Introduction

1

The term ‘lifewriting’ includes a wide range of genres and practices such as autobiographies, memoirs, eye-witness accounts, confessions, apology, diaries, family chronicles, personal essays, hagiographies, biographies, travelogues and letters. An element of family resemblances is found in all lifewriting forms which are employed for telling a life story. An autobiography usually contains confessions of the autobiographical subject, his diary entries, travel experiences, family chronicles and exchanged letters. A biographer quotes from newspapers, speeches, magazines, interviews and other available documents to furnish historical evidence (Saunders 6). Literary and cultural allusions provide textual richness to attempts of presenting a life in a narrative form. Moreover, the relationship between fact and fiction remains a matter of contestation and debate in the lifewriting accounts. This way, ‘lifewriting’ as a genre is “fundamentally intertextual” (5). It tends to encompass all possible referential modes of writing which deal with the element of ‘life’.

Keeping in mind the protean nature of the genre, the issue of nomenclature is at the heart of lifewriting criticism. Out of all personal forms of writing, autobiography remains the most commonly recognized mode of telling a life. Nonetheless, the use of word ‘autobiography’ in the generic sense has become problematic. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, in their book Reading Autobiography: A Guide of Interpreting Life Narratives, inform that ‘autobiography’ as a generic term has been firmly challenged in the wake of postmodernism and postcolonialism:

Privileged as the definitive achievement of a mode of life narrative, “autobiography” celebrates the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story. Its theorists have installed this master narrative of “the sovereign self” as an institution of literature and culture, and identified, in the course of the twentieth century, a canon of representative life narratives. But implicit in this canonization is the assignment of lesser value to many other kinds of life narratives produced at the same time and, indeed, a refusal to recognize them as “true” autobiography. (3-4)
In the ever expanding field of subjective accounts, Smith and Watson have identified fifty-two modes of lifewriting, and the term ‘autobiography’ is considered “inadequate” to describe this extensive range of life narratives (4). As a result, contemporary pundits of the genre consensually use the term ‘lifewriting’ as an overarching and democratic nomenclature for the variety of life accounts.

In its evolution through centuries, lifewriting has gone past many phases – both generically and thematically. Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* (398 AD) is identified as the most elementary form of the genre. The text initiates a mode of writing that deals with self-examination and serves a therapeutic purpose. Divided in thirteen parts, it highlights Augustine’s sinful past, religious conversion and understanding of the Christian theology. Thematically, it delves into a journey of the self from sin to redemption and fosters a spiritual and didactic propensity towards life. Undergoing gradual changes, the confessional mode of writing reflects secular overtones in its development. It turns into a chronicle of soul’s progress in John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666) and takes a narcissistic plunge in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1782). Discarding the spiritual model, Rousseau claims individuality as he asserts: “I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different” (Rousseau 17). Despite such self-obsessive remarks, he candidly confesses his trespasses with a desire to “leave nothing unsaid” (548).

Unlike confession which carries an element of guilt, an apology or *apologia* is a ‘defense’ of one’s religious, political, social or philosophical stand. It is an attempt to “to vindicate one’s own beliefs and actions, often in the face of official censure or public controversy” (Goodwin 5). Having been charged of corrupting the youth and disrespecting the gods, Socrates delivered an apology during his trial and refuted the accusations against him. Responding to Stephen Gosson’s attack on the English stage, Elizabethan poet and critic Philip Sidney upheld his views on literature in *The Defense of Poesy* (1579). In the sixteenth-century Michel de Montaigne introduced *Essays* (1572-1588) as a new form of relating ‘life’. He exploits the ordinary, everyday experience as a basis to unravel the complexities of human behaviour.
However, *Essays* is not a detailed history of Montaigne’s life, but it ponders over “the materials of experience that life immediately offers” (Goodwin 5).

In the times of imperial advancement, lifewriting witnessed a deluge of travel narratives which exhibit the heroic experiences of travelers. Beginning with *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (1271), these travel accounts, over the next four centuries, cover the tales of exploration, conquest, hardships, survival and extension of empires (Smith and Watson 90). In the mid seventeenth century, Samuel Pepys familiarized ‘diary’ as a new form of documenting everyday life. His *Diary* minutely traces the urban London life and, in the process, remains one of the few authentic documents on the Great Fire and the plague (94). Following Pepys, diary as a public document did not thrive well until Anne Frank revived the subgenre with *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1952). Written in an epistolary form, her diary primarily captures the sufferings of her family during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. In 1791 James Boswell introduced modern biography with *The Life of Samuel Johnson*. Relying on extensive research and personal interaction with the subject, Boswell’s account caters a readymade formula to modern day biographers and ghostwriters. Modern biography, however, retains its generic focus on the individual but, due to its anthropological nature, it also tends to be “unself-centred” piece of cultural history (Buckridge 15). A memoir can be defined as a form in which the focus of the narrative is narrowed down to a ‘specific phase’ or a benchmark incident of the subject’s life. In a memoir, the narrator, at times, is more of an observer or a witness to certain significant historical figures and events. For instance, Italian adventurer Giovanni Casanova’s *Memoirs*, written around the late eighteenth century, are recollections and opinions on the royal kings and philosophers of his times (Goodwin 6). This form of lifewriting is also recognized by its “broadly historical scope” (7).

As for the inception of full-fledged autobiography, its origin is traced back to antiquity. The term ‘autobiography’, however, is believed to be coined by Robert Southey in 1809. French theorist Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as a “retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality” (qtd. in Smith and Watson 1). Over the years, the autobiographical
understanding has evolved beyond its commonsensical definitions due to inherent fluidities and complexities in this lifewriting species. Pondering over the indefinable form, Georg Misch comments:

   Autobiography is unlike any other form of literary composition. Its boundaries are more fluid and less definable in relation to form. In itself it is a representation of life that is committed to no definite form. It abounds in fresh initiatives, drawn from actual life: it adopts the different forms with which different periods provide the individual for his self-revelation and self-portrayal. (Misch 2)

In other words, autobiography as a genre evades simplistic definitions and cannot be circumscribed by anticipated dictums and patterns. It thrives on the uniqueness of each autobiographical ‘self’. It is a modus vivendi that disregards formulaic portrayal of human lives (Gray 34). Consequently, autobiography proliferates in the form of many subgenres such as auto/biography or a/b, autogynography, autoethnography, bildungsroman, collaborative life narratives and other indefinite variants.5

II

Lifewriting is not a static genre for it resurrects itself with a new directive every now and then. New cultural conditions not only supply fresh forms of writing but also give way to new practitioners of the genre. Lifewriting as a cultural practice is now no longer limited to the elites, churchmen, saints, literary men of letters, travelers, war heroes, political leaders or the nationalist elite. It rather emerges as an expression of the marginalized sections of society. The new non-elitist imperatives of lifewriting concede space to every individual in the making of collective history. This secularization stimulates the previously disregarded subjects and communities to document their experiences publicly. Consequently, the hitherto silenced voices of minorities, women, blacks, dalits, gays and lesbians, refugees and other subalterns pervasively begin to find expression through the emerging form of lifewriting. In the last two decades the genre of lifewriting has witnessed a proliferation of autobiographies by the new social outcasts such as sex workers, maids and servants, cancer and AIDS patients, and people with physical disabilities. They are experience
based narratives and often convey a group or “communal consciousness” (Singh 1). According to Janet Gunn, the life accounts of subaltern subjects prominently differ in two senses from the mainstream autobiography. Firstly, they offer “an unmasking” or a “denostalgizing of the past” (Gunn 77); and secondly, they imagine or look forward to “a liberated society in the future” (77). These life stories, in this sense, are forms of resistance literature as well as utopian literature (77).

New historicists theorize this paradigm shift in lifewriting as a new development in historical consciousness. Life stories of individuals – common and uncommon, both – gain ground as potential sites of counter-history. With this augmentation, lifewriting has acquired historical validity. The objective accounts of past are now approached rather skeptically. The practitioners of new historicism opine that anecdotes and other vernacular forms are better furnished histories than monolithic historical constructs (Kaes 154). As a result, the reductionist practices in traditional historiography such as chronological narratives and arbitrary selection of events are firmly challenged by Clifford Geertz’s interpretive model of ‘thick description’. Based on detailed analysis, his model subversively takes into consideration inconsequential occurrences, “seemingly insignificant rituals”, and “anecdotal everyday events” (Kaes 153-54). This leads to an unprecedented focus on fragmented, subjective and mundane yet serious forms of lifewriting. With its focus on “real bodies and living voices,” lifewriting emerges as a rather credible source of historical and cultural description (Gallagher and Greenblatt 30). Offering an alternative poetics of comprehending culture(s), it exposes the boundaries between high and low culture, or between centers and margins (Kaes 154).

III

The new historicist turn in lifewriting has expanded the scope of genre as it opens itself to stars or starlets even from those domains of popular culture which were perceived to be non-serious, low and flippant. Exploiting the non-literary walks of life, a large number of books exhibit lives of statesmen, industrialists, criminals, activists, scientists, film stars and athletes. Sportspersons were never regarded as subjects of sustained nationalist attention; at best they were treated as transient stars who would possibly remain in the public memory as long as they out-perform in the
arena. In the recent past, autobiographies of sportspersons have inundated the market, and leading international publishing houses have shown enormous interest in sports, in general and the lifewriting of sportspersons, in particular.

With the secularization of fame, celebrity autobiographies are in much vogue. According to Daniel Boorstin, the celebrity is a person who is “known for his well-knownness” (Boorstin 57). Prior to media proliferation, celebrity status was ascribed to a few people, but now mass media has turned ‘celebrity’ into a general phenomenon. Virtually every arena – politics, literature, cinema, music, dance, advertising, comedy, sports, commerce, religion, cookery, astrology – has its own share of celebrated personalities. In the hierarchies of celebrity culture, a sportsperson is “a hero, as opposed to a mere celebrity” (Nayar, Seeing Stars 15) and, thus, more likely to become a subject of autobiography. Unlike film celebrities, a sportsperson’s fame is not entirely determined by media representations as he becomes famous for personal achievements and feats. His art is based on authentic contest between individuals which requires no makeover, no family connections and no illusionary effects (Nayar, Seeing Stars 15-6). Moreover, a sportsperson, on the basis of his representative identity, is not seen solely as a performer but also as an ambassador of his nation, community, gender and race.

In a field which assigns success on the basis of victories and defeats, achievement remains a necessary precondition for a sportsperson to become an autobiographical subject. An athlete creates himself before media further creates him. Along with achievement, there are certain pre-existent cultural conditions, commercial and ideological organizations and contexts of fame that enable particular sort of elevation in a star’s status (Newbury 276). The heroism of sportspersons is not only limited to playfield alone, it is harnessed for all kinds of other patently not sporting-causes as well. It is exploited for off field activism which includes a diverse range of pursuits such as the desire to uplift the race, the aspiration to connect oneself with social movements or even to launch a political party. In the arena of sports, it is generally the lifewriting of blacks, homosexuals, aboriginals and athletes from the Third World that attracts the vicarious global market maximum. As tales of poverty, crime and social exclusion, these life narratives merchandise the element of ‘struggle’
in a profitable form. At the same time, they trigger a dialogue with the status quo representing the “culturally and politically subversive agent[s]” (Andrews and Jackson 11). Sportspersons down with an element of dysfunction or impairment such as severe illness, match-fixing, drug addiction, sexual abuse and what Paul Willis calls ‘profane culture’ are also catchy subjects for autobiographical writing for they are assumed to possess the ingredients of newness, otherness and deviance. Mere talent, achievement or victory is not enough to catapult an athlete or a sportsperson into stardom. He has to evince a distinct ‘otherness’ as an autobiographical subject so as to become different and, hence, attractive enough for the potential community of readers in the global market.

Writing a life story is about representing the self, exposing the self, confessing the self, sensationalizing the self, justifying the self or marketing the self (Pipkin 2). With ‘self’ being the common denominator, a life narrative primarily is an engagement with one’s identity. The contemporary understanding of ‘the self’, however, suggests that an individual carries a range of shifting identities. According to Stuart Hall, identities are “unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture” (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 395). Lifewriting of sportspersons captures this ‘play’ of identities and its effects on cultural capital. For instance, boxing legend Muhammad Ali’s autobiography The Greatest: My Own Story depicts his life as a pugilist, as a social activist and also as a messenger of peace in the hatred ridden America. Imran: The Autobiography portrays Pakistani cricketer Imran Khan’s on-field heroics, playboy image, philanthropic endeavours and his life as a nationalist-elite. Edson Arantes do Nascimento (Pelé)’s life story recounts his journey as a soccer player, as a Minister for Sports in Brazil, as a commentator and as a Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF. An athlete’s shifting subject-positions while performing multiple roles convey the broader significance of sports memoirs.

Autobiography is generally understood as a mode of recovering one’s past in the form of a coherent narrative. The autobiographical ‘re-play’ of an athlete’s life, however, is not simply a mundane recounting of the past. It is an act of reviewing one’s experiences with an additional acumen. Like the visual replay of a sporting act,
autobiographical re-play entails the possibilities of the emergence of something novel. Through a patient display of events, it retrieves the obscured facts and unveils hidden outcomes. In other words, it is a repetition of the subject’s experiences but with a difference. This ‘difference’ surcharges sports autobiography with extra-sporting realities. It enables the autobiographical subject to externalize his/her subjective experience by linking it to the outside world. The autobiographical ‘re-play’ of a sporting life is neither a transformation of the self into sublimity nor a mechanical duplication of one’s being. It is rather a re-enactment of the self’s relation with “the social categories in which people are placed and through which they have to make sense of their lives” (Dyer 18). These ‘social categories’ determine the cultural identity of an autobiographical self. On the basis of their cultural identities or subject positions, sportspersons are indentified with certain social groups. They are perceived as “[e]mblematic individuals” who embody, influence and constantly redefine the culture and behaviour of their respective communities (Braudy 601).

The lifewriting of sportspersons, in this way, serves multiple and somewhat paradoxical purposes. It is responsible for producing a carefully cultivated self, driven with a consumerist desire of late capitalism. Here, identity and, therefore, an autobiography becomes a cultural product. Due to their marketability and synecdoche ability to influence social scenarios, athletes are familiarized even with the non-sport fans. The elevation of their image as icons and heroes stimulates a public desire to know the “real” persons behind them (Whannel, Media Sport Stars 56). The plethora of information about sport stars endorses “a sense of familiarity, intrigue, and sometimes obsession” with them (Andrews and Jackson 1). Gary Whannel identifies four predominant cultural forms through which the lives of sportspersons are transcribed into narratives – newspaper news stories, magazine profiles, television previews of sporting events, and biographies, autobiographies and biopics (Whannel, Media Sport Stars 56-7). All these cultural forms contribute considerably to the production of consumable sporting heroes but biographies, autobiographies and biopics, unlike other three forms, possess a sense of complete narrative for they relate a rather comprehensive life account. Due to the inconsistencies found in the media accounts, sport fans clamour for the personal version of stories related to the athletes
they admire. The circulation of athletes’ life stories appeases the voyeuristic desires of the populace and thus augments the surplus value of sport stars.

Similarly, sportspersons fallen from public favour, due to their involvement in illegal or repellant practices, employ autobiographies as a vehicle to rehabilitate their disgraced personas. Through their life scripts, they attempt to repair their damaged reputations and win back the public trust (Nunn and Biressi 50). In this way, lifewriting of sportspersons caters to what Pramod K. Nayar calls the “scar culture” (States of Sentiment 75). Wimbledon champion Arthur Ashe in his memoir Days of Grace claims ‘reputation’ to be the driving force of his life. As the title suggests, he is consciously concerned about his integrity and the public opinion of him. His reputation is scarred as people come to know that he is infected with the HIV virus. Ashe shares with a sense of dejection:

First there was the sense of guilt that surrounds the acquisition of a disease, and especially a disease like AIDS that is linked sensationaly in the public mind to “deviant” sex and drug abuse. Then there was the guilt … in having deliberately kept a secret from the people. (Ashe and Rampersad 18)

Here, the memoir seems to serve a confessional purpose. It is an endeavour to assuage the drifting followers by relating the autobiographer’s version of story. Conceptualizing the idea of shame, Jennifer Biddle asserts: “As much as shame seeks to avert itself – there is no feeling more painful – shame seeks to confess. To be heard, to be borne by another, to find a witness (Biddle 113). In such cases, sports autobiography becomes a medium for tainted athletes to advocate their ways of living. It chants the rhetoric of ‘expectancy’ and ‘betrayal’ and feeds what Chris Rojek terms the “market of sentiments” (14).

Along with the imperatives of commodity culture, a life story of a sportsperson is consciously designed and produced in terms of bringing out his ability to engender social transformation. In other words, it seeks to act as an instrument of social change. The involvement of an athlete in a socio-political campaign makes it a necessary precondition that the book comes out at a time when his views as a social icon matter
the most. For this purpose, a politically surcharged life story of an athlete is published following his on-field heroics so that every time the athlete appears on the ground, he becomes an advertisement for the book as well as the larger cause he stands for. As a cultural product, sports autobiography aspires to strike the public nerve and seeks to articulate “the right elements at the right moment in time for the right audience” (Whannel, *Culture, Politics and Sport* 130). Unlike an earlier belief that art is free from all practical interests and stands merely for art’s sake, the lifewriting of sportspersons as an art form makes use of the self for grossly economic and patently political means.

James W. Pipkin in his book *Sporting Lives* considers sports autobiographies as “body songs” for athletes distinctively construct their identities through bodies (Pipkin 16). In their autobiographies, they cover a journey from a period of physical prime to an inevitable bodily decay.9 Their sense of subjectivity suffers setback as they reach the final stage of their competitive pursuit. Having lived a life full of fame, they lament the temporal limits of their sporting self. Written usually near the end of their careers, sports autobiographies voice this crisis and anticipate the mundane life after retirement. Andre Agassi, in his life story *Open*, mourns the loss of physical vitality: “I’m a young man, relatively speaking. Thirty-six. But I wake as if ninety-six. After three decades of sprinting, stopping on a dime, jumping high and landing hard, my body no longer feels like my own body …” (Agassi 3). Imagining the life after sports, he adds: “I can’t escape the feeling that I’m about to die” (8). Retirement from active sports is, thus, perceived as a symbolic death (Pipkin 16). The untimeliness of this ‘death’ culminates in a desire to ensure a vibrant after-life to their short sporting careers.

Since a sportsperson is acutely aware of the transience of his sporting career, he attempts to enhance his active self by means of scripting his life story. The objective of writing one’s life is “to save time, to rescue time from death, to redeem it through the word” (Shapiro 436). To a certain degree, sports autobiography helps an athlete to sustain the fame he cultivated over the years. It lionizes his persona through re-telling the story of struggles and achievements and promises a ‘postself’ to his otherwise fleeting fame. Raymond L. Schmitt and Wilbert M. Leonard II, in their
article “Immortalizing the Self through Sport”, conceptualize ‘postself’ as a role-identity that concerns the “permanence of selfhood” (1088). In other words, it is an individual’s longing for “the presentation of his or her self in the history” (1088). For instance, Indian ace shooter Abhinav Bindra claims in his autobiography A Shot at History:

History is not why I shot, but history was partially my fuel. I never felt the burden of a nation waiting, but I appreciated how long it had been waiting. Olympic games after Olympic games, watching athletes from countries like Suriname win gold, from Mozambique, listening to outsiders sneer, ‘one billion people, not one individual gold’. I guess I had the power to alter that, I presume people believed I had the power to change that. (Bindra and Brijnath 4)

Sports autobiography articulates a craving for one’s share in history and, at the same time, it becomes a historical document ensuring sustained recognition. Chronicling the historic past, it establishes a lasting relationship between an athlete and his followers. The social world of sports instills a sense of permanence in a sportsperson for it provides opportunities and settings through which he becomes a public hero (Schmitt and Leonardo II 1090). Post-retirement, his life story fosters a permanent reminder of the feats he achieved in the past and, thus, it serves as a document of symbolic presence or a piece of extended mortality.

IV

Different cultural sites shape the narratives emanating from them and generate a variety of experiences. The construction of ‘self’ in an autobiographical account is largely influenced by its subject’s geographical or institutional site. Sites raise expectations about “the kind of stories that will be told and will be intelligible for others” (Smith and Watson 56). For instance, an autobiographical narrative proceeding from a prison cell evokes distinct cultural aesthetics than the narrative located in a domestic setting. The importance of different sites is adjudged on the basis of their impact on the cultural milieu. In this regard, the sites of sports were historically perceived as arenas for leisure activities, devoid of serious cultural
engagement. Subsequently, the lifewriting of sportspersons was discredited as an aesthetically unappealing genre of writing. The life accounts of athletes were disapproved for being “gossipy accounts of others’ suffering and successes,” “mediocre, largely unreflective,” “anecdotal gossip, raggle-taggle news from nowhere,” “entertaining, readily marketable life stories,” “popular and profitable,” “pastiche-representations of famous lives,” and “a vicarious dalliance with another’s circumstances” (Gray 52). In other words, sports lifewriting was assumed to dispossess the literary and cultural ingredients required for critical respectability.

Sport today redeems itself from being a recreational activity pursued for the sake of pleasure to proceed as a politically meaningful social institution. The sociology of sport involves issues such as morality and ethics, culture and representation, norm and deviance, race and identity, ethnicity and loyalty, body and (trans)gender, marginality and posterity, diaspora and nationality. The outlook towards sports has changed considerably with its evolution from informal ‘play’ to a more organized institutional ‘sport’. Usually considered as synonyms for each other, ‘play’ and ‘sport’ engender distinct cultural codes and outcomes:

Play is viewed as an activity where entry and exit are free and voluntary, rules are emergent and temporary, fantasy is permitted, utility of action is irrelevant, and the result is uncertain. Play has no formal history nor organization; motivation and satisfaction are intrinsic; and the outcome does not have serious impact beyond the context of the activity. On the other hand, modern sport as represented by the Olympic Games, big-time college athletics, and professional sports exhibits the opposite profile. (Frey and Eitzen 508)

The “opposite profile” involves a centrality of extrinsic cultural concerns along with a rather institutionalized sporting system. The institutionalization of sports undoubtedly promotes commercialization of most sporting activities, but it simultaneously provides opportunities to assert one’s identity – both personal and communal, to speak for larger humanitarian causes, to question reductive beliefs, and to nourish national pride through excellence or achievement. The phenomenon of modern sport emerges as a microcosm of social reality for it reflects the everyday life – social
hierarchies, gendered paradigms, racial differences, public prejudices, (sub)cultural insecurities, public-private debates, ideological operations, institutional constraints – in the specific context of sports.

Sports field serves as a carnivalesque site providing locale for political protests, philanthropy, propaganda, peacemaking, fashion and what not. In other words what was just dismissed as a non-space\(^\text{11}\), the sports stadium today competes with other historically privileged sites of battlegrounds, war-scarred forts, national art museums and other hoary monuments in terms of its stakes in the mapping of culture. It emerges as an exceptional domain for no other social institution “except perhaps religion, commands the mystique, the nostalgia, the romantic ideational cultural fixation that sports does. No other activity so paradoxically combines the serious with the frivolous, playfulness with intensity and the ideological with the structural” (Frey and Eitzen 504). Similarly, lifewriting of sportspersons which not long ago was supposed to be not more than extended piece of journalesse now gathers respectability as a suitable subject for academic study.

The early attempts at lifewriting in sports, however, suggest that it lacked the element of subjective experience. In the initial experiments, the elite gentlemen or aristocrats scripted their leisurely engagement with sports such as hunting, horse racing, golf and cricket. These accounts were more of instructions on the skills, technique, sporting etiquettes and terminology used in different sports rather than reminiscences of the people engaged in writing (Taylor 474). With the rise of professional sports and its spread in the public quarters, the poetics of sports lifewriting however evolved but it still did not indulge with “the self”. It was either a record of scores and statistics or a document on disputes between sports associations, management and employees, relationships of teammates and rivals, and criticism of rules, wages and transfer system (475). In other words, sports lifewriting signified “career narratives” rather than “life stories” (481). Defying the larger tradition of autobiographical writing, the subgenre ignored ‘the self’ and its relationship with the outside world. As a result, it remained for long an insignificant source of historical and cultural analysis.
Gradually, sports lifewriting overcame the limitations of its content by delving into issues other than sport. C L R James, with his monumental account *Beyond a Boundary*, commences a dialogue between sports and society. With his suggestive remark, “what do they know of cricket who only cricket know?” (James 334), the author broadens the corpus of sport and establishes it as a tool to make cultural inquiry. Burgeoning upon the metaphor of ‘beyondness,’ the text transgresses into the realm of selfhood, nation, politics, art, and aesthetics. James’s insights on cricket simultaneously inscribe the social realities of his times as the personal narrative investigates racism, cultural identity, religion, inheritance and public school system through the lens of sport. On a broader level, it emerges as an “allegory of the growth of Trinidad, the West Indies and, indeed, the whole colonial world, towards independence” (Moore-Gilbert 24). In the pursuit of recapturing his personal engagement with the sport, the autobiographer ends up writing a collective past. James clarifies how sport was a site of social conflict and being a cricketer was an added social responsibility:

> I haven’t the slightest doubt that the clash of race, caste and class did not retard but stimulated West Indian cricket. I am equally certain that in those years social and political passions, denied normal outlets, expressed themselves so fiercely in cricket (and other games) precisely because they were games … the cricket field was a stage on which selected individuals played representative roles which were charged with social significance … Theirs is the history of cricket and of the West Indies … (James 88)\(^\text{12}\)

Sport thus becomes a medium of cultural expression through which its practitioners seize and execute their ethnic accountabilities. As a result, the life narratives of sportspersons who play “representative roles” unfold the social milieu of their times. These accounts capture the dialectics of ‘self’ and ‘society’ and promulgate the contexts of self-formation. While maintaining the genric focus on the individual, sports lifewriting dovetails the ‘shared’ history in the ‘personal’ stories. In this way, it transcends the “self-sufficient intransitivity” which is usually associated with the auto/biographical writing (Buckridge 6).
Conspicuously crossing the ‘boundary,’ autobiographies of athletes incorporate the larger currents of culture. They are accounts of heroism wherein the source of heroic is generally driven from the off field discourses. Pierre Bourdieu aptly observes that “[o]nly the techniques of the Bildungsroman could enable us to show how collective crisis and personal crisis provide each other with a mutual opportunity, how political revision is accompanied by personal regeneration” (Homo Academicus 193). The unity of personal and mass voice has been a dominant tradition in sports lifewriting. The appeal of boxing legend Muhammad Ali’s autobiography The Greatest: My Own Story lies in the reasons largely unconnected with sports. The autobiographer’s personal journey and the racial and religious conflicts in the United States are brought together in the course of narration. Pakistani cricketer Imran Khan’s life narrative Imran: The Autobiography is a fine balance between the personal reminiscence and the political affairs and foreign policy of Pakistan. American tennis sensation Andre Agassi’s memoir Open reinforces alternative subcultural trajectories of a nation by having a punk hero under discussion. Indian ace runner Milkha Singh’s autobiography The Race of My Life recaptures the horrible event of partition between India and Pakistan. Czech-American tennis legend Martina Navratilova’s autobiography Being Myself is a valuable discussion on the problems related to gender, homosexuality, socialist economy and defection. Therefore, with an intersection of the personal and the historical, sports lifewriting serves “a key interface between everyday commonsense and more organised political discourse” (Whannel, Media Sport Stars 1).

The involvement of sportspersons in the extra-sporting causes lends their life accounts a degree of historical legitimacy. Traditionally, the pursuit of autobiographical writing was assumed to be inferior to ‘history’ and was subsequently dismissed as a “genre of writing which could offer a flavor of personal insight, perhaps, but was otherwise unsuited to the more substantial task of understanding past societies in all their complexities” (Taylor 471). Transgressing the ‘personal,’ sports autobiography advances as an archive of historical and cultural information. The subgenre, moreover, enriches the established historical ‘truth’ by reinterpreting the events of past. For instance, Muhammad Ali’s autobiography scrutinizes the Vietnam
War from an American Muslim’s point of view and, thus, supplements the understanding of the historical episode. Even in the accounts that do not explicitly deal with the events of history, sports lifewriting carries an imprint of the public life. Roy Pascal, in his book *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, claims that “the more marked the personality, the more he seems to sum up a whole social trend, a generation, perhaps a class” (57). Autobiographies of athletes, in this light, represent the voice of social multitudes and portray the journey and evolution of collective selves.

Nonetheless, sports autobiography is perceived as a “superficially entertaining” sub-category of an otherwise “profoundly recreative” genre of lifewriting (Gray 52-3). The aim of this project is to problematise such simplistic classifications. With definite share in enlarging the cultural discourse, sports lifewriting disproves all prevailing myths pertaining to its low cultural value. It however does not intend to compete with the established canon of lifewriting but it seeks some degree of cultural credibility. The current project thrives on a “betwixt-and-betweenness which challenges the either-orism of prescriptive categorisation” (Ruthven 66). ‘Betweeness’ is not a category of arithmetical average; instead it is a dialectical dynamic that negotiates between two extreme modalities. It generates the aesthetics of ‘mutuality’ rather than that of ‘animosity’, of ‘reciprocity’ and not that of ‘hostility’. Against easy polemics of the binary oppositions, it rather promotes intertextuality, hybridity, mediation, ambiguity and amalgamation. ‘In-betweeness’ subversively discourages mathematical positioning and proceeds as an act of undetermined slippage. A brief summary of the chapters would suggest how the thesis overrules the binary model and counters the reductive approaches to sports lifewriting.

**Chapter 1: Between the Self and the Ghost**

Sportspersons however exhibit enormous interest in telling their personal lives but they lack the necessary skill of writing to articulate their stories. Authorship is a refined cultural practice that requires an element of creativity and also demands a considerable amount of time. Being unequipped with literary tools and having a fixed calendar of sporting activities, a sportsperson is assumed to be the most obvious
claimant of professional assistance when it comes to scripting a life account. For an athlete, the professional help also becomes a practical requisite because “the time in the limelight is so brief, the financial opportunity so obvious” (Rubin, Jr. 240). The chapter would focus on the aesthetics of sports autobiography in terms of its association with the practice of ghostwriting.\textsuperscript{15} Ghostwriters, as professional scribers, nourish the otherwise scattered tales of athletes into readable stories. Their primary task is to research, interview, tape and transcribe the personal experiences of sportspersons in order to produce them to the readers in a narrative form. A ghostwriter, in this way, is one of the “cultural intermediaries” who stage and manage the presence of celebrated stars in the public eye and subsequently enhance their appeal (Rojek 10).\textsuperscript{16}

Despite its utilitarian need, the practice of ghostwriting complicates certain issues pertaining to the requirements of genre, the politics of representation and the ethics of authorship.\textsuperscript{17} It problematises Phillip Lejeune’s idea of ‘autobiographical pact’, according to which, the author, the narrator and the protagonist of an autobiography must be an identical figure (Taylor 477). Involving a collaborator, sports autobiographies bypass the ‘autobiographical pact’. Though the intervention of ghostwriters in sports autobiographies is a well known fact, yet these accounts maintain the pretense of first person narratives. In order to serve the autobiographical ‘I’, a ghostwriter seeks to “capture the signature style” of the athlete (Brandt 556). He attempts to write in congruence with the publically known image of the sportsperson. For instance, one cannot imagine a life story of Andre Agassi without the use of slangs or Muhammad Ali’s autobiography sans his usual bragging. By capturing the style, character and personality of the athlete, a ghostwriter however gives ‘voice’ to his autobiographical subject but, on a close reading, the scripter’s own subjectivity also seems to surface from the autobiography. The text inevitably entails the intrusion of ghostwriter’s voice which operates through various strategic or unconscious mediums.

Ghostwriting is neither an innocent practice nor an act of absolute forgery. A ghostwriter, controlling the fate of the story, may appropriate certain discourses according to his personal ideological inclinations. The differences in the subject-
positions of the ghost and his subject allow a potential threat of corruption in the original testimony. Therefore, the practice of collaboration in sports autobiographies demands critical scrutiny for the joint endeavour “does not necessarily resolve tensions or correct dissimilarities, but instead imbibes and embodies them, often seeks to mask them” (Sanders 446). The chapter explores the possibilities of dissent and representation in the ghostwritten autobiographies of sportspersons. It minutely probes the politics of ‘invisible hand’ in the autobiographies of Imran Khan, Milkha Singh, Martina Navratilova and Muhammad Ali.

Chapter 2: Between Literature and Journalism

Sports autobiographies enjoy their own share of readership and overshadow most mainstream literary texts in terms of sales. Nonetheless, when it comes to discern their literary worth, these ghostwritten autobiographies are dismissed as flat pieces of journalism. Most of the ghostwriters are basically journalists who are assumed to transform the available material into a coherent story. In the absence of firsthand experience or the essential support of memory, they count on various sources for the retrieval of their subject’s past. For instance, Muhammad Ali’s ghostwriter Richard Durham makes use of Ali’s poetry which he wrote on the eve of major fights to threaten his opponents. His experience as a programme writer for a radio show on eminent African-Americans and his work as an editor of the official publication of the Nation of Islam Muhammad Speaks also come handy in the pursuit of writing Ali’s life story. Similarly, Martina Navratilova’s ghostwriter George Vecsey, in terms of accumulating source material for writing her autobiography, is largely benefited for his coverage of tennis tours as a sports journalist. The connection of journalists with these life accounts and their dependence on already publicized material cater to the popular belief that sports autobiographies are formally too simple and aesthetically dry form of writing. They are relegated as fact based narratives or unimaginative pursuits that hold no literary promise.

On the contrary, this chapter aims to explore the literary facet of sports lifewriting. It however maintains that the autobiographies of sportspersons do not possess the finesse of mainstream literature but it exemplifies that they hardly surrender to the conventions of traditional journalism either. They rather display a
curious blend of creativity and journalism and complicate the oft-assumed binaries of fiction and non-fiction. The very task of writing an autobiography is stepping out of the sophistication of literature but it is not scripted in complete literary dearth. Infringing the deadpan style of reporting, autobiographers make use of all figurative mediums and rhetorical resources of the literary art. As a subclass, sports lifewriting follows dictates of the larger tradition of its parent genre. Beyond the journalistic world of momentary headlines, it seeks to ensure longevity for itself. For this purpose, sports lifewriting oversteps the burdening codes of journalism to venture into the literary domain. The three sports autobiographies which would be discussed in this chapter manifest creativity by way of using novelistic details, scenes and dialogues, chronological experiments, techniques of realism, art of defamiliarization, methods of storytelling and other devices usually associated with the aesthetically proven genres. The chapter, in this light, examines the literary potential in the life stories of Muhammad Ali, Martina Navratilova and Milkha Singh.

Chapter 3: Between the Home and the World

Among the debatable issues that frequently emerge on the sporting scene, the most conspicuous is the question of women’s representation in sports. By and large, the phenomenon of sport was perceived to be unsuited for the female body. Many myths related to infertility, child bearing, menstruation, biological inferiority and masculinization of female physique prevailed so as to discourage women from participating in sports activities. The curtailment of their geographical freedom further reduced their chances of involvement in sport events. As a result, sport has historically been a male preserve wherein women were merely expected to play the supportive roles of mothers, wives and girlfriends. Of late, the cultural dynamics have changed significantly with women negotiating their spaces as actual participants in sports. Extending their horizons, sportswomen explore the routes that eventually lead them to the so-called masculine terrains. The arenas of sport emancipate women from the spatial restrictions and challenge the traditional division of territories.

Autobiographies of sportswomen encompass this struggle and vindication of the so-called ‘weaker sex’. They contest and revise the cultural norms that determine “the relationship of bodies to specific sites, behaviors, and destinies” (Smith and
These life accounts emerge as spatial narratives that entail the dynamics of freedom and constraint. The chapter foregrounds how sportswomen defy the sites of interior and make an assured entry in the outer space. Different sports, with their own set of codes, carry varied possibilities for physical assertion. Initially, women participate in sports such as gymnastics, swimming, archery and shooting that do not threaten the notion of basic femininity but eventually they acclimatize the aggressive world of combat sports such as boxing and wrestling. As sportswomen adopt the non-feminine sports, the patriarchal forces intend to unnerve them through labeling and stereotyping. With the circulation of new myths, the patriarchal system seeks to establish that a woman athlete, no matter how accomplished, must continue to be a ‘woman’ in the socially accepted sense of the word (Prakash 27). This chapter investigates how sportswomen alter gender equations and negotiate between ‘the home’ and ‘the world’. In the specific Indian setting, it covers the sporting journey of three women Olympians i.e. Saina Nehwal, P.T. Usha and M. C. Mary Kom. It also presents their different levels of bodily assertion from a rather mischievous sport of badminton to the fierce domain of boxing.

**Chapter 4: Between Resistance and Censorship**

Social set-ups are characterized by inequality, oppression, prejudices and indifferences. Through a process of ‘othering’, the minority cultures are censored from the dominant core of society. As agents of action, athletes question such discriminatory attitudes and register their protest against them. Martina Navratilova, in her autobiography *Being Myself*, exposes the oppressive communist regime during the Cold War era. Being a bisexual herself, she also raises her voice for the sexual minorities and counters the heterosexual norm. Andre Agassi’s life story scripts his acts of non-conformity on and off the court. His existential crisis – the lack of choice and free will – makes him question the existing social order. He subverts the structured codes of tennis deriving energies from the spectacular subculture, the hippie consciousness and the Beat Movement. Wimbledon champion Arthur Ashe’s autobiography *Days of Grace* uncovers his experiences as a ‘coloured’ man in the racism afflicted America. He courageously breaks the silence on the AIDS stigma and recovers his lost ‘grace’. Therefore, having ‘deviant’ heroes as its subject, sports
lifewriting engenders the element of resistance. It becomes the assertion of “a distinctly individual voice which refuses to be identified with the mass conditions of life or swallowed up in the stereotypes of the age” (Gray 53-4).

Resistance, however, remains the central theme of sports memoirs but it operates at a moderate level. The acts of resistance by athletes expose the status quo but do not promote the establishment of an oppositional culture. They unfold as everyday acts of defiance rather than ideologically driven gospels of change. Evading the overt rebellion, sportspersons take mediated stance for they are duty bound to both the culture and the counterculture. Consequently, they adopt rather cosmetic and non-militant ways of protest. As written script of cultural struggle, sports lifewriting traces this dialectics of agency and coercion. The chapter unmasks the exclusion mechanisms of power and displays the alternative approach of the ‘deviant’ subjects to tackle these apparatuses. Keeping a track of the degree of resistance, it charts the potential of sports lifewriting to fight cultural censorship.

Chapter 5: Between the Reel and the Real

This chapter foregrounds the cinematographic nature of the life stories of athletes. Paul Douglass claims that cinematic thinking has considerably penetrated into the art of narrative fiction and biography. According to him, studying the narrative today means to “confront a challenge to think cinematically” (103). In the age of visual culture, nearly all forms of art are influenced by the primacy of vision. Visual culture largely relies on “sensory experience – particularly the visual” (Homer 7). The chapter explores how visuality permeates the aesthetics of sports autobiography. The life narratives of sportspersons showcase an interface between the image and the text. Juxtaposing the two, they refute the oft perceived binaries of the visual and the verbal. In addition to the pictorial quotient, sports autobiographies embody cinematic constituents required for a screenplay. They are melodramatic narratives that conspicuously interact with the realm of cinema.

From this perspective, the chapter investigates the autobiographies of Brazilian footballer Edson Arantes do Nascimento (Pelé), boxing icon Muhammad Ali and Indian pugilist M. C. Mary Kom. In the autobiography of Pelé, memories of
past lend the visual or pictorial material to the narrative. The life account recovers the
sporting action and scenes of spectacle in a picturesque manner. It, moreover,
augments the legend of Pelé suitable for motion-picture adaptation. Muhammad Ali’s
life narrative *The Greatest: My Own Story* is consummately driven by cinematic
orientation. Written in the form of scenes and dialogues, the autobiography almost
appears as a script for a film. It has a reified narrative that presents the things and
events as they were. For cinematic purpose, the autobiography offers a readymade
protagonist who fulfills requirements of what Robert McKee calls a “deep character”
(142). Indian boxer M. C. Mary Kom’s life story *Unbreakable: An Autobiography*
establishes the myth of a warrior woman. With a mixture of action, melodrama, love
story, and romance, the autobiography shares the conventions of a Bollywood
‘masala’ movie.

Notes:

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1 The lifewriting forms catalogued here primarily emanate from the Western world. If
we include other life narrative traditions from the non-Western world, for instance,
the Indian conventions of ‘nama’ and ‘rachit’, the lifewriting forms would multiply
further.

2 British biographer Hermione Lee opines that the term is used “when the distinction
between biography and autobiography is being deliberately blurred, or when different
ways of telling a life story – memoir, autobiography, biography, diary, letters,
autobiographical fiction – are being discussed together” (Lee 100).

3 Smith and Watson believe that autobiographical narrators usually discover new
ways of telling their lives for they find the existing models quite limiting or
inadequate for their purpose. Due to these alternative modes of communicating the
self, the lifewriting forms have multiplied dramatically. Some of these modes are
catalogued as follows: apology, autography, autobiography, autoethnography,
bildungsroman, captivity narratives, chronicle, collaborative life narratives,
confessions, heterobiography, ecobiography, ethnic life narratives, letters, diary,
mediation, memoir, oral history, poetic autobiography, trauma narrative, slave
narrative, travel narrative, testimonio and other variants (183-207).
In the thesis, however, I would also use the terms autobiography, life narrative and life story interchangeably as there are no fundamental differences in these subsets. The ambit of lifewriting is larger; therefore, I have used it in the title of my thesis.

The various subsets of autobiography are classified on the basis of their distinct characteristics and features. The acronym ‘auto/biography’ or ‘a/b’ suggests the interrelation of autobiography and biography. It identifies the presence of “biography/ies within an autobiography, or the converse, a personal narrative within a biography” (Smith and Watson 184). The term ‘autoethnography’ is associated with the narratives of colonized subjects. In this form of life narrative, the indigenous subjects represent themselves and sometimes collaborate with the master/colonizer to produce a ‘transcultural’ and hybrid form of narrative (185). Autoethnography foregrounds how “the identities of dominant and subordinated subjects interlock and interact despite histories of radically uneven power relations” (186). ‘Autogynography’, as the term suggests, recommends “the centrality of gendered subjectivity” in a personal narrative (187). The term ‘bildungsroman’ is historically associated with the development and social formation of a protagonist in a fictional work. This form is adopted by many autobiographical subjects to comprehend their self-development and coming to terms with society (189). In a ‘collaborative life narrative’, the autobiographical subject/informant relates his/her story to an interviewer who records, edits and shapes the narrative (191). These collaborative accounts are also known as ‘as-told-to’ narratives or the ghostwritten narratives.

Pramod K. Nayar, in *Seeing Stars: Spectacle, Society and Celebrity Culture*, discusses Chris Rojek’s model of three celebrity types i.e. ascribed celebrity, achieved celebrity and attributed celebrity. People who become famous for being “part of a royal or famous family”, such as Tatas, Ambanis, Rajes and Birlas, are ascribed celebrities. Sachin Tendulkar, Roger Federer, Vishwanath Anand and other sportspersons who enjoy fame “not by virtue of birth or family but because of individual achievements” have the status of achieved celebrity. Attributed celebrities or ‘celetoids’ are “short term celebrities” or incidents, such as Abhishek Bachchan-Aishwarya Rai wedding, which are popularized by media for a limited existence (14-21).
The deviancy or otherness is simply understood as a state of “being different from surrounding norms” (Freedman and Doob 4). In that sense, a deviant person possesses the characteristics that are not shared by the “comparison group,” which is generally the dominant and conformist array of the society (3).

‘Scar culture’ is Nayar’s term for the textual, graphic, visual, autobiographical, or testimonial narratives of suffering that demand certain kinds of affective responses from the audience, viewers or readers. These narratives mediate between the suffering ‘object’ and the feeling ‘subject’ and produce a culture of compassion and anxiety (Nayar, *States of Sentiment* 75-6).

James W. Pipkin argues that the autobiographical narratives of sportspersons metaphorically move from a period of ‘echoing green’ to ‘the end of autumn,’ signifying the different stages of a sportsperson’s career. While the earlier is associated with the youthful beginning and the subsequent bloom of a sportsperson’s career, the latter represents his inevitable fall. This journey is characterized with a “premature” and “unnatural” acceleration of events (16).

The public accounts such as autobiographies, biographies, interviews reveal the desire and importance of postself in a sportsperson’s life. The very structure of sporting world nurtures this quest through various means, i.e. by providing opportunity for role-support from audiences or emotional associates, by leaving an eternal mark through participation and achievement, by way of comparison with other legends through measurement and records, and recognition through awards, commemorations and monuments (Schmitt and Leonard II 1093).

Dipankar Gupta, in *Culture, Space and the Nation-State*, asserts that culture is examined on the basis of root metaphors. According to him, the notions of purity and pollution, racial differences, and any other sort of binary division in a culture are driven by root metaphors (19). On the other hand, non-spaces such as stadiums, airports, multiplexes, supermarket, and apartment complexes are “designed to appeal to all which is why they are nobody’s prerogative” (19). Unlike root metaphors, they give opportunity to “people of diverse cultural backgrounds to participate” and hence
invoke a “universalistic non-discriminatory organizational logic that is open to all” (23).

12 In *Beyond a Boundary*, C L R James devotes a full chapter entitled “Prince and Pauper” on Learie Constantine, the great West Indian cricketer who played domestic cricket in England. According to James, Constantine not only expressed himself on the cricket field but also used his reputation as a means of advancing the cause of the West Indian people. He delivered speeches on the West Indian politics in public meetings in England and clarified the prejudices of the people (156).

13 Ramachandra Guha, in his attempt to write “a history of India through cricket” (Guha xiii), asserts the importance of biographical approach to history writing as his *A Corner of a Foreign Field* is “woven around biographies of men of influence” (xiii).

14 For traditional historians, autobiography has been an imperfect source of historical knowledge. They however acknowledge that autobiography, unlike fiction, is closer to historical ‘truth’ for it deals with ‘real’ life experiences but due to its engagement with the subjective and its literary construction, autobiography is prone to distrust and, consequently, subjected to careful investigation and cross-verification (Taylor 470).

15 The term ‘ghostwriting’ was coined and institutionalized by an Irishman Christy Walsh who formed the Christy Walsh syndicate of ghostwriters in 1921 to control the literary output of American sportsmen. He initiated with the idea of ghostwriting show business names but soon switched his focus to sportspersons (Ahrens, http://www.booksonbaseball.com/2010/08/christy-walsh-baseballs-first-agent/).

16 ‘Cultural intermediaries’, explains Chris Rojek in his book *Celebrity*, is a collective term for people engaged in enhancing the celebrity persona. The term includes agents, publicists, fitness trainers, cameramen, ghostwriters, personal assistants, marketing personnel, promoters, speech writers, wardrobe staff, cosmetic experts and other people involved in concocting the public presentation of celebrities (10-11).

17 Linda A. Riley and Stuart C. Brown, in their article “Crafting a Public Image: An Empirical Study of the Ethics of Ghostwriting” systematically present three positions
or stances that are generally taken on the ethics of ghostwriting – the ethicist position, the organizational position and the ghostwriter’s position. The ethicists sternly believe that the practice of ghostwriting is deceptive and, therefore, unethical. They argue that it is a deception similar to plagiarism for the audience is not always informed of the employment of the ghostwriter (712). On the other hand, the individuals, reckoning ghostwriting as an ethical activity, defend the practice arguing that regardless of the fact who has written the book, the public knows who is responsible for its contents and message (712). From the organizational point of view, ghostwriting is a practical and utilitarian need. Celebrities or sportspersons who have numerous responsibilities and busy schedules pragmatically require somebody to write their books. Believers of this model argue that the employment of ghostwriters is as ethical as the assistance of other specialists such as lawyers, managers, agents etc. (713). Like lawyers, the ghostwriters provide voice to the people who deserve to be heard. As for the position of a ghostwriter, the question of ethics no longer remains debatable. For him, the finished work is a personal communication between the leader and his followers (713). A ghostwriter, therefore, demands his name on the cheque rather than on the cover of the book.