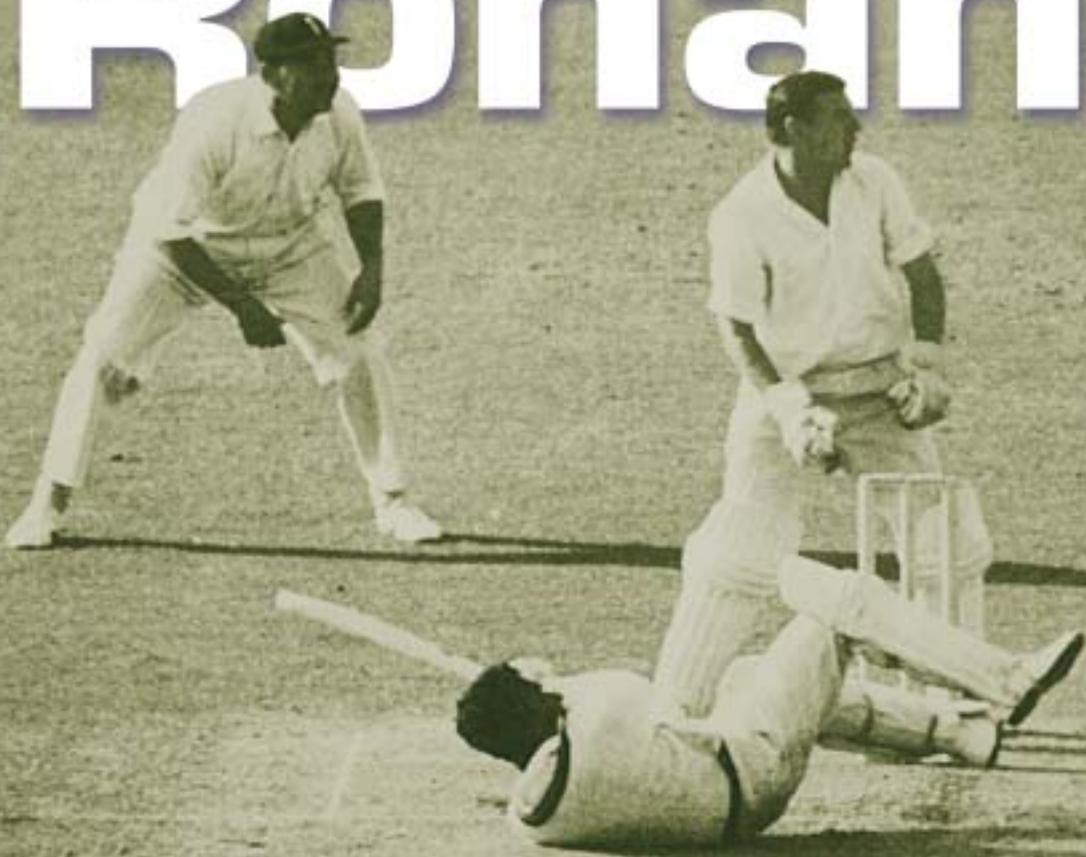


Clem Seecharan

Cricket and Indian Identity in
Colonial Guyana 1890s – 1960s

from
Ranji
to
Rohan



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From Ranji to Rohan

Cricket and Indian Identity in Colonial Guyana 1890s - 1960s

by Clem Seecharan

From the late 19th century, cricket was central to being West Indian in the British West Indies. By the 1890s a small Indian middle class in British Guiana (Guyana), descendants of 'bound coolies' taken from India after slavery, began to advance their own credentials of belonging to the region. They sought to forge an identity inspired by Mother India's cultural resurgence, in conjunction with the Creole sensibility of their new homeland, permeated by British imperial culture.

The mastery of the great Indian cricketer in England, Prince Ranjitsinhji 'Ranji' (1872-1933), who possessed the imagination of the cricketing world before the Great War, stirred Indo-Guyanese to accelerated proficiency in the game. They claimed him as their own, an antidote to the 'coolie' stain.

This book explores the role of cricket in shaping Indo-Guyanese identity, from Ranji's example, through the seminal achievement of cricketers such as J.A. Veerasawmy and Chatterpaul 'Doosha' Persaud, to the reliable craftsmanship of Joe Solomon and the mercurial genius of Rohan Kanhai. This is framed by the complex socio-cultural milieu of colonial Guyana, culminating in the shifting perceptions by Indo-Guyanese of their two heroes towards the end of Empire: Rohan Kanhai (born 1935) and Cheddi Jagan (1918-1997). They were both from Plantation, Port Mourant, a fascinating place.

But the Indo-Guyanese narrative has no space for another gifted Test cricketer from Port Mourant, Basil Butcher. He is African-Guyanese. This book attempts to redress that. It is a study of the "passions and forces ... embodied in great popular heroes." [C.L.R. James]

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