



ISSN Print: 2664-8717
ISSN Online: 2664-8725
Impact Factor: RJIF 8.00
IJRE 2024; 6(2): 308-311
www.englishjournal.net
Received: 03-09-2024
Accepted: 06-10-2024

Julie Thomas
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Bishop Moore College,
Mavelikara, Kerala, India

Showcasing the Chak De! Effect: A clarion call for reinforced sports coverage

Julie Thomas

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648717.2024.v6.i2e.245>

Abstract

Sports is a way of life for many people, all over the world. There are many people who dedicate their whole lives to the practice of sports. Many are the sacrifices they have had to make for their dreams. In India, sports is a factor that often invokes nationalistic fervour. However, it is very rare that the struggles and feats of our sportspersons get rightful exposure through any medium. When, occasionally, a film or an article gets into public attention, the impact can be tremendous. Such is the imprint left on Indian society by the film *Chak de! India*. The title song of the film has become the unofficial sporting anthem of our country. This article serves to highlight the necessity of giving rightful coverage to the efforts and accomplishments of our sportspersons.

Keywords: Sports films, nationalism, Chak de effect, sports journalism, sacrifices

Introduction

It was Thursday, the 5th of August 2021. History was scripted and emotions were pouring out on the hockey field in Tokyo, the venue of the Summer Olympics, as India defeated Germany 5 -4 in a nail-biting finish, to clinch the bronze medal. India, once the powerhouse in hockey, was winning an Olympic medal in its national sport, after a gap of 41 years. The significance of the medal could not be emphasised enough. Coach Graham Reid and captain Manpreet Singh had every right to be happy. However, the real star of the match was the veteran custodian, P.R. Sreejesh from Kerala. Sreejesh's heroic efforts towards the dying moments of the game, making a save from a penalty corner to deny Germany the equalizer, was the key that clinched the match and the medal for India.

Wild and emotional moments of celebration erupted on the hockey field, in the dressing room, and across many homes and streets in India. A constant theme song that punctuated these moments of celebration was *Chak de! ... Chak de! India* (Go for It! India), as millions of hearts went into a frenzy of nationalistic fervour. If one took a glimpse of the past, one could see, though, that this was not the first time that people, and a whole stadium, had erupted to chants of *Chak de*.

The year was 2011. The ICC Cricket World Cup was played in India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. India won the tournament, defeating Sri Lanka by six wickets in the final at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, thus becoming the first country to win the Cricket World Cup final on home soil. As the Men in Blue took the victory lap, the whole stadium took up the chorus - *Chak de! ... Chak de! India*.

Let's take a flash forward to the 23rd of October 2022. When India defeated Pakistan in a group stage match of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, one could again hear chants of *Chak de! ... Chak de! India*, this time around in Melbourne. Definitely, *Chak de!* had established its credentials as the sporting anthem of the country.

So, where did it all begin?

Perhaps we can say that the story took its birth from a small, inconspicuous newspaper article. The year was 2002. The Indian Women's hockey team had just done something unthinkable – it had won the gold medal in the Commonwealth games, defeating hosts England in the final held at Manchester on 3rd August. A crucial member of the coaching staff was Mir Ranjan Negi, the goalkeeping coach, who had once, as a player, fallen from public grace, after conceding seven goals to arch-rivals Pakistan in the final of the 1982 Asian games.

Corresponding Author:
Julie Thomas
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
Bishop Moore College,
Mavelikara, Kerala, India

Following this humiliating defeat, he had been accused of throwing away the game to Pakistan, and had, since then, been dropped from the national squad. The gold medal at the Commonwealth Games had succeeded in creating a new lease of life for him too.

A very small article appeared about the Women in Blue in the Indian newspapers the next day, with cricket, as usual, taking up the vast majority of the sports page. Most of us may have read such a report with apathy. However, one man read the article and was much saddened by the unfairness of it. The man in question was the noted screenplay writer and lyricist Jaideep Sahni. As he himself later said in an interview,

I had just read a newspaper article. I felt so bad seeing the placement of that article. It was a small write-up placed on the last page. I thought, if India loses in cricket, then also it makes the front page. These girls had won for our country, and they got a small write-up. I thought it was wrong. I started researching on it, went to stadiums and talked to people. I used to see the hockey team literally begging for sponsorship or kits, or even laptops. I had worked in advertising, so I thought I would get them sponsors. I did not leave any brand behind. I started from health drinks to makeup brands even though the latter is not for athletes, but I had to. Nothing happened though. These brands wanted product placement in my films instead. The condition of women's hockey team used to be so bad that time. It is quite better now. People used to steal bulbs from their toilets, and it used to be so messy. I also saw that two girls were holding a jersey and another girl was changing behind that. This was the national team. I started crying. I promised to make a film on them at that moment. It was my dream. ("Chak de! India writer")

Produced by Adithya Chopra (Yash Raj Films), and directed by Shimit Amin, the film *Chak de! India* was born out of that promise in the year 2007. The film turned out to be a landmark in the history of Indian sports cinema.

The world of sports has long captivated the imagination of both readers and viewers alike, weaving tales of triumph, perseverance, and human spirit. This fascination extends beyond the stadiums and fields, finding a cherished place in literature and films too. In India, a country where cricket is akin to a religion and football clubs inspire fierce loyalty, sports literature and sports films have flourished, offering a plethora of stories that capture the essence of various games and the lives intertwined with them.

Indian sports achievers are inspirational heroes but they are those who often have had to fight against odds. Family pressure to concentrate on academics rather than sports, the need to earn an income instead of being a financial drain, and the necessity of spending time and money on training or competition for choice spots in sports academies are common themes in the lives of many athletes.

The Indian women's national hockey team is the subject of the superhit film *Chak De! India* (Go for It! India). The hockey team, composed of sixteen players from different states, is coached by a disgraced former captain of the Indian national men's hockey team, Kabir Khan. Khan is someone who has been, at one point of his career, suspected of giving away a game to Pakistan by deliberately losing a penalty stroke. Crudely suggesting that, as a Muslim, his sympathies lie with Pakistan, Khan is reviled by the media and spat upon by his neighbours, who paint the word "traitor" on the walls of his home. The former sports hero

has to lock up his home and leave the place with his mother. After seven years of oblivion, he applies to the Sports Authority of India to coach the women's hockey team. He is given the job, only because sports officials do not think the team is important enough.

As the players arrive from across the country, we are treated to revealing vignettes of attitudes from the families of the girls and the biases of Indian men against women. Some parents don't want their daughters to play on the team, while others exhort their girls to uphold their families' sporting traditions. Prejudices are also displayed among the registration officials, who are shown to be incapable of distinguishing between players from different states of South India. These biases continue into the dormitory, where the players' egos come to the fore.

Khan's work is cut out for him as he tries to drill some discipline into his team – an assorted group of young women who are divided by their own competitive natures and individual prejudices. While Komal Chautala from Haryana conflicts with Preeti Sabarwal from Chandigarh, Balbir Kaur from Punjab has an extremely short temper and bullies Rani Dispotta and Soimoi Kerketa, belonging to remote villages in Jharkhand. Mary Ralte from Mizoram and Molly Zimik from Manipur are both treated as "foreigners" by virtually everyone they meet. The team's captain, Vidya Sharma, is forced to choose between hockey and the wishes of her husband's family, while Preeti's fiancé, Abhimanyu Singh, the (fictional) vice-captain of the Indian national cricket team, is deeply threatened by her involvement with the team.

Khan realizes that he can only unite the girls if they develop the discipline to work as a team. This leads him to bench a number of players during the first few days, including the most experienced player of the squad, Bindia Naik. In response, Bindia engineers a revolt which leads Khan to resign. As a gesture of good will, however, Khan invites Krishnaji, the Assistant coach, Sukhlal, the team manager, and the girls to a farewell lunch. During the lunch, a few boys start teasing Mary, leading to a large brawl between the girls and the boys. The quarrel, however, unites the girls and destroys their anger towards Khan. They request him to remain as their coach. Khan, impressed by the display of their team spirit, eventually agrees.

Their newly found unity is, however, challenged when the Indian Hockey Association refuses to let the team travel abroad for the World Championship. Khan, however, forces the Association President to agree to a challenge match with the men's team, on condition that, if the girls win, they will be allowed to go to Australia. The girls eventually lose the match, but their courageous performance is well praised by the men's team and forces the hockey body to send them to the Championship.

The scenes of the women with "INDIA" emblazoned on the backs of their jerseys as the Indian flag flutters overhead are an exercise in creating national fervour. In the first match, they are trounced by the Australian home team because of fouls committed by their opponents, that are not called as fouls by biased referees. Taking the lesson to heart, the team strategizes and goes on to win game after game, qualifying as the winners of the semifinals. At the finals, they are up against their old adversaries, the home team, whom they beat in a spirited game to become the world champions. Khan is feted as the "Pride of India" and, with his mother, returns to unlock his home in his old neighbourhood. His

neighbours are now keen to befriend him and have his autograph. While patriotism is fanned, the audience also sees the fickleness of fans and the media.

From time immemorial, human beings have exhibited an inclination towards sports. Descriptions of different types of games and sports can be found in ancient writings and scriptures. Narratives of various types of physical training, and training of weaponry given to the sons of king Pandu and king Kuru by Acharya Drona in the *Mahabharata*, can possibly be treated as instances of sports reporting. The Roman philosopher and writer Homer, has written about a wrestling match between Odysseus and Ajax in his epic drama *Iliad*. These can be taken as some of the earliest instances of sports journalism.

Sports journalism can be defined as a form of journalism that reports on matters concerning sporting topics and competitions. One of the most popular forms of journalism, it goes beyond scores and statistics, delving into the heart of the game, and the stories behind the athletes. Sports journalism includes everything from college level sporting events to amateur and professional sporting events. Regional, national and international sporting events come under its purview. Sports journalism acts as a bridge between sporting events and their audience. Sports coverage has grown in importance. Sports journalism is an essential element of any news media organization today.

Indian sports journalism is of recent growth. It was in the late nineteen thirties that *Times of India*, Bombay (now Mumbai), started a separate sports page. However, till independence, very few newspapers had a regular sports page. One among those few was *The Hindu*. Apart from being the pioneer in designing and developing the concept of the sports page, *The Hindu* also played a consistent and committed role as a promoter of sports, long before the theme of sponsorship acquired its present-day significance. At the present moment, almost every major Indian newspaper gives ample space to sports news in their publications.

We can perhaps come full circle to the newspaper article that led to the birth of the superhit sports movie *Chak de! India*. It was not at all an instance of responsible sports journalism. A deserving team had to wait for long to get its due merit. It was just by a fortuitous chance, that the team got its due five long years later.

Sports films both reflect and shape viewers' attitudes towards sporting culture. They can be an amalgamation of entertainment and education, if watched with a creative and analytical mind. Through their compelling narratives, these films have not only celebrated the glory of victory but have also shed light on the profound challenges that athletes face in their journeys.

Chak de! India is a movie that tries to make one believe that impossible is nothing, as it teaches us to never give up. There can be a whole lot of difference between real life and reel life, but an inspiration we can take home from the movie is to have faith in oneself and to keep trying.

The movie reflected on various issues concerning sports in India, including the media's influence on the general attitude of the public towards sports personalities, the step – motherly treatment offered by the government to most of the sports played in the country other than cricket, the discrimination that exists in sports, based on gender, race and ethnicity etc. The film was declared to be a blockbuster at the box office, and it triggered a new wave of nationalistic

fervour in the country, as well as the renewal of support and interest in our national game.

The title song, "Chak de! India", had a tremendous impact on the Indian public. Within no time at all, it came to acquire the status of a national war cry, as well as to become the national sports anthem of India, similar perhaps, to the *Vamos ...Vamos* chants of frenzied fans in support of the *La Albiceleste*.

Navneet Kaur, an integral part of the current Indian women's hockey team, once opened up thus about the impact of the film and the song:

All of us on the team had started playing by the time that movie came out, but we noticed that the sport got a public boost after this film hit the screens. We often play the songs from that movie before we go out to play. It helps motivate us and gives us a mental lift. (Khanna)

The film has inspired the Indian public, especially our youth, to develop a sense of identity and belonging to their country, through the language of sports. The movie is also worth- watching to learn life lessons that motivate viewers to achieve personal and professional success.

If so much can be done for Indian sports by a meagre newspaper article and a great film that was born out of it, how much more can be achieved by responsible coverage and due recognition given to sports and sportspersons! Existence of sport does not depend on media, journalism or cinema, but its success as a form of commercial entertainment, and its influence on the general public can definitely be boosted by encouraging attention from any or all of these quarters.

Sportspersons are truly unique. They are not merely some statistics and scores to be brushed off in disdain. The lessons they teach us are also unique. Through their feats, our elite athletes push and re-define boundaries and limits. Many sporting careers involve years of training for a chance at glory that lasts a few minutes or, even a few seconds. Performing well as an athlete is an around – the- clock commitment. They take many risks, with uncertain rewards. There's practically no room for mistakes and little role for chance.

Sportspersons, among other things, sacrifice their free time, make very tough dietary choices, often miss school / college, and stretch their financial resources quite a lot. They teach us lessons in commitment, self-discipline, mental toughness, resilience, teamwork, goal setting, time management, dedication, patience, integrity, responsibility, overcoming adversity, handling victories and defeats, etc.

Sports journalism and sports films affect the development of physical education as well. They play a pivotal role in promoting sports culture among the youth of today. Responsible sports coverage can go a long way in humanising athletes, in flaming the spirit of nationalism (something that politics or religion can never realistically hope to achieve), and in providing inspiration and motivation to our future champions.

To mark a brighter sporting future for our nation, let us therefore, among other things, promote the adoption of responsible standards of sports coverage. Let there be more articles, and more films and media coverage that highlight the value of sports, and pays tribute to all deserving champions. It's time to stand up in defence of the good values that sports inculcate in us. Afterall, as the saying goes, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

References

1. Andrews P. Sports Journalism: A Practical Introduction. London: Sage; 2005.
2. Williams AL, editor. Film and Nationalism. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press; 2002.
3. Khanna A. We listen to songs from Chak de! India to pump us up before matches. Times News Network. 2024 Oct 19. Available from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/event/s/bangalore/we-listen-to-songs-from-chak-de-india-to-pump-us-up-before-matches/articleshow/114327056.cms>. Accessed 2024 Oct 22.
4. Chak De India writer Jaideep Sahni says he broke down when he saw the condition of Indian women's hockey team. India Today. 2022 Nov 20. Available from: <https://www.indiatoday.in/movies/celebrities/story/chak-de-india-writer-jaideep-sahni-recalls-the-struggles-while-making-the-film-says-no-one-wanted-to-sponsor-2299591-2022-11-20>. Accessed 2024 Oct 22.
5. Shah Rukh Khan delivers life lessons at University of Edinburgh. India.com. Available from: <https://www.india.com/entertainment/shah-rukh-khan-delivers-life-lessons-at-university-of-edinburgh-watch-full-speech-video-638219>. Accessed 2024 Oct 11.