

**Indian Cricket and Fear: A Study of the Movie 83 and the
Autobiographies of Kapil Dev and Sunil Gavaskar**

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Abstract

Cricket all over the world is called 'a gentleman's game.' However, when it comes to cricket in India, this gentleman's game has often led to hostile crowds attacking cricketers verbally and physically to the extent of throwing stones at them and their homes whenever people feel that the team has not lived up to their expectations. Even a single failure in any critical game invites crowd aggression on and off the field. India's loss to the West Indies in 1983-84 was reason enough for the crowd to shout at and hurl stones at the bus carrying the Indian cricketers. Such incidents are not unheard of in the history of cricket in India. Apart from these external apprehensions, there are many more inside. Team selection, media influence, inferiority complex, judgmental approach, losing matches, etc., amplify the fear in the players and eventually affect their overall performance. These elements are aptly discussed in many places in the autobiographies of Kapil Dev and Sunil Gavaskar, titled *Straight from the Heart* and *Sunny Days*, respectively. Furthermore, it is also showcased in the 1983 World Cup-based Bollywood movie *83* (2022), where the Indian team created history by becoming World Champions for the first time. This paper will analyze the factors leading to fear in Indian cricket by comparing the abovementioned texts and the movie.

Keywords: Indian Cricketers, Performance and Public Pressure, Fear, Failure and Efficiency, 83

Bio-note

I, Sheikh Salman Murtaza from Kashmir, am currently doing research in English Literature at Aligarh Muslim University related to sports autobiographies. I have done a master's and bachelor's in English Literature from AMU, with percentages of 70 and 64, respectively, and my schooling is from Kashmir only. Although my research interest revolves around Feminism, post-colonialism, absurdist theatre, and autobiographies, I like to read, write, and research the topics I am interested in. Furthermore, I am passionate about playing badminton, which is one of the reasons that I am working on sports autobiographies in my ongoing research.

Cricket is immensely popular in India, with matches often drawing passionate and enthusiastic crowds. Although most supporters contribute to a vibrant atmosphere, hostile crowds occasionally emerge during cricket matches within the country. These instances typically arise during high-stakes contests, intense rivalries, or when the home team is underperforming.

Crowd hostility can manifest in various forms, including booing, jeering, and hurling objects onto the field. Players, particularly those from the visiting team, may encounter verbal abuse and occasionally aggressive behavior from spectators. Crowd disturbances have been documented in domestic and international matches held in India.

Several factors contribute to the intense ambiance within Indian cricket stadiums, such as the deep emotional bond fans share with the sport, regional rivalries, and the entrenched cricketing culture within the nation. In India, cricket often transcends being just a game; it serves as a source of national pride and a means for supporters to showcase their passion. It is essential to acknowledge that while instances of hostility exist, they do not represent the conduct of all cricket fans in India. Most spectators demonstrate respect and support, contributing to the overall exhilarating and celebratory atmosphere that characterizes cricket matches in the country. Authorities and cricket boards continually strive to ensure the safety of players and spectators by implementing security measures and promoting responsible fan conduct.

Fear, an inherent and profound sentiment, is incited by the discernment of impending danger, thereby instigating a prompt and urgent response characterized by an alarmingly reactive state that activates the entire organism by initiating a series of intricate and vital bodily adjustments. These adaptations encompass not only an accelerated rhythm of the heart but also the redirection of vital fluids away from the outer extremities and towards the inner core of the body, a tightening of the muscles, as well as a comprehensive mobilization of the entire organism, empowering it to take immediate and necessary action. Fear constitutes an indispensable reaction to both physical and emotional jeopardy, serving as a crucial factor throughout human evolution.

Besides specific phobias, fear frequently manifests in different ways. For instance, social anxiety disorder, commonly referred to as social phobia, is characterized by a profound fear of the judgment, assessment, and rejection of others that prevents sufferers from fully engaging in life. Those who struggle with social anxiety may avoid circumstances where they may be observed by others, such as public speaking, dining in front of others, making new friends, or participating in group discussions. Arthur J. Westermayr, in his essay *The Psychology of Fear* notes:

From the beginning of human thought, fear has been regarded with contempt. To fear, to be afraid, is considered the earmark of cowardice, and as all the world is said to love a lover, so all the world scorns a coward. Moreover, because it occupies, in our estimation, such an unenviable position, it serves a valuable purpose. Since fear is considered contemptible, man tries to divest

himself of it; he is ashamed of its existence; he hates its profoundest and most beneficent manifestation. (250)

When it comes to sports, most athletes' fears stem from their sense of the significance of a given performance or their assumptions about the opinions of others. The immediate fears are avoiding subpar outcomes or fearing the harmful effects of a subpar performance. Athletes are concerned about disappointing their coach or team. They fear not living up to their parent's expectations or disappointing them. They worry about many things that are often outside their direct or immediate control. Moreover, they might worry about the crowd there to support them.

Speaking of cricket in India, there exists a plethora of cultures and religions in this secular nation. However, amidst this diversity, the one thing that unifies the hearts and souls of every Indian is none other than the game of cricket. Even though hockey holds the prestigious title of India's national sport, cricket has an enormous fan base. With numerous ardent followers, cricket is one of India's most revered traditions. "Men in Blue" has become synonymous with the passionate cricket enthusiasts who proudly support their national team. Whether it be a young student or an elderly retiree, the allure of cricket has captivated nearly every Indian. In fact, since the advent of the immensely popular Indian Premier League (IPL), the fever for cricket has soared to unprecedented heights of fame and grandeur.

While the Indian Cricket Control Board (BCCI) possesses a roster of 32 contracted athletes for the men's national team, hordes of enthusiasts from beyond the 22-yard arena rally behind their beloved squad and the sport itself. Estimates reveal that a staggering 730 million individuals in India, more than double the populace of the United States of America, avidly tuned in to the 2016 ICC T20 World Cup (USA). Even considering India's prodigious populace, this statistic remains remarkable, as it signifies that over 50% of the Indian population eagerly witnessed the global tournament. Cricket within India is not merely a game but an embodiment of existence itself, an ethereal essence that would have never materialized without the unwavering allegiance of its devoted supporters. Indian fans, illustrious in their ardor, often exhibit a fervor that transcends rationality. Ironically, one of India's best unifying forces today is possibly a game that was a gift from imperial control. Here, cricket is a religion that connects people of all castes, creeds, and socioeconomic classes.

The well-known and widely recognized idiom "Cricket is my religion, and Sachin is my god" continues to resonate in the hearts and minds of cricket enthusiasts, as it is frequently echoed within the hallowed grounds of cricket stadiums nationwide. While some argue that this expression may appear exaggerated or hyperbolic, delving into the life story of a particular individual named Sudhir Kumar Chaudhary could provide a profound understanding and appreciation for the underlying reality conveyed by the phrase above. Thus, it becomes abundantly clear that the sentiments and passionate attachment evoked by Indian cricket run deep within the very fabric of the country, often igniting intense emotions that occasionally manifest in irrational behaviors, reaching unfathomable extents, such as the unwarranted attacks on cricketers and their residences.

Fear of failure is most prevalent in competitive sports environments because of the conflict between the cognitive uncertainty of one's ability to accomplish tasks or goals and the personal drive to do so. Given that external figures regularly evaluate the majority of young athletes' sporting actions based on performance and success criteria, sports experience self-perception tends to be oriented toward the fear of making a mistake, especially when the appearance of feelings of shame, ridicule, or embarrassment accompanies it. However, the paper will concentrate on the fear of the hostile crowd.

Before going any further, let me briefly tell you about the 1983 World Cup. In no way was India the favorite to win the World Cup. As Kapil Dev puts it in his autobiography titled *Straight From the Heart*, "Nobody expects us even to qualify. Our friends (even other cricketers) mention in the passing that we are here for a picnic" (Dev 103). However, eventually, the Indian Team reached the World Cup finals for the first time and then beat the mighty West Indies to lift the World Cup trophy for the first time. Not only did India win the World Cup final at Lords on June 25, 1983, but that moment also marked a sea change in our nation's perception of itself as a cricketing nation, as that fantastic victory infused the very essence of a nation that had up until that point defined itself both on and off the cricket field. Everything changed drastically when the following morning's banner headlines declared, "The Cup Is Ours.". It was a rush of blood unlike any other. After that, cricket in India has been a very different story.

Conversely, the crowd turned very hostile when the West Indies beat India in India soon after the World Cup. After the loss in a test match, the Indian team had to be "warned by the cops not to come out because the crowd was furious. Half an hour later, the police commissioner advised us to leave immediately. When we come out, there are mounted police to escort us. We get into the bus, and as it moves, somebody shouts, 'Maro.' I refuse to lie down on the floor as stones and other missiles crash into the windscreen of the bus. Most of my colleagues are flat on the floor" (Dev 133). So, the crowd there to lift the players on their shoulders after the World Cup has now turned to attack the players.

Moreover, this happens in no time in cricket as, according to Kapil Dev, getting humiliated is as common as praise in a cricketer's life. There have been many incidents where the players or their properties were attacked after they lost a match. During the 2003 World Cup, after India's poor performance, angry cricket fans took to the streets, with posters of numerous Indian cricketers being burned and residences of players being stoned. Cricket fans burnt pictures of Indian captain Sourav Ganguly, top batsmen Sachin Tendulkar and Virendra Sehwag and screamed chants such as "Down with Sourav." According to media reports, the most violent protest was directed at the family home of batsman Mohammad Kaif. A crowd hurled plastic bags containing paint and black oil at Kaif's residence in Allahabad.

During the 2007 World Cup, Mahendra Singh Dhoni's under-construction house was also vandalized after the exact match. The supporters, led by Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) activists, urged the state government to revoke the land given

to Dhoni. The mob damaged a few pillars and several walls on the property. There are many such cases in the history of Indian cricket.

This hostile crowd is also featured in the movie during the 1983 World Cup and is depicted in both the autobiography of Kapil Dev and the movie *83* (2022). Some of the West Indian fans are seen humiliating the wives of Indian cricketers to the extent of forcing them to leave watching the match at the stadium. Furthermore, even the supporters on the Indian team are seen making humiliating comments at the players, saying, "Ek match to jeet k dikhao" (at least win a single match). This is because the emotions for cricket in India run very high.

In most countries, the crowds in the 70s and 80s used to be very hostile towards the touring sides. West Indians were subject to racism and humiliation when they toured Australia in '75. You can see all those details in "The Fire in Babylon" movie. An incredible West Indies cricket team from the 1970s and 1980s is the subject of the 2010 British documentary *Fire in Babylon*. Directed and written by Stevan Riley, the film included stock footage and interviews with several former players and officials, including Viv Richards, Andy Roberts, Gordon Greenidge, Gordon Greenidge, Desmond Haynes, Michael Holding, Clive Lloyd, and Colin Croft. It was nominated for a British Independent Film Award for Best Documentary. The documentary explains how the West Indies cricket team rose from a group of primarily gifted, entertaining "Calypso Cricketers" to a focused team that ruled the cricket world for nearly two decades. The more fearful pace bowling machine grew out of that anger, and the Caribbean home crowd was always ready to give the visitors a taste of their own medicine. Indian cricket team also faced the brute of the Caribbean during that period, and Sunil Gavaskar highlights this in his autobiography *Sunny Days*.

"To call the crowd a crowd in Jamaica is a misnomer. It should be called a mob. The way they shrieked and howled every time Holding bowled was positively horrible. They encouraged him with shouts of 'Kill him, Maan!', 'Hit him, Maan!' 'Knock his head off, Mike!" (Gavaskar 230)

Here I quote one more incident where a batter named Anushman was hit just behind the left ear:

"Another short ball went like a guided missile, knocking Anushman's spectacles off. Moreover, can one guess the crowd's reaction? They were stamping their legs, clapping, and jumping with joy. ... here was a man seriously injured, and these barbarians were thirsting for more blood instead of expressing sympathy, as any civilized and sporting crowd would have done" (231).

Gavaskar mentions another incident in his autobiography where an umpire gave out a West Indian player, Richards. "After the Richards run-out, when the crowd gave vent to its anger, umpire Gosein was not going to give anybody out. Oh no! He wanted to live to see the next day. He did not dare to take any risk because the crowd was already after his blood." (217)

It is worth mentioning that such instances were not only prevalent in the last decades of the twentieth century but occur in the present day, mostly in social media

abuse. A lot of social media abuse was aimed at the only Muslim player in the Indian playing XI, Mohammad Shami, to the extent of even calling him a 'traitor' after his side was thrashed by arch-rivals Pakistan at the T20 World Cup 2021. When the then-Indian captain came in support of Shami, the fans stooped a new low and gave rape threats to Virat's nine-month-old daughter. In the IPL 2023, Shubman Gill, a young Indian cricketer, and even his sister were hurled abuses at when he helped his team, Gujrat Titans, win over Virat Kohli's Royal Challengers Bangalore. Again, Harry Brook, a cricketer from England, though a foreign player, was also harassed online as he, during the post-match presentation ceremony, mentioned that "I was putting pressure on myself, and the bad stuff written on social media impacted me. I hope the Indian fans who were after me will change their opinions after my hundred in today's game." These are to name a few incidents. Social media abuse of Indian cricketers is the new trend these days, and the abuse turns physical when things do not go India's way, insignificant events like the World Cup.

Summing up, the cricket fans in India, or fans of any other game, do not take the defeats lightly. The residences of the players are subjected to acts of violence involving projectiles while their effigies are burnt throughout the nation. This animosity is often directed towards esteemed players such as, earlier, Captain Rahul Dravid, Sahin Tendulkar, and Virender Sehwag, and now the 'king of cricket,' Virat Kohli, is not spared. While discussing social media trolls, Kohli said, "It has become a social pandemic in today's world, which is unfortunate and sad to see because this is the lowest level of human potential one can operate at. Moreover, that is how I look at these people." Indian cricketers find themselves disheartened by being on the receiving end of this outburst of anger. Then, the fear of the crowd must be at the back of the players' minds, which might also affect their performance on the field. Thus, fans must exercise restraint in criticizing cricketers following a subpar performance or an error on the field because somebody has to lose, and both teams cannot win.

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