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## A great Indian cricketer Babaji Palwankar Baloo: An analysis on his life career and performances

**Pradeep Kumar U and Dr. Pratap Singh Tiwari**

### Abstract

This study is on the Cricket performance of the Great First Indian Cricketer Babaji Palwankar Baloo and on his early life and political carrier. Babaji Palwankar Baloo, commonly known as P. Baloo, He was an Indian cricketer, left arm orthodox spinner he bowled a ball with great accuracy he had a great control over the ball to turn any way and he is also a lower-order batsman.

This study assumes to be great significance given its comprehensive study of a first great Indian cricketer such as Babaji Palawankar Baloo. The present investigations delineate Babaji Palwankar Baloo as the great cricketer of India before the independence. The study attempts to delineate his performances in the field of cricket is a great significance itself.

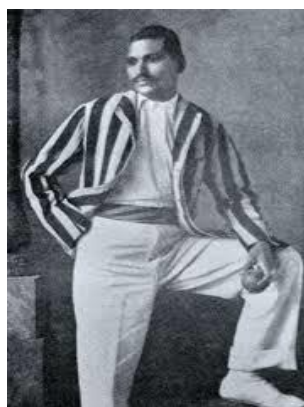
In this study we can know the full Cricket performance of Palwankar Baloo. The Information about the matches which he played in India and also in abroad. He is the person who made his name bowling the Hindus to victory against the Parsis and the Europeans. In western India, at least, Palwankar Baloo was the first public figure to emerge from the ranks of the Untouchables.

The different sources and methods used by the investigator to gather data and information about the present study. There are three major sources and methods that have been identified to obtain the information and data are Interview, Documents and Archival records.

Baloo was a Chamaar, a member of the leather-working caste which ranks close to the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy. He was born in 1875 in Dharwad, but the family moved soon afterwards to Poona, the old Maratha city hundred miles south-east of Bombay. His father was found working in cleaning guns and cart-ridges in a Government emanations department.

**Keywords:** sports performance, talent identification, social recognition, need and scope of research

### 1. Introduction



**Babaji Palwankar Baloo**

Babaji Palwankar Baloo, was a Chamaar, a member of the leather-working caste which ranks close to the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy. He was born in 1875 in Dharwad, but the family moved soon afterwards to Poona, the old Maratha city hundred miles south-east of Bombay. His father was found working in cleaning guns and cart-ridges in a Government emanations department, a job regarded as polluting by caste Hindus.

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He was the first member of the Dalit (also known as the "Untouchable") caste to make a significant impact on the sport. Although being one of the finest cricketers of his time, he was never allowed to lead the team as a captain because of his so called lower caste. However, in later years, his brother Palwankar Vithal was made captain of the Hindu team by the Hindu Gymkhana Club, which was seen as an impact of changing social situations in India.

Babaji Palwankar Baloo, commonly known as Palwankar Baloo, was an Indian cricketer. He bowled left-arm orthodox spin with great accuracy and the ability to turn the ball both ways. He was also a moderately skilled lower-order batsman. Babaji Palawankar Baloo was in fact a famous cricketer, who made his name bowling the Hindus to victory against the Parsis and the Europeans. In western India, at least, Palwankar Baloo was the first public figure to emerge from the ranks of the Untouchables, commanding enormous respect inside and outside of his community.

In cricketing terms Babaji Palawankar Baloo was W. G. Grace's equivalent, as the first truly great cricketer produced in India. But of course his contributions extended far beyond the boundary; with his brothers, he played a vital part in the movement for self-respect among the depressed castes. In social terms Baloo's achievement can be likened to that of Jackie Robinson in American baseball, the first black to break through a previously impenetrable social barrier by playing in the major leagues.

Baloo was in fact a famous cricketer, who made his name bowling the Hindus to victory against the Parsis and the Europeans. In western India, at least, Palwankar Baloo was the first public figure to emerge from the ranks of the Untouchables, commanding enormous respect inside and outside of his community. As a student, Ambedkar himself had 'looked at the solid fame of the Untouchable bowler with pride'.

The purpose of the study is established based on the previous facts written by Ramachandra Guha (2002) <sup>[2]</sup>, in cricketing terms Babaji Palawankar Baloo was W. G. Grace's equivalent, as the first truly great cricketer produced in India. But of course his contributions extended far beyond the boundary; with his brothers, he played a vital part in the movement for self-respect among the depressed castes. In social terms Baloo's achievement can be likened to that of Jackie Robinson in American baseball, the first black to break through a previously impenetrable social barrier by playing in the major leagues. Further the study was analyzed based on the fact figures of match score sheets.

### Definition of Research Problem

This study assumes to be great significance given its comprehensive study of a first great Indian cricketer such as Babaji Palawankar Baloo. The present investigations delineate Babaji Palwankar Baloo as the great cricketer of India before the independence. The study attempts to delineate his performances in the field of cricket is a great significance itself.

### Objectives of the Study

- The present investigation attempts to delineate Babaji Palwankar Baloo as the great cricketer of India before the independence era.
- To study the performances of Babaji Palwankar Baloo in the field of cricket at abroad.

### 2. Materials and Methods

As per the objectives laid down in the present study the

investigator collected the data and information related to the present study in the following methods,

#### Methods

- Illustrative Case studies.
- Explorative (or pilot) Case studies.

#### Data Collection Techniques

- Documents: Score sheets, Letters, newspaper articles, pamphlets, magazines, books, photos, administrative records, etc.
- Archival Records: Census records, Survey records, Name lists, etc.

#### Design of the Study

##### Sources of Data and Information

The different sources and methods used by the investigator to gather data and information about the present study. There are three major sources and methods that have been identified to obtain the information and data are Interview, Documents and Archival records.

It is further divided as the collection of data and information for this investigation as both primary and secondary resources.

##### Primary Resources

The original data, material and information are collected from the following primary resource.

**a) Interview Method:** The investigator personally visited Pune city to met Sri. Sudhir Vaidya, former BCCI scorer to collect the data in the form score sheets of matches played by Babaji Palwankar Baloo in India during 1906-1913.

**b) Books/Articles:** The book/articles written on subject's author were taken to study the socio-economic background, life history and personality of Late. Babaji Palwankar Baloo.

##### Secondary Resources

###### a) Documents

The investigator visited various universities like LNUPE, Gwalior, Jiwaji University, Gwalior, Banaras Hindhu University, Bangalore University, Bangalore, University of Mysore, Mysore, Karnatak University, Dharwad, University of Mumbai, University of Pune etc., to get the related data information of the study in the form of M.Phil and Ph.D thesis. The published materials in the form of News Papers, Articles, Magazines, Books and Administrative records etc. are collected, studied and information were retained as documents for the investigation.

###### b) Archival Records

The official records and data about the cricket performances of Babaji Palwankar Baloo in the websites were studied and information and data were retained for the study.

### 3. Results and Discussions

Based on the previous facts written by Ramachandra Guha (2002 & 2006) <sup>[2, 3]</sup> and statistical records maintained by Sri. Sudhir Vaidya, former BCCI scorer and others the descriptive and statistical interpretation is made in the following steps,

1. Early Life.
2. Cricket career.
  - a. Introduction to cricket
  - b. First-Class Cricket career

3. Political career
4. Cricket Performance in Abroad.
5. Cricket Performance in India:

### 1. Early Life

Baloo was born in July 1876 in Dharwad. His father was employed in the army, and he either worked in an ammunition factory in Kirkee, or was a sepoy in the 112th Infantry Regiment. His family name of Palwankar came from his native village of Palwan. Being a Dalit, he faced discrimination prevalent in India at that time (Guha 2002:86)<sup>[2]</sup>.

His first job was tending the pitch at a cricket club for Parsis in Poona, now known as Pune. He also occasionally bowled to the members, and was paid 3 Rupees a month. Around 1892, he moved to the Poona Club, a cricket club for Europeans, where his duties included rolling and sweeping the pitch, erecting the practice nets and occasionally marking the tennis courts. His salary increased to Rs.4 a month.

### 2. Cricket career

#### a) Introduction to cricket

One of the Europeans, a Mr Tross, encouraged the young Baloo to bowl to him in the nets. His skill at slow left-arm bowling was enough to encourage other members to bat against him for practice, in particular the fine batsman Captain J.G. Greig. In time, he was bowling to them regularly, his bowling important practice for the club members. Despite bowling for hundreds of hours, Baloo later lamented that not once did any of the club members offer to allow him to bat a role then considered the preserve of the aristocratic classes (Guha 2002:90)<sup>[2]</sup>. An undocumented story states that he was paid 8 annas by JG Greig every time he dismissed him. Baloo thus perfected his bowling, spending hours in the nets bowling to the Europeans.

A Hindu club in Pune challenged the Europeans to a cricket match, creating a dilemma over whether or not to include the obviously talented Baloo in their side. The (high-caste) Brahmins in the Hindu side were against it, but some Telugu members argued for his inclusion, as did Captain Greig. This seemed to settle the matter, for Baloo was invited to play with the Hindu Club.

On the field, Baloo played cricket as an equal, but off it he was segregated from the Europeans and the higher caste Hindus during rest and meal breaks. While his team-mates dined inside the pavilion on fine china, Baloo was left outside to eat and drink out of disposable clay crockery. Despite this treatment, he bowled well and took plenty of wickets, leading his club to several victories almost single handedly (Guha 2002:93)<sup>[2]</sup>.

Over the next few years, Baloo slowly earned the respect of his Hindu club team-mates. As his standing in the Poona cricket community grew due to his obvious talents, these barriers broke down and he was eventually accorded the right to gather with his fellow players off the field.

In 1896, Baloo chose to move to Bombay with his family – at least partly because of the severe plague which broke out in the region, but also because of the greater opportunities for cricket in the larger city. There he served with the Army and played for the newly formed Parmanandas Jivandas Hindu Gymkhana club. The captain of the Gymkhana cricket team wanted Baloo's bowling skills, but had to overrule the protests of several other players who objected to Baloo's caste. When he left the Army, Bombay Berar and Central Indian Railways gave him a job, allowing him to play for their corporate cricket team as well as the Gymkhana.

#### b) First-Class Cricket career

Baloo played for the Hindu side in the famous 1906 and 1907 matches against the Europeans of the Bombay Gymkhana, in which the Hindus defeated the Europeans by 109 runs and 238 runs respectively. These matches led to various newspaper commentaries, of two types: ones proclaiming a victory over caste prejudice as the united Hindu team triumphed, and others painting them in nationalist tones as a victory of the natives against European rule.

Baloo was chosen for an all-Indian team to tour England in 1911, consisting of Parsis, Hindus, and Muslims, captained by a Sikh. In results terms, the tour was a failure, but Baloo was the outstanding performer for the tourists, taking 114 wickets at an average of 18.84, 75 of which were in first class matches.

From 1912 to 1919, Baloo was a regular player in the Bombay Quadrangular tournament, between the Hindu, Parsi, Muslim, and European Gymkhanas. Despite regular calls for him to be named captain of the Hindu team, there was still enough caste-based prejudice within the club to prevent it. Three of his brothers, Shivram, Ganpat and Vithal, also played in the Quadrangular, and Palwankar Vithal eventually captained the Hindu team.

In 1920, Baloo was dropped from the side to play the Muslims. Rank and file members of the club were outraged and at a meeting after the match expressed their displeasure so vehemently that Deodhar was removed and Baloo invited to play again for the Hindu Gymkhana, as vice captain.

During the next match against the Parsis, Deodhar's replacement, M. D. Pai (also a Brahmin), deliberately left the field for an extended period, allowing Baloo to direct the team in his absence. In this manner, Baloo broke the barrier against members of his caste acting as leaders, at a time when Mahatma Gandhi was just beginning his campaign against the stigma of Untouchability.

### 3. Political career



**Babaji Palwankar Baloo with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

Late in his cricket career, Baloo met and befriended with B. R. Ambedkar, who went on to become the greatest leader of the Dalit and pre-eminent in the struggle to overturn the caste system. As Dhananjay Keer writes in his book, Dr Ambedkar: Life and Mission: As a little known lecturer in Bombay's Sydenham College, Ambedkar organised functions to felicitate Baloo and worked for his elevation in the Bombay Municipal Corporation. Ambedkar considered Baloo a hero of the Dalit, naming him as an inspiration to himself and others of their caste, but over the following years a rift was to grow between the men over the methods of dismantling the caste system. Baloo went on to become involved in politics, strongly supporting Gandhi's efforts to bring home rule to

India and to fully integrate Dalit into Indian society.

Baloo released a press statement stating his admiration for "the spirit in which Mr. Gandhi has proclaimed his intention of sacrificing his life for the sake of the Depressed Classes." Under pressure from Congress, Baloo told Ambedkar that he "was also a leader of the Untouchables and also had an equal right to express his views." Ambedkar was opposed by M.C. Rajah and P. Baloo who joined hands with Congress and Hindu Mahasabha and signed a pact against the position of Ambedkar called 'Rajah-Moonje Pact'.

In October 1933, Baloo stood for election for a seat on the Bombay Municipality, on a Hindu Mahasabha ticket. His opponent was a high caste Hindu, well liked by many sections of the community, Baloo lost 2,179 votes to 3,030. In 1937, Baloo ran against Ambedkar for a designated "Scheduled Caste" seat in the Bombay Legislative Assembly. Ambedkar defeated Baloo by the close margin of 13,245 votes to 11,225.

#### 4. Cricket Performance in Abroad

**Table 1:** Showing the performances of Babaji Palwankar Baloo in Two and Three day matches played in abroad

S.N	Tournaments/ Matches	Matches	Performances		Results		
			Batting	Bowling	Won	Lost	Drawn
1	Two & Three Day Matches	18	376	87	04	13	01

Table No.1 Showing the performances of Babaji Palwankar Baloo in Two and Three day matches played in Abroad. According to the performances shown in the table Babaji Palwankar Baloo played total 18 Two and Three day matches played in Abroad during 1911-1912 among them total 04 matches won, 13 lost and 01 is drawn. As per the above table

results he played total 18 two and three day matches played in Abroad and scored 376 runs, took 87 wickets. Because of his outstanding performances Indian team won total 04 matches.

#### 5. Cricket Performance in India

**Table 2:** Showing the performances of Babaji Palwankar Baloo in Triangular and Quadrangular Cricket tournaments and Bombay Presidency matches played in India

S.N	Tournaments	Matches	Performances		Results		
			Batting	Bowling	Won	Lost	Drawn
	Triangular	08	227	64	06	--	02
	Quadrangular	06	83	24	03	01	02
	Bombay Presidency Matches	02	100	21	01	--	01
	Total	16	410	109	10	01	05

Table No.2 Showing the performances of Babaji Palwankar Baloo in Triangular and Quadrangular Cricket tournaments and Bombay Presidency matches played in India. According to the performances shown in the table Babaji Palwankar Baloo played total 16 first class matches in India during 1906-1913 among them total 10 matches won, 01 lost and 05 were drawn. As per the above table results he played total 08 triangular matches and scored 227 runs, took 64 wickets. Also he played total 06 quadrangular matches and scored 83 runs, took 24 wickets. Further he played 02 Bombay Presidency matches and scored 100 runs and took 13 wickets. Because of his outstanding performances his team won total 06 Triangular, 03 Quadrangular and 01 Bombay Presidency matches respectively.

that Babaji Palwankar Baloo was a forgotten first great Indian cricketer of British era.

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#### 4. Conclusions

- ✓ These stories of Un-touchability being challenged in cricket have largely been ignored by historians but served as great inspiration for pioneers and architect of Indian constitution like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. This is why the man who emerged as the foremost sportsman of the untouchables in 1927-28 went to telling village audiences about his early attempts to gain recognition for Babaji Palwankar Baloo's achievement.
- ✓ Babaji bowled left arm orthodox spin with great accuracy and the ability to turn the ball both easy. He was the first member of Dalit caste to make a significant impact on the sport. Palwankar Baloo name stands out in history and not just in cricket as he though being an unfair victim of the caste system, managed to challenge this very system with his immense cricket talents.
- ✓ Due to his outstanding performances at abroad the Indian team won total 04 matches. At the end it is concluded