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Sanjay Joshi
Sanjay.Joshi@nau.edu

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'THE MORAL THAT CAN BE SAFELY DRAWN FROM THE HINDUS' MAGNIFICENT VICTORY': CRICKET, CASTE AND THE PALWANKAR BROTHERS¹

Ramachandra Guha

Introduction

V. S. Naipaul once wrote of his native Trinidad that 'we were a society with no heroes, except cricketers'. In other times and other places too it is sportsmen who have often most fully embodied the hopes of the lowly and dispossessed. Naipaul's sentiments would be recognized by blacks in the Chicago ghetto, who honour no hero other than Michael Jordan, and by mulattos in the slums of Buenos Aires who are devotees of the deity Diego Maradona. They would also have been appreciated by an Indian not generally known for his interest in sport, Dr B. R. Ambedkar. As an Untouchable boy placed by the accident of birth at the bottom of the Hindu hierarchy Ambedkar, the future draughtsman of the Indian Constitution, took as his hero a slow left-arm bowler named Palwankar Baloo. Year after year Baloo dominated the Bombay Quadrangular which was the showcase cricketing tournament of India at that time. He was one of the first great Indian cricketers and among the earliest public figures to emerge from the ranks of the Untouchables. Now almost wholly forgotten, Palwankar Baloo commanded enormous respect inside and outside his community during his lifetime. Consider thus a little, thirty-page biography published in Poona in 1959 as part of a series of Marathi tracts with the running title 'Kahintari Navech Kara!' or 'Do Something Distinctive!' Priced at half-a-rupee these booklets were aimed at school and college kids presumed to be in search of role models. The subjects were chosen for having 'gone outside the rut of normal life' by making a name through courage and innovativeness.

The tracts were short enough to be read within thirty minutes. Of the forty titles listed in the series twenty were about Maharashtrians and twenty featuring people from other parts of India or the world. The publishers did not, of course, commission tracts on men like Shivaji or Tilak or Gandhi or Einstein whom one could worship but certainly not emulate. The subjects chosen included Marathi pioneers of theatre, printing, education, history and the cinema. They included a progressive Marathi poet, a wealthy and successful Marathi lawyer and the first circus promoter in Maharashtra. From elsewhere in the sub-continent came the hockey player Dhyan Chand, architect of India's Olympic victories in 1928, 1932 and 1936; the first of our great modern painters Raja Ravi Varma of Kerala; and the myriad-minded Bengali Rabindranath Tagore. More interesting perhaps was the choice of foreigners. There was Spartacus of Rome described simply as 'A Slave who Revolted'. There was Michaelangelo, the 'Unequaled Sculptor', and Benjamin Franklin, the diplomat and scientist remembered also for 'The Art of Cultivating Good Qualities'. There was a pamphlet on Captain Cook, 'Girdling the Oceans for his Country', and another on Lawrence of Arabia, that 'Great Organizer of Military Campaigns'. From the world of technology came the builder of the Suez Canal, the 'Monumental Architect', Ferdinand Lesseps and finally, moving from the heroic to the pragmatic there was a study of Woolworth, the founder of the supermarket, with the title 'Buy Anything Here'. In this exalted company was to be found the name of Palwankar Baloo. The pamphlet on him, written by the Poona cricketer and broadcaster Bal J. Pandit, was titled 'Khada Kheladu' or 'True Sportsman'.

Palwankar Baloo

Palwankar Baloo was born in July 1875 in the town of Dharwad which is deep in the Deccan Plateau. His father worked there but soon after his birth appears to have taken a job in Poona. The family were Chamaars from a caste that lies almost at the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy. The caste's name comes from the Sanskrit word for leather, 'charman', and the people of the caste work with leather as tanners and dyers and as the makers of shoes, bottles, tents and saddles.

The Chamaars, wrote one authority, 'are by birth doomed to illiteracy' and to 'lamentable and abject poverty'. They undertook tasks vital to the clean castes yet were despised by them. 'Economically the Chamar is a most valuable element in the population and his function is the rough toil and drudgery of the community'. In the 'traditional' Indian village the Chamaar is:

Regarded with loathing and disgust by the higher castes ... Except when it is absolutely necessary, a clean-living Hindu will not visit his part of the

village. The author of *Hindu Castes and Sects* says that the very touch of a Chamar renders it necessary for a good Hindu to bathe with all his clothes on. The Chamar's very name connects him with the carcasses of cattle. Besides, he not only removes the skins from the cattle that have died, but also he eats the flesh. The defilement and degradation resulting from these acts is insurmountable (Briggs 1920: 241, 228, 58, 20).

For the Chamaars, as for other Untouchable castes, the advent of British rule allowed a means of escape. The adventurous and skilled among them could abandon the village to seek employment in the towns and cities of the Raj. In some professions, indeed, their past was an advantage. Caste Hindus would not work in ammunition depots and gun factories as it was feared that the bullets might use the grease of the sacred cow. But the Chamaars had no such inhibition. They would, when they could, flock to the cantonments and factories set up by the British in western and southern India after their defeat of the Peshwas in 1818.

Baloo's own father was employed in the army. One account suggests that he worked in the ammunition factory in the suburb of Kirkee, while another claims that he was a sepoy in the 112th Infantry Regiment.² It was in Poona that Baloo and his younger brother Shivram learnt to play cricket with equipment discarded by army officers. The boys also went, briefly, to school but were soon withdrawn to help augment the family income. Baloo's first job was at a cricket club run by Parsis. Here he swept and rolled the pitch and occasionally bowled to the members at the nets. For this work he took home three rupees a month (Vithal 1948: 11-12; Pandit 1959: 11; Palwankar 1996). After this and around 1892, Baloo moved from his job with the Parsi cricketers of the city to their European counterparts. These congregated in the Poona Club which had been founded a few years previously in a wooded estate known as the Edwardes Gardens. Baloo was now paid 4 rupees a month and his duties included rolling and marking the pitch, erecting the nets and, when required, marking out the tennis courts as well. To these routine tasks was later added an altogether more pleasurable one: bowling to the members after a Mr Tross first encouraged Baloo to bowl to him. Baloo took as his model a Captain Barton, a left-arm bowler with a smooth, flowing action. Soon Baloo was bowling on a more-or-less regular basis to the members of the Club to provide valuable practice for the matches they would play against other teams of expatriates (Pandit 11-12).

At this time the leading English cricketer of Poona was Captain J. G. Greig. He was known as 'Jungly' because that was how his forenames 'John Glennie' sounded if spoken quickly (Green 1986: 354; Raiji 1986: 61). Greig was a small man with supple wrists and quick feet. A master of the square cut he

was regarded for years as the best white batsman in India. Every day Greig would arrive at the Poona Club an hour before anybody else and command Baloo to bowl to him. There is a nice story, undocumented but therefore all the more appealing, that Greig paid Baloo eight *annas* for every time he got him out. At this rate if the bowler was successful once a week he would have doubled his salary every month. Baloo once told his son that although he had bowled for hundreds of hours at the Poona Club he was not once given a chance to bat (Palwankar 1999). In India, as in England, batting was the preserve of the aristocratic élite. One consolation was that by adding bowling to his other duties Baloo had his salary tripled. And his control of spin and flight was honed to perfection by the thousands of balls bowled to Jungly Greig and his less gifted colleagues. Like his ancestors Palwankar Baloo had come to make a living working with skill and care upon a piece of leather. Slowly, word of his talents with the cricket ball reached the 'native' part of the city. There was a pioneering Hindu club which was seeking to challenge the Europeans of Poona and they faced the dilemma of whether or not they should call upon the services of a low-caste bowler. The question divided the Hindu cricketers. Some Telugu members were keen to include Baloo whereas the local Marathi-speaking Brahmins were not. At this stage J. G. Greig jumped into the fray. He gave an interview to the press suggesting that the Hindus would be fools to deprive themselves of Baloo's services. It was not that Greig had the instincts of a social reformer, his commitment to his race was scarcely less strict than the Poona Brahmin's commitment to his caste, but rather he wished to test his skills against Baloo in the fierce heat of match competition.

In the event Baloo was invited to play for the Poona Hindus, but at a price. On the field the upper caste cricketers touched the same ball as him but off it they observed the ritual taboos. At the tea interval, that ceremony sacred to cricket, Baloo was served the liquid outside the pavilion and in a disposable clay *matka* while his colleagues drank in white porcelain cups inside. If he wished to wash his hands and face an 'untouchable' servant of the club took a kettle out into a corner of the field and poured water from it. Baloo also ate his lunch off a separate plate and on a separate table (Vithal 10–13; Pandit 1999). He took plenty of wickets all the same. Due chiefly to Baloo's bowling the Poona Hindus defeated the Poona Europeans and other local sides as well. On a celebrated occasion they visited the inland town of Satara, to play against its white-only Gymkhana. The hosts had instructed their groundsman to roll the wicket for a week so that it would blunt Baloo's spin. Baloo still took seven wickets and his team won easily. In one account the bowler was then serenaded on an elephant through the streets of Satara. In another account he was garlanded at a public function on his return to Poona by the great scholar and reformer Mahadev Govind Ranade. It was also Ranade who told

his fellow Brahmins that if they could play with Baloo they must drink tea and break bread with him too (Pandit: 16–17; Vithal: 14; Palwankar 1996). Later, Baloo was praised at a public meeting by a Brahmin nationalist even more celebrated than Ranade, Bal Gangadhar Tilak. This, writes one chronicler, created 'a stir, because in those days a person from the backward community did not have a honourable place in society' (Pandit: 17).

Just as the orthodoxies of Poona were relenting for him, Baloo chose to move with his family to Bombay. One reason for this was the plague of 1896, which was especially severe in Poona; another was the attractions of cricket at the centre. By the 1890s there were dozens of active cricket teams in Bombay and while Parsi clubs were generally demarcated by locality, Hindu cricketers sorted themselves out on the lines of caste and region: as such there were the Gowd Saraswat Cricket Club, Kshatriya Cricket Club, Gujarati Union Cricket Club, Maratha Cricket Club or the Telugu Young Cricketers. The smaller communities in this city of migrants also formed their own clubs so that there were the Mangalorian Catholic Cricket Club (for émigrés from the southern port town of Mangalore), the Instituto Luso Cricket Club (for those coming to the city from Portuguese-ruled Goa) and the Bombay Jewish Cricket Club. A different category of clubs was those sponsored by companies and banks. Cricket teams were run by Thomas Cook, Forbes, Forbes and Campbell, the Bombay Gas Company, the Bank of Bombay and the Army and Navy Stores. These were heterogeneous in their membership with employees of various Hindu castes playing on the same side as Muslims and Christians under the leadership of a senior manager who was almost always an Englishman. One active club of this kind was run by the Bombay Berar and Central Indian Railway. It was this company that gave Palwankar Baloo a job, at the suggestion of its manager and cricket captain, a Mr Lucas (Palwankar 1996).

Cricket, Caste and Colonialism in Bombay

Baloo played for the B. B. C. I. Railway in inter-office matches but more significantly he was poached for the newly commissioned P. J. Hindu Gymkhana team. This institution had been in two minds about whether to admit him even though the cricket captain Kirtikar wanted to augment his bowling attack. He got his way only after 'pacifying a few Gujarati members as regards his [Baloo's] admission' (Anon. 1906). By the turn of the century the most terrific excitement attended contests between the Hindu Gymkhana and leading Parsi teams such as the Baronet Cricket Club. There were large crowds ringing the ground, five or ten rows deep, with the overspill accommodated on the railway bridge that linked the Gymkhana to the nearby Churnee Road station. The scene was made more vivid by the nearness of the sea.

There was no Marine Drive then and, as a participant in those games recalled, 'the waves often used to beat over the rocks and enter the cricket ground' (Mehta 1954).

The statistics of those matches are lost to history but one may safely assume that Palwankar Baloo took plenty of wickets as from a very early stage he was regarded as the bulwark of the Hindu Gymkhana. One of his opponents, Dr M. E. Pavri (1901) of the Baronet C. C., described him as 'one of the best native bowlers. A left-handed medium-pace bowler with an easy action. Has both breaks and a curl in the air and has a lot of spin on the ball. The most deadly bowler on a sticky wicket. May be called [Wilfred] 'Rhodes' of India. A sound bat and an active field' (Pavri 1901: 164). Baloo's control was phenomenal and his variations subtle. 'His pace was medium', recalled a Bombay journalist J.C. Maitra 'but he could bowl from a very slow to a really fast one and send them by round to full over-arm action. He manipulated an amazing change of flight in the ball and set the batsman always guessing in each delivery, which was always different' (Sportsman 30/11/1929). From across India, a Calcutta cricketer H.C. Muckerjee who had observed Baloo at close quarters remarked that he was:

A fine left-hand bowler, who possesses marvellous stamina. Breaks from both sides. Has the easiest of deliveries. Seldom tires. Can bowl all day long. Keeps an excellent length. Never sends down a loose delivery. Understands the game thoroughly. Places the field to a nicety, catches come [to the fielders], they have not to go in for them. Decidedly a 'head' bowler (Muckerjee 1911: 20).

By the early years of the twentieth century Baloo's skills with the cricket ball were known as far away as Calcutta. In that city lived a cricketing patron, the Maharajah of Natore, who had an overwhelming ambition to defeat the all-European Calcutta Cricket Club. One year he put together a side of top-class Hindus that included the wicket-keeper K. Seshachari from Madras, the fast bowler H. L. Sempre from Karachi and Palwankar Baloo and his brother Shivram from Bombay. His side won but the colonists took their defeat without grace. After the match the captain of the Calcutta Cricket Club asked Natore how many 'gentlemen' there were in his side, insinuating there was no honour in Indian professionals defeating a side of English amateurs (Langrana 1956).

Seven years younger than Baloo, Shivram was a hard-hitting batsman, a useful medium-pace bowler and an outstanding field. Taller than his brother and powerfully built, his trademark was a black belt that he wore around his waist. We know far less of his early years in the game, but we do know that by

1906 he was regarded as one of the eleven best cricketers of his religion because in February of that year he was chosen with his brother to play for the Hindus against the Europeans of the Bombay Presidency. The match inevitably carried nationalist overtones for in 1905–6 the Indian National Congress was renewing itself under two leaders from Western India, Gopalkrishna Gokhale and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Meanwhile, in Bengal the *swadeshi* movement had just been launched and was presenting the British with the best organized challenge to their rule of the last half century. Patriotic entrepreneurs had set up factories to compete with British capital. Radicals urged the boycott of foreign goods. Bonfires were being made of cloth manufactured in the mills of Manchester (Sarkar 1973). In the last week of 1905 the Congress had met in the holy city of Benares where the Bengali delegates urged a countrywide spread of their campaign. Tilak's paper, *Kesari*, agreed with the Bengalis. 'It is not so manly to resign oneself to one's degraded position' it remarked 'or to sit weeping in the house like women but it is our duty to strive strenuously to remove the causes of our misfortune' (*Kesari* 02/01/1906). Another Marathi paper asked for India to be granted Home Rule. Indians, it said, 'should fearlessly speak out their minds to their rulers without mincing words' (Bhala 01/01/1906).

It was against this backdrop that the three-day match was played at the Bombay Gymkhana ground from 8th to 10th February 1906. In its assessment of the two teams the *Bombay Gazette* praised Baloo and said of Shivram that 'he is Mr Baloo's brother and that is enough. He must keep up the reputation of the first bowler of India, his brother. Much is expected of his smartness in the field' (*Bombay Gazette* 08/01/1906). The Hindus batted first and posted a decent score of 242 with Baloo contributing 25 and his brother 24. Much to the disappointment of his admirers the 'Little Man' (Greig) was bowled by Erasha for 11 and the Europeans were all out for 191. After the next Indian innings the British needed 212 to win. The final day of the match was finely poised and 'marked with a deal of excitement and enthusiasm. Large throngs of people of every denomination—even larger than the previous two days—lined the ropes and greeted every stroke with loud ovation'. The European challenge relied heavily on Greig, but with 'a superb piece of stumping worth going miles to see' he was quickly out, and his colleagues crumbled to 102 all out (*Bombay Gazette* 10 and 12/02/1906; *The Madras Mail* 15/02/1906). The Indian triumph was celebrated as a nationalist victory. The victorious cricketers had behaved 'with the noble self-restraint which characterized the Japanese over the fall of Port Arthur and all the subsequent victories which attended their arms, victories the like of which history has never recorded'. Had the result been reversed, the report went on, then the English cricketers would have been vulgar and ostentatious in victory,

mimicking 'the perfect pandemonium into which hoary England had been converted by modern Britons over the relief of Mafeking'³ (*The Tribune* 23/01/1906).

While *The Tribune* interpreted the cricketing victory as another sign that a subdued and suppressed Asia was shaking off its shackles, other papers welcomed it as a victory over caste prejudice. During the three days of the match, the players of both sides dined together, the European with the Hindu and the Brahmin with the Chamaar. The way to this unprecedented intermingling had been previously cleared by the decision of the Hindu Gymkhana to allow Baloo and Shivram entry not only into its cricket field but into its café as well. Now, the course of the match and the contribution to the Hindu victory of the Baloo brothers provoked a long leading article in that respected voice of Hindu liberalism *The Indian Social Reformer*. By 'openly interdining' with low-castes the Hindu Gymkhana would 'destroy for good' the 'silly barrier of pollution by touch'. The 'history of the admission of these chamar brothers in the Hindu Gymkhana' continued the *Indian Social Reformer* 'is a credit to all and has done far more to liberalize the minds of thousands of young Hindus than all other attempts in other spheres'. Indeed, the triumph of cricket over caste was:

a landmark in the nation's emancipation from the old disuniting and denationalizing customs. This is a conscious voluntary change, a manly moral regulated liberty, not, as in [the] railways [where members of different castes had willy-nilly to sit with each other], a compulsory change ... Hindu sportsmen of Poona and Bombay have shown in different degrees that, where national interest required, equal opportunity must be given to all of any caste, even though the offer of such opportunity involved the trampling of some old prejudices ... Let the lesson learnt in sport be repeated in political, social and educational walks of life. Let all disuniting and denationalizing customs in all high, low or lowest Hindus disappear and let India cease to be the laughing-stock of the whole world (Anon. 1906).

Education, England, the Carnival and Captaincy

In 1907 the Hindus, Parsis and Europeans began playing an annual cricket tournament known as the Triangular. Both Baloo and Shivram played for the Hindus and they were joined in 1910 by a third brother, Palwankar Vithal, who was born in 1886 and sent by Baloo to the cricket-minded Elphinstone High School. Vithal was a graceful right-hand batsman with a penchant for the cover drive.

After leaving school Vithal accepted a job with the Greater Indian Peninsular Railway where Shivram already worked. The youngster scored a sheaf of centuries in club cricket and was chosen to play for the Hindus in the 1910 Triangular. In the next year an All India Team was due to tour England. From January 1911 trial matches were held in Bombay for aspirants from all over the country. The selectors were seven in all, two Muslim, two Hindu, and two Parsi with the venerable Jungly Greig in the chair. This ecumenism was reflected in the team finally chosen. They included six Parsis, three Muslims and five Hindus. The captain however was a Sikh, the twenty-year-old Maharaja Bhupendra Singh of Patiala, freshly installed onto his *gaddi* by the Viceroy Lord Minto (Polishwalla 1919: 64-7). All three Palwankar brothers made the trip.

In England the Indian captain was not often to be found with his team. Patiala played a match at Lord's, and one or two more, but for the most part he was active on the London social circuit (there were many parties to attend that summer as a new King had just ascended the throne). His absence was a blow in purely cricketing terms for this particular prince was a first-class batsman and, while he was away, the side divided into Parsi and Hindu factions. Patiala also took with him wherever he went his five servants who included his secretary Keki Mistry, perhaps the best of all Indian batsmen at the time. Without Patiala and Mistry, the tourists' batting was desperately ill-equipped to handle English wickets and English professional bowling. This showed in the results. Fourteen matches were played against the recognized English counties, of which two were won, ten lost and two drawn. The singular success, from the Indian point of view, was the bowling of Palwankar Baloo. He took 114 wickets at an average of 18.84 runs per wicket and would easily have claimed 150 wickets had he found more support in the field. Baloo enjoyed success against all the top county sides, including seven wickets against Lancashire and six against Somerset. The real match-winner against Somerset was younger brother Shivram who scored 113 not out as the visitors scraped home with one wicket standing. He was, said one observer, 'the most promising of Hindu batsmen' (S. K. Roy 1946). The respected English critic E. H. D. Sewell meanwhile commented that Baloo 'is a bowler most of our counties would be very glad to have in their eleven' (Muckerjee 1911: 109). In the ninety years since Baloo returned home, only one other Indian bowler, Vinoo Mankad in 1946, has claimed more than a hundred first-class wickets on a tour of England.

The Palwankars were celebrated upon their return to India and there was a function organized by the Depressed Classes of Bombay to felicitate Baloo. The community's pride was well-earned for this erstwhile Untouchable had far exceeded the Brahmins and Muslims and Parsis and Princes who accompanied him to England. At this function the *manpatra*, or welcome address, for Baloo was written and presented by Bhimrao Ambedkar. This, according to

Eleanor Zelliott, was the first public appearance of the man who was to become the greatest of all lower-caste politicians and reformers, and a figure of surpassing importance in modern Indian history (Zelliott 1969). Within a year of their return it became clear that the family was set to produce another fine player. The youngest brother, Ganpat, was studying for a bachelor's degree at Elphinstone College, with fees paid by brother Baloo. In January 1912 he was the undoubted star of the college cricket tour of Northern India. When the visitors defeated the famous Mohammedan College in Aligarh he top-scored in both innings and in a drawn match against the Maharaja of Patiala's XI Ganpat claimed two wickets, effected two catches and scored a brilliant hundred besides. Ganpat Palwankar played 'cricket of the highest class' remarked the college cricket historian: 'It was not the sum of his runs that was so much appreciated as the style in which they were obtained, for he employed a variety of strokes and his batting was perfect and true' (Antia 1913: 194ff.).⁴

That same year the Muslims were admitted into the annual Bombay tournament, which thus became a Quadrangular. The Quadrangular was generally referred to as the 'Bombay Cricket Carnival' but there is also a reference to it as 'a sort of a Roman forum' (Bombay Chronicle (BC) 05/09/1923). Sport was both spectacle and contest, an outing with friends and family but also a vehicle for suppressed social ambitions. Spectators sung songs, shone mirrors, flew kites and garlanded cricketers as each team came to represent their community's pride.

In 1913 Baloo was joined in the Hindu team by Shivram, Vithal and Ganpat. The captain, however, was the batsman M. D. Pai. Pai was lauded by his caste association, the Gowd Saraswat Brahmin Mitra Mandal, for achieving the 'highest honour to which a cricketer can aspire'. In his reply Pai thanked his community for the reception they had hosted for him but made clear that he was uneasy with the politics of his position. He stated baldly that 'the honour of captainship should have been given to his friend Mr Balu, he being the senior and experienced player in the team' (Bombay Chronicle 01/11/1913). Pai had been on that 1911 tour and struggled with the bat while Baloo shone with the ball. Nonetheless his remarks were an extraordinary gesture. For in 1913 Mahatma Gandhi was still in South Africa and the Hindu political élite was, by and large, still bound to the Laws of Manu. An Untouchable cricketer of courage and skill could be chosen to play for the Hindus but it was unthinkable that he could be captain. The leader of a cricket team has to exercise his mind more often and more innovatively than a football or basketball captain. In this slow paced sport it is the captain and not the coach or manager who decides the order of batsmen, the order of bowlers and changes in the field. Intelligence and foresight were commonly

held to be the preserve of the high castes and Pai was a Brahmin while Baloo was a Chamaar. To suggest the appointment of the latter as captain of the Hindus was to suggest the symbolic inversion of the hierarchy of caste. But to judge the issue on purely sporting grounds it was clear that the talent and experience of Baloo should long ago have qualified him to act as captain of the Hindus. Pai's speech to his caste group suggests that his team-mates would have found his elevation quite acceptable and that it was sporting rather than cultural criteria that should prevail. But the merchants and lawyers who ran the Hindu Gymkhana evidently did not agree.

In June 1914 the *Bombay Chronicle* commented in an editorial that 'the services rendered by Baloo to Hindu cricket are worth their weight in gold and it speaks volumes for the wonderful vitality of the man that after the lapse of more than two decades he is still their foremost bowler' (Bombay Chronicle 02/02/1914). The next month the paper carried an angry letter by one 'C. S. T.' The angry fan argued that the Hindus had been robbed of a win by 'bad management and worse fielding'. To remedy this, 'the choice of a captain should be a free one and that onerous post should be in the hands of the best and most competent man on the field'. The letter writer was plainly hinting at Baloo whom he elsewhere called a 'sure thing' and a 'crack bowler who can always do some work of outstanding merit' (BC 07/06/1914). One can only imagine C.S.T.'s response when the events of the following season unfolded. In 1915 the Quadrangular was played at Poona, apparently on the insistence of the Europeans. They had lobbied hard for this, because, as one Indian critic sarcastically commented, in a Poona September 'the [social] season is in full swing with all its gaieties, the pitch is more like Home and the climate is less exhausting' (BC 29/05/1913). The matches were played at the Poona Club, that old haunt of Baloo. An early report suggested that all four Palwankar brothers were certainties. But when the side was chosen a week ahead of the Hindu-Parsi match Baloo was not in it. Apparently a selector had asked Baloo how he was and the bowler, out of modesty, answered 'that he was not in his usual form but added that if he were selected he would gladly lend his services in the interests of Hindu cricket'. This diffidence was likely used as an excuse to drop him. The *Bombay Chronicle* now received numerous angry letters of protest. These suggested that the Hindu selection committee had conspired to throw Baloo out. 'Now nobody will say that Baloo is quite the demon bowler he once was' said one writer 'but it cannot be denied that he is still a fine bowler, who is worth his place in any representative eleven'. The decision to dump him remarked this correspondent:

has been received with great and justifiable surprise by the supporters of Hindu cricket. Baloo has been the mainstay of Hindu cricket for more

than a decade and a half and his services in the cause of Hindu cricket have been invaluable. By every right of ability, of seniority, and of the services rendered to his side, he should long ago have been appointed captain of the team. He has not only been denied that right but now he has been excluded from the team itself (BC 03/09/1915).

Significantly, the day after the appearance of this letter the *Chronicle* carried an explanatory letter from the Hindu captain M. D. Pai. 'I was strongly in favour of Mr Baloo's inclusion' he wrote 'but the hesitating reply of Mr Baloo showing his inability to keep up for three days forced the Committee to give him up'. The captain had urged that 'preference should be given to Mr Baloo on whom I much rely as a bowler of sound and mature judgement' (BC 04/09/1915). But his words were disregarded. That a captain should openly participate in a selection controversy was most unusual. Perhaps Pai deeply felt Baloo's omission or perhaps he wished to forestall criticism in case his team performed poorly in the tournament. What is noticeable about the exchanges on the issue is that Untouchability was never publicly mentioned. Gandhi had yet to elevate the issue to national prominence and, even those who had the suspicion that Baloo's caste was part of the reason for his being dropped from the team, did not dare to voice it.

Baloo returned to the team and, indeed annually until 1919, there was a concerted annual campaign to have him made captain of the Hindu cricket team. Every year it met with failure. However, in the months leading up to the 1920 Quadrangular Mahatma Gandhi began speaking out against the practice of Untouchability, which he called 'a crime against God and humanity' in May. He expanded on the issue, 'My conscience tells me that untouchability can never be a part of Hinduism. I do not think it too much to dedicate my whole life to removing the thick crust of sin with which Hindu society has covered itself for so long by stupidly regarding these people as untouchables' (Gandhi v. 17: 471, 534). Upper caste Hindus, thought Gandhi, 'must realize that if they wish to offer successful non-co-operation against the Government, they must make common cause with the *Panchammas* [Untouchables], even as they have made common cause with the Mussulmans' (Gandhi v. 18: 377). When he spoke millions listened, among them a growing number of Hindu cricket fans in Bombay.

That year, as usual, there was a slow and stately build-up to the Quadrangular. In mid November the *Bombay Chronicle* ran a full page feature on the preparations of the different teams, their chances, and the likely response of the crowd. Speaking of the Hindus, the anonymous feature writer

tastefully put the case for a long overdue elevation. 'It would not be out of place' he suggested:

to give expression to the very widespread desire that exists among the Hindu public that the captaincy of the team should at least for once be offered to P. Baloo ... No Hindu bowler could claim such a distinguished and sustained record of achievement in first-class cricket extending over a large number of years as he ... [S]heer justice demands that his long and splendid cricket career should be crowned with the leadership of the Hindu representative team before he finally retires from first-class cricket ... The desire given expression to above is not the result of any doubt as to the capacity of M. D. Pai (BC 15/11/1920).

A week later, and ten days before the start of the tournament, the Hindu team was announced. M. D. Pai was named as captain, Vithal and Shivram had been included in the eleven and Baloo was dropped. However, before the first game Pai fell ill and withdrew from the fixture, which was against the Muslims. The Hindu selectors now appointed D. B. Deodhar as captain. Deodhar was a fine player, and also a Brahmin and a batsman. The Gymkhana's decision was a subject of furious controversy amongst its rank-and-file. There 'was much discontent prevailing among the members of the [Hindu] Gymkhana over the repeated exclusion of Mr Baloo' reported one scribe: 'The trend of opinion among the bulk of the members who were present in the Gymkhana in the evening was that Mr Baloo should now be taken in the team and asked to captain it' (BC 03/12/20).

To the Palwankars, already bowed by Ganpat's death⁵ and Baloo's exclusion, Deodhar's appointment was a final blow. Both Vithal and Shivram were at least the equal in talent of the Poona cricketer and they had preceded him into the team. Vithal recalled in his memoirs that when Pai fell ill, 'amongst the players of the team myself and Shivram were the most senior and considering our ability and skill it was our rightful expectation that one of us should have been chosen captain. Many members of the Hindu Gymkhana also expected the same' (Vithal: 88). In disgust they decided to stand down from the Hindu team. Their explanation, published in the papers the day the Hindu-Muslim match began, still makes compelling reading:

It need hardly be said [wrote Vithal and Shivram] that the claims of one of us are superior to those of Mr Deodhar, and the [Hindu Selection] Committee's decision can only be characterised as unsportsmanlike in the extreme, inasmuch as they have apparently been influenced by the

caste and social and educational status of their selection rather than his achievements or seniority in the field of cricket, and as such the Committee's decision can only be taken as partial with a bias in favour of caste. Social or educational status has no place in sport, when the claims of a cricketer of lesser social status are admittedly superior. In the decision the Committee arrived at, this vital principle of all sport appears to have been lightly passed over, with the result that the claims of one of us have been brushed aside as beneath contempt. This sort of shuffling of claims by the Hindu Selection Committee has compelled us to withdraw from the Hindu Representative Team this year, much against our desire to add our quota to the achievements of the Hindu Cricket Team. In arriving at this decision [not to play] be it remembered that we feel very strongly the covert or overt insult levelled at us as belonging to the so-called depressed class as it amounts to a nullification of our claims for recognition for all time. That such matters as caste should be the determining factor in Cricket is more than we can quietly bow down to, hence our decision to stand down from the Hindu Team this year. The impartial cricket-loving public, we feel sure, will at once understand our position and exonerate us from all blame for the step we have thus deliberately taken as it was on a question of principle and self-respect (BC 04/12/1920).

The sentiments were unquestionably their own, although the statement itself might have been drafted by a better-educated member of the impartial cricket-loving public.⁶ A small section of this public regarded the withdrawal as a 'revolt against authority' but numerous others approved of the action and believed that as 'self-respecting men [Vithal and Shivram] could not have done otherwise'. Among the strikers' supporters were those who approved of Gandhi's wider struggle against Untouchability. A movement was started to collect funds for a purse to be presented to Vithal and Shivram. Contributions were to be sent to 'Mr Govindji Vasanji, the National Confectioner, either at Chira Bazar, Girgaum or at the Grant Road Terminus'.⁷ Five hundred rupees, then a considerable sum, was collected in the first twenty-hours itself (BC 04/12/1920).

The Hindus won their match against the Muslims. The formidable Parsis were to be encountered next. Hectic parleys now commenced within the Hindu Gymkhana. Their outcome was summarized in a banner headline printed the day the final began: 'PAI CAPTAINING THE TEAM: BALOO BROTHERS PLAYING'. M. D. Pai, now fit, was to captain and Vithal, Shivram and Baloo were all to play. The decision to reinstate the strikers and to call upon their brother remarked one journalist 'though belated, is a

sensible one and is undoubtedly a concession to public opinion'. Baloo, wrote the scribe, was at first inclined to reject the call and it was only 'on the urgent intervention of friends whose love of Hindu cricket surpasses their love for the Committee and its ways, that Mr Baloo consented to play in today's match'. In fact, the Hindu Selection Committee was suitably conciliatory as in this letter written by its Secretary, S. A. Shethe:

Dear Mr Baloo,

I understand that you are hesitating to play though selected in the match against Parsis. I shall be obliged if you will kindly reconsider your decision and play. The interest of cricket will appeal to you as in the past (BC 07/12/1920).

Honour was restored more fully when Baloo was appointed vice-captain. In what must certainly have been a pre-arranged move, Pai left the field while the Parsis were batting in the second innings. A sympathetic reporter commented on the 'excellent leadership' of Baloo, adding that 'he displayed fine judgement in the management of his side's bowling' (BC 09/12/1920). The match itself had a suitably dramatic *denouement*. The Hindus amassed a score of 428 and then dismissed the Parsis for 214. They followed on and early in the Parsi second innings their captain, Dr H. D. Kanga, was injured and taken to hospital. The ninth Parsi wicket fell after lunch on the final day and the Hindu fans streamed into the ground with garlands. As they reached the pitch the umpire drew their attention to Dr Kanga, who had returned from hospital and was slowly emerging from the pavilion. The crowd reluctantly withdrew to the boundary's edge, where they stayed in frustration for the next two hours, as the last wicket pair of Kanga and Elavia played out time to draw the match (Deodhar 1966: 33).

The struggle over the Hindu captaincy anticipated, by nearly forty years, the campaign to have a black man chosen as captain of the West Indies cricket team. The West Indies played its first Test matches in 1928 and for the next three decades it was axiomatic that a white man, and a white man alone, could be the team's captain. Such remarkable cricketers as Learie Constantine and George Headley had to be content with being 'led' by fair-skinned sportsmen of demonstrably inferior skill. In his playing days Constantine had protested against this discrimination. He continued to speak out after he retired, joined by such men as the great historian and revolutionary C. L. R. James. It was James who was in the forefront of the campaign which, in 1960, resulted in Frank Worrell's appointment as the first black captain of the West Indies (James 1963). The career of Palwankar Baloo also anticipated, by half-a-century and more, the much memorialized breakthrough

into major league football of Jackie Robinson. Only in 1947 would the American public accept racially mixed teams in sport but already, in 1896-7, the Hindus of Poona and Bombay were made to accept an Untouchable cricketer. Like Robinson after him, Baloo broke through a previously impenetrable social barrier as much by force of personality as by sporting skill alone.

In 1922 the Quadrangular was played in Poona, Palwankar Baloo's old home town. The captain and players were to be chosen by the local sponsors, the Poona Hindu Gymkhana. The city was a conservative one and its Hindus, by and large, never had time for Gandhi. Unlike the members of the P. J. Hindu Gymkhana the Brahmins of Poona were not convinced that Untouchability was altogether a bad thing. The Poona Hindus chose S. M. Dalvi as captain and Vithal and Shivram went on strike again. The Hindus won their first match, narrowly, and had now to play the Parsis in the final. A compromise was attempted whereby M. D. Pai would be appointed captain and Vithal and Shivram would agree to return. But Pai refused to play ball and the brothers stuck to their stand. A complete nonentity, Dr Prabhakar, was asked to lead the Hindus. The Parsis, by contrast, were at full strength. Expectedly they won by a handsome margin (Deodhar 1966: 41; Roy 1945: 100). The press comment on the Hindu defeat was curious. Before the final the *Chronicle* said that the 'Hindu team will hardly be representative without a trio [the Baloo brothers] whom everybody will miss'. Afterwards it suggested that if the defeat 'will only serve to shed more light on this *faux pas*, real or imaginary, the moral which distills out of this year's tournament will have been sufficiently emphasised' (BC 10 and 21/09/1922). The *Mahratta* of Pune appears to have drawn a different moral from disunity and defeat. 'We do not know what exactly was the apple of discord' it remarked:

but it is more than probable that it must have been the captainship... [We] do not mean to put one caste against one another, but our idea is that the healthy spirit of rivalry kindled by such inter-communal games must be maintained at a high level. We congratulate the Parsis on their deserved success and wish that the Hindus will make up their deficiency and will not allow their private grudges to hamper their efficiency (Mahratta 24/09/1922).

This reads like a back-handed criticism of Vithal and Shivram. The *Mahratta* wanted them to suppress their 'private' grudges in the interests of the community. Someone who saw the Hindu failure in a different light was the radical playwright B. V. ('Mama') Varerkar. The sidelining of Vithal and Shivram in the 1922 Quadrangular inspired him to write a remarkable play on the bloody

intersection where the politics of cricket met the politics of caste. Entitled *Turungachya Darat* (At the Gate of a Prison) the play was written in the weeks following the Quadrangular and first performed at the New Imperial Theatre in Bombay on the 1st of February 1923. Its climax comes when a Brahmin owner of a bank moves his operations from Poona to Bombay and decides to make an Untouchable his manager. As he puts it, 'Yesterday we made the very serious mistake of leaving out Vithal and Shivram Chambhar and lost in the Quadrangular cricket tournament. I do not want to lose in the battleground of life by leaving you out' (Varerkar 1923). Varerkar was inspired by the cricket field to make a more general statement on behalf of social reform. It is not clear how his play was received but it might very well have played a part in what was to follow. At the next Annual General Meeting of the Hindu Gymkhana a vote of censure was passed against the selectors of the previous year's team. When the tournament came back to Bombay in 1923 the selectors there set against the claims of tradition the call of the Mahatma and the fact that in both 1921 and 1922 their team had lost heavily. Now the management of Hindu cricket in Bombay was dominated by *banias*, or merchants, who were perhaps more pragmatic and certainly less ideological than the Poona Brahmins. Crucially, for the case at hand, Gandhi was himself a *bania*. The concerns of the members reached the selectors who appointed P. Vithal as captain (BC 17/10/1937).⁸

A ten year campaign on behalf of the Chamaar cricketers had finally succeeded. In the early matches the Hindus defeated the Muslims by an innings while the Europeans prevailed over the Parsis. The Final was on and the Europeans batted first and posted an impressive total of 481. The Hindu reply was built around a composed and assured hundred by captain Vithal and they reached 475 all out. Three full days of cricket had passed watched by a large and appreciative crowd. 'Every inch of space was occupied and the crowd at the tree end was at least ten deep. Every pavilion was full and hundreds were watching the game from house-tops, while some were perched on trees'. During the partnership between Vithal and Nayudu, wrote one reporter, the crowd clapped so much that the sound 'was similar to the sound of sea-waves dashing to the floor' (BC 13/12/1923). The captain's century brought forth a surge of 'maddening joy' (Navakal (Bombay) 13/12/1923). One day's play remained. The European captain now suggested that since a result was impossible they might as well call it a draw. Vithal answered that since twenty thousand fans had come to watch the match they must play it out. The Europeans went in again and this time found S. M. Joshi in his best form. As he handed him the ball Vithal told Joshi, in Marathi, that it was time to 'start Bhairavi'. The bowler was a fine classical singer and Bhairavi is the last *raga* sung or played in a concert. Thus inspired, Joshi took 7 for 39

as the Europeans crumbled to 153 all out (Vithal 1948: 90–98). After this magnificent spell of bowling the Hindus required 162 runs to win. Two hours of play remained. Vithal played another master stroke. Instead of the wicket-keeper-batsman J. G. Navle, a careful and orthodox player, he sent in the big-hitting C. K. Nayudu to open with K. G. Pardeshi. Nayudu smashed the bowling all over, and outside, the park. One six landed on the Bombay Gymkhana pavilion and another on the Waudby Road. Pardeshi also scored at a brisk pace. When Nayudu was dismissed twenty runs were left to get. The captain promoted himself and hit three slashing boundaries to win the game (Nayudu 1953). With his final stroke:

groups of spectators one after another jumped up from the tents and ran towards the wicket. A few among them carried both of us (Pardeshi and myself) on their shoulders to the pavilion, shouting joyously. On reaching the pavilion everyone rushed to shake hands with me. Many European ladies congratulated me saying 'O Vithal, well played, congratulations Vithal'. The reason for these congratulations (as I came to know afterwards) was that they had taken a bet on the result of the match and had won against their own menfolk (Vithal 1948: 98–9).

This description is confirmed by the *Bombay Chronicle* report which speaks of how 'at the end of the game a seething mass of humanity invaded the pavilion and expended their enthusiasm and exuberance of hilarity near the players'. Three thousand rupees were immediately subscribed for a Prize Fund. The donors, in these last days of the Khilafat movement, included Hindus as well as Muslims.

In an editorial on the tournament the *Chronicle* noted that 'the success of the Hindu team was largely due to the confidence which its captain inspired. The heartiest congratulations of all lovers of cricket are due to him and to his team and no less to the Hindu Selection Committee which did not allow a pernicious caste prejudice to come in the way of selecting the right man to lead the team'. The same issue contained the same sentiments expressed more evocatively by a letter writer. 'The Hindus' brilliant victory' said Vijayashram was 'due more to the judicious and bold step of the Hindu Gymkhana in appointing Mr Vithal, brother of Mr Baloo—premier bowler of India—who is a member of the Untouchable Class to captain the Hindu team. The moral that can be safely drawn from the Hindus' magnificent victory is that removal of Untouchability would lead to Swaraj—which is the prophecy of the Mahatma' (BC 15/12/1923). Another letter three days later noted that 'The happiest event' he said 'the most agreeable upshot of the set of matches was the carrying of Captain Vithal on the shoulders of Hindus belonging to the

so-called higher castes. Hurrah! Captain Vithal! Hurrah! Hindus who forget caste prejudice! Mahatma Gandhi Maharaj ki jai!' (BC 18/12/1923).

In four years Palwankar Vithal led the Hindus to three victories. The last win might have given him the most pleasure for it was a desperately close-fought match, a match played in reactionary Poona and at the ground where his beloved elder brother had slaved and bowled. Baloo was never allowed to enter the pavilion of the Poona Club but it was in that pavilion that Vithal received the Quadrangular trophy. At the ground and afterwards he received tributes aplenty. He and his men were fêted with 'at homes' and 'pan suparis' and even congratulated by the now conservative *Mahratta* for coming out 'with flying colours against the Europeans in a game native to them' (*Mahratta* 26/11/1926). Vithal was compelled to insert a collective acknowledgement in the newspapers, 'I have received a number of telegrams and letters congratulating the Hindu Team for their victory in the Quadrangular Tournament. It is not possible for me to write to each of them separately. I therefore hereby thank them for all their kindness and sympathy and hope they will kindly accept it' (BC 04/12/1926).

Vithal always underlined his debt to the eldest of the Palwankars. 'I must mention with respect and gratitude my brother Shri P. Baloo' he once wrote 'his advice and instruction were very useful and his deep knowledge about the game was always helpful to me' (Vithal 1948: 156). But he was a real hero in his own right. Once, when he was playing in Rajkot for a team sponsored by the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar a crowd gathered round the players' tent asking: 'Where is Vithal? What does he look like?' At this Ranji himself asked him to stand on a table and announced to the assembled fans 'See! This is Vithal!'. In Calcutta the rush of fans screaming 'esho', 'esho' (come! come!) so unnerved him that he had to escape through the back door of his host Gymkhana (Ibid.: 162). The years of Vithal's greatest triumphs, 1923 to 1926, coincided with the arrival on the political stage of Dr B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar had returned to India in 1923 with a doctoral degree from London and another from Columbia University in New York. He had previously qualified for the bar from Grays' Inn. While Vithal was leading the Hindu cricket team Ambedkar was making a name at the Bombay Bar and, when the court was in recess, in politics. He travelled through the villages of the Deccan seeking to build a base among the depressed classes. In his speeches Ambedkar was careful to recall his own association with the first and greatest of the Palwankars. As a student and teacher in Bombay he had 'looked at the solid fame of the Untouchable bowler with pride'. As a little-known lecturer in Sydenham College, he had organized meetings to felicitate the bowler and worked for his elevation to the city's Municipal Corporation. Now as he sought to establish his credentials with the Untouchables of Western India

Ambedkar would tell his audiences of his early efforts as champion of Baloo's achievements (Keer 1971: 39–40, 86).

From Player to Politician

In 1929 the youngest of the Palwankar brotherhood retired from first-class cricket but by now the oldest of the brothers was taking a more active role in politics. In September 1932 Mahatma Gandhi embarked on a fast until death in Poona's Yeravada jail. Gandhi was protesting the decision to award separate electorates to the Untouchables, a move he thought would take them away from the Hindu fold. B. R. Ambedkar was adamant however that the separate electorates must stay because he saw a future for his people only outside the stifling social structure of Hinduism. Gandhi's fast continued for several weeks and ended only after a pact was forged between the two men which gave Untouchables more seats in the legislatures in exchange for the abandonment of their claim for separate electorates. The two key intermediaries in the construction of the Poona pact were the South Indian social worker M. C. Rajah and Palwankar Baloo (Pyarelal 1932). The Poona Pact broke down and Ambedkar established his own party to represent the interests of the Untouchables in explicit opposition to the Congress. In the elections of 1937, the first with an extended franchise, Baloo was persuaded by the Congress to stand in a Bombay constituency. The key rival for the seat was Ambedkar. Thus, a quarter-of-a-century after the young Ambedkar had presented the welcome address to Baloo after his epic 1911 tour of England, the two men came to fight an electoral battle in the city of Bombay.

The decision to select Baloo was made by Congress strongman Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Baloo was chosen as a sporting hero, who had once been a hero of his opponent as well. More to the point he was a Chamaar and Patel knew from the Census of India that these city wards had a fair contingent from that particular caste. Sardar calculated that Baloo would split the low caste vote for Ambedkar, and that by giving Ambedkar a fight for his seat it would prevent him from campaigning elsewhere. The Congress High Command sent out its stars to bat for Baloo. Consider the report of a packed election meeting held at Matunga on Saturday 9th January 1937. The Congress candidate was introduced by Patel's own right-hand man, K. M. Munshi, shortly to become Home Minister in the Bombay Government. Baloo, said Munshi, 'had been a great cricketer in his younger days and had once scored [off] many an opponent. Hence, let the opponents take heed that they had to face a first-class bowler'. 'A vote for Baloo' continued Munshi:

is a vote for the Poona Pact. That seat for the 'E' and 'F' Ward should be fought for tooth and nail. It is a seat which is of an all-India importance.

Dr B. R. Ambedkar, who went to the Round Table Conference, entered into the historical Poona Pact, and even before the ink was dry on the paper, he tried to secede from the Hindu faith. Every vote for Mr Baloo was a vote for the Poona Pact. If Baloo falls, the Poona Pact falls, and with it all of us fall.

After Munshi came Baloo. The cricketer told the voters that:

he personally was not interested in contesting the elections. Though he had not taken [a] very prominent part in politics, he had always come forward to help and take part when necessity demanded. Otherwise, he preferred to remain in the background. The call of the Congress came. At the last moment he agreed to stand on behalf of the Congress, and he did not even know from what constituency he would be asked to contest the seat in the assembly.

After the nominations were filed, he came to know that he was contesting for the same seat as Dr B. R. Ambedkar. It was providential coincidence. As he said before he did not want to go to the Legislature, but what were they to do when seats were reserved for them in the House? They had to be occupied. He was sure the voters would cast their vote for him, the Congress candidate as against Ambedkar (BC 10/01/1937).

Other reports suggest that Ambedkar had filed his nomination before Baloo. Whatever was the case, Baloo's son and nephew both state that he was very reluctant to fight Ambedkar in the elections of 1937 (Palwankar 1996; Palwankar 1999). The Marathi-language Congress paper *Navakal* forcefully campaigned on Baloo's behalf. It reminded its readers of how Ambedkar 'had himself accepted Baloo's greatness many times'. The lawyer had often expressed his 'great respect and regard' for the cricketer. It offered, in illustration, the story of how Ambedkar was once felicitated at the hands of Baloo at a function organized by the Cobblers Union. This, in truth, actually showed the remarkable emergence of Ambedkar as an Untouchable leader. For once, as in 1911, Ambedkar had felicitated Baloo and now it was the other way around. The paper seems to have recognized this, for immediately after recounting the incident it asked its readers 'to vote for Baloo and not be hypnotized by Ambedkar's personality' (*Navakal* (Bombay) 11/01/1937, 17/02/1937).

On polling day it was reported that Ambedkar's supporters came to vote in trucks and the Congressmen in cars. In the end, Ambedkar won with 13245 votes against Baloo's 11225. It had been a close-run thing and the *Bombay Chronicle* suggested that Baloo's defeat was due to a 'spoiler', the labour leader

Joglekar who had stood as an independent and garnered 10,000 votes. If Joglekar had not been in the race complained the paper then 'Dr Ambedkar would have been positively swamped' (BC 28/02/1937). Whatever was the case, Baloo's decision to fight an election was a 'world-first' for a professional cricketer and anticipated the much later moves in the same direction of Guyana's Roy Fredericks and Pakistan's Imran Khan. Baloo had provided Dalits with a hero and a model of progress through his achievements on and off the field and by his great personal dignity at all times. He had demonstrated that the low castes could be the equals of the elites. Yet the election result showed that Baloo had served his purpose by preparing the way for Ambedkar. With the higher expectations and greater confidence that the Palwankars had inspired among the lower castes, Dalits came to regard scholars and lawyers as more likely leaders than sportsmen.

Conclusion

The last word goes to a now forgotten newspaper columnist in an article called 'Hindu Cricket and Baloo Brothers' (BC 30/11/1929). In 1929 Vithal was dropped from the Hindu team to make way for rising young talent. With this demotion the 'last of the Baloo family after years of meritorious service has been unceremoniously driven from first class cricket'. Thus wrote one 'R. V. M.' in a moving tribute to the brothers, a tribute marked by deep knowledge of the game of cricket and a subtle understanding of its sometimes brutal social context. The Hindu team's announcement, he remarked, 'abruptly ends a thirty years' unbroken connection of the Baloo brothers with Hindu cricket. Nowhere else does the history of cricket supply such a glorious page'. The individual brothers were recalled, one by one. First the patriarch:

And what a proud record to contemplate! It was Baloo who began Hindu bowling as such. With what wonderful wiles did he accomplish single-handed the herculean task of putting the Parsi and European veterans out, only those knew who intelligently watched him doing it. Bowlers on the other side might come and go but Baloo plodded on for ever.

Then the younger siblings:

Baloo brought Shivram into the field and the best fieldsman he became, with considerable bowling and batting powers in addition. Then came Vithal. He made his first appearance at the Marine Lines Parade Ground, when the Parsi Parekh had a hat-trick and Warden a century against the Hindus. Vithal, however, was not one of the 'tricked' ones.

He played with the sweeping forward style that alone could withstand the fast swerving left-handers of the Parsis. He wielded this weapon with considerable effect and gradually stayed the rot year after year, with centuries against the Mahomedans and the Europeans. To his help then came Gunpat with his pretty style and quick movements. There was thus a time when the Hindu team included all the four brothers at one and the same time, and people fondly called the Hindu side as 'Baloo brothers plus 7'.

R. V. M.'s point was that theirs were not just cricketing achievements:

Did ever a family establish such a record? Could a Hindu lover of cricket having the least culture within him ever dream of breathing against such pillars of Hindu cricket any ignoble reference to their caste? Could a Hindu cricketer think of them with anything but respect? The late Pandharinath Telang, the Hindu Jessop, noble-minded as he was, could never think of Baloo as other than a dear comrade. Sir Chunilal [Mehta] never entertained any ugly thought of the Baloo brothers 'depressed' class.

But society, it seems, sometimes moved more slowly than the cricketers. The final steps to the summit were the hardest:

Baloo though senior was deprived of the captainship. He soon retired and the matter was hushed up. Shivram retired before such a question could crop up in his case. Then it came to the turn of Vithal. But time and again he was put down. His juniors were thrust over his head. No wonder the Hindus failed—miserably failed—yet the die-hards would not listen to justice and reason. But the force of circumstances was too great and after a lot of higgling, at long last, they 'liberalized' themselves enough to throw the captainship at Vithal.

The history of cricket does in fact have pages filled with the deeds of brothers such as the Graces of England, the Waughs of Australia and above all the Mohammeds of Pakistan. In cricketing skill and achievements the Palwankars of India were comfortably the equal of them all. These other families, moreover, had to fight their demons on the field alone whereas the Palwankars were sinned against most grievously by the society into which they were born. Why then are they so wholly forgotten? One reason is that they played before India became an 'official' Test playing nation. Another is the unconscionable ahistoricism of Indians, with their disregard for documents,

records, remembrances and past heroes. While the Palwankars lived and played it was all too different. Men like 'R. V. M.' knew what they were worth. Men like Dr B. R. Ambedkar knew it too. It is past time that they were restored to their rightful place in the history of Indian cricket and indeed in the history of Indian social emancipation.