**Muralitharan and Sangakkara:**

**Forging Identity and Pride through Cricket in a Small Island Nation**

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**Introduction**

It was the seminal moment in Sri Lankan cricketing history. A nation’s heart was a flutter. Nearly every eye was glued to the television. For those without means, every ear was tuned to the radio. It was Sri Lanka versus powerhouse Australia in the 1996 One-Day International (ODI) World Cup final, only the sixth ODI World Cup to be contested.

It was also a time of uncertainty in Sri Lanka. The Tamil Tigers had recently bombed the Central Bank in Colombo, killing 91 people and injuring 1400 others. With India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka jointly hosting the World Cup, there were security concerns over the Sri Lankan venues with two of the Group Stage matches abandoned. Yet, in this troubling time, on the world stage, tiny Sri Lanka had made it to the final. They were a decisive underdog. In the openings innings of the match, Australia was held to 241 runs, largely due to the bowling expertise of Muttiah Muralitharan (“Murali”), then a 23 year old newcomer to international cricket. He was the most outstanding bowler of the finals, limiting Australia to 31 runs through 10 overs.[[1]](#endnote-2) In the second innings, Sri Lanka scored 245 runs, winning by 7 wickets[[2]](#endnote-3) with 22 balls remaining.

At the end of the match, wild celebrations erupted in Sri Lanka, and amongst the Sri Lankan diaspora throughout the world, including Australia. Murali had become a national icon. Hardly an imposing figure at 5 feet 7 inches tall and of Tamil background, the Sinhalese majority worshipped him. Back in Kandy, a young schoolboy of 18 years, Kumar Sangakkara (“Sanga”), had been watching the final and had been duly inspired.

This chapter tells the story of Murali and Sanga, two Sri Lankan cricketers whose backgrounds could not be more different. Yet together, they have made a deep impression on the game of cricket, forging identity and pride in the small island nation of Sri Lanka. Moreover, this chapter speaks to the excellence of these two cricketers in the face of challenging politics and ethnic turmoil in a country that is relatively new to the game of international cricket. Our chapter begins by examining the roots of cricket in Sri Lanka beginning from colonial times. We then describe the paths taken by Murali and Sanga from childhood to their prominence in world cricket, to their status today as ambassadors and icons for Sri Lanka.

**Sri Lankan Cricket in Context**

To understand the context of cricket in Sri Lanka, we first need to delve into the history of Sri Lanka in general and the history of cricket in Sri Lanka in particular. Sri Lanka is an island with a diverse population of nearly 21 million people in a land area of 25,000 square miles – about the size of West Virginia. It is located just off the southeast coast of India, which is the second most populous country in the world.

Originally the island was inhabited by Veddah tribes who were the equivalent of Canada’s First Nations, i.e. aboriginal people. Migration first began with Prince Vijaya and his followers (ca 543 BC) who arrived from what is now West Bengal in India, and originated the Sinhalese ethnicity. They were followed by Dravidians (of Tamil ethnicity) from South India.

Traders and sailors from Arab nations followed – the Moors in particular – who in turn were followed by colonists from Europe (Portuguese, Dutch and British) lured by the rich trade in spices. In 1815, Ceylon (later named Sri Lanka) became a British Crown Colony. During the British Raj, numerous ethnicities settled in Sri Lanka. A second wave of Tamils, brought by the British, worked as labourers in the tea plantations in the 1860s, including Murali’s grandfather.

All of these groups had deep influences on aspects of Sri Lankan life in terms of politics, ethnicity, language, religion, art, architecture, music, food, dress, etc., all of which remain evident in the early 21st century. The Portuguese and the Dutch, many of whom intermarried with the local population (unlike the British) and whose descendants are called *Burghers*, left their mark in place names, family names, food, and religion. The island has been known by many names by many peoples, including the British ‘Ceylon,’ the name that continued to be used after independence in 1948, until the island was renamed Sri Lanka in 1972.[[3]](#endnote-4)

With such a history, one can readily appreciate the current multi-ethnic and multicultural society in Sri Lanka where practices include Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Looking forward, it is difficult to imagine how a simple game (cricket) came to dominate the consciousness of this diverse country. Under British control of the maritime provinces in 1802 and the whole island in 1815, the British instituted many customs, including cricket, which was chief among the British recreational activities. The game itself dates back to England circa 1600. In Sri Lanka, however, the Colombo Cricket Club, the first such club, was set up in 1832,though they did not played their first official match against a British regiment until the next calendar year.

The first international match between a Sri Lankan team and an English team was held in Colombo in 1882 and was facilitated by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The match was a consequence of a travel break taken by the English team en route to Australia when the ship stopped for fuel and provisions in Colombo. These matches were what are known as *limb-looseners* for the traveling cricketers. The matches provided an opportunity for local players to gain ‘first-class’[[4]](#endnote-5)experience and were awaited with bated breath by the residents of Colombo. With the popularisation of air travel in the mid-1960s, ships carrying cricketers no longer called in Colombo, and as a result, few international cricketers came to Sri Lanka.

Many of the founding Sri Lankan cricketing clubs have ethnically based names such as the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC), the Tamil Union, the Moor’s Sports Club, and the Burgher Recreation Club (BRC), dating back to the 1890s. In the early 21st century, club teams are no longer ethnically based, although the club names have not changed.

Significantly, Murali and Sanga hail from the two main ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, the Tamil and Sinhalese communities respectively. Although these two communities have had a troubling relationship, cricket has been a unifying factor in Sri Lanka, and with respect to cricket, ethnicity has never been an issue. In fact, the current Sri Lankan cricket team includes almost all of the different ethnicities and religious persuasions prevalent on the island. This speaks volumes for the passions generated by the game to the extent that ethnic loyalties can be drowned by an overriding national loyalty for the Sri Lanka cricket team.

Between 1953 and 1975, the only serious international matches involving Sri Lankan teams were between the Ceylon Cricket Association and the Madras team of India. These were first-class matches played for the Gopalan Trophy with the venue alternating between Colombo and Madras (now Chennai). During this period, cricket was commonly played by boys in village fields, backyards, beaches, and even in fallow rice paddies using discarded tennis balls and bats, when such were available, or with improvised equipment such as balls made of ‘kaduru,’ a type of large round hard seed, and bats made of ‘polpiti’ (the leaf stalk of coconut fronds). In contrast, real cricket with proper equipment was reserved for boys at elite schools that had the necessary resources and cricket grounds. These were the youngsters who had an opportunity to play for the local cricket clubs that held first-class tournaments.

To be sure, cricket is the most popular sport in Sri Lanka whether it be at international, club or school levels. However, school cricket has the longest history and also perhaps the most partisan supporters. Some of the schools have played each other for well over a century. The ‘Big Matches’ between schools get far more publicity and press coverage than any first class club matches. The associated parades and carnivals create a festival atmosphere and is now embedded in the local culture. The original ‘Big Match’ between Royal College and St. Thomas’ College, two elite boys’ schools in Colombo, dates back to 1879. By the beginning of the First World War in 1914, there were three ‘Big Matches’ on the island, one of which was played between the two elite schools in Kandy, St. Anthony’s College and Trinity College, which respectively were to be the crucibles for schoolboys Murali(born in 1972) and Sanga (born in 1977). Since school cricket teams are age denoted, Murali and Sanga did not actually face each other on the field in any of the ‘Trinity-Anthonian’ Big Matches.

Murali and Sanga began their cricketing careers at a time when Sri Lanka cricket was still in its infancy. Sri Lanka had not yet attained international ‘Test’ status and even the opportunity to view high level cricket was limited.[[5]](#endnote-6) Although future talent was being developed through the school system, the game was raw, coaching was undeveloped, and the odds of rising to international star status seemed insurmountable.

Sri Lanka attained Test status, the highest designation in international cricket, in 1981 after years of canvassing with the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC). The MCC is England’s original cricket club established in 1787 with its home grounds being the hallowed Lord's Cricket Ground in St John’s Wood, London. The MCC evolved over time to be the governing body for international cricket until the establishment of the International Cricket Council (ICC) in the early 1990s. Until 1981, the only countries enjoying Test status were England (1877), Australia (1877), South Africa (1889), West Indies (1928), New Zealand (1930), India (1932), and Pakistan (1952). For a while it seemed like only these seven countries would ever play Test cricket. However, after a hiatus of thirty years, Sri Lanka managed to gain entry as the 8th country by displaying their skills in both cricket and diplomacy. Subsequent to Sri Lanka’s ascension to Test status in 1981, two other countries have been admitted to the Test cricket club: Zimbabwe in 1992 and Bangladesh in 2000.[[6]](#endnote-7)

Notably, all of the ICC’s Test playing nations were once part of the British Empire through varying degrees of colonization. Understandably, there has always been particular joy for Sri Lankans (and other former British colonies) when the English are defeated in cricket. Sri Lanka also revels when it defeats its neighbouring superpower India.

The story of how Sri Lanka achieved Test status from its humble beginnings in cricket is a consequence of diplomacy, determination, and skill. Sri Lankan’s inclusion as a Test country in 1981 can be mainly attributed to Gamini Dissanayake, a senior Cabinet Minister in the Sri who delivered a watershed speech to the MCC. Dissanayake was a lawyer by profession as well as a great orator with a dynamic personality. At the time, there was a feeling amongst MCC committee members that Sri Lanka should wait several more years before being admitted to the fold. However, Dissanayake was persuasive as he unleashed his charm, political savvy, oratorical skills, and legal mind with a promise to deliver on various infrastructure commitments to the MCC. In 2001, journalist David Hopps wrote, “The cricket world will be forever grateful that nearly 30 years ago the mission to grant Sri Lanka Test status was successful.”[[7]](#endnote-8)

Sri Lanka played their first Test match, fittingly against England, in Colombo in February, 1982. After attaining Test status, the government established funding for proper cricket to be played all over the island. Consequently, as the selection pool of talent increased, Sri Lanka began to achieve greater success at the international level. By the time Sri Lanka achieved Test match status in 1981, Murali was 9 years old and Sanga was 4 years old. For them, the impetus and the opportunities were beginning to open. However, relentless effort and dedication were required to get to the top of the world.

The popularity and excitement of cricket has grown dramatically in the last two decades, especially due to the shorter formats of the game such as one-day cricket and Twenty20 (or T20) cricket, a roughly three-hour game limited to 20 overs per side. In whatever format, the drama in the sport has historically been known as the “glorious uncertainty of cricket.” In *The Wisden Cricket Almanack*, Rowland Ryder writes:

Among the myriad delights of cricket, not least is the glorious uncertainty of the game. Nothing is certain in cricket except its uncertainty. It is not likely that a batsman will hit every ball of an over for six; that a last wicket stand will add three hundred runs to the score; that a wicket-keeper will take off his pads and do the hat trick: none of these things are anything more than remotely possible, yet all of them have happened; and improbable events, their duration in time varying from a split second to a long drawn out week, interesting, exhilarating, something unbearably exciting, are happening every year that cricket is played.[[8]](#endnote-9)

**Murali: Sport Triumphing over Ethnic Divisions**

As mentioned earlier, Murali’s grandfather emigrated from southern India and came to Ceylon, as the country was then called, to work in the tea plantations run by the British. Not much is known about the grandfather as he eventually went back to India. However, the grandfather’s sons stayed on and established themselves in the central hill capital of Kandy, which is an area adjacent to the high mountains where the best tea plantations flourish.

Murali’s opportunity to succeed at cricket from a young age shows how age-old antagonisms can be overcome by the egalitarian nature of modern sports, particularly spectator sports that engulf whole nations in fervent national pride. It is true to say that when important cricket matches involving the Sri Lanka team are being played, especially the shorter versions of ODI and T20, the nation comes to a halt, with most people watching the progress of play on TV in their homes or even their offices, with very little work being done. A palpable *cricket above all else* attitude is omnipresent, much to the detriment of office productivity, though on the positive social side, it brings a sense of national unity where it is sorely needed.

Murali was disadvantaged, both economically in terms of his family’s vocation and socially, as part of a minority ethnic group. Murali rarely gives interviews, but there is a 2010 piece where he discusses his ethnicity and childhood in an interview with Peter Roebuck in the Melbourne, Australia newspaper *The Age* on5th November 2010:

**Peter Roebuck (PR):**Let's talk about your background. Tell me about your ancestors.

**Muttiah Muralitharan (MM):**They come from India. I still have [the] right to live there. My grandfather came to Sri Lanka to work on a tea plantation. Afterwards he went back, but my father and his brothers stayed, and they built a biscuit factory in Kandy in the 1950s. All sorts of biscuits. Still we have that.

**PR:**Growing up as a Tamil in Sri Lanka wasn’t an easy thing in your early days?

**MM:**There were riots, but after 1983, it was normal. Remember: I was staying at hostel in school for seven years and living with many Sinhalese and Tamils in the same dormitories, so it was not that difficult.

**PR:**But in the early days a lot of harm was done to the Tamils. Do you have any memories of that?

**MM:**Our factory and our house were burnt down in 1977, and that was painful for a time. We were saved by Sinhalese. They came and stopped the crazy people before they killed us. We never forgot that. We rebuilt them and moved on. That was our family way. We are businessmen not politicians. My father kept things as simple as possible.

**PR:**Do you think that these troubles and growing up in a mixed community helped to give you strength of character? The Tamils had a hard time.

**MM:**The Sinhalese as well. They had hard times when the communist party came. [T]hey were targeted and a lot of people were killed.

**PR:**You’ve never spoken up on political issues. You’ve been a unifying figure. Is that how you see yourself?

**MM:**Our lives in Kandy were mostly fine. I could not talk about problems I had not seen.[[9]](#endnote-10)

The ‘hostel in school’ to which Murali refers is the hostel of St. Anthony’s College, Kandy, a private school run by Benedictine monks. It is interesting to note that in Sri Lanka’s multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi religious society, such private schools foster a sense of egalitarian citizenship. Here was Murali, a Tamil follower of the Hindu religion, enrolled in a school run by Catholic Benedictine monks, some of whom came from Italy. Similarly, as we discuss later, Sanga, a Sinhalese and a follower of Buddhism, was put into a school run by the British Anglican Church through the Ceylon Missionary Society, and that school was Trinity College, the other big private school in Kandy.

Ethnically, Murali is Tamil. He grew up in a Sri Lanka where ethnic fissures were a by-product of many factors including land hunger in an overpopulated island, ‘official language’ issues, job shortages, and terrorism; a conflict that have been fought between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. Though the origins of the conflict date back more than two thousand years when there were repeated invasions from southern India, there were intervening centuries of peace due to various geographical and political factors, including 450 years of colonisation by European powers.[[10]](#endnote-11)

Murali began playing school cricket at eight years of age and went on to become a schoolboy cricketing prodigy with a haul of over 100 wickets in a 14-game season in 1990-91 and winning the coveted ‘Bata Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year’, an award which considers all schools in Sri Lanka.[[11]](#endnote-12)Following his schoolboy career, Murali was recruited to play for the Tamil Union Club while being included in the Sri Lanka ‘A’ team that toured England in 1991. Though that tour was not very successful, by 1992,he joined the Sri Lanka Test team and played his first Test match in August against the Australians when he was just 20 years old. During this otherwise unremarkable match, however, Murali took one wicket that put his extraordinary skills on display and focused the spotlight on him with the promise of greatness to come. Murali pitched a ball to Tom Moody that had the most unusual movement in the sense that it bounced in a completely unanticipated direction. To use Moody’s own words: “I can clearly remember the ball he got me out with. It almost pitched off the strip and spun back five feet to bowl me middle-and-off while I was padding up. We thought he was a leg-spinner; his action was that unusual.”[[12]](#endnote-13)

Murali’s form continued to improve, and he played a pivotal role in most of Sri Lanka’s matches, even though the team’s wins were few and far between. Arjuna Ranatunga, the Sri Lanka captain, as well as a Sinhalese Buddhist, had absolute faith in Murali despite the traditional ethnic divide, and believed that Murali’s presence would herald a new age for Sri Lanka’s struggling, and thus far, short, Test history. Murali exceeded the high expectations. He continued to mesmerise batsmen from opposing teams, both in Sri Lanka and overseas, even when Sri Lanka as a team failed miserably.

By the last quarter of 1995, Murali had played in 22 Test matches against Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa, India, and Pakistan while taking 80 wickets, though his accompanying bowling average allowing 32.7 runs per 100 balls was not that flattering. In the midst of this remarkable run came the fateful Boxing Day Test against Australia in Melbourne in 1995, a match that was destined to change some fundamental rules in relation to bowling and umpiring.

Murali was bowling against Australia in the 2nd Test in front of a huge crowd of 55,000 spectators at the hallowed MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground) on Boxing Day in 1995. Suddenly, Australian umpire Darrell Hair called Murali for ‘throwing,’ which in cricketing parlance means bending one’s arm at the elbow and straightening it whilst making the delivery, the sort of action that is characteristic of a toss in baseball. Throwing is illegal in cricket and is given as a ‘no-ball,’ which means that the batsman cannot be called out, a run is added to the batting side’s total, and the bowler has to bowl an extra ball. Hair continued to no-ball Murali seven times in three overs. Murali had by then already bowled three overs in this Test and had also gone through 22 Tests previously without incident, using the same action, and was therefore completely perplexed.[[13]](#endnote-14)

As the controversy continued, there was much discussion involving Sri Lankan captain Ranatunga and others in team management. After a subsequent no-ball ruling by Hair, it was decided to make Murali bowl from the other end of the pitch to avoid Hair’s judgment, and he did so for another 12 overs that day without further no-balling. What was more puzzling was that Hair, being at the bowler’s end, did not have the necessary square-on (900) view of the bowling action, yet he assigned to himself the authority normally given to the square leg umpire who is in a much better position to judge the action. To add to the controversy, Murali bowled many more overs during the Test with Hair as the square leg umpire without any more protests from either umpire. This led to various allegations including that the Australians had been acting in a racist fashion against Murali. There was a sense that Murali was too good and, therefore, must have been cheating. The claims of racial discrimination were ironic since such claims would be expected to come from the majority Sinhalese dominated Sri Lanka Cricket Board and not from some other source. Murali would later address these events in his interview with Peter Roebuck:

**PR:**You had a great time in Melbourne yesterday, but in 1995 it was not so good. On Boxing Day you were called for throwing from the bowler's end. What was your reaction?

**MM:**I was shocked. Darrell Hair had umpired me so many times before. Before the match I had bowled 10 overs in Sydney in a one-day game. So I was very surprised when he said I was illegal next match.

**PR:**What was it like to be called in front of 55,000 people on the first day of a series?

**MM:**I was so upset. The team was behind me, and I was able to change ends, but that’s not real cricket. He had made up his mind what he wanted to do. That should not happen to another bowler. It’s very embarrassing. A single umpire cannot decide on the career of a bowler. If you are narrow-minded, then you will see it that way.

**PR:**Don Bradman said it was the worst umpiring decision he had seen, and that you were obviously not throwing. Not every Australian was on your case. How did you feel that night?

**MM:**It was terrible because I didn’t know what to do or what was going to happen to my career.

**PR:**Alone among modern bowlers, you put your arm in a splint, went live on television and bowled all your variations. You went to England with Michael Slater and Mark Nicholas in charge, both [sceptics] at the time, and bowled with your arm in the splint. Both changed their minds. What made you do that?

**MM:**Because I always thought I was not doing anything wrong – it’s an illusion caused by my wrist and the way my joints and arm are built. To the naked eye it looks like throwing, but when you use technology, it shows I don’t throw. I have gone through more tests than any other bowler since 1995 and passed them all. But it wanted to prove it. But still I was being booed in Australia, so a reporter gave me the idea and I thought it might end the talk.

**PR:**What material was used?

**MM:**Doctors said plaster of Paris can bend, so we put in steel rods. They weighed two pounds, which made it harder to bowl. But I bowled [the] same pace.

**PR:**Nicholas said there was no way a bowler could straighten his arm in that splint. It’s a pity more Australians have not seen the footage. They say it’s too expensive to buy. These things seem to crop up only in Australia. Why is that?

**MM:**Hard to say. Maybe the two umpires [were] premeditated. Maybe someone [was] behind it. I don’t know.

In 1996, Murali’s action was subjected to scientific biomechanical analysis by both the University of Western Australia in Perth and the Hong Kong University of Science & Technology, who concluded that his action was legitimate.[[14]](#endnote-15)To be sure, Darrell Hair was no stranger to controversy both before and after the Murali incident. There was the 1992 Adelaide Test between Australia and India where Hair was umpiring, and which Australia won. *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* said that the match was “marred … by controversy on lbw (Leg Before Wicket) decisions – eight times Indians were given out, while all but two of their own appeals were rejected.” Subsequently, Hair was involved in litigation with the ICC on other matters.

The Murali fiasco was one that, amongst others, acted as a catalyst for ICC to eventually bring in rules appointing umpires from non-participating countries for all international matches. It also led to the further development and refinement of biomechanical analysis of bowlers’ actions and to the revision of the ICC rules governing ‘throwing’ where the permissible allowed elbow extension or straightening was changed from a range of 50 to 100 to the current 150 as it was found that 99% of bowlers examined exceeded the existing elbow flexion limits.[[15]](#endnote-16)This incident brought Murali to international attention. The resolution concerning his arm action was critical as it established that he was a truly great bowler rather than the possibility that he was simply a cheater. Furthermore, his impact upon the game in terms of rule changes is something that can be said about few (if any) cricketers.

Murali went on to become the greatest Test bowler of all time, ending his Test cricket career in spectacular fashion by taking his 800th and last Test wicket with the last ball of his last over in his last Test match in 2010.[[16]](#endnote-17) There is no other bowler on the horizon who appears likely to match this phenomenal record. Furthermore, Murali has amassed 534 wickets in ODI matches. He held the number one spot in the ICC’s player rankings for Test bowlers for a record period of 1,711 days (roughly 4½ years).

**Sanga: Pursuing Sport Versus Familial Expectations**

Unlike Murali, whose grandfather was an immigrant labourer brought to work in the tea fields by the British, Sanga was raised in Kandy by a privileged family with an aristocratic lineage coming from the era of the Kandyan Kings. As with many of the Kandyan privileged classes, all of whom were Sinhalese Buddhists, the children were, paradoxically, sent to study at the elite Anglican Christian school called Trinity College. Perhaps such parents saw the benefits of a Western liberal education that emphasized all round development and egalitarianism over privilege as a means to success in the wider world.

Soon after entering Trinity, Sanga was seen not only playing the violin, but he participated in most of the games that the school provided in the junior section (ages 5-12), i.e. badminton, tennis, table tennis, swimming, and cricket. A natural at sports, he won junior national colours for badminton and tennis. However, the principal of the school wanted him to concentrate and excel in one activity, and persuaded Sanga’s mother that the boy should take up cricket. Thus began a career that was to take Sanga to the top of the cricket world.[[17]](#endnote-18)

As he grew up, Sanga played for his school’s cricket teams at all age levels beginning with teams in the under-13 circuit. In schoolboy cricket, Sanga was ultimately awarded the “Trinity Lion,” the most prestigious yearly sporting prize at Trinity College given to a member of the senior team. Sanga earned the award due to his remarkable batting and wicket-keeping performances in the 1996 school season.[[18]](#endnote-19)

Trinity College has always tried to foster the ‘complete man’ who is an all-rounder in academics, in sport, and in other extracurricular activities. Sanga was the definition of the complete man and was accordingly awarded the prestigious Ryde Gold Medal in 1996.[[19]](#endnote-20)Awarded each year to the “best all-round boy” at Trinity, the Ryde Gold Medal is the highest honour that the school can bestow, and the recipient is decided by a secret ballot conducted among the senior boys, the staff, and the school’s principal. Historical records show that such a prize has been awarded as early as 1894 at Trinity. Every parent of a Trinity student wishes that his or her son will win this coveted award and therefore tries to foster a balance between academics and sport.[[20]](#endnote-21) Sanga’s father, a well-known lawyer in their hometown of Kandy, was no different. As Sanga remarked during an interview on Cricinfo, “… his father, Kshema, would throw him balls and instruct him on technique in the backyard of their beautiful hillside home in Kandy.” The article goes on to explain that “Sanga had designs to follow his father into the [legal] profession before cricket called him properly, part-way through law school, at 22.”Maybe the father, whilst promoting Sanga’s cricketing ambitions, had hoped that the son would follow him as a lawyer. In any event, once Sanga achieved the rank of captain on the Sri Lanka Test team, he had the full support of the father, who continued to be his most ardent and perhaps critical supporter. To quote from the interview again, Sanga’s father remarks, “Actually, he has never reached my expectations” [sic]. “You see, now, for example, Don Bradman was one person whose every other match gave him a century .... According to Bradman, it is he who gets out - the bowler can't get him out. So Kumar must perfect first the art of not getting out, and the balance will work for itself.”[[21]](#endnote-22)

As mentioned earlier, upon leaving school, Sanga’s first choice of career was to be a lawyer like his father, and he entered the Law Faculty of the University of Colombo. However, fate had other plans. While studying for his law degree, Sanga continued to play club cricket. Whereas Murali gravitated to the Tamil Union Club, Sanga played for the Nondescripts Cricket Club (NCC) in Colombo. As Sanga stated in a later interview, he really blossomed at 19 while playing at NCC and “seeing real competition ... in a very competitive surrounding, amongst better known players.”[[22]](#endnote-23)

In 2000 Sanga made a dramatic entry into international matches, playing for the Sri Lanka ‘A’ team and scored an impressive 156 runs against Zimbabwe in only 140balls, which ensured his selection to the Test team. But it also foretold doom to his university studies when he was on the verge of completion. The demands of Test cricket and the rigorous levels of training and travel precluded any opportunities to attend classes or sit for exams. Nevertheless, years later, Sanga was cited as the inspiration to continue his academic studies by Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim who went on to receive a Masters degree.[[23]](#endnote-24) Perhaps if Sanga had envisioned beforehand the immense amount of time and effort, the endless hours of practice that was needed to make the national team, leave alone achieve success in the international arena, he might have had second thoughts about abandoning a university education for cricket. Fortunately for the game of cricket, Sanga persevered.

It is worth reflecting on the possibility that Sanga the cricketer could easily have been Sanga the lawyer. Giving up his university education was a risky decision at a young age, compounded by the fact that cricket is full of ‘glorious uncertainties’ or more likely, inglorious certainties. A lawyer with Sanga’s oratorical skills can have a lucrative career and a comfortable life almost anywhere. A cricketer who does not make it to the big leagues and is unable to have sustained success over a long period of time can end up in penury. There are few, if any, active cricketers with university levels of formal education. In a country like Sri Lanka, the level of adulation by fans is such that one rarely sees a press article that is critical of the star players. Young people often overlook the fact that there is more to life than cricket, much to the detriment of their studies. In that respect, perhaps Sanga is not the best example for everyone to follow, for few reach Test level success, and tens of thousands fall by the wayside.

The MCC itself has realised this problem and has initiated a program called ‘A degree in life, not just cricket’ with the goal to prepare cricketers for ‘life after the game.’[[24]](#endnote-25)As the journalist George Dobell so eloquently states on the subject:

Professional sport is a seductive beast. It sucks you in with whispered promises of glory and glamour and spits you out with broken dreams and an aching body. For every cricketing career that ends in a raised bat and warm ovation, there are a thousand that end on a physio's treatment table or in an uncomfortable meeting in a director of cricket's office. Many, many more stall well before that level.

And that's where the trouble starts. Young men trained for little other than sport can suddenly find themselves in a world for which they have little training and little preparation. Without status, salary or support, the world can seem an inhospitable place. It is relevant, surely, that the suicide rate of former cricketers is three times the national average.

By the age of 22, Sanga had graduated to Test cricket, debuting against South Africa in July 2000.[[25]](#endnote-26)The following year he achieved his first Test century.[[26]](#endnote-27)In his second Test match, he won his first ‘Man of the Match’ award, giving further rise to the notion that a new star was on the horizon in Sri Lanka.

Sanga became Captain of the Sri Lanka team for two years, from 2009 to 2011. He then decided that it was not for him, stating, “captaining Sri Lanka is a job that ages you very quickly ... It’s rarely a job you will last long in ... I had a two-year stint, and I enjoyed it at times, certainly on the field where our results showed we were one of the top two sides in the world for one-and-a-half years, especially in the shorter form of the game.”[[27]](#endnote-28)What was left unsaid, but broadly hinted was the debilitating effect the politics of the game in Sri Lanka was having on him and the other players. A suave diplomat as always, he did not directly attack any politicians but everyone got the message. But as Pathiravithana queried in the *Sunday Times*, “One of the greatest cricketing mysteries of the twenty-first century would be as to why Sanga, after leading his side to a Cricket World Cup final, turned his back on the crown a few hours later and decided to abdicate. Yes, we have listened to reasons touted, but none of them are plausible. The truth is yet to arrive, but we at this end do not want to hear it.”[[28]](#endnote-29)

In the midst of his cricket career, Sanga delivered the 2011 MCC ‘Spirit of Cricket’ Cowdrey Lecture at Lords and became the youngest person and the first current international player to deliver that lecture, which was widely praised by the cricketing community. The one hour long speech appeared in the front pages of almost all of Britain’s mainstream newspapers, a first for any speech of this nature. At the Cowdrey Lecture, Sanga spoke reverently of his father’s heroism during perhaps the most defining week of Sri Lanka’s post-colonial history. When mobs scoured parts of the nation in late July 1983, hounding Tamils, killing them and burning down houses in retaliation for an LTTE (Tamil Tiger terrorist group) ambush on troops in the north, Kshema and his wife, Kumari, (Sanga’s parents) rallied around 35 Tamil neighbours and friends, providing refuge at Engeltine Cottage, (Sanga’s family home) at great personal risk.[[29]](#endnote-30)

The journalist Peter Roebuck called Sanga’s lecture “the most important speech in the history of cricket,” because it grounded the game in Sri Lanka’s history and implored administrators to safeguard cricket for its immense social value, if nothing else. Sri Lankan Tamils have not forgotten what brave Sinhalese men and women like Kshema and Kumari did in those dark times.[[30]](#endnote-31)Their story certainly hasn’t escaped the denizens of the once-embattled northern city of Jaffna, where Sanga is wildly, unreservedly popular: every kid’s idol, every coaches’ favourite exemplar. “What his father did for Tamils in 1983” is rarely far from northerners’ lips when Sanga comes up in discussion.

Sanga’s various records are too numerous to elaborate in detail, but a few are worth noting. Sanga has 38 Test centuries including eleven double centuries (i.e. 200 runs and above) and one triple century with 319 against Bangladesh in February 2014. To put this in perspective, there have been a total of only 28 triple centuries in Test cricket since the first one was recorded in 1930. Sanga’s tally of 11 double centuries is second only to legendary Don Bradman’s tally of twelve. He is also the first cricketer ever to score 150+ scores in four consecutive Test matches. With teammate Mahela Jayawardene, he holds the world record for the highest partnership in Test cricket – 624 runs against South Africa in 2006, where Sanga scored 287 runs and Mahela 374. As a wicketkeeper, Sanga has the 3rd highest number of dismissals in ODIs, 382 including 81 stumpings, the highest ever for a wicketkeeper in one-day international cricket. Moreover, Sanga was the fastest batsman in terms of innings to reach 8,000, 9,000, and 11,000 runs in Test cricket.[[31]](#endnote-32)

In 2012, Sanga had an unprecedented year with five notable distinctions. He was awarded the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for being the ‘ICC Cricketer of the Year’, the ‘Test Cricketer of the Year’ award and the ‘People's Choice’ award. He was also selected to the ‘World Test’ and the ‘World One-day’ cricket squads. There have been many more awards throughout Sanga’s career.

Sanga retired from the T20 format soon after leading Sri Lanka to victory in the T20 World Cup in March 2014. He retired from ODI cricket after the 2015 Cricket World Cup where he established an all time tournament record of scoring four consecutive centuries. At the age 37, his retirement from the Test cricket cannot be far off.

**Beyond Cricket**

We have made the case that through different and difficult paths, Murali and Sanga have risen to the pinnacles of world cricket. However, as icons and as ambassadors for Sri Lanka, their impact has been felt beyond cricket.

While both Murali and Sanga, whose faces adorn numerous advertising billboards around Colombo and other parts of Sri Lanka, have earned money by endorsing products, they also lend their names and make their presence felt for charities, having established their own charitable trusts. Murali partnered with his Sinhalese manager Kushil Gunasekara to establish the charity ‘*Foundation of Goodness*.’ With the support of cricketers and administrators from England and Australia, this charity raises funds to support local needs in Seenigama in the Sinhalese dominated south of the island. The foundation helps children, providing education and training, health care, livelihoods and sporting facilities.

When the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004 devastated many parts of Sri Lanka, including Seenigama, Murali mobilised resources to bring aid to the affected people. Due in Seenigama 20 minutes later for a prize distribution ceremony involving his charity, he narrowly escaped death himself when the tsunami hit. In the subsequent rebuilding efforts where cement was badly needed, Murali signed a barter deal with the Lafarge Cement Company to provide cement in return for his endorsements of their products. Subsequently, with the support of Bryan Adams, the Canadian pop-star, Murali raised funds to build a swimming pool in Seenigama where hundreds died needlessly because of their inability to swim.

With the ending of the war in 2009, Murali was also able to extend his charitable work to the Tamil dominated areas of the north, and is building a sports complex, IT and English training centres, and other facilities in Mankulam. In June 2004, Muralitharan was appointed by the United Nations World Food Program as an ambassador to fight hunger among school children.[[32]](#endnote-33)

Sanga has also been involved in charitable work, giving of his time and money. For some time, he has been an ambassador for the ICC's ‘Think Wise’ campaign, a partnership with UNAIDS and UNICEF that works to eliminate stigma and discrimination and promote HIV and Aids awareness. The Test playing nations are home to around a third of the world's population living with HIV.[[33]](#endnote-34)

In Sri Lanka, Sanga has also been helping to bridge the ethnic gap, often in joint efforts with Murali. Large crowds of Tamil people in the north crowded to meet Sanga and get his autograph when he attended the 2014 Murali Harmony Cup cricket tournament in Jaffna. The **Murali Harmony Cup tournament is a reconciliation T20 tournament to promote community-building and friendship in post-war Sri Lanka and is organised by the Foundation of Goodness – the charity that now involves Murali, Sanga, their cricket teammate Mahela Jayawardene and other friends and colleagues. In this tournament, cricket is played between schools and clubs, both men’s and women’s, from the Sinhalese dominated south and the Tamil dominated north. The matches are held in the north, which was deprived of sporting activities for decades during the war.**

**Final Thoughts**

Murali and Sanga, two all-time greats in the world of cricket, were both born in Sri Lanka but came from two often antagonistic ethnic groups and from two very different social milieus. Playing cricket for the same team but with decidedly opposing skills and facing common adversaries over many years and in many different parts of the world no doubt reinforced their mutual respect for each other and their joint efforts for national reconciliation.

**Together they represent the hopes and strengths of Sri Lanka, perhaps best embodied in the poem “Call of Lanka” by the Rev. Walter. S. Senior who was Vice Principal of Sanga’s school, Trinity, from 1906 to 1916 who almost presciently wrote:**

**But most shall he sing of Lanka  
In the brave new days that come,  
When the races all have blended  
And the voice of strife is dumb;  
When we leap to a single bugle,  
March to a single drum**

**~~….[this needs heft here. Perhaps flesh out a bit more in terms of what they represent then as now, leading toward~~**

**~~the below quote.]~~**

[~~http://www.poetryatlas.com/poetry/poem/4354/the-call-of-lanka.html~~](http://www.poetryatlas.com/poetry/poem/4354/the-call-of-lanka.html)

[**~~http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W.\_S.\_Senior~~**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._S._Senior)

As Sanga remarked to England’s *The Guardian* newspaper in 2011, “It is always going to be something like sport that brings people together ... cricket has been the heal-all of social evils, the one thing that held the country together during 30 years of war.

**Until and unless Sri Lanka again produces such giants of world cricket, who are able to break many existing world records and set the bar even higher for cricketers of all nations, Murali and Sanga will be remembered as the greatest cricketers of all time to have emerged from the once minnows of world cricket, Sri Lanka. Having a written history etched in palm leaf scrolls (called Ola leafs) going back more than two thousand years, Sri Lankans love to quote heroes from their history, especially when the present looks bleak. Hence without doubt, Sri Lankans will look back on this duo with great reverence. Like with great vintages, the memory and folklore of their great doings on the world stage will improve with age.**

**Tim – in terms of the above section, try to think here in terms of what appears to be the way folks remember them as they age out of the spotlight and eventually into death. Will they be hailed as conquerors, cogs in a bigger machine, take charge men ignoring boundaries, political pawns whose celebrity gave afforded them privilege….anything that can offer readers a chance to put who these guys were and are into a broader and perhaps even deeper perspective.**

**PS – Please have a look at the below. Some missing info in the notes (dates, years, publication info, etc.).**

1. **Endnotes:**

   An over consists of six balls delivered by a bowler to batsmen. In a 50-overs match (as in one-day cricket), the maximum number of allowable overs by one bowler is 10. Thus, Sri Lanka showed great confidence in their young star Murali by allowing him to bowl 10 overs in the World Cup final. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. A wicket, also known as a ‘dismissal’ is the baseball equivalent of an ‘out’. In one-day cricket a team’s batting innings terminates when either 10 wickets have occurred or 50 overs (i.e. 300 balls) have been bowled. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. De Silva, K.M. (University of California Press, 1981). “A History of Sri Lanka” [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. ‘First class’ in this context refers to a match between two international teams. In modern parlance, ‘first-class’ means a match played by two teams of eleven players over a duration of three days and is usually the highest level of cricket in any country. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. In terms of international play, where lasting reputations are forged, a cricket ‘Test’ match is the original and longest version of cricket. Test matches can last up to five days, often with no winner, which may sound strange to those familiar with North American sports. The term ‘Test’ comes from fact that the five-day game is a gruelling test of the skills and enduring power required by the two teams. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Wisden Cricketers’ Almanack. *ESPNcricinfo-*Online Archive : 1864-2014 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. Hopps, David (2001). “The Speech that set free Sri Lanka cricket and glued a troubled nation”. *The Guardian.-*Retrieved 18th May 2011. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. Ryder, Rowland. “Nothing is certain in cricket-except its uncertainty, 1974 - The Glorious uncertainty”. Wisden, *ESPNcricinfo* [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Roebuck Peter. (Nov 05, 2010). “The Kandy man”. *The Age.* [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. De Silva, P.L. (1997). ["The growth of Tamil paramilitary nationalisms: Sinhala Chauvinism and Tamil responses"](http://www.informaworld.com/index/778260866.pdf). *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* **20** (1): 97–118 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. De Silva, A.C. (March 16, 2008). ["Murali won Observer Schoolboy Cricketer of the Year title in 1991"](http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2008/03/16/spo01.asp). *Sunday Observer.* [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. “Murali is a unique bowler in modern cricket: Moody” (Dec 3, 2007). [*www.dnaindia.com*](http://www.dnaindia.com) [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. [“Muralitharan no-balled by Hair](http://web.archive.org/web/20071217053020/http:/www.mcg.org.au/default.asp?pg=historydisplay&articleid=196)”. (Dec 17, 2007). *The People's Ground.* [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Goonetilleke, Ravi, [“Biomechanical Tests done on MuttiahMuralitharan at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology”](http://www-ieem.ust.hk/dfaculty/ravi/murali01.html)- Retrieved 28th January 2008. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. Ferdinands E.D. Rene, Kersting G. Uwe (Sep, 2007) ["An evaluation of biomechanical measures of bowling action legality in cricket"](http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a781625456~db=all~jumptype=rss).[*Sports Biomechanics*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sports_Biomechanics)*;* ["ICC relaxes bowling regulations"](http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/cricket/4238403.stm) (Feb 5, 2005). *BBC Sport Cricket* (London). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. Veera, Sriram. “Murali gets 800, Sri Lanka win by ten wickets”. *ESPNcricinfo*- Retrieved 22nd July 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. “[Principal Delighted With Former Student Sangakkara](http://www.cricketworld.com/principal-delighted-with-former-student-sangakkara/12329.htm)” (July 14, 2007). *Cricket World.* [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Jayasundara, Upananda (Feb 12, 2005). ["Sangakkara receives 'Super Lions' Award"](http://www.dailynews.lk/2005/02/12/spo06.html). [*Daily News*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daily_News_(Sri_Lanka))*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Jayasundara, Upananda (Feb 12, 2005). ["Sangakkara receives 'Super Lions' Award"](http://www.dailynews.lk/2005/02/12/spo06.html). [*Daily News*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daily_News_(Sri_Lanka))*;* [*http://trinitycollege.lk/the-ryde-gold-medal*](http://trinitycollege.lk/the-ryde-gold-medal) [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. [***http://trinitycollege.lk/the-ryde-gold-medal***](http://trinitycollege.lk/the-ryde-gold-medal) [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
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22. Epasinghe, Premasara (Sep 29, 2010). ["Kumar Sangakkara’s long journey to world’s leading batsman"](http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=7821). [*The Island*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Island_(Sri_Lanka)). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. Isam, Mohammad (Dec 25, 2012). ["Bangladesh news: Mushfiqur bags Masters degree in History"](http://www.espncricinfo.com/bangladesh/content/story/598478.html). [*ESPNcricinfo*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricinfo)  [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. Dobell, George (June 22, 2012). “A degree in life, not just cricket”. *ESPNcricinfo* [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. “South Africa in Sri Lanka (July 20-24, 2000) – Scorecard of the 1st Test”. *ESPNcricinfo* [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. A century is a cricket term that denotes scoring at least 100 runs in a match. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. Miller, Andrew (June 15, 2011). “[Reluctant Sangakkara admits captaincy headache](http://www.espncricinfo.com/england-v-sri-lanka-2011/content/story/519173.html)”. *ESPNcricinfo* [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
28. Pathiravithana, S.R. (Sep 18, 2011). ["Kumar says Test cricket is the pinnacle"](http://sundaytimes.lk/110918/Sports/spt09.html). [*The Sunday Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sunday_Times_(Sri_Lanka))*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
29. “Kumar Sangakkara’s 2011 MCC spirit of cricket Cowdrey Lecture in full”. *The Telegraph, UK.* [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
30. Roebuck, Peter (July 5, 2011).["Sangakkara's challenge to cricket"](http://www.espncricinfo.com/magazine/content/story/522022.html). [*ESPNcricinfo*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ESPNcricinfo) [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
31. “[Statistics / Statsguru / KC Sangakkara"](http://stats.espncricinfo.com/ci/engine/player/50710.html?class=2;template=results;type=batting).*ESPNcricinfo*  [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
32. Austin, Charlie (Jan 5, 2005). ["Murali leads from the front"](http://content-aus.cricinfo.com/srilanka/content/story/145035.html). *ESPNcricinfo* [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
33. “Cricket unites for people living with HIV on World Aids Day” (Nov 29, 2010). *UNICEF;* Bull, Andy (June 02, 2011). “Kumar Sangakkara focuses on HIV charity work after Test debacle”. *The Guardian.*  [↑](#endnote-ref-34)