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SPORT, CELEBRITY AND POPULAR CULTURE

Sachin Tendulkar, Cricket and Indian Nationalisms

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Abstract The theme of sporting celebrity has attracted a significant amount of attention in the sociology of sport in recent times. Evident here has been a sense that the autobiographical details of contemporary sports figures represent key sites through which cultural change can be observed, interpreted and analysed. In this article we take one particular sporting celebrity, Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar, and assess his image in terms of its contribution to debates surrounding politics, religion and Indian nationalism. Our central thesis is that whilst Tendulkar affords all the hallmarks of celebrity status, his identity remains rooted within the context of certain political and nationalistic values, all of which shape the contours of his iconic status especially in his homeland.

Key words • cricket • Hindutva • Indian nationalisms • sporting celebrity

Introduction

Technological advancements in recent years have spawned both a growth and intensification of media resources that, in turn, has led to the wider popularization of sport as a cultural spectacle (Whannel, 1992; Boyle and Haynes, 1999; Bernstein and Blain, 2003; Rowe, 2003). Sports coverage now features large among the offerings of numerous television and communication networks as the sport-media relationship becomes ever more intimate and lucrative. Such interest necessarily brings with it fame and popular cultural exposure for a number of star performers. Footballer David Beckham, golfer Tiger Woods and motor racing star Michael Schumacher are modern-day examples following, as they do, some of the stars of yesteryear: George Best, Muhammad Ali and Michael Jordan — all of whom have sampled fame and notoriety to one degree or another.

But as sports media coverage has changed so too has the popular cultural appeal of its personnel, to the point where some contemporary performers have outgrown their sporting identities and have acquired instead a celebrity status traditionally reserved for the stars of film and television. Consequently (yet perhaps not surprisingly), a relatively new theme has emerged in the sociology of sport; the analysis of sporting celebrities themselves (Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Cashmore and Parker, 2003; Chung, 2003). Of course, this is no co-incidence. One of the things that sociologists set out to do is to investigate and analyse social

forces, patterns and trends, entities over which a number of contemporary sporting figures proffer considerable influence because of their popular appeal. Indeed, of central interest for writers in this area has been the extent to which modern-day professional sports stars might transcend their occupational locales to become wider public figures, national ambassadors, global commodities and/or popular cultural icons.[1] In the main, writers have focused on sporting celebrities from western industrialized nations. In the US and the UK, for example, a sense of popular cultural saturation has developed during recent years in relation to images and narratives of particular sporting figures, of which Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods and David Beckham are familiar examples. Part of this monopolization has as much to do with the sports that these stars represent as it does their ability and potential, especially given the significant (if varying) amount of attention which some sports attract in the US and the UK in terms of sports-media representation. To this end, there is a related tendency to ignore, or at least overlook, a broader range of sporting heroes; individuals who, to all intents and purposes, mean just as much (if not more) to millions of people as national and international celebrities and yet who, for some or other reason, are not considered in quite the same way.

This article seeks to counter this sense of geographical and cultural myopia by focusing on one of the most celebrated and highly acclaimed sports performers of modern times, the Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar. In particular, we are concerned with Tendulkar's popular cultural influence in Indian society both as an international sporting figure and as an ambassador for certain political and 'national' values that draw sustenance from religion and culture. Whilst Tendulkar's sporting success has elevated him in terms of lifestyle circumstance, his public image remains grounded in the realities and complexities of popular cultural struggle, his appeal proving as prevalent amongst the higher echelons of Indian society as it does amongst the urban slums of the country's largest cities. He means as much to the young as he does to the old; as much to the market as he does to the masses. Within the cultural context of his homeland, Sachin Tendulkar, it seems, is all things to all people (Ezekiel, 2002).

Sport, Celebrity and Sachin Tendulkar

Like other high profile occupations, professional sport generates an institutional climate conducive to the construction of celebrity status. Sports performers become famous as a consequence of their physical and cognitive abilities, by way of their charismatic demeanour; or sometimes both. For a small number, fame transforms itself into an altogether more intense form of recognition around which celebrities are born and who, according to Boorstin's (1961: 58) often quoted (if somewhat over-used phrase) are simply '. . . well-known for their well-known-ness'. Many writers have attempted to plot the logic of this transformative process, but the fact remains that celebrity is a highly contested concept that has eluded any real sense of academic definition or understanding to date.[2] Inherent in the mêlée of explanatory and analytical offerings on the subject is a conflation of terms and descriptors that are commonly rendered synonymous —

'stars', 'superstars' 'heroines', 'heroes', 'icons' — and yet which in many ways present their own specific differences and idiosyncrasies (Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Rojek, 2001; Turner, 2004). Characterized by notions of fame, notoriety, charisma and exception, celebrityhood is a commodification of the human form; the epitome of economic fetishism, the process and product of representations and images promoted and exchanged via the complex nexus of modern-day media networks.[3]

In early 1999, India celebrated 10 years of exposure to its most famous cricketing star, Sachin Ramesh Tendulkar. It was a media event that found parallels only in the year-long celebration of 50 years of the country's independence in 1997. Newspapers and news magazines (national and regional, English and Indian-language) produced special supplements to mark the occasion. Television channels, both terrestrial and satellite, broadcast special programmes to commemorate Tendulkar's contribution to Indian society. The richest cricketer in the world was packaged before the public as a proud patriot and as a role model for India's youth in upholding the country's middle-class family values and sense of morality, which, in turn, would enable India to continue its existence as a country with an unchanging cultural essence even though its markets, by that time, had become flooded with global products and its main business interests bolstered by foreign investment.

Amidst this media frenzy were a small number of commentators citing Tendulkar as the standard-bearer of the Indian economy in the post-liberalization phase. Tendulkar's emergence as a cricketer meshed perfectly with a wider cultural revolution in India: the information technology boom of the early 1990s, the growth and development of satellite television, consumerism, and the expansion of cricket literacy. As the cultural order of global relations has changed in recent years, so too has the connection between sport, business and the media. To this end, while associations between professional sport and the media and business worlds are historically grounded (see for example, Whannel, 1992), the emergence of an intensified (and altogether more inclusive) sport-media nexus has created an enlarged and globalized sporting economy (see Appadurai, 1990; Wenner, 1998; Maguire, 1999). The ability of professional sport to become spatially fluid by allying itself to the mass media has allowed it to operate more dynamically within global contexts and has provided the ideal backdrop against which the modern-day sporting celebrity has emerged. Indeed, some have argued that Tendulkar became a central figure in India's socio-cultural life precisely because of the simultaneous burgeoning of the Indian consumer market and the global media revolution (see Guha, 2002; McDonald, 2003). Others have presented Tendulkar as the ideal brand ambassador because he extends personal attributes such as loyalty to the nation and impeccable moral character to the commercial sector. Added to this, televisual representations showcase Tendulkar as a 'man of the masses' and as a symbol of nationhood (Marqusee, 1996). But Tendulkar is no ordinary celebrity figure. By the late 1990s he was not only famous for his cricketing prowess and instant recognizability (because of his popular cultural exposure) he was also a fully-fledged sporting icon.

For Kear and Steinberg (1999) icons comprise quintessential (often religious) representations of culture; their iconicity determined not by their iconic status

alone but by the levels of 'subjective identification' to which they are open and the degree to which their depiction transcends and outgrows its origins. Tendulkar has long since occupied this iconographic milieu; at once the very face of Indian cricket, whilst sustaining a variety of alternative corporate and nationalistic identifications. He is a national hero; a 'sporting God'; some would argue, the greatest Indian alive (see Ezekiel, 2002). His iconicity in the post-liberalization, post-Hindutva political economy of India can, on the one hand, be attributed to consumerism and the burgeoning of Indian media, and on the other, the switch in the register of stardom in the history of sporting iconicity in India from anti-colonial nationalism to national jingoism, patriotism, and communalism (see Majumdar, 2004). In India's market economy cricket became part of the entertainment industry, and Tendulkar its pivotal figure, his image retaining specific features of iconicity in the colonial and the immediate post-Independence years. As Majumdar (2004) argues, iconicity in the colonial period hinged, not on India's cricketers winning as a team, but on individual performances amidst a losing or a match-saving cause which captured the national imagination as much as it did that of western nations. The centrality of irrationality in Indian cricket and its role in the construction of icons has been noted in particular by journalist Rohit Brijnath (2002: 40):

> For an entire generation of Indians, Sachin Tendulkar is not a person, he is an occurrence, a phenomenon whose uniqueness does not carry the rust of time: to watch him is akin to seeing the Northern Lights or taking a trip to Lourdes . . . Watching Tendulkar goes beyond a cricketing experience for the mob, an occasion beyond the mere matter of fine geometry of his strokes. It is almost more a religious occasion than it is an aesthetic experience. He is more saviour than artist . . . Irrational passions define Indian cricket. The game is escape, it is identity, it is hope, it is national well being, and reason is not invited. Tendulkar, more than his predecessors, has embodied all this. India has never seen anything like, and it will not either.

With this contextual scenario in mind, it is to the further analysis of Tendulkar's sporting, political and popular cultural status that we now turn.

Cricket, Tendulkar and Gandhian Nationalism

The celebratory atmosphere of 1999 can be viewed as a crucial moment in the Tendulkar story, especially with regard to India's international cricketing commitments against Pakistan in that year. These constituted two Test matches to be played at Madras and New Delhi and an Asian Test Championship match in Calcutta. The Indian media proclaimed that the Pakistan series was an ideal opportunity for Tendulkar to reinforce his sporting prowess and to demonstrate his unflagging patriotism towards the nation. But others did not think that a tour by Pakistan was a good idea. Bal Thackeray, the founder and leader of the Shiv Sena (the Indian Hindu nationalist party) and de facto chief minister of the Maharashtra region of India, declared that his supporters would not allow Pakistan to play on Indian soil. Thackeray threatened to mobilize a protest of vandalism at the series venues in New Delhi, Madras and Calcutta and warned that his 'partymen' would respond to his exhortations much as they had done in

1991, the year that Shiv Sena members had vandalized the playing surface at Bombay's Wankhede stadium before Pakistan's tour of India. The 1991 tour was cancelled for 'security reasons'. The threats by Thackeray in 1999, and the subsequent attempts to vandalize the ground in New Delhi, were noted in Pakistan whose then government (of Nawaz Shariff), told its Indian counterpart that the Pakistan team would tour only if the Indian government guaranteed the security of all its members. The Bharatiya Jaranta Party (BJP)-headed coalition government in India (of which Shiv Sena was a part) acted swiftly to avoid international disrepute. The then Indian Home Minister, Lal Krishna Advani, who had traditionally been at the extreme right of the BJP and who is facing trial in connection with the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in 1992, undertook a 'liberal' mission in an attempt to change Thackeray's mind. In the event, Thackeray relented, and the series went ahead.[4]

Although Thackeray was apparently attempting to hold the 1999 tour to ransom, media celebrations of Tendulkar's anniversary prevailed. Most of the accolades written at that time are rather mundane, but one piece is central to our attempts to analyse Tendulkar's location in Indian public life. It provides a valuable point of departure from which to analyse the crucial issues of caste, class and religion (which have been largely overlooked or depoliticized to date), attempting, as it does, to relate Tendulkar the person to wider notions of 'Indian' nationalism.

Entitled 'Spoilsport Thackeray: Tendulkar Symbolises Maharashtra's Pride', the article, written by Rajdeep Sardesai (1999), stated that cricket and Tendulkar (and not Thackeray and his party) were the central proponents of Maharashtrian middle-class identity in this particular period.[5] Sardesai noted that the rise of the right-wing politics of Shiv Sena in the 1960s are best understood in terms of a middle-class Maharashtrian backlash against the loss of political, economic and cultural self-respect in the 20th century. A host of reasons precipitated this sense of loss. First, the nationalist baton in the Indian Congress passed on from Bal Gangadhar Tilak to M.K. Gandhi in the 1920s. Second, in the 1930s, Gujarathi business communities took over entrepreneurship pushing the Maharashtrian middle classes to the anonymity of clerical serfdom. Third, after Independence in 1947, Bombay found itself subject to a decade of increased migration and its most famous institution, the film industry, witnessed the Punjabis emerging as a dominant force at the expense of the Maharashtrians. Sardesai sketches the historical transformation of Shiv Sena's agenda from Maharashtrian self-respect in the 1960s to the militant Hindu nationalism of the 1980s, and points out that by using cricket as the site for expressing this backlash, Thackeray was historically blinded to the fact that for 50 years the game had been the only remaining bastion of Maharashtrian middle-class dominance. Sardesai concludes by observing that if Thackeray were indeed a true nationalist, he would have urged Tendulkar to show off his genius against Pakistan at Bombay's Wankhede Stadium instead of threatening to have the venue vandalized by his party workers.

Sardesai's attempt to counterpose the 'healthy' nationalism of Tendulkar against the 'xenophobia-dressed-up-as-nationalism' of Thackeray has to be read in conjunction with the history of mainstream Indian nationalism (Pandey, 1990;

Guha, 1997). Aloysius (1998) identifies three distinct phases in political nationalism in India; first was the pan-Indian nationalism that emerged in the closing years of the 19th century when the reformist organizations of 'upper'-caste Hindu society (such as the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj, which came into existence after the East India Company passed the Removal of Caste and Religious Disabilities Act — Lex Loci Act — in 1850), reinvented themselves in political form. During this phase, which lasted until the take-over of Indian nationalism by Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920s, nationalism was the exclusive territory of upper-class/'upper'-caste Hindus and Parsis largely organized from Bombay. Second, the composite nationalism of Gandhi, which synthesized 'upper'-caste Hindu public opinion with the Muslim voice and brought the 'untouchables' into the political picture (though in a token way), dominated the Indian political spectrum from 1920 to 1947.[6] The third phase of nationalism coexisted with Gandhian nationalism. This was a reactionary school which emerged among the 'upper'-caste urban middle-class Hindus, primarily in the state of Maharashtra, as a backlash against the Gandhian synthesis of religions (see McDonald, 1999a).[7] The pre-Gandhian phase is believed to have become obsolete after the Gandhian synthesis. Stripped of its nationalistic economic element but largely retaining the political dimension, today Gandhian nationalism finds its voice through the politics of the centrist Congress Party. The school of nationalism that emerged as a reaction against Gandhi is the precursor of the right-wing politics of the BJP and its parent organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), or the National Volunteer Corp. The Shiv Sena, which draws its ideological sustenance now from the RSS's Hindutva discourse is an electoral partner of the BJP in the state of Maharashtra as well as in the Federal politics of New Delhi.[8] Sardesai's (1999) censure of Thackeray and endorsement of Tendulkar can therefore be read as an attack on Hindu nationalism of the third phase from the standpoint of an all-encompassing Gandhian nationalism. Sardesai's article might also be seen as an attempt to place Tendulkar as a representative of the first phase of nationalism. Sardesai attributes the emancipation of the 'untouchables' (and the so-called 'backward castes' of Maharashtra by the early part of the 20th century) to the socio-political liberalism of M.G. Ranade, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and G.G. Agarkar, all 'upper'-caste Maharashtrian leaders of the pre-Gandhian phase. Sardesai goes on to argue that the spirit of liberalism and reformist zeal of these leaders and the proliferation of high-quality educational institutions in Maharashtra ensured that the 'scheduled castes' of that state received a much better deal than their counterparts in other regions of India. The article, however, is silent about the real political movement that arose from among the Maharashtrian Dalits and 'scheduled castes' — the activism of Jyotiba Phule in the second half of the 19th century. It was Phule's activism (and not the 'liberalism' of Ranade, Tilak and Gokhale) which improved the lot of the 'untouchables' in Maharashtra and later gave the platform for B.R. Ambedkar to contest Gandhian nationalism from a Dalit perspective (see Omvedt, 1999).

Ironically, Tendulkar himself has illustrated that Sardesai's (1999) attempt to absolve him of any complicity in associating with the Hindutva discourse is an example of selective special-pleading. Indeed, Tendulkar has been seen on more

than one occasion occupying public platforms organized by Shiv Udyog Sena (the culture and entertainment wing of Shiv Sena) headed by Thackeray's son and his nephew.[9] Of course, Tendulkar's public patronage of political, religious and nationalistic manoeuvres is not unique in the cricketing fraternity. Ex-Pakistan international captain Imran Khan, for example, openly declared political leanings long before his sporting days were over, and has since gone on to pursue a full-time political career (see Corrigan, 2001).[10] Tendulkar's fraternizing with the Shiv Sena is also put into perspective by comparing him to another acclaimed Indian cricketer (and former international captain), Sunil Gavaskar, who has maintained his distance from the right-wing political formation.[11] Gavaskar has also resisted the BJP in symbolic ways. For example, during the Bombay Riots of December 1992 and January 1993, he was seen in the street outside his residence trying to prevent Hindu mobs from attacking Muslim homes in the locality.

The positions of Gavaskar and Tendulkar follow the same trajectory within the context of Hindu fundamentalism as they do in their public postures towards the power networks of the Indian cricketing establishment, in particular, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). Gavaskar has a history of making less than diplomatic comments about the organization of Indian cricket, and has consistently raised the issue of players' rights (e.g. on matters such as pay) with the BCCI throughout his career (see Bose, 1986, 1990). In contrast, Tendulkar has been far less likely to protest or even demonstrate displeasure at the functioning of the Board. The first time the issue of revision of pay was taken up by the Indian team after he became a member was in 2001 when his compatriot Anil Kumble negotiated on behalf of the players for a central payment contract. Tendulkar later became part of these negotiations after the 2002–03 ambush marketing fiasco involving Indian players, the BCCI and the ICC.

Though Tendulkar made his international cricketing debut two years after Gavaskar's retirement, in terms of the political economy of cricket, his era was different from that of his predecessor. Tendulkar's conformism in relation to issues such as players' pay could be explained in terms of the fact that he is the most important member of the first generation of Indian cricketers who are products of the commercial age of cricket patronage, the characteristics of which are significant personal and institutional revenues through product endorsements, brand ambassadorship, TV rights, marketing, and global sports sponsorship. Though modern-day Indian cricketers continue to be no different from the players of previous decades in having a pseudo-amateur identity, they have become virtually detached from their 'employers' in the non-cricketing sphere. In recent years, for instance, Tendulkar's image has primarily become associated with the Pepsi Cola products he endorses, whereas he has virtually ceased to be identified with *Sungrace-Mafatlal*, an Indian textile company that provided him (and his schoolmate and fellow cricketer Vinod Kambli) with sponsorship and employment early in his career. Though Gavaskar was one of the first Indian cricketers to earn a comfortable living through product endorsements, he was always identified in public discourse as an employee of *Nirlons*, a textile company based in Bombay, because of the popularity of factory teams and tournaments during his time. It could be argued that stronger links with their employers (Indian-owned

private companies, banks and other institutions in the public sector) engendered among the Indian players of previous years, a greater awareness of industrial labour and its relation to capital (see Cashman, 1980; McDonald, 1999b). The sense of conformism surrounding Tendulkar (especially with regard to the BCCI), however, should not be seen entirely as that of a person trapped institutionally. Like Gavaskar, he has had the stature and aura to shake off the institutions concerned and yet still remain part of them, on account of his indispensability. Indeed, while Gavaskar actively exploited the discretionary (some might say, celebrity) space that was afforded him (in terms of personal autonomy), Tendulkar does not appear to have done so to the same degree. At the same time, Tendulkar's popular cultural status might be a restraining factor in terms of both his sporting and political exploits, given the immense pressures that sponsorship and endorsement deals place on such figures. While celebrity status is clearly not dependent upon conformity,[12] it is worth considering the extent to which Tendulkar's seemingly moderate approach to sporting and political intervention is a consequence of his personal convictions or his overall image management.

Cricket, Tendulkar and Hindutva

Sardesai's (1999) reading of Tendulkar's pre-eminence in India, on the basis of a healthy all-encompassing nationalism, is not entirely incorrect. In many ways, Tendulkar is to the history of Indian cricket what Gandhi was to the history of the Indian freedom struggle — the first individual whose regional, religious and caste identities were transmuted into an amorphous national identity by agents mediating between them and the public (see Appadurai, 1995). Further illustration of this is provided by Chatterjee (1999), quoting Gopal Bose, a cricketer-turned-coach based in Calcutta in the state of West Bengal, as saying that Tendulkar is the main idol of the boys he coaches, and that Bengal captain Sourav Ganguly — who later went on to become Indian captain — is a distant second. The media-created struggle between Tendulkar and Ganguly for centrality in the state of Bengal, and Tendulkar's eventual victory, finds a parallel in the way nationalist historiography presented the Indian Congress under Gandhi's leadership as the central political formation among the anti-colonial movements of Bengal even though Subhash Chandra Bose, a nationalist leader from Bengal, contested Gandhi first from within the Congress and then as leader of the Indian National Army which he founded after leaving the Congress.

As soon as Tendulkar became captain of the Indian national team for the second time he told his fellow players that Hindi would be the official Indian language of the locker room and that the use of other Indian languages would not be entertained. These languages, according to Tendulkar, created an ambience of 'regionalism' rather than one of 'nationalism'.[13] Such instruction paralleled Gandhi's insistence that Hindi be taught all over India so that the nationalist cause could be served through a common language.

However, in modern India it is the BJP that has sought to reconcile the apparently contradictory politics of Gandhian nationalism and Hindutva. During the 1998 parliamentary elections, the BJP shelved the agenda of the Hindutva

organizations to build the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya in the hope of forging a coalition government with the assistance of parties outside the Hindutva fold.[14] In 1999, the BJP appointed Bangaru Laxman (a Dalit) as its president and the party has been trying relentlessly to appeal to Indian Muslims ever since it came to power in New Delhi for a 13-day period in 1996. These developments have been interpreted by Indian political commentators as the 'Congressification of the BJP', or as attempts by the BJP to dilute its 'upper'-caste Hindu rhetoric.[15]

On the matter of interventions in caste, although Tendulkar has not made any public statements about his political position, his own special friendship and partnership with India colleague Vinod Kambli (the first Dalit cricketer to have represented post-Independent India in cricket)[16] can be seen as a departure from the extremely watchful and conformist positions that Tendulkar has adopted over the years. The relationship between the son of a well-known literary figure in Bombay (Tendulkar) and the son of a suburban mechanic in the same city (Kambli) began when the pair set a world record partnership (for any wicket-stand, in any level of cricket) of 664 runs in February 1988 for their school, Sharadashram Vidyamandir. Tendulkar was selected for the national team in October 1989 and Kambli followed three years later with a highly successful debut series at home against England. This was followed by a match against Zimbabwe in New Delhi. Kambli scored two double-centuries in the four Tests and Indian cricket lovers thought there would be a healthy run-making rivalry in the years to follow between the two schoolmates. But the selectors omitted Kambli from the team after he did not play well in a home series against the West Indies in 1994. The 'upper'-caste dominated Indian-English media mercilessly highlighted Kambli's sporting fallibilities and his rather eventful private life (Ezekiel, 2002). Thereafter the selectors became reluctant to provide a second chance for him to play in Test matches, though he appeared occasionally for the one-day team until 2000.

To Tendulkar's credit, he did fight for his friend Kambli's inclusion in the international team during his two periods as captain. Tendulkar also had to face charges of nepotism when he selected Kambli in place of Sourav Ganguly for a one-day tournament in Toronto in 1996. In September 1999, soon after Tendulkar was appointed captain of the Indian team for the second time, Kambli made a comeback for one-day tournaments in Sri Lanka and Singapore. Tendulkar is quoted as saying that alongside Australian Shane Warne and West Indian international Brian Lara, Kambli is the cricketing peer he most admires. Considering that Kambli's batting average in the small number of Test matches he played was second only to that of Tendulkar, it perhaps comes as no surprise that Tendulkar fought for Kambli's inclusion in the Indian team. However, when viewed in light of his proactive move of relinquishing the captaincy in 2000, in the possible context of Mohammed Azharuddin's selection to the team, one could also argue that Tendulkar may not have gone far enough in his support of Kambli. Some might even suggest that Tendulkar categorically failed to bolster the Dalit cause. In turn, of course, one can only speculate about the extent to which a prolonged career for Kambli at the international level might have encouraged more Dalit children and young people to aspire to a career in cricket. Suffice to say that if Tendulkar's interventions in relation to the Kambli issue are excluded, his centrality to Indian

socio-cultural life has, in the main, been fashioned by a dynamic process of resolution of the internal contradictions between the Hindutva brand of nationalistic fervour and Gandhian nationalism itself.

What then of Tendulkar's impact on wider social processes? It could be argued that cricket has never played a representative function in India but has always been the site of nationalist appropriation in a purely commercial sense. Civil society and the market have continually featured such an appropriation, but the state itself has colluded with it actively as well as passively in numerous ways. The production of Tendulkar's image by the market and civil society (i.e. the media and corporate worlds) has served to highlight the 'national' representation of Indian cricket. Indeed, the construction of cricket as a democratic medium in India has occurred primarily through the market and not through the democratic and secular space of the State.[17] Though civil society in India is deeply religious and feudal, it is an important site where an exclusive (Hindu) definition of the nation is forged. Moreover, the market is an exclusive domain in a developing country where there is a huge disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. Cricket and Tendulkar, therefore, are amenable to promoting a religious identity of being a Hindu, as well as the exclusive politics of Hindutva.[18]

Conclusions

Rumours surrounding the public and private lives of modern-day sports stars are part of everyday media discourse. Whether sporting celebrities are famous because of their athletic prowess and talent or simply 'known for their well-knowness', both we and they have come to accept (and, indeed, expect) the intrusive strategies of the world's media and the scrutinizing gaze this affords. Since the early 1990s, when he was exploding onto the international cricketing scene, Sachin Tendulkar has been at the centre of popular cultural life in India. Yet, on entering the twilight of his career, he now faces the prospect of being eased out of the media gaze. Where, we might ask, does this leave Tendulkar as a sporting celebrity and/or as an ambassador on wider social issues?

There are a number of things to consider here. First, we must acknowledge that Tendulkar's celebrity did not emerge in a social, cultural and political vacuum. On the contrary, part of the reason for his mass appeal (in India at least) is the synchronicity with which his own sporting potential developed alongside India's wider cultural expansion in the 1990s. Second, and as is often the case for celebrity figures, time ultimately changes the nature and level of their influence, yet whilst Tendulkar's impact in and through cricket may alter or diminish, that is not to say that he will disappear completely from public view. As we have argued previously, one of the hallmarks of celebrity status is that it allows individuals to transcend their occupational locales, conferring upon them an ongoing popularity which often manifests itself within a range of alternative social settings. Third, despite the amount of media coverage afforded to him, we must guard against assuming that we actually *know* anything about Tendulkar as a person. All we can say with any degree of certainty is that we know something of him in terms of his popular cultural image; his mass media representations and

his iconic identifications — of which there are many. Finally, we must accept that these representations are, more often that not, strategically managed and finely crafted portraits of the person whom marketing and advertising executives wish (and need) to depict. The celebrity-media relationship is symbiotic. Sports celebrities simply cannot maintain their popular cultural position without a marketized media presence. Likewise, the market depends on their sporting appeal and commodified status to sell the products (and ideas) in question.

For Tendulkar himself, the early years of the new millennium have witnessed continuing success in the joining of his popular cultural image and his nationalist identity within the ideological landscape of India's right-wing political formations. The RSS and the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (the Hindutva organization functioning in the sphere of economics), viciously oppose the policy of Indian economic liberalization; while the BJP (which still vehemently adheres to a philosophy of cultural nationalism) continued to implement second-generation economic reforms as prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) until they lost power in New Delhi in 2004 to a coalition government headed by the Congress Party, which similarly endorses such pro-liberalization policies.

In terms of sport, despite being eased out of the limelight of Indian cricket in relation to international team selection, Tendulkar still maintains significant influence. Over the years, celebrity status has facilitated an expression (albeit relatively subtle) of his broader religious and political beliefs. In turn, it has allowed an exploration of his autonomy with regard to the decision-making powers of the Indian cricketing establishment. What remains to be seen is how long this level of status and influence will prevail in light of his inevitable withdrawal from professional sports participation. Moreover, it will be interesting to note whether Tendulkar pursues wider political ventures as part of an alternative career strategy (vis-à-vis the precedent set by Imran Khan) or whether the fall from media gaze will ultimately render his wider cultural influence somewhat redundant. At a time when the BJP (or at least one faction of it) has made concerted efforts to portray itself as a moderate, liberal political group working independently of Hindutva influences, it may well be that electoral opportunities will come Tendulkar's way sooner rather than later.

Notes

1. We use the term 'stars' here to denote sports performers who have become well known (and recognized) publicly as celebrity figures. For further discussion on the star/celebrity relationship, see Andrews and Jackson (2001) and Dyer (1998). For more detailed insight into sporting celebrity and notoriety, see Cashmore (2005).
2. For more on this subject, see the work of Debord (1968), Monaco (1978), Gamson (1994), Marshall (1997), Boyle and Haynes (1999), Evans and Wilson (1999), Giles (2000), Turner et al. (2000) and Smart (2005). For specific discussion on taxonomies of celebrity, see Rojek (2001) and Turner (2004).
3. As Gilchrist (2002) points out, there are clear links between modern-day conceptions of the 'sporting hero' and Weber's notion of 'charismatic authority'.
4. Lal Krishna Advani was the Deputy Prime Minister of India between 2002 and May 2004, when the BJP-led coalition government was defeated in the General Elections by the Congress Party-led coalition.

5. Sardesai was managing editor of New Delhi Television — a private company that then produced news and current affairs programmes for the Rupert Murdoch-owned Star TV — and he is the son of Dilip Sardesai, former Indian opening batsman from Bombay who was part of the 1971 Indian team led by Ajit Wadekar which won consecutive Test series for the first time in the West Indies and England.
6. The Indian caste system is one of static inequality. It is pre-modern and pre-capitalist. The traditional Hindu social order consisted of four 'ordered' castes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras.
7. The 'upper'-caste, middle-class Hindus of the state of Maharashtra were attracted to the writings of Veer Savarkar, who envisaged the formation of a Hindu state at the end of colonization. They formed the Hindu Mahasabha, a militant Hindu organization that was responsible for the assassination of Gandhi in 1948. The writings of K.G. Hegdewar, another middle-class Maharashtrian proponent of a Hindu state, inspired the formation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or the National Volunteer Corp, a right-wing Hindu organization, in Nagpur in Maharashtra. The RSS now concentrates on providing the ideological and organizational leadership to the large network of organizations active in political, social, economic and religious spheres for the sake of securing the hegemony of the Hindutva discourse (which asserts that to be a 'true' Indian is to be a Hindu).
8. Shiv Sena had a regional agenda of Maharashtrian self-respect when it was formed in the 1960s, so much so that South Indian and even Gujarathi 'upper'-caste Hindus in Bombay were among the targets of their hate campaigns. For related discussion, see McDonald (2003).
9. Thackeray has been found guilty by a state-commissioned judicial commission of being one of the main instigators of the Bombay Riots of 1992–3.
10. Despite the fact that celebrity figures at a wider popular cultural level commonly associate themselves with religion or religious iconicity (either by attempting to promote themselves as — or simply becoming — some form of deity or by proffering an attachment to particular theologies and schools of thought), celebrity sports personnel appear to have been less likely to openly espouse such associations. For more on the relationship between celebrity and religion (and/or religious iconicity), see Kear and Steinberg (1999) and Rojek (2001).
11. Gavaskar comes from the same caste/class formation as Tendulkar. The latter has often described the former as a source of inspiration and guidance.
12. Here we refer to Rojek's (2001: 143–79) insightful observations on 'celebrity and transgression' in which he charts instances of how individuals have sought fame via notoriety.
13. The captain enforced this Hindi-or-English rule at a time when half the team members were from the South Indian states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, where a political party had come to power in the 1960s using the political discourse of Dravidian identity and after staging an anti-Hindi stir. Tamil Nadu has been ruled by a Dravidian party since then, though the Congress and the BJP have recently been minor partners in election alliances headed by the two major Dravidian parties.
14. The right-wing Hindutva brigade in the late 1980s and 1990s in India campaigned to construct a temple (Mandir) in the name of the Hindu God, Ram, in Ayodhya, believed to be the birthplace of Ram; this was to be exactly on the site of a Muslim structure called the Babri Masjid built by Mughal emperor Babar in the 14th century. On 6 December 1992, Hindu right-wing activists marched to the site and demolished the Babri Masjid to symbolically begin the construction of Ram Mandir, a project now stayed by the apex court of India.
15. In modern India, it is the BJP and its Hindutva partners, more than the Indian National Congress, that vociferously pursue the Gandhian agenda that Dalits are part of the 'Hindu' fold; and yet, the BJP not so long ago supported a government formed by the Bahujan Samaj Party, a party with a Dalit ideology, in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Moreover, and as an extension of this discussion, there are some interesting connections to be made between notions of masculinity and Hindu nationalism. For more on this subject, see Vijayan (2004).
16. According to Anand (2003), Kambli was born into a 'backward' caste family, not one of scheduled caste or Dalit.
17. On 1 February 2005, a five-member panel of the Indian Supreme Court ruled that the BCCI (the Board of Cricket Control in India) was an autonomous body which could not be considered as falling within the ambit of the state, as defined by Article 12 of the Indian Constitution. For more

on the BCCI, the Indian Supreme Court, and the battle over cricketing television rights in India, see Majumdar (2004).

18. For a full history of the religious and nationalist appropriation of Indian cricket, particularly with respect to the politics of the successful Bombay Pentangulars of the late 1930s and 1940s (where the participating teams were 'Hindus', 'Muslims', 'Parsis', 'Europeans' and 'The Rest'), see Guha (2002).

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