top of their game who, due to character flaws, endured stunning falls from grace in the public eye. When their triumphs unravel, their flaws are exposed, and their wealth and fame become meaningless. In the public imagination, these failures are compared to Greek myths or Shakespearean tragedies. Failure in sports stories is not only prevalent, but also desired in this regard because it fits so well with classical theatre. The stories involve descending character arcs, with heroes falling from their pedestals due to poetic frailty. These are athletes who cheat, have been caught cheating in their personal lives, or have been charged with murder. This paradigm, on the other hand, does not quite fit in with the most ambitious sports fiction in modern American and Indian fiction. Professional athletes and amateurs are the protagonists in all of the works brought under this research. Each portrayal is vividly worded and unique in its perspective. These are compositions that examine how narrative formats break down, portray amateur discontent and marginalisation, or examine how failure is an essential part of self-awareness; in many cases, these pieces include all three of these themes. In *The Art of Fielding*, Henry's lamentation about never attaining Aparicio Rodriguez's impeccable timing underscores his perception of losing that skill. Nonetheless, his unwavering determination to persist with his college team, despite this realization, is truly heartbreaking. One sort of failure expands in order to elevate a more central failure. It has been discovered from the women's stories how failure was ingrained in them and how they managed to live with its eerie consequences.

The ball serves as a metaphor for how one could evaluate their own existence by centrifuging around a single, exact, and far-off moment. Every one of these works uses failure as a catalyst for reinvention in sports. Sport offers a well-defined goal. However, neither the writers nor the characters they are dealing with have yet arrived at a victorious conclusion where there is nothing more to be done or the tale can be wrapped up. In these pieces, discrepancies suggest a broader breadth by their very nature, while failure indicates a creative openness of form. Jean-Paul Sartre in his book *Notebooks for an Ethics* writes, "In one sense, there is success in failure for it remains open, it has not been 'caught', it does not allow itself to become frozen" (121). According to Sartre, traditional achievement has a static element that is limiting and far less inspiring than its opposite form. When it comes to unleashing an alternate capability to incorporate affirmative reappraisal and upending the success story and progress assumptions, failure or breakdown might be the most freeing state. Failure is a means of subverting the logic of control and the prevailing power. When failure is separated from its usual application, it becomes a critical analysis that exposes how, in Halberstam's words, "alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent", leading to departures from discourse and structures of authority (88).

The analysis of the works under consideration reveals that each failure is unique; no two failures are the same. The most political is Malamud's, the most personal is Harbach's, and the most philosophical are Levin's and Adiga's. Sporting storylines have inspired failure in a variety of genres, styles, and ethnicities. Not just for the heroes of sports fiction, failure gives artists the platform and means to address some of the most pressing issues that people can encounter. In each study, the thesis looked at authors whose interests were around the process of writing itself, as well as

the issues and opportunities it presents. According to Gavin Jones, failure in nineteenth-century American literature "…becomes less of a personal battle than something woven into the fabric of literary creativity, a requirement of aesthetic expression" (159). This idea is taken even farther by the writers that are the subject of this inquiry, who embrace and even exalt textual contradictions, conflicts with narrative devices, and problems with authorial authority. They see nothing but promise and liberation in the cracks in literary convention. Despite their reservations about being labelled as postmodern, their self-referential tendencies and rejection of metanarratives are distinguishing characteristics of these sports fiction narratives. The authors participating in this study are aware of the paradoxes associated with failure, such as the notion that failure is actually a journey. As one gets older, failure is reconsidered and gains significance on its own. In a 2013 *Guardian* piece about writers' reactions to failure, Julian Barnes skillfully points out that the line separating grandeur from suffering becomes increasingly blurry over time and requires critical thought. He writes,

> When I was growing up, failure presented itself as something clear and public: we failed an exam, we failed to clear the high-jump bar. And in the grown-up world, it was the same: marriages failed, your cricket team failed to gain World Cup quarterfinals from what was then called the super six. Later, I realised that failure could also be private and hidden: there was emotional, moral, sexual failure; the failure to understand another person, to make friends, to say what we meant. But even in these new areas, the binary system applied: win or lose, pass or fail. It took me a long time to understand the nuances of success and failure, to see how they are often intertwined. (4)

The research examines how failure and success are not mutually exclusive but rather entwined to offer a different perspective; to understand failure is to face an essential aspect of the human condition rather than to concede vanquishment in order to harden oneself. Sport writing has shown to be particularly successful in this area, and American literature has also succeeded in creating a distinct athletic aesthetic in this vein. The masculinized athletic image of Hemingway or Miller has been replaced by narratives from the margins, those of marginalised people who doubt the validity of conventional heroes. These are pieces where writers' efforts and the drama of sport are united to achieve artistic expression and significance. American writers still have a special place in their hearts for sports. Philip Roth put down his pen to put an end to his writing career, he could not help but make a reference to both failure and baseball in his final literary simile. As Roth comments in *The Great American Novel*, "I no longer have the stamina to endure the frustration. Writing is frustration — it's daily frustration, not to mention humiliation. It's just like baseball: we fail two-thirds of the time" (127).

The thesis examined how defeated sportspersons are portrayed in Indian and American sports literature. It also looked at how gender interacts with failure experiences by analysing gender dynamics in the representation of unsuccessful athletes. The research addressed national identity through studying the ways in which narratives of failure shape national identities in the US and India. It explored how athletes' personalities are shaped by failure, looking at how disappointments and failures foster personal development. In the second chapter, the study was on Indian and American Sports Fiction with sportsmen as protagonists. It was discovered that, although conventional sports storylines would feature instances of individual failure, they would be succeeded by redemptive portrayals of heroes rising from a defeat or

setback to become stronger and ultimately claim triumph. This study suggests that redemption takes a significantly less straightforward or linear form in these particular novels. Within the framework of sports literature, the thesis provided insights into the intricacies of human experience by examining the psychological aspects of failure narratives. Failure in the select novels is assimilated into one's self-awareness rather than being exacted revenge upon or vanquished. When the impact of failure on sportspersons' personality is analysed, Henry eventually recognises the ebbs he is experiencing in *The Art of Fielding* and climbs back up. He reclaims his sense of control and becomes aware of the change that has taken place in his life. He decides to continue his studies with Schwartz at Westish College while acknowledging the prospect that he may no longer be a shortstop. We are, Sandage says, people who tend to "beat ourselves up" because of the hegemonic hold of success as the "dominant model for our outer and inner lives" (265). But Henry recognises and resists this hegemonic claim of success and writes his own version of resistance. Henry is finally able to find that the alternative to self-punishment is surely not the immersion in failure's ontological abyss.

When Prasoon in *Striker* has to decline an offer and quit the Shobhabajar club, he is also devastated. He withdraws from society, does not speak to any of his friends, practises in total isolation, and works at a gas station to support his family. He eventually receives his second chance to perform in front of the Calcuttan audience. Roy Hobbs in Malamud's novel exhibits existential solitude. Examples of unhealthy methods to deal with loneliness include pursuing sexual arousal without sincere intercourse or living solely for the approval of others. The existential idea of isolation might be used to analyse Roy's attempts to marry Memo Paris, with whom he has a sexual obsession. Likewise, Manju would not have become resentful of the world and

cricket if he had the choice to stay with Javed. Men protagonists in fiction fail profoundly and irrecoverably. Two of them, Henry and Prasoon recognizes and resists this hegemonic claim of success.

The American novels manifest nationalism by foregrounding national consciousness. National consciousness plays a significant role in fostering a sense of national identity and influencing the way individuals perceive their roles within the larger American community. The American protagonists crave for the admiration of their fellow Americans and dreams to carve a niche for themselves in the sporting world. So there are club affiliations and significant World Series victories in *The Natural*. Likewise in *The Art of Fielding*, once his Westish College team wins the national title, Henry and his teammates hope to be selected by minor or major league clubs. Yet they are driven by the ethos of the American Dream. Likewise Indian novels remarks of the national team of India. If they are talented enough, the protagonists might make the national team. Being a part of the national squad is highly regarded and prestigious. Because his boys are the top and second-best batsmen in the world, Manju's father boasts in *Selection Day* that they made the national team. Sachin Tendulkar makes an appearance in the storyline of one of the episodes. Prasoon wants to join the national team after excelling in the domestic league in Nandi's *Striker*. He thinks that by performing at the national level, he will be able to rid his father of the disgrace he has experienced.

Gender is handled considerably differently in these particular texts. The characters' failures alter how they view their own gender. Two characters exude extreme masculinity, one character is asexual, and the fourth character identifies as bisexual. As they struggle with the sense of failure, the intricacy of their gender notions becomes increasingly evident. In *The Natural*, Roy puts a lot of effort to court

Memo. His disgust for Iris further solidifies his notions about gender. Due to his masculine standards, Roy is insensitive to Memo's loss and extremely rude to Iris. In *The Art of Fielding*, Henry appears to be almost exclusively asexual when he is fixated on baseball. The only thing he is interested in is baseball. When he loses his rhythm and continually fails to make a perfect throw, he ends up sleeping with Pella. While in contrast, Prasoon in *Striker* becomes reclusive and avoids Nilima after quitting his team. He rarely approaches Nilima in the wake of his foiled ambitions. He keeps himself occupied with practise and work. He acts as though Nilima will view his failure as making him less of a man. Manju in *Selection Day*, however, is unable to accept his gender, which causes him to fail both at cricket and in life. He is afraid of what society would think of him because he lacks privilege and cannot come out of the closet.

The third chapter of this study discovers that the two female athletes who serve as the protagonists of the Indian sports novels, Koni and Arya, are wilful and tenacious in their ambitions. They are realistic characters that have been meticulously carved out of a vivid narrative. But, the men in their individual stories have a big impact on them. Koni is essentially cast aside while Moti Nandi devotes almost the entire book to Kshid- da's problems. If it were not for Kshid-da, Koni is unlikely to have achieved fame, much less the national championships. Similar to Arya in Prajwal Hegde's novel, her father plans practically everything for her; therefore she is completely surrounded by his love and support. Arya is once more encouraged by her partner, cricketer Arvind Ram, to take her fitness regimen more seriously. Arya seems to be thinking about retiring at the start of the book. Arya could have given up tennis if not for their breakup and a near-career-ending injury. There is no ambiguity about the fact that these women's embrace of success in sport and in life was influenced by

the males. As absurd as it may sound, men in these women's lives make them fierier despite the fact that they are impetuous and sensible in themselves. Women in Indian fiction are yet to be handled with literary fervour and seriousness. The study offered insights into the complex nature of human experience by examining the psychological aspects of failure narratives. Koni and Arya face challenges and Yalom's existential perspective could be aptly studied in their sporting lives. Yalom explores the human fear of death, termed 'death anxiety', arising from the existential awareness of mortality. This fear can lead to defense mechanisms and existential dilemmas. However, Yalom highlights the positive impact of confronting mortality. Koni has compassionately supported Kamal in his last moments, steadfastly by his side as he neared the end of his life. This awareness can catalyze conscious and authentic living, inspiring her to pursue meaningful goals, deepen relationships, and seek personal growth. The fear of non-being becomes a motivator for a richer, purposeful life. Applied to Arya's recuperation, Yalom's themes shed light on her journey in facing mortality and finding meaning. In Arya's recovery, Yalom's themes illuminate her journey in confronting mortality and seeking purpose. Her father's prolonged battle with illness deeply impacted her, prompting profound reflections on life and mortality. Aligning with Yalom's insights on the fear of death fostering a heightened appreciation for life, Arya begins to view life with newfound clarity. While the fear of mortality is inherent, it also propels individuals toward a deeper engagement with existence. Arya's contemplations led to a re-evaluation of time's significance, resulting in a gradual transformation of her perspective.

Jesse and Dorey, the American women protagonists in fiction in this study, experience what Yalom regards to as "the abyss", which is the overwhelming sensation of meaninglessness, emptiness, and despair that people may feel when they

are faced with the basic realities of life, such as death, freedom, and loneliness. The abyss is a metaphor for the existential crises that people experience when they believe their life have no meaning or purpose. As people search for meaning or purpose in their life, this can result in feelings of depression, anxiety, and despair. Due to their failures, they both lose respect in both their own eyes and the eyes of the world, making them both lesser beings. In fiction, female characters experience failure and yet have more miserable lives than their male counterparts.

In the fourth chapter where the study concerned with autobiographies of men was carried out, sportsmen are shown persistently self-reflective and inquisitive. In order to gain an insight into how failure shapes athletes' personalities, the thesis looked at how disappointments and failures foster personal development. Sportsmen exaggerate and scrutinize their shortcomings. They in their auto/biographies openly share emotional struggles or failures defying the dominant masculine script that equates emotional expression with weakness. Rahul Dravid focuses on his failures in particular since he will unavoidably learn more about his flaws through his unsuccessful attempts. Abhinav Bindra develops a posture of an ascetic philosopher against suffering loss. American autobiographies place a lot of focus on failure and losses compared to the Indian autobiographies. Ali boasts about his losses the same way he does about his triumphs. Similar to this, Agassi writes just as much about his vanquishment as he does about his triumphs. According to him, success cannot equate to the humiliation one feels after losing a game in terms of satisfaction. American sportsmen in their auto/biographies critique/challenge the prevailing attitudes towards failure within their culture, thus contributing to a more nuanced discourse on national identity. Agassi critiques the nationalistic awe for success, Ali constantly questions his view of America after each victory. Contrastingly, Indian sportsmen in their

auto/biographies highlight stoicism and determination in the face of defeat, aligning such attitudes with their nation's historical narrative. Sportsmen in their auto/biographies varyingly embody traditional masculine traits like stoicism, aggression, and resilience- recasting setbacks as tests of their masculine fortitude - reinforcing the stereotype of the indomitable male athlete.

The fifth chapter discusses women autobiographies by Indian and American sportswomen. In literature women writers have questioned the existing quo by using their life writing to uncover marginalised experiences, such as sexual and family abuse against women, or by capturing the "suppressed histories" of people who are not part of the dominant culture that is dominated by men. Sportswomen in their auto/biographies are subjected to gender-biased interpretations of their setbacks, and their struggles with failure may be associated with wider cultural beliefs about the abilities and roles of women in sports. Mary Kom's and P T Usha's autobiographies do discuss any difficulties or challenges they had to face in a highly patriarchal country. Because Kom places a lot of importance on the idea that she is intrinsically Indian, *Unbreakable* often exhibits ardent nationalism. She writes with fervour on how cruelly mainland Indians treat North East Indians. As a result, she makes it a point to assert her Indian identity whenever possible. Interestingly, Indian sportswomen see themselves a huge part of the national dream to excel in the international games. They also write of how kind their compatriots were when they failed in the arena. Collective empathy for fallen heroes often engenders a more profound sense of patriotism, one that embraces vulnerability. Conversely, American sportswomen in their auto/biographies subvert societal expectations and values. For years, Navratilova had been hiding a personal burden that was getting harder and harder to hide: her true lesbian orientation. Navratilova was always aware of her

unique sentiments for other women and girls, which she subsequently came to identify as “gay” or “lesbian” feelings. Following her defection in 1975, Navratilova felt a newfound freedom to explore her feelings for other women when she started to compete internationally in tennis. She was already destined to be perceived as the “Other” due to her Eastern European heritage as a Communist living behind the Iron Curtain. Navratilova battled to win American citizenship as well as popular favour. In a similar vein, Serena perfectly captures America in a variety of ways, including race, economics, stardom, culture, and fashion. She is both an American and not. She has a sizable following who adore her game and attitude, as well as a minority following that constantly jeer and abuse her for being black and subversive. Indian sportswomen, in their auto/biographies on the other hand both resists and conforms to gender norms- highlight the strength inherent in traditionally feminine characteristics like vulnerability and emotional intelligence- yet readily agrees to conservative norms. Both Kom and Usha embellish the truth to show off their femininity; Kom maintains she deliciously cooks her native cuisines, and Usha boasts she observes social mores. Women in their autobiographies explores their agency in rationally analysing routine changes to travail through “the abyss”. The study examined how athletes overcome obstacles, get stronger, and experience personal transformation as a result of misfortune. The study asserts that sportswomen are subjected to gender-biased interpretations of their setbacks, and their struggles with failure may be associated with wider cultural beliefs about the abilities and roles of women in sports. While American sportswomen subvert societal expectations and values, Indian sportswomen, on the other hand both resists and conforms to gender norms- defy gender norms by chronicling her psychological and physical tenacity in the face of

defeat, claiming attributes associated with masculine perseverance. They readily agree to conservative norms.

The study's conclusions are outlined in this chapter, "Conclusion", together with the justifications and discoveries from the preceding chapters. The topic of this study and related subjects are also covered, and it is mentioned that certain works are outside the scope of the study and therefore cannot be included in the thesis. Regional literature in India could not be included in this research as these works have not been translated to English. Some research gaps are identified, and suggestions are made for how sports narratives can be further interpreted using novel theories. The argument concludes optimistically by pointing out that, if one can overcome the predatory nature of the global market, failure in sports can be a great success. Future studies on those knowledge gaps in the many fascinating fields that are closely related to the selected topic will be interesting. It is important to keep in mind that many narratives published by transgender athletes could also be examined in this context, even if the thesis largely focuses on sports narratives produced by former players. It will also be essential to evaluate the cultural significance of sports by analysing the actual stories under investigation using cultural studies theories. These stories can also be reinterpreted via the lens of sports psychology, particularly when they are written by unsuccessful athletes. Another avenue to investigate gender inequalities in sports narratives is via the lens of poststructuralist theory. Analysing the impact of globalisation on sports again demands profound research.

It does appear that the serious cricket novel is becoming into a respectable literary subgenre. There are incredible books like *Netherland* (2008) by Joseph O'Neill, *24 for 3* (2008) by Jennie Walker and *Chinaman: The Tale of Pradeep Mathew* (2012) by Shehan Karunatilaka which garnered the interest of the readers and

the critics alike. Cricket is a game that unites Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Indians, West Indians, and other ethnic groups in a Brooklyn park, even as its un-Americanness emphasises their uniqueness. In *Netherland*, cricket symbolises the imagined community of immigrants. The love triangle in *24 for 3*, a novella, is set against a Test match between England and India as the unnamed woman vacillates between her unconvincing husband and a loss adviser. She also worries about her teenage stepson, who has indicated his growing estrangement from his family by absconding. Parallels between sport and love are established without being overdone as the five days of cricket progress and the tone shifts from contemplation to anxiety, and the heroine recognizes she must make a decision. In a sense, Karunatilaka's *Chinaman: The Tale of Pradeep Mathew* is an autobiographical story of a cricket journalist nearing death who set out to write a book and make a video about Pradeep Mathew, the most potent and gifted spin bowler in Sri Lanka during the 1980s. Since then, Mathew has inexplicably disappeared from both history and his home country, and it is possible that he is dead. Beyond this drama, or rather trundling silently but menacingly is the story of a divided Sri Lanka in the second half of the 20th century, a society torn apart by corruption and terrorism.

Franchises and the local sports league will benefit more from the global market's boundless potential for income growth. These opportunities have given rise to a vast body of literature, but there is still much that needs to be learned. Throughout history, athletes have protested in a number of ways, many of which had a profound effect on society, governments, and the world at large. Since anti-establishment demonstrations have been around for a while, it is important to investigate how they have influenced sports and literature. It requires detailed research to examine neuroscience in depth and how it is revolutionising sports. There is still a study gap

that needs to be filled about the distinctive ways that the athletic brain might be taught. Numerous fascinating topics are directly related to the selected topic, such as the relationship between fascism and athletics. History has shown a complicated relationship between sports and fascism. Sports have frequently been used by fascist governments to further their ideology and rule over society. They have used sporting events as platforms for propaganda to extol their fortitude, cohesion, and patriotism. The use of sports to invigorate and unite the populace was recognised by fascist leaders like Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. They made significant infrastructural investments, planned massive sporting events, and employed athletic competitions to advance their political objectives. Examples include the 1934 FIFA World Cup in Italy under Mussolini's rule and the 1936 Berlin Olympics under Nazi Germany.

Similarly, cricket and international relationship between India and Pakistan is worth analysing. The relationship between India and Pakistan on the world stage has been significantly influenced by cricket. The rivalry between the two nations in cricket is fierce and frequently referred to as one of the most publicised and fervent in the sport. Over the years, India and Pakistan have played both home and away bilateral cricket series against one another. Fans in both countries are extremely excited about these matches and look forward to them with great anticipation. Cricket matches frequently act as a vehicle for cross-political people-to-people communication and cultural exchange. Cricketing connections have occasionally been impacted by India and Pakistan's political and diplomatic relations. The suspension or cancellation of cricket series between the two countries has occurred in cases of political tension, conflict, and security concerns. Recent years have seen a particularly high prevalence of this due to the few bilateral cricket matches. Sports can be used as a diplomatic instrument to reduce barriers and promote international communication.

International sporting events give athletes from many nations a forum for interaction, encouraging camaraderie and understanding. Sporting exchanges can provide doors for cross-cultural communication, trust-building, and debunking misconceptions. Because they unite people from all backgrounds, sports promote communication and cooperation. Through sports, people can overcome political, cultural, and religious divides and engage in constructive rivalry, teamwork, and mutual respect.

One can persuasively argue that this research has recognised failure and how it impacts a sportsperson's opinion of their personality, gender, and country in a comparative study of Indian and American sports literature; even though it acknowledges that the subjects and regions described above are outside the direct range and scope of the current thesis. This thesis is an attempt initiated in studying the different facets of failure and the attitude of the vanquished sportspersons. It examined how disappointments and failures contribute to human growth, examining how athletes' personalities are formed by failure. It investigated the relationship between gender and failure experiences through studying the gender dynamics at play in the portrayal of failed athletes. The study also explored how failure narratives in the US and India shape national identities. Investigating the complex aspects of the obsession with failure in American and Indian sports literature was the primary objective of the research problem. In fiction, male protagonists experience severe and irreversible failures. Recognising this hegemonic claim to achievement, two of them oppose it. In fiction, women live miserable lives than men in terms of failure. Women have not yet been treated with literary zeal and seriousness in Indian fiction. In their autobiographies, men reflect deeply on their mistakes and turn to outside help to help them overcome "the abyss". In their memoirs, women examine their agency through logical analysis of everyday adjustments to physical labour through "the abyss".

Sportsmen reject the prevailing male narrative that links emotional expression with weakness by candidly sharing their emotional problems and disappointments in their autobiographies. Sportsmen reinforce the notion of the indestructible male athlete by embodying conventional masculine attributes like stoicism, aggression, and tenacity. They often reinterpret losses as tests of their masculine fortitude. Gender-biased interpretations of sportswomen's failures are common, and these readings may be linked to broader cultural views regarding the roles and skills of women in sports. American sportswomen challenge social norms and expectations. Indian sportswomen, on the other hand, challenge gender stereotypes by documenting their psychological and physical fortitude in the face of failure, claiming qualities associated with masculine perseverance. They also oppose gender standards by conforming to them. Nevertheless they readily accepts conservative conventions.

Men and women protagonists in Indian and American novels aspire to play for the national team or the major league team, which further elucidates the concept of nationalism in literature. American fiction emphasises the idea of the "American Dream", which embodies the national consciousness. Indian sportsmen in their autobiographies emphasise stoicism and determination in the face of failure, associating these traits with the historical narrative of their country. American sportsmen question and critique the culture's pervasive views on failure, which helps to advance a more complex conversation on national identity. Indian sportswomen consider themselves to be an integral component of the country's aspiration to win numerous international titles. They write of their fellow compatriots' kindness towards them after they fall short in competition. This showcases how empathy for fallen heroes among all people frequently leads to a deeper sense of patriotism, one that embraces vulnerability.

According to Scott Kretchmar's essay *Competition, Redemption, and Hope*, athletes who have lost can still rise beyond their present circumstances if they have the chance to compete tomorrow. It is clear that this statement has been used metaphorically. One might literally be unable to play tomorrow. Before a rematch can be scheduled, it may take until next spring or perhaps a year, and league schedules and regulations frequently take precedence over individual judgements on when to play another game. Finally, it is not realistic for certain sportsmen to play tomorrow after suffering injuries, being cut from teams, or passing away from old age. But this is the main thing. Repetition, another chance to win, overcoming, and at least partially substituting a better ending for the unpleasant one are the ways in which an activity that involves the sting of failure and the possibility of lower ranking can be made redeeming. Crucially, this strategy does not call for one to try to minimise loss by emphasising shared advantages, soft sell vanquishment, or console a loser by telling them that games are inherently pointless. Instead, one focuses on fresh prospects and lets the individual or group that did not succeed move over the loss and the ensuing disappointment. This is a very human and humane move. He argues that, "For sportspersons, no game (apart from unusual circumstances) is the final game. No victory or defeat (apart from lopsided outcomes) offers a conclusive verdict. This pushes attention of competitors to the future, to the next chance, to the next inconclusive outcome. Hope, it would seem, is the lifeblood of the winner and loser alike" (167).

Sportspeople understand that a single zero-sum contest and its result are just one pearl in what they hope will be a lengthy string of pearls, even before the game begins. This event was preceded by earlier games, and there will be more to come. Singular wins or losses will not matter. There will be crescendos and diminuendos in

story lines that represent increasing and decreasing numbers of wins and losses. Athletes pursue an endless number of tomorrows and an equally endless number of competitions because of hope. Thus, in sports, one does more than just throw in the towel and go home. One does not take one's victories and go home either. Fallibility is a fundamental aspect of the human condition. The notion of failure has been extended and amplified notoriously by capitalism and globalisation. Meanwhile one should imagine a better future where failure is a fundamental step of consciousness, a recognition of the need for constant error and correction, disintegration and restoration, and error and revision.

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