



Book Review: The Test of My Life from Cricket to Cancer and Back

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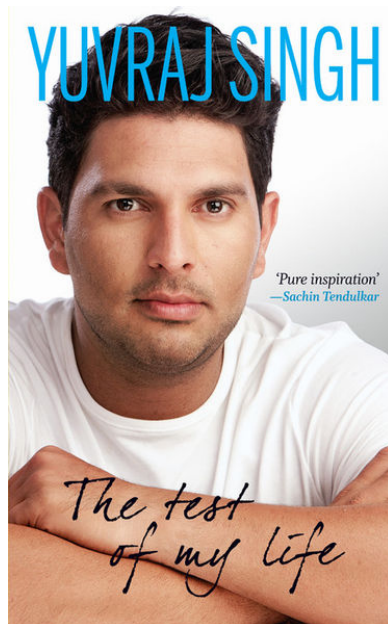
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Published in 2013, the memoir *The Test of My Life from Cricket to Cancer and Back* (hereafter *Test of My Life*) by Indian cricketer Yuvraj Singh is perhaps the first Indian sports illness narrative. Considering the fact that illness in India is still veiled in secrecy, the memoir *The*

Test of My Life is significant and therefore deserves special attention. Drawing inspiration from the cyclist Lance Armstrong's *It's Not About the Bike: My Journey of Life* (2000), the memoir, as Yuvraj Singh himself attests, concerns with his "life before cancer, with cancer"

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and “life after it” (p. 10-11). Divided into six chapters, excluding the prologue, this poignant autopathography is not just a record of medical condition; but, a success story of a human self which triumphs the adversities of the body by resilience and self-determination. And then, befitting a memoir, there are some photographs placed toward the end of the text which complement and authenticate Yuvraj Singh’s narrative.

Although Singh’s illness is always in the foreground, he embeds his experience within a full account of his life and family history. Accordingly, in the first chapter titled “All the Way to India,” Yuvraj Singh recounts about his authoritarian father, Yograj Singh (a former Indian cricketer) and his caring and clement mother Shabnam Singh. At one point Yuvraj Singh makes an uneasy observation that he became an international cricketer owing to his father’s pressure. In short, musing on his childhood self, Yuvraj succinctly sums up thus: “Well meaning, all consuming, fun-loving and prone to drive head first into trouble. Always seeking balance, I would run and fall, dust myself off and start over” (p. 18). Despite Yuvraj Singh “living [his] father’s life” (p. 20), he debuted for Indian cricket at nineteen years and emerged as a world class cricketer.

A few months before the ICC World Cup 2011 in one of the test matches Yuvraj shows symptoms of breathlessness, vomiting and persistent coughing which adumbrates a serious health problem. “[T]orn between [the] confidence in [his] ability and the betrayals of [his] body” (p. 39), Yuvraj Singh, however, with the sheer passion for cricket, wins the Man of the Series title in the ICC World Cup 2011. After this glorious victory, the fine needle aspiration cytology test, which was carried out by Dr. PDS Kohli in May 2011, identifies a malignant tumor in his cavity between the lungs. Unable to resolve the exact nature of the tumor, Yuvraj Singh resorts to alternative therapy under Jatin Choudary, his friend. Confidently assuming that the alternative therapy would cure him, Yuvraj endures the pain of acupuncture, continues to play cricket and lives like a “happy zombie” (p. 81).

With no recovery in sight, more tests are administered. Accordingly, biopsy report conducted in end-October, scans in Bangalore and an oncologist in Delhi confirm that Yuvraj has mediastinal seminoma, a rare germ cancer. Upon knowing that he has cancer, devastated Yuvraj Singh on the advice of his oncologist in India decides to meet Dr. Peter Harper in London who recommends immediate chemotherapy. However, honoring, as it were, the spiritual gurus in India who prophesied that “[w]hen Yuvi comes back from America he will be all right” (p. 118), Yuvraj Singh proceeds to IU Simon Cancer Center in the University of Indiana to be treated by Dr. Lawrence Einhorn. Listening to Yuvraj Singh’s misgivings about chemotherapy, Dr. Einhorn assures Yuvraj that “[a]fter three cycles [of chemotherapy]. . . you could walk out of here like a man who never had cancer” (p. 120). This assurance of the doctor alleviates his fears and also helps him to view chemotherapy cycles as just another test of his life for fifty seven days.

In spite of such a positive attitude, he realizes that “[p]ain can be a confidence killer” (p. 132). Thus, recounting his torturous chemotherapy cycles, Yuvraj Singh states that “[t]he body that [he] knew was gone . . . [and his] mind was in pieces” (p. 132) implying how chemotherapy sessions, and cancer at large, has irrevocably altered his world. Although the unconditional care of his mother, his friends and Dr. Nitesh Rohatgi (his oncologist in India) and Kapil Dev’s adage that “this too shall pass” (p. 130) enables him to fight cancer and further helps him to concentrate on recovery, the intense physical pain and mental anguish transforms Yuvraj Singh into a sober, introspective and a philosophical person. Elsewhere, he also confesses that cancer was a “steep learning curve” (p. xi) which created in him a heightened sense of mortality. At one point Yuvraj Singh finds his own new self “Yuvi, the shell” who “didn’t want to talk, whose world only looked inward” (p. 132). Finally, Yuvraj Singh after two successful chemotherapy sessions at IU Simon Cancer Center is discharged from the hospital. Finding it “incredibly hard” (p. 151) to stay in Indianapolis, Yuvraj Singh

hurries to India via London. Real healing, he believes, will commence only at his home in India—"I needed to begin healing in full and I could only do it at home" (p. 156). Eventually, Yuvraj Singh recovers physically and emotionally, and the penultimate chapter ends with him resuming his cricketing life.

In the last chapter titled "The Battle for Confidence," Yuvraj Singh recounts how he rehabilitated himself through the power of hope. As he states: "hope is the rescue rope" which can "win back our lives and our passions" (p. 186). And fittingly and like a typical cancer narrative, Yuvraj Singh's memoir closes with an encouraging scenario when he states thus, "if Yuvi can, you can," thereby representing cancer as another survivable crisis. Although Yuvraj Singh is appropriately self-concerned during his illness, he strives to enhance other people's lives by not only sharing his

experience but also by establishing a non-profit cancer charity organization called YOUWECAN which aims to work for the early detection of cancer and in removing "the stigma around cancer in India" (p. 188). To these ends, YOUWECAN has opened early cancer detection centers across India.

To conclude, the memoir *The Test of My Life* is a living testimony of Yuvraj Singh's endurance, indomitable spirit and fortitude. Apart from revealing the enabling power of hope, courage and determination in fighting cancer, the memoir also inspires the readers to fight real-life odds. Considering these facts, the memoir should not be treated as a mere celebrity cancer narrative but as the success story of an individual who dauntlessly strove to reclaim his life from an impersonal medical condition called cancer.

