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## Historical Perspectives of Mumbai Cricket : Formation, Growth And Development

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### Abstract

Mumbai, being the financial capital of the country, is seen to have taken the lead in various art, cultural and commercial aspects. Mumbai also seems to have taken the lead in the glorious construction of the sports field. At the heart of this sports field is cricket, which is the subject of Mumbai's and alternatively the country's affection. Even so, considering cricket as the centre in the study of Mumbai's structure and history, it is seen that the study of cricket's foundation, its development, its expansion, its socio-cultural threads, the economy developed from it has remained neglected from a historical point of view. Various players, critics, commentators, cricket connoisseurs, cricket analysts, journalists have written extensively on the history and quality of Mumbai cricket. In this, Bharat Ratna Sachin Tendulkar through his autobiography 'Playing it My Way' and renowned socio-political scholar Ramchandra Guha have shed light on Mumbai's cricket through his literature like 'The Commonwealth of Cricket', 'Gandhi and Cricket'. Despite such wealth of literature, there does not seem to have been substantial research on the history of Mumbai cricket. Today even children from ordinary middle-class families are looking at cricket as a professional career. It is said that 'the future is guided by history'. Likewise, the Research paper will be an innovative guide for the coming generation. Therefore, through this research paper, I intend to reveal the rich heritage of Mumbai cricket and keep the progress, formation, and expansion of the history-rich Mumbai cricket before the society.

**Keywords** – Mumbai, Cricket, Formation, Development, Historical Point Of View, Literature, Sachin Tendulkar, Ramchandra Guha, Gandhi etc.

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### Introduction

"Cricket, it has famously been said, is an Indian game accidentally invented by the Britishers." The game which was started by some rich men of England to pass the time reached every corner of the world with the expansion of the British Empire. The game came to India through English rulers and soldiers. Of course, the game was then only for European owners, the "natives" were only there for match preparation and player appreciation. Mumbai was such a favourite of the Britishers. India remained a British colony after the First War of Independence had been fought and brutally put an end to in 1857. Colonel George Robert Canning Harris, a former England Test cricketer, was appointed governor of the thriving Bombay Presidency. Lord Harris remained until 1895, a period of five years. He played a crucial role in introducing one of Mumbai's enduring

loves, crickets throughout this time. After the destruction of the Bombay fort, the huge open space in the city of Mumbai started marking the residents of this place for sports, and then wanted to play Saheb's outdoor games. The Azad Maidan was first used to play cricket by the Englishmen stationed in the Bombay Presidency. The expansive area known as the Esplanade in the 1800s included Azad Maidan, Oval Maidan, and Cross Maidan. Lord Harris, the Governor and a former member of the Queen's cricket team, was heavily involved in the Presidency cricket matches, which featured seasoned European cricketers against the young Indian cricket team, which was made up of natives Harris believed had "potential." These Presidency matches, which were played between 1892 and 1907, introduced the people to the gentleman's game, which Mumbai (then Bombay) residents turned out

to be very skilled at. Held between 1892 and 1907, these Presidency matches inducted the locals into the gentleman's game, a sport that Mumbai (then Bombay) locals turned out to be exceptionally good at. Parsis were the first people to play cricket in this city which is a major trading community of India. Various social elements have contributed significantly in the formation and development of this game and alternatively in the golden history of Mumbai cricket. A cricket player with great talent got on stage to perform irrespective of their Caste and religion status in colonial period which was also a unique feature of Mumbai cricket. For example, Mumbaikar Cricketer Baloo Palwankar who was Dalit by birth but He played in the all-Indian team led by the Maharaja of Patiala during their tour of England in 1911. The tour was a failure, but Baloo's outstanding performance was well praised. He was a left-handed spin bowler who recorded 114 dismissals on the tour. He was known as the Rhodes of India. Coming back to overall Mumbai cricketers, almost one-third of the runs in the history of Indian Test cricket have been scored by Mumbai batsmen. Out of the 84 Ranji Trophies which is the main domestic cricket tournament in India played till date, 41 are held by Mumbai Cricket. It is difficult to find another example in the world of sports of such an overwhelming dominance of a competition. Almost 140 years of history and over 500 Ranji cricket matches stand behind these victories. This Research paper is to study formation, growth and development of the game of cricket through socio-cultural angles and trace this illustrious history and unravel the successful tradition of true cricket of Mumbai before the future generations from a historical perspective.

#### **Methodology of the Research Paper**

According to the study of the said research topic, different research methods which are useful will be consulted. To collect the facts of the said research, primary sources like Records in newspapers and magazines around the time of the event or topic and secondary/tertiary sources like newspapers, weekly, special issues, magazines, publications of various organizations can be included as well as the research method as follows.

1. Descriptive study method.
2. Historical Study Methods.
3. Analytical study methods.

#### **Findings and observations**

After the destruction of the Bombay fort, the huge open space in the city of Mumbai started marking the residents of this place for sports, and then locals wanted to play Saheb's outdoor games. Parsis were the first people to play cricket in this city which is a major trading centre of India. The first cricket club of Indians was established in Mumbai in the year 1848. It was the Persian 'Oriental Cricket Club'. In the next 20 years, around 30 Parsi clubs came into existence in Bombay and with the help of big personalities like Kawasji Jehangir and Sorabji Shapoorji, they started competing with each other. Around this time, on the initiative of the Governor of Bombay, the 'Bombay Gymkhana' was established in 1875, which is still standing today. A match was played for the first time in 1877 between the Parsi team and the European team of the Bombay Gymkhana. The matches were played on an annual basis from 1884, after a gap of a few years after the tussle over the field. The Parsis established their Cricket Gymkhana in 1888. Seeing them, by 1893, what we see today at Marine Drive, first the Muslim Gymkhana and then the Hindu Gymkhana came into existence. By 1906, a predominantly Gujarati Hindu Sangh had grown stronger and challenged the Parsi Sangh. The Parsi team, however, rejected this challenge, at which point the European team accepted the fight with the Hindu team. Hindu team won this match by 110 runs. In 1907, the Hindu Sangh again defeated the British Sangh. Left-arm spinner Balu Palavankar was the architect of both these victories. He took 8 wickets in the first match and 13 wickets in the second match. Although Balu, a Dalit by birth, was allowed to play for the team, his food and drinking water was kept separate from that of his team. Later the Parsi team also decided to participate in these matches. Thus the Bombay Gymkhana, the Parsi Sangh and the Hindu Sangh started playing matches against each other and from 1907 the tricolour tournament started in Bombay. Constant match play raised the standard of Indian cricket and in 1911 an all-India team was fielded in England. Although not much success was achieved at the team level, the tour was fruitful at the individual level. Palwankar brothers of Mumbai achieved spectacular success in this. Balu Palavankar as a bowler and his younger

brother Shivram Palavankar as the main batsman. HD Kanga (whos the Kanga League is named after) also played on the tour. The tri-colour competition was transformed into a four-colour competition in 1912 with the arrival of the Muslim League. Players started coming from all corners of India to play in this tournament and this tournament came to be known as the 'Carnival of Bombay Cricket'. Under the leadership of Arthur Gilligan, the MCC team toured India in 1926. Even when the team came to Mumbai after playing elsewhere in the country, it was undefeated. On 30 November, a two-day match between MCC and Hindustan was played at the Bombay Gymkhana. The visitors batted on the first day in this match. An English batsman named Guy Earl caught the attention of the Indians by batting with a storm. He scored 130 runs hitting 11 fours and 8 sixes in front of nearly 25 thousand spectators. The audience of Mumbai had never seen such fireworks. The English team ended on 363 at the end of the first day while the Hindu team was playing at 16/1. On the second day, CK Nayudu came into bat at 84/3 after skipper Vitthal Palavankar was dismissed. CK started hitting huge sixes one after the other, taking out the juice of the English bowlers. Naidu's foray was eventually stopped by 153 runs. In this he hit 13 fours and 11 sixes, 11 sixes in an innings was then a world record in first-class cricket. This innings had a far-reaching impact on Indian cricket. The English attitude understood that the level of Indian cricket had risen and paved the way for India to play international cricket. The first Test in India in 1930 (which was not played due to the intensity of the Indian freedom struggle) and then in England in 1932 was proposed. Douglas Jardine's (Bodyline fame) team came to India after playing the 1932 Lord's Test. The first Test match played in India was at the Bombay Gymkhana ground in Mumbai. The match started on 15 December 1933, India was of course captained by CK Nayudu. India batted first and scored 219 runs, with Lala Amarnath contributing the most, adding 38 runs. Even with Mohammad Nisar taking

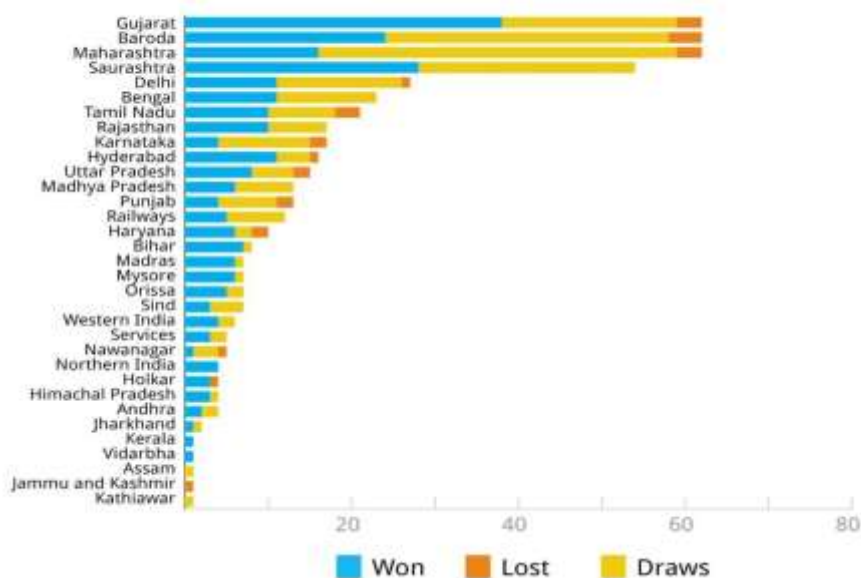
90/5, the English team made a mountain of 438 runs. Chasing this innings, the Indian team's score was 21/2. After this, Nayudu and Amarnath recovered the innings and took the score to 207. Lala Amarnath became India's first Test centurion by scoring a century in his very first Test. Amarnath's 118 runs were appreciated by the entire nation and overnight he became a national talisman. These golden moments were lived by Bombay Gymkhana. Even though India lost the Mumbai Test, cricket gained immense popularity in the country. In 1934-35, the 'Ranji Trophy', covering the entire country, was started and that is why the idea of resuming the Mumbai quadruple tournament, which had been discontinued for the past few years, came forward. After the 1935 quadruple tournament, there was a demand for an 'other' team to accommodate people from other castes. The first cricket stadium in Mumbai 'Brabourne Stadium' was established in 1937 under the chairmanship of Governor Lord Brabourne. The first quintet tournament (British, Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and others) was decided to be played on this ground. The Hindu team did not participate in the 1937 tournament due to a dispute over ticket numbers at Brabourne. From the following years, however, the five-colour tournament was played regularly. Over time, the five-colour contest over the religious issue in Indian politics began to collapse. Gradually, it started to face opposition from all sections of the society and by 1946, the competition was completely stopped. From 1947, the Ranji tournament took centre stage in Indian cricket and a new chapter in the history of Mumbai cricket began.

### **Conclusion**

After the Formation of Prestigious Ranji Trophy tournament, The Mumbai team has been dominant in the tournament, playing more than 500 Ranji matches and winning 41 Ranji titles so far. It's not an overnight miracle but the rich heritage, efforts, enthusiasm by many sections of the society, administration and structure from 1846 in Mumbai which we discussed above in the research paper.

## Mumbai's Ranji record is pretty stellar

Break-up of Mumbai's Ranji matches since 1934



**Source:-** Cricket archives via Mumbai Cricket Association 2017.

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