

Article

Scaling the Standing of *The Diary of a Cricketer's Wife: An Unusual Memoir* in the Canon of Memoir Writing

Dr Satyajit Patil

Professor of English, Pemraj Sarda College, Ahilyanagar, MS, India;
satyajitpatil76@gmail.com

Accepted version published on 5th August 2025

DOI <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16745022>

Abstract: This paper aims to explore *The Diary of a Cricketer's Wife: An Unusual Memoir* by Puja Pujara, not just as a personal story but as a significant contribution to the memoir genre. It looks closely at the book's narrative style, thematic richness, and cultural relevance, particularly through the lens of gender and emotional labour. By comparing it with established memoirs, the paper reflects on how this unique account fits into, and potentially expands, the literary canon of "self-life writing".

Keywords: memoir; canon; gender; self-life writing; domesticity

Introduction

"Self-life writing" (also called "life writing") is an umbrella term that encompasses different forms of personal narratives – autobiography, memoir/reminiscences, diary, letters, etc. – all focused on the author's own life and experiences. It is a broad genre that explores identity, memory, and the construction of self through writing. Essentially, it is the practice of writing about one's own life and experiences.

Memoir, a form of self-life writing, is a focused narrative, often highlighting a particular period, theme, or event in a person's life. It opens doors to deeply personal stories while reflecting the wider social and cultural realities in which those lives unfold. Memoirs exist somewhere between autobiography and creative nonfiction, balancing personal memory with narrative craft. The dividing line between autobiography and memoir or reminiscence is skinny. It is because both are reflective and are based on individual experience. Thus, every autobiography is in some respect a memoir and vice versa. Still, they are vitally different from each other in the direction of the writer's attention. Dr. C. L. N. Prakash elaborates upon this distinction as follows:

A memoir ...is a record of events written by a person having intimate knowledge of them and based on personal observation... A memoir is not an autobiography because it is only about a part of the author's life, not his/her whole life. A memoir focuses on the event that is in some way important to the author...Memoirs contain a combination of memories and the author's thoughts and feelings about the memories. The author of the memoir may not specifically tell you his or her feelings about the event, but may indicate his or her feelings through the actions of the characters. Memoirs may deal with time differently; some may be 'many-moment' and others may be 'moment-in-time' pieces. Authors may embellish small details or the exact wording of a dialogue in a memoir. Most writers try to describe their memoirs as accurately as possible. Many memoirs are written in the first person. However, some writers use the third-person to increase the amount of reflection and narration in the piece (47-48). In other words, while in autobiography, the focus of attention is on the self, in a memoir or reminiscence, it is on others.

In Indian English writing, the memoir has long been the domain of political figures, spiritual leaders, and artists. *The Diary of a Cricketer's Wife* adds a fresh and unusual voice to this tradition—that of a woman closely linked to the world of cricket, but living in its margins. Puja Pujara's account captures the emotional and everyday challenges of being married to a public figure, while also offering a quietly powerful commentary on fame, domesticity, and identity. This paper considers the literary strengths of the memoir and its potential standing in the broader field of memoir writing.

Philippe Lejeune's idea of the "autobiographical pact" emphasizes how central truth and identity are to this form of writing (Lejeune 13). Many widely recognized memoirs—such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, or Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father*—are essentially remembered not just for their depth, but for how they speak to broader cultural or political experiences.

In India, memoirs tend to be centred on public achievements and political legacy. Stories from domestic or semi-public spheres, especially from the perspectives of women, are relatively rare. Divided into four Parts, *The Diary of a Cricketer's Wife* enters this space with a voice that is both personal and culturally resonant. Most memoirs revolve around the life of the person telling the story. Rarely do we get to hear from those whose lives are shaped by another's public career. Puja Pujara breaks this mould. As the wife of Cheteshwar Pujara—one of India's most dedicated Test cricketers—she brings the reader behind the scenes of cricketing life, not from the pitch but from the sidelines, where emotional endurance is just as vital. Right from the first sentence, she makes her intentions clear by keeping Cheteshwar on the centre stage, while putting herself on the periphery. Of course, while recollecting her sweet-sour memories as a (less-known) cricketer's wife, she successfully establishes herself as an independent individual with an identity of her own. In a refreshingly honest manner, she offers a grounded, human take on what it means to support a sportsman's life rather than glorifying the sport or her husband's fame. Her diary entries are often raw, emotional, and full of small yet powerful insights.

One of the central themes of the memoir is emotional labour. This quiet, unrecognized work goes into keeping a household and a relationship afloat under the pressures of public life. Whether she is planning meals to suit her husband's strict vegetarianism or withholding difficult news to keep him focused during matches, Puja's reflections are strikingly relatable. They mirror those found in works like Michelle Obama's *Becoming*, where behind-the-scenes sacrifices often go unnoticed.

The Diary of a Cricketer's Wife also examines the problematic balance between being part of a public figure's life and preserving one's private emotions. A particularly poignant moment is when Puja chooses not to reveal a family emergency to Cheteshwar during a high-stakes Test series—a moment of personal resilience and quiet strength.

The memoir's structure—comprising short, dated entries—feels immediate and authentic. It allows for emotional variation and spontaneous reflection, typical of compelling memoirs. Puja does not dramatize her life, nor does she downplay its complexities. Her tone is clear, relatable, and sometimes humorously self-aware—qualities that make the memoir both readable and credible. Cricket is often described as a religion in India, and this memoir gives us a behind-the-scenes look at how it impacts family life, travel, routines, and relationships. It is not just about one family's story; it is a subtle commentary on the nation's sporting culture.

Puja's memoir is not just about cricket—it is about being a woman navigating identity, duty, and personal dreams while living in someone else's spotlight. It challenges the genre of the sports memoir, which often centres male voices and achievements, by placing the emotional and domestic toil of a spouse at the heart of the narrative. In doing so, it contributes meaningfully to feminist life writing and Indian cultural studies.

While fictional, Meg Wolitzer's *The Wife* explores similar emotional terrains—the hidden contributions of a woman behind a successful man. Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night*, a memoir from conflict-ridden Kashmir, offers another example of how personal experience becomes political commentary. Puja Pujara's work, though quieter in tone, adds to this tradition by emphasizing lived experience over spectacle. No wonder the book has been praised for its honesty and unique perspective, even receiving support from cricket legends like Anil Kumble and Rahul Dravid. As one news outlet noted, this is "the first time a sportsman's better half...presented his story in her words."

For the book to enter academic discourse, it will need to be engaged by scholars in gender studies, sports culture, and life-writing disciplines. John Guillory's argument that literary canonization often requires cultural validation as much as literary quality (Guillory 37) is particularly relevant here. *The Diary of a Cricketer's Wife* certainly has the quality—it now needs the academic attention.

To sum up, Puja Pujara's *The Diary of a Cricketer's Wife* brings something new to the world of memoirs. By focusing on the emotional complexities and invisible labour of life alongside a public figure, it stretches the boundaries of what memoirs can do. It is a gentle, yet decisive contribution to the genre—one that deserves a place in future literary discussions, classrooms, and canon-building efforts. As we move toward more

inclusive and diverse storytelling, memoirs like this will help shape a richer, more representative literary landscape.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data sharing policy does not apply to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Works cited

Guillory, John. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. Edited by Paul John Eakin, translated by Katherine Leary, University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Obama, Michelle. *Becoming*. Crown Publishing Group, 2018.

Prakash, C. L. N. *Reflections III: an anthology of prose, poetry, and fiction*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Pujara, Puja, and Namita Kala. *The Diary of a Cricketer's Wife: A Very Unusual Memoir*. HarperCollins India, 2025.

Wolitzer, Meg. *The Wife*. Scribner, 2003.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of Magnus Publishing and/or the editor(s). Magnus Publishing and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.