

YES, NO, IT’S COMPLICATED

Has India earned the number one spot in Test cricket?

YES



ANDREW ALDERSON is a cricket correspondent with the New Zealand Herald

The victory in Australia suggests the sport’s momentum could stay with India

The answer to this can be confirmed by simply checking the rankings, but where’s the fun in that? Instead of surrendering the joy of the game to an avalanche of data, sometimes relying on instinct is welcome.

Let’s apply a comparative hypothesis: Which international team would fans, donning their impartial hats, want to watch? The answer for me? India. The current team brings enviable qualities to the Test arena. This verdict is based less on the pioneering and comprehensive 2-1 away series win over Australia, their first in 71 years, and more on

the team’s relatively new holistic approach. They play with soul and a sense of respect, seen in how they walked around the boundary to thank fans after defeating Australia by 137 runs at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Playing the team card

Yes, the incumbent Australians were vulnerable and India seized the opportunity to punish them, but the Indian team also lost the Test series in South Africa and England last year. This side, like New Zealand in January 2013 under captain Brendon McCullum and coach

Mike Hesson, had an epiphany in South Africa 12 months earlier.

Coach Ravi Shastri alluded to it in the post-match press conference in Sydney. At one point they decided “there’s a certain brand of cricket we’re going to play... we’re going to find out what suits the team best and take it forward from there”. Captain Virat Kohli also struck a chord with New Zealand fans now acclimatised to Kane Williamson’s selfless approach.

When asked to single out the best contribution in the India-Australia series, the skipper played the team card. He said the 66 balls faced by Hanuma Vihari to see off



the new ball on Boxing Day in Melbourne was “as big as anyone getting a 100”. This came straight from the Williamson playbook. If Kohli comes anywhere near maintaining those sentiments long term, his tenure will be revered.

The Kohli factor

The Indian team is formidable and watchable. Their capabilities have been obvious in Australia. Cheteshwar Pujara and Jasprit Bumrah were especially unstoppable. However, the most important human component to any sustained success will be Kohli. His playing ability has been enhanced with the cap-

taincy, and he is among the most powerful leaders of any sports team worldwide. I witnessed the energy he can generate during the New Zealand-India Test at Eden Gardens in 2016. Kohli stood in the slip cordon and raised his palms skyward. The higher they went the louder the crowd roared. He was a human amplifier.

If Kohli embraces Indian fans’ love of the game and defends against slipping into a cult of personality, he will become a captain loved at home and respected abroad. At 30, he’s a poster child for a savvy generation of Indian millennials. They know the power they wield, and they defer to no one. He only has to avoid getting lured into a narcissistic echo chamber and be-

lieving the hype.

The coup in Australia suggests the sport’s momentum could stay with India for the foreseeable future, given the talent on show anywhere from the Ranji Trophy to the Indian Premier League. The IPL investment has matured over 11 editions into a jewel, albeit a gaudy one, on the cricketing landscape. For local players to get an annual audience with the world’s best is of priceless development value.

If the qualities of empathy, passion and independence are replenished in the Indian dressing room to feed the team culture, and the combative approach of the players simmers but never boils over into poisonous aggression, a dynasty could be propagated.

NO



NAROTTAM PURI is a cricket expert and commentator

India has to be at the top for a certain period to be accorded the tag of best

History has been made. I followed the Test series closely and was hardly surprised by the reactions in the media. Indian cricket was on a high after winning its first ever Test series in Australia. True, this has taken a long time, but I must give credit to Virat Kohli’s team for having set new a benchmark. India first went to Australia in 1947-48 to play against Don Bradman’s invincible team and did not cause any embarrassment to its supporters. After that there were some fascinating contests between India and Australia,

but it took the current team to achieve the much-awaited result. Does the feat make this team the best ever or the number one team in the world? I don’t think so.

Need for consistency

To become the best team you have to achieve longevity in the field. Cricketers like Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid and Anil Kumble are considered greats because they performed over a period of time. Virat Kohli certainly falls in that category because he has

excelled consistently in all formats of the game. We will not compare him with the others but hail him as one of the greats of the current era. I am sure connoisseurs of the game would agree that you have to be at the top for a certain period of time to be accorded the tag of best or greatness.

One swallow does not make a summer. This applies to the current team. It beat Australia in Australia, a much laudable effort, but it lost the Test series in South Africa (1-2) and England (1-4) last year. Let me add that India played some outstanding cricket in 2018 but you



can’t set aside the defeats in South Africa and England. The process of rankings that the International Cricket Council follows is one thing, but my simple understanding is that India has to win a series in South Africa and again in England (the last time it did was in 2007) to be truly acknowledged as the best team in the world.

Defeating a depleted side

There is no need to get carried away. It is well-known that Australia was a depleted side and India, going by the pre-tour expectations, was strong on paper. Under Kohli’s

captaincy, India has emerged as both highly competitive and competent to make history. I remember the 1977-78 team under Bishan Singh Bedi taking on a depleted Australian but failing to win the series. A key factor then was some poor umpiring. It must be accepted that this was not the best Australian team to play a home series. True, it was not India’s fault that it was playing a weak opposition, but you can’t discount a fact which even former Australian greats have noted: This was a very weak batting line-up.

I had commented on the Melbourne Test in 1981 when India pulled off a magnificent victory

against a strong Australian team. The win at Adelaide in 2003 was memorable. And how can one forget the victory at Perth in 2008? It remains one of India’s finest against Australia. All those wins came against highly competitive opponents. India’s win against New Zealand in 1967-68 under Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi was its first Test series triumph overseas, just as the latest one under Kohli was the first Test series win in Australia. Both, to my mind, are equally laudable as indeed were India’s first series wins in West Indies and England in 1971. Let’s applaud this team’s victory but never forget that earlier victories were no less significant.

IT’S COMPLICATED



DWARKANATH SANZGIRI is a journalist and has authored books on cricket

Ratings are more about numbers and do not present the full picture

India won a Test series Down Under for the first time. This historic feat has expectedly created euphoria. Everybody is rating the team as the best in the world. Is India the champion of Test cricket? Is it the best team in the world? The answer is a little complicated.

The limits of statistics

The International Cricket Council ranking system has already put India at the top of the table. Though this system takes into consideration

the relative strengths of various teams and the different playing conditions the world over, the ratings are more about numbers and do not present a perfect picture. Cricket is a game that has its own vagaries beginning with the toss and the different type of pitches and atmospheric conditions. In fact, the intrigue that every session of Test cricket presents to the fans is the most attractive feature of the format. That’s why I am not convinced that you can evaluate a team

on the basis of statistics alone.

In terms of statistics, India is the best, but mostly at home. In contemporary cricket, most teams are unbeatable at home and we saw that when India played in South Africa and England last year and the home teams won convincingly. The issue is not winning at home but failing overseas. India has a history of failing overseas. The team has been referred to by critics as tigers at home but rabbits outside the subcontinent. Of course, one can argue that times are changing. The series win



in Australia is a welcome change for Indian cricket, a change that has taken a long time.

The major reason for India’s failure overseas has been the weakness of the batsmen in dealing with swing and seam; the batsmen were ill-equipped in terms of technique to tackle bounce. The team also lacked the bowling ammunition to retaliate, because spin was not going to take the team forward when playing away. All that changed in Australia.

Losing to South Africa and England did not really mean India was

swept aside. There were moments of dominance for India. Virat Kohli’s team had learnt to fight. The toss played a significant role in deciding the course of the match in England, where the conditions, other than the pitch, play a crucial part. The batsmen could not give the bowlers a shield of 300 runs and it impacted the contest.

Conquering teams overseas

A champion team must conquer the opponents in their backyards. India has not done that, unlike teams led by Clive Lloyd and Richie Benaud. Don Bradman’s ‘Invincibles’ was the ultimate team. Steve

Waugh was the modern Alexander in cricket until he ran into the Sourav Ganguly-led team in India in 2001. India today looks the best-balanced team in the world after the success in Australia. No team in today’s cricket has beaten all its opponents in away series, which puts all the teams on the same pedestal. India can claim to have the best bowling attack for all conditions. It can also claim to have the world’s best batsman (Virat Kohli) and fast bowler (Jasprit Bumrah). The journey to become the best has begun but we need to wait before pronouncing India to be the best in the world in comprehensive terms.

SINGLE FILE

Caught in the babble

Unless the political project of Hindutva is tackled head-on, pseudo-scientific claims will continue to be made

SRINIVASAN RAMANI



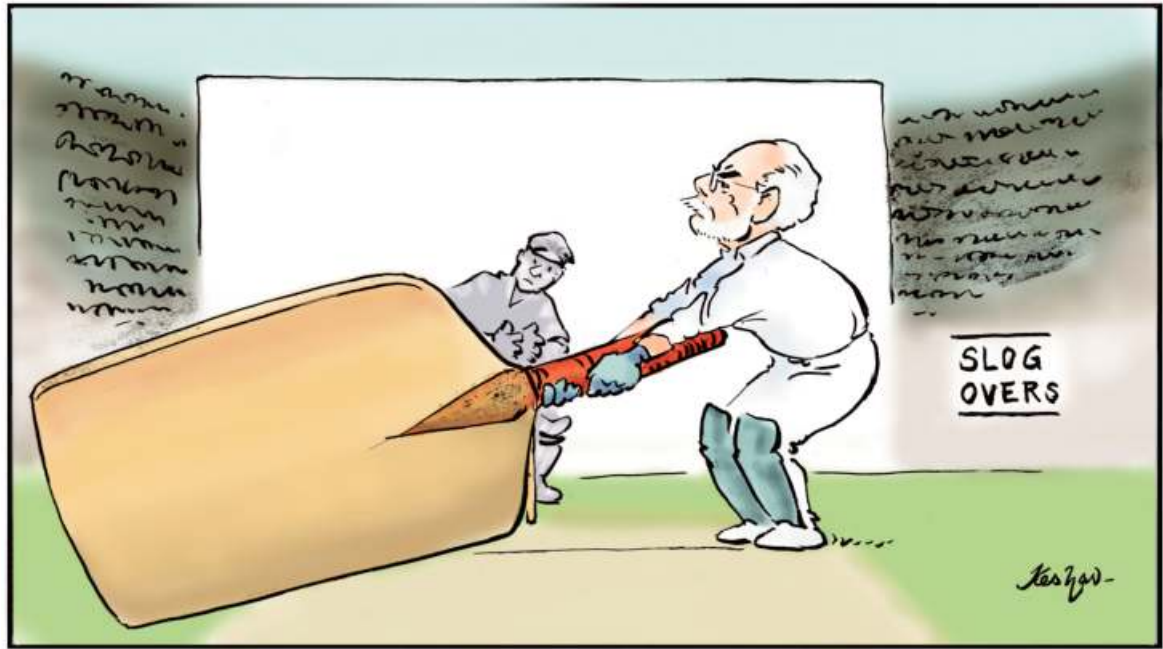
Much has been written about the nonsense that finds its way into the Indian Science Congress. There is a reason why pseudo-scientific beliefs are uttered at such prestigious events. They are shared by politicians in power and this inspires their repetition despite the widespread criticism they receive every time they are aired in public. Unscientific belief systems and grand political narratives have a symbiotic relationship.

The most infamous examples of this relationship in the near past are the eugenics project that had Nazi Germany in its thrall and Lysenkoism in Stalin’s Soviet Union. As the author Siddhartha Mukherjee eloquently explains in his book, *The Gene: An Intimate History*, these two projects positioned themselves as paradigmatic opposites apropos the science of genetics. The former emphasised “selective breeding” of human beings to achieve “desired characteristics” by working on genetic engineering, while the latter rejected Mendelian inheritance and the concept of the gene itself. Both these belief systems served their ideological state apparatuses well – eugenics fit well with the glorification of the “perfect Aryan race” and Nazi ideology, while Lysenkoism and its belief in what Mukherjee calls the “complete pliability” of identity served the totalitarian collectivisation project launched by Stalin.

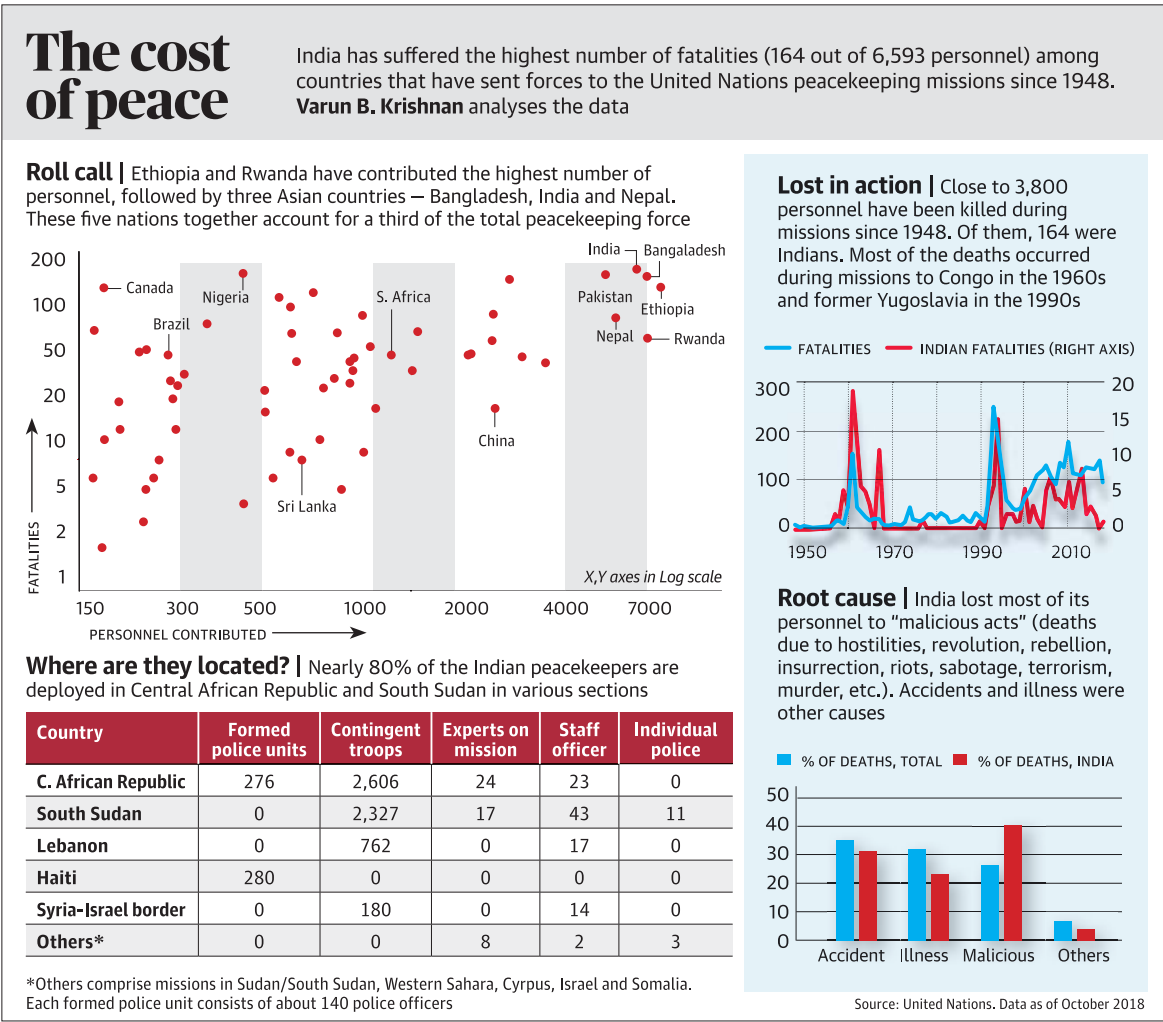
In India’s case, the belief systems are less consequential but equally problematic. Repeatedly, there is talk of a “glorious past” described in Hindu mythology, which is uncritically taken as fact. These “facts” can only be understood if it is assumed that the technological advancements of today were already achieved in the past. It is also the same epistemology that drives these belief systems to attribute miraculous powers to cow urine and to promote research on how dung and urine can cure cancer.

The political project that these belief systems are bound with is, of course, Hindutva, that bases itself on a monistic version of Brahminical Hinduism, whose apogee was supposedly in ancient India. The warriors of Hindutva in the Sangh Parivar therefore seek to revive the “glorious ancient Hindu past” in a modern, technological world. This project seeks to identify with the instrumentalism of the technological progress achieved today without having to engage with the phenomena that brought about modernity. Western Enlightenment that emphasised reason, pluralism and a grounding in philosophies that go beyond abstract metaphysics is therefore anathema. Also unacceptable is the idea that profound achievements in areas such as astronomy and mathematics in ancient India were a product of contested ideologies and philosophies that included materialist and non-Vedic thought. Unless the political project of Hindutva is tackled head-on ideologically, we will continue to receive more pearls of unscientific wisdom.

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DATA POINT



FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 11, 1969

India’s proposal on dispute settlement

A joint machinery to resolve Indo-Pakistan problems had been suggested by India to Pakistan. A proposal to this effect was conveyed to the Pakistan High Commissioner, Mr. Sajjad Hyder, by Mr. Kewal Singh, Secretary, External Affairs Ministry, here [New Delhi] to-day [Jan. 10]. Mr. Hyder was given the text of the statement made by the Prime Minister and her Press Conference on January 1. In particular Mr. Hyder’s attention was drawn to the Prime Minister’s offer to set up a joint machinery for the resolution of Indo-Pakistan differences along with the conclusion of a no-war pact. The Prime Minister’s proposal is a follow-up of her earlier offer of a no-war pact.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 11, 1919.

Presidency Cricket Match.

So this great game of the seasons is after all coming off to-morrow [January 12] at Chepauk and all S Madras will be there for certain. The weather too so far has been all that could be desired, so that it looks as though a fast and true cricket is awaiting the batsman. Thus he will indeed be a lucky skipper who wins the toss and secures for his side the first tenancy of the wickets. Both sides have made their final choice of players and the lists too have already been published in these columns. Looking at the Indian side, one is at first struck with its tremendous batting strength. In fact it would be hard to improve it in this line. Coming now to individuals, Dr. V. Ramanjulu stands a clan by himself. He is as sound as he is brilliant, a rare combination indeed. In short he is the most finished batsman of the side. Then comes Ramaswami, his own brother. He is even more dangerous than his great brother, for playing left handed, he takes most bowlers at a disadvantage. As for Yogannathan, he is unquestionably a batsman of an high order though he has not been particularly successful in the past in these games.

CONCEPTUAL

Joint supply

ECONOMICS

This refers to a situation where the supply of two or more goods is inextricably linked. The increase or decrease in the supply of one of the goods will cause the supply of the other good to also increase or decrease at the same time. The increase in the supply of cows, for instance, simultaneously increases the supply of both milk as well as meat in the market. So the prices of both milk and meat will be affected by the rearing of more cows by farmers. The demand for jointly supplied goods, however, may not be commensurate with the available supply of each of the goods. The demand for milk, for instance, may be greater than the demand for meat in certain markets.

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