

The ultimate fun called cricket

(My Autobiography)



- Saurabh Choudhary

"Prelude"

My dear friends, this is the international cricketer Saurabh Choudhary, writing my autobiography under this title "The Ultimate Fun Called Cricket" narrating the story of my life from birth to retirement. I got motivated to write this book getting inspired from Sachin's book. When I read his book in 2014, that joy of that innocent love for cricket & the spirit of cricket impressed me that I can also write a similar book. The backgrounds & values of most of Sachin's & my upbringings are similar & we have developed on identical virtues. At this time in 2018, when I have completed 18 years pf my international career, I am feeling that WC 2019 will be an ideal time for me to retire after if we win this WC. My career after 5 WCs will come to a full circle & I can then look back at my recreational desires & move on. This is although premature to talk about still as the WC is a tough competition & I shouldn't be talking about it easily, & shouldn't be expressing excitement on retirement as I should be respecting the work of cricket, but this is still evening of my career & I just want to say that I am summarising my career in this. So, here am I, Saurabh Choudhary, narrating the story of what I have lived as **"The ultimate fun called cricket"**.

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Chapter 1: My historical background

"As you put in, so shall you receive. This world is a balanced system of effort & output. You get as you give. God has made human life with full justice to your karmas & character with full scope for enjoyment & happiness."

- These were the words of my father which echoed in my ears for long durations during my growing up years as I prepared for my cricket career through my coaching school.

Dad was an idealist and a perfectionist. He lived life with full principals and values. He believed in integrity & spirituality & practised them throughout in all departments. A chartered accountant by profession, he acted the same way in personal life also. He audited the accounts of his company as an Internal Auditor by position & verified it to the concerned authorities for authenticity & validity, similarly, he judged all things from the point of view of good-bad / right-wrong in personal life also & took all the decisions and actions accordingly.

Goodness, integrity & righteousness were the baselines of his character & he taught me the same.

Our family was a typical middle class family with full practise & following of principals & virtues.

Though we were only 3 in the house - Mom, Dad & me, but dad never let me feel the absence of any family or kin. Stories of my grandmother & uncle were common in our proceedings & we lived them with full respect & value.

Mom was an M.Sc. (Computer Science) & taught in a middle school till before marriage. Dad was a C.A. by education & worked in a government bank as Manager.

My childhood passed in a fun-going party-chilling apartment in Sector 61 in Ghaziabad where we lived in a flat in a colony of

working-class people. Dad's bank was PNB whose HQ was in Delhi & this was one of the main branches in Rajnagar where he joined as a Senior Manager in 1974. The house was a three-bedroom flat where we remained from the time of my birth till my purchasing of our bungalow in 2005.

My early days were totally fun-filled in which I played things of my interest in the house with mom & dad ever since gaining consciousness & with my classmates in school & neighbours in society. Cricket was the first proper game we picked up after playing many tiny-tidbit titter-bitter games like "Stapoo" & "Catch me if you can" and was an instant hit with us as we realised the fun of batting hard & hitting shots. Soon we were into routine games of limited-overs-cricket in the games period & evening with full seriousness and passion. Our timetable was a common like any school going child with attending school, doing homework and playing in the society filling all the time, but cricket rose in our importance with processions of it engaging in our games, activity & house activity periods also soon as we experienced the magic of batting hard, hitting big & making high scores.

The turning point came in my life when I gained consciousness & saw some real high-level cricket from my colony boys who were talented in cricket which hooked me & drew me towards following a dream of a career in it.

Before proceeding to the second chapter, I would like to brief about the other members of our family from the generation of my great grandfather. My Bade Babaji (father of my father's father), Sh. H.P. Choudhary, was born in 1902. He participated in our freedom movement till 1947 & entered politics after that. He contested in Lok Sabha elections 3 times, & won once, in 1977, from Ghaziabad. He was a member of the Socialist Party. He had two sons - My grandfather Sh. C.D. Choudhary & his younger brother Kapil Dev Choudhary. My grandfather was a civil servant of the UP administrative service. He joined the police service & remained posted at different places in UP through his career. He was an officer of the 1951 batch. The other son of my great grandfather whom I called Chhote Baba, ran a petrol pump in Calcutta. My father had one sibling - My uncle. Uncle was an MBA & worked in a private company in Meerut. Chhote Baba had 2 sons & my uncle has a son & a daughter, both of whom are engineers. My maternal grandfather was a professor of Hindi & taught in Lucknow University.

Chapter 2: Gaining consciousness & admission in Golden School

I had left the last chapter at the point of my gaining consciousness. This happened when I was 7 years old & was in class II. I had studied some topics of practical mathematics in mathematics that year, like geometry & mensuration. Although I didn't remember any of it as I hadn't gained consciousness till then, but I had some faint idea of what their main subject was like. When I studied multiplication & division of decimal, it occurred to me that I have studied something of importance. I had now completed the complete operation of numbers including decimals i.e. addition, subtraction, multiplication & division. So when I understood this topic, I felt that numbers are of use in world, calculation & computation of them comes into involvement, hence by learning all the arithmetic operations of numbers I have completed a whole branch of science. & Then I started remembering that I had studied things like circles, areas & volumes in the summer which are also of use in real world. Hence I realised that I have grasped something of importance. This opened my mind & I started gaining consciousness. The next thing I remember was that I was seeing a group of colony boys play intense cricket in the campus. They were talented players playing leather-ball cricket. After an evidence of few minutes, I saw how passionate the game of cricket was, how amazing it is to hit shots, how joyful it is to bat & how fun-filling it is to bat hard & long & score big runs & smash boundaries. This practise continued for a few days. They came to play everyday & I watched them everyday. With days, the impression of cricket deepened. These boys were of some skilled level & the result was that I developed an imprint in my mind that cricket is an extremely interesting thing & playing it can entertain me much. Within a fraction of seconds it also went through my mind that being a professional cricketer & having a career in cricket can be a source of joy. I have to do something when I grow up, why shouldn't I make cricket my profession. & The moment this passed from my mind, it excited my psyche like something sensational.

This is the time I took decision that I will test my talent of cricket, whether I have the potential, will work to attain it, try to learn whatever from wherever I can & put my decision before Mom & Dad when I am satisfied.

The next 18 months I did just what I had planned. I played with extra-consciousness in school, tried to explore by experimentation in society & tried to learn the techniques of batting from the people I saw in front & TV. After one & a half years, I had developed some art & could strike a few shots. Then I determined that I'll open up to Mumma & Daddy & promise to maintain my academics at the same level at which I should have sans cricket.

The next question then was to find out from where the coaching of cricket can be taken & is it available in our nearby places. I told my decision to Mummy & Daddy & sought advise from them. I told them that they should see me play themselves & I will go for my plan only if they are satisfied with me.

I also promised to them that I will follow my plan only if there is a coaching academy in our city & the expense isn't much. Mom & Dad saw me play, & were convinced that I am having potential given the fact that I had developed this technique which I had till now myself only by observation. Then they started enquiring about any academies which were there in our city or any nearby place. On investigation it was found that there was a "Golden Cricket Academy" in our neighbourhood head-coached by Sandeep Sir, which was run by a Dubai-based businessman who had hired him to coach the students seeing his high potential & calibre as a mentor. The "Golden Cricket Academy" was an elite academy in our area & trying to get admission in it was a big thing for a career.

I was going on 9 now & could get admission in it only from class IV. The academy was a cricket-cum-academics school & provided full training to students from game to studies. Dad enquired about the details of this thing & discovered a positive answer that the academy is very good, the coach is Sandeep Sir only, the training is exclusive & the admission tests are open to all for attempting. Sandeep Sir told my father on meeting that we will give your child complete support of education if he competes in this test & passes our interview. But this was possible only if I had cricketing talent. The amount of skill that I had developed till now was very elementary & I needed to develop some grit against fast bowling & spin to impress the screeners. I utilised the next four months to intensify my practise & applied myself harder to develop something.

The forms of the GCA were out. & I had to appear for a two round audition to get selected. The first round was adjudged by an assistant coach & Sandeep Sir wasn't there. I had to face 2 overs

from a spinner of my age who was also being tested for the same thing. The boy was very weak & his balls weren't even reaching me. The referee had shortage of time & he thus gave me benefit of doubt & promoted me to the next round of test. This was a tough level, I had to face fast bowling from some boys a little older than me for about ten overs & it was these ten overs which were going to decide what happens to me.

I affirmed to myself that this is the test of my life, & if I have strength, I must pass this convincingly. The balls started coming, hard as expected, I tightened myself from within & put myself across for saving my life. In the 60 balls, I hit ten fours & struck 15-16 shots besides leaving some sparable balls. The result came after two hours & I had been shortlisted for the summer camp.

The summer camp was a session of 2 months & Sandeep Sir had to filter candidates on the basis of the progress made in it & learning grasped & result shown by them by end of this period.

We appeared in this test for 55 days & 20% of us who participated in it had cleared the test, including me.

This was however about what I loved only, while the tasks in hand were many. I had to maintain myself in studies also and also generate something my mom-dad who had risked their everything for my dream and aspiration.

This was a life changer event for me. Sandeep Sir was an icon of a coach with total expertise & command over the art. I was privileged with such an able & competent guide being there in our surrounding & my selection in his school.

Our timetable was very interesting. The school started at 07:10 am & we did exercise during morning assembly. Our coaching then happened for 4 hours. We then got a break after that & then we had tutorial classes.

The coaching of batting in the first few months was basic which we practised in the nets while later it shared time with match practise & inter school tournaments.

We practised both limited & unlimited overs cricket. The performances at this level criteriorised the selection for the inter district, inter state & inter-zonal matches. The format was similar for the under-17 & under-19 levels after which gates opened for the I class.

I was very committed, persevering & brave & this Sandeep Sir noted soon & started giving me extra attention. He scheduled specially practise matches for me & took me to play everywhere wherever the some match was being played. I also obeyed him with full submission & worked hard till I didn't get fatigued.

I worked extra on other aspects also like I did some exercises myself also at home, I was always thinking about the game & practising what I had learnt all the time.

Soon I had attained some rhythm, was meddling the ball well & playing long & big.

Sandeep Sir taught us the perfect technique of batting and we were developing as hard hitters against all types of bowling.

I commuted to school on bicycle and was very excited on this fact that I'll be earning money for my games soon (The matches from the inter-school level onwards provided us some fee). This started from the age of 12. & I was thrilled to give my earnings to my mom-dad.

I especially enjoyed batting against fast bowling & the sound & feel of the stroke of the bat on the ball that every cricketer loves, gave me immense pleasure. This was 1991 & India were playing a Test series in Australia. It was at this time that I started watching cricket on TV.

Daddy supported me fully, enquiring daily what I had learnt the day and where I stood on my development path.

Time moved this way & we learnt the naunces of cricket. Soon I was playing under-15 state level & national level. I had developed keen interest in some subjects also. Social Studies seemed very dear to me & I grasped Sanskrit very easily.

Our school was not affiliated to CBSE but we were enroled for the CBSE exam. I had started thinking what subject I would take at the XI & graduation levels. Science was an obvious choice for my parents. And they comprehended a computer degree for me at college. Daddy brought a computer when I reached class X. Physics, Chemistry were fragrating my technical imaginations. My earnings at this level were giving me immense satisfaction. My fame was also spreading in our circle. My friends had a recognition for me. The traveling to new places also was a fun-filled experience.

I secured 86% marks in class X & 64% in XII. Mom-Dad were satisfied that I was maintaining my academics. The end of my XII

board exam coincided with my selection in the UP I class team for the first time.

Most of my friends at the class XI & XII level had motorbikes. But my father was against it. He said you should own a bike only when you are eligible for the driving license. So I got my bike at the college time, by this time we traveled by flights. The income was also sufficient for my security. I was very happy with my progress. In 1999 I got to play 2 practise matches against Newzealand before the Test series as a member of the Board President's XI. It was on the basis of this series (I hit centuries in both matches) & first class games in the last two years that I got a call up in the thirty probables of the Australia tour.

Playing UP was a big honour & I took it to the second round in the first season of the Ranji Trophy & knockout in the second.

I hit 12 centuries in my 2 seasons of the first class cricket.

A few times when I had played well at the under 19 state & national levels the news of it had come in the local newspaper. Mom-dad felt proud of it.

I was studying DOEACC at the college level & I had cleared the III semester by the time I reached the Australia series.

The institute people were kind enough to be flexible with the exam schedule & allowed me retest whenever I missed the exams due to matches. My friends also were very helpful & provided me the notes of difficult subjects.

Sandeep Sir was a very loving & caring person. He didn't only act as a very competent mentor, but also cared like a father-figure to all of us. & With my selection in the national team for the first time in 2000, he also got appointed as the national coach of India. Thus we walked some more years together.

Chapter 3: Dronacharya Sandeep Sir

Sandeep Sir was an icon of a coach. He radiated passion for the game & zeal for success in a way which infected the surroundings with passionate pleasure & inspired love & commitment for the game. He instructed us basic coaching from age 9 to 12. Then we were pooled for selection in the under-15 levels. I struggled with a bit of rust in the first few months but then I felt energy that I can attain the required success if I apply myself with conscious dedication. With his able torchship I was able to cross the under-15, under-17 & under-19 ladders by the age 14, 16 & 18 respectively & reach the I class level with my majorship. Vijay Merchant was the first major tournament I played at the age of 14, we won the trophy & I was the highest run getter. Along my under-19 days, I got to play Vijay Merchant Trophy one more season. & Through the under-19 & I class years I got to play two seasons each of Cooch Behar Trophy, NKP Salve Trophy, C.K. Naidu Trophy, Vinoo Mankad Trophy & Saurashtra Premier League. We in Golden Academy could stay till the age of 20 & my expiry coincided with my selection in the national team. The year I got to play I class cricket first, Ranji Trophy had happened before the Irani Trophy. Hence I got the chance to play in Irani Trophy also on the basis of my performance in the Ranji Trophy. I scored runs consistently in almost all the series I played through this phase. & Worked back on any weaknesses I encountered ever.

After playing 2 seasons of Ranji, Irani, Duleep, Challenger & Vijay Hazare trophies, I got a chance to play in 2 practise matches against NZ, after which I got a call up in the 30 probables of the practise camp for the BGT on the basis of my centuries in both the matches. Before this, Sandeep Sir was appointed as the new Head Coach of Team India in November 1999. Sandeep Sir announced to us in the academy that he will have to leave for the national duty but there will be some equally competent coach in the academy soon to replace him. In the practise camp, I got selected with high marks. I have been very lucky to have a coach like Sandeep Sir in my

formative coaching & I owe a mountain of gratitudes to him for his
tutions. My Sir Dronacharya.

Chapter 4: Steps through the progressive ladders

Meanwhile, when all this cricket schedule was happening, some things of my other interests also happened. Daddy bought home a desktop PC when I was in class X. He had received a training of MS-Office in office that year & was interested in exploring it with me on our home PC. I learnt some new things on PC. When I passed class XII, dad made me appear for a DOEACC test & then I pursued a computer degree. While the program faculty taught us all the software & hardware subjects, I practised them at home in my personal PC. I learnt driving after attaining the age of 18 & bike riding also, & attained the driving lisense. Dad provided me a bike to commute to college. He got me opened a bank account the same year when I started receiving cheques from UPCA. & I completed a senior secondary with PCM with some online tutions from nearby teachers. All these things enchanted my life & filled colours of bright shade in it & I had a life much enjoyable besides cricket also. The day I completed 20, I got passed out from the Golden Academy & then joined the equally elite Ghaziabad Sports Complex for practise when I am at home.

Chapter 5: Reaching final levels & break into the national team

My big break came in 1999 when I was selected for the 30 probables of the Australia tour. The series was set to be a tough one as India weren't at the top of their game at this time and Australia were raising the bar continuously after winning the World Cup 1999. We needed a few batsmen to face the hostile Australian bowling badly. McGrath & Warne were at their fiercest best & the Oz had discovered a batting rhythm in their line-up. I got selected in the squad with 'A' marks & we dumped ourselves in the fire of our mission. I had been assigned the role of an opener throughout my domestic career & Sachin had assigned the same role to me here also. I fared well in the two practise games & hit fifties in both.

I had loved Test cricket always also because it gave me the permission to play slowly, easily, there was no hurry & this relaxed the job, plus the prospect of batting long & big.

My debut happened on 07 Jan 2000. The experience of playing against the Aussies in Test cricket was more thrilling and satisfying than against any other team as it was the most difficult one & I found the Australians the most naturally talented cricketers of our time as they were the toughest & most aggressive. Steve Waugh was leading the team with an extra-motivated spirit & they're eyeing unprecedented feats under him.

We had potential batsmen in Sachin, Rahul, Sourav & Azhar but the issue was of all of us clicking together. The series passed as expected and we lost it 0-3 with the Aussies outplaying us in all the departments. Our performance had some high points, but in all the show was forgettable.

The first Test began with a solid Aussie post of 441 with Ricky and Steve knocking centuries. We managed 285 in the first inning but succumbed to 195 in the second. The main batsmen of our team were given minimum targets for the series which they were

expected to attain. My target was 210. I managed 200. My performance wasn't upto the mark but the quality of my style & shots provided me grace marks.

The second match was also similar with the only difference that Sachin hit hard in both the innings. I again showed some resilience with 38 & 26.

Indian cricket had always been burderned with the expectation of 2-3 players delivering the output of the whole team. People aren't able to avoid the temptation of placing such expectations ever.

Sachin's hundred & half-hundred in the second match & Laxman's 167 in the third were the only high points in our side in this series, although I consider my average also successful considering that I was a debutant. In the third match, Laxman struck a hammering 167 against their 552. Had I clicked for a century, we could have set up an opening partnership of 300 which could easily take us to 500. But I just maintained a decent average in the series. High scores are the biggest motivaters in Test cricket. Laxman's 167 also charged me to dream of a few big ones of my own. Double centuries are what facinate me the most in Test cricket.

Our 2000 season comprised of Test series against Aus & SA & Asia Cup & Champions Trophy in summer. The tours of Aus & SA also had ODI legs. After the 0-3 loss to Aus in Tests, 0-2 loss to Aus in the finals of the VB Series, 0-2 to SA in Test series & 2-3 in ODI against them, India needed some major change. Sachin took this step & moved down from captaincy. We were in need of someone more aggressive & Sourav Ganguly fitted the bill perfectly. Dada was appointed as the new captain of India & he took charge in a very motivated manner. The Asia Cup, although we still lost before reaching the final, but the CT we smacked valiantly & steered to the trophy with emphatic wins against top teams. This CT win was a big one as CT was a mini World Cup & it was the first title of it. Beating all those matches convincingly established our strength & we moved on to the next cycle with confidence from that.

Chapter 6: My academic education

My academic education was spirited from the word go. I developed interest in Social Studies, Science & Mathematics from class VI. Rugged hard through the middle standards & reached IX with complete command over Sanskrit. I was so passionate about Social Science that I think I could compete into some government service easily. Science was also a natural aptitude for me & I brushed up syllabi of mathematics in ten days in high school. I obtained 86% marks in X board, secured 100% in S.St. & Sanskrit. XII stream was PCM & I managed 69% in board. After that my parents guided a computer program for me, for which I gave 4 exams. One, the DOEACC from JLJ for which I had to give a competitive test, another B.Sc. (IT) from Haryana REC for which again I had to give a competitive test, the third one a DU course which was based on class XII marks & the fourth a BCA program from IGNOU which was merely on the basis of passing XII. I cleared all 4 cracks & brought commendable ranks in each. I graduated from the JLJ Institute in 2001 & had convocation in 2002. I also got an honorary degree of M.Sc. (Computer Science) from Gautam Buddha University in 2010.

Chapter 7: Debut season

My debut season was a landmark in the history of time. It brought a new millennium in the conscious history. I completed twenty years of age the day I made debut. I had always set an aim that I should most probably make debut by the age of twenty. I achieved this target comfortably. My debut happened under a young captain - Sachin. The year included 5 Tests against two of the top teams ever & a high-held Asia Cup & Champions Trophy. The Tests were expected to be lost badly, but we managed to give Australia a few punches in the form of Laxman's big 167 & my consistent @ 35 & scare South Africa in the first Test. Sandeep Sir had given all of us batsmen & bowlers target of runs & wickets in the series to focus on. Sachin was set 350, Dravid 350, Sourav 300, Azhar 300, Laxman 250 & me 210. & Each of the 3 main bowlers 15 wickets. I was the one who reached closest to my target in terms of percentage. We had two practise matches before the series in which I scored fifties in both. I got chance to play in the playing XI because there was a slot of opener vacant after the retirement of Siddhu & Prabhakar. In the first two Tests, Australia batted first & scored big. We battled hard but steamed out before their mighty totals. In each of my first four innings, I set in & managed middle level scores. Compulsively in the second innings of both these Tests, we had to bat ultra defensively to play out time & I meddled long to try to save. I am proud to strike good partnerships with my idol Sachin in both innings of the second Test & play 100+ balls in each of my first 6 innings.

In the third Test, Australia put us under the heap of a huge mount. Laxman smashed a pole of magnificence in the second inning & my partnership with him put us in a position to try for a draw. We had piled 200 for the first wicket & I got immense satisfaction to play such a lengthy inning in my debut series. We posted 400 in this inning & earned some positives to draw from the series & the vacancy for an opener in the Test side gave me the scope to try long.

The ODI leg of the tour was the VB series involving Pakistan as the third team. We had to play 4 matches with each opponent in

the league round & then 3 finals. I was again selected in the squad & then the playing XI. We managed to win all the matches against Pakistan & lost all against Australia & reached the finals faced with Australia. I had produced average 20s & 25s in all the matches but failed in both the finals. We were again given targets in the ODI series & I was the only one who reached my target (228 against 225). The home tour was scheduled against South Africa & we entered it with drained heart expecting another grind.

The first Test saw South Africa trail us with a setback show in the first inning. The confidence we drew from this lead crossed the boundary of over confidence & we got bundled out for a low total in the second inning. We managed to uproot 6 South African wickets in their chase but, they didn't make mistake for the second time. The second Test was also like the last Australian Test & they bulked a huge score of 479 following our 158. This was the only inning in this Test season in which I had played less than 100 balls. In the second inning, Azhar did what Laxman did in Australia & registered a 200 partnership with me. We again recorded 400+ & SA got a target of 80. They chased the target but were able to do so with just 3-4 overs remaining. The ODI series against SA, we lost in the first 3 games only, but made a consolation in the final two matches. After the SA series, we saw a sad event of Sachin stepping down from captaincy resonating his failure to take the team to success in most matches under his leadership. He was an ideal captain but couldn't achieve the team result. The new appointment was made soon after the resignation & it aroused much interests as Sourav was an aggressive person & was seemingly a skipper like the one we needed in our ahead assignments. The Asia Cup in June was a disaster as we lost both the league games & couldn't reach the finals. I made 30s & 40s in both these games as also I had made averaging 35-40 in the SA ODI series. The CT was a new experiment & was modeled on the pattern of a mini WC. All the matches in the first edition were knockouts & we faced Australia, South Africa & Newzealand in our route to the title. We had some backlog of failures & were under pressure to win something big. The pressure saw us dump ourselves in the duty & we played all these matches in the state of tranquility & focus. The focus made us all the teammates deliver & we produced team performance in all these matches. The result was a glorious title in the honour of Mother India. I struck 50s in all the three innings & won an MoM in the final. We had set target of 260 to Newzealand & restricted them to 230. This commemorated my debut season & I returned back home with head held high as a debutant. I was the top scorer for India in the CT, Asia Cup & SA ODI series. Now we had 4 months off, in which I could play some domestic cricket but I had some pending exams to clear, so I settled down with my books & played in the GSC on weekends.

Chapter 8: Life at the international stage & senior players

Under Sourav Ganguly's captaincy, we evolved as a team many notches up. With the CT under our belt & the BGT coming up, we were on course to a historic accomplishment in the second year of my career. Ganguly was a hard taskmaster & he had made this clear at his appointment only that he is going to be strict with the boys. He was aggressive personally & rubbed off his aggression on to the players to make them attacking & dominant.

The 2001 season saw the rise of two new knights in our army - the Turbanater & the Crisis Monger. Before this the Australian team had come to India with a winning streak of 16 Tests which extended to 17 by the first Test & got halted thereafter. The series was a dream tale as we lost the first match badly but bounced back to take the title 2-1. In the second match, we were struggling badly at 171/8 in front of Australia's 445 when I anchored a follow-on-saving 120 & saved the team from batting-on. Australia made 383 in their second inning & we were given target of 539. Harbhajan played a vital role in countering the Aussies & took 6 & 7 wickets respectively in the two innings. The target didn't prove unreachable as Laxman & Rahul put up a large partnership to take us win by 6 wickets.

The next match also was a big show as we heaped up 501 in reply to Australia's 391 & dismissed them for 264 in the second inning chasing the target easily. In this way Harbhajan, Laxman & Rahul stitched up a memorable win for India. Bhajji ended up with 32 wickets & VVS 503 runs.

The following ODI series was a big milestone for India as Sachin became the first batsman to complete 10000 runs in ODI. India won this series 3-2 & I contributed consistently in all the five games.

Senior players are the pillar of any team & we were lucky to have many such. In June we had an easy cakewalk - The triseries in Zimbabwe which involved West Indies besides India & Zimbabwe. We won all the four matches in the league round as both the opponents were weaker to us & clinched the final also with a handy 74 from me.

The next series brought me the opportunity to showcase my opening skills as Sachin was out due to an injury & I was promoted to the opening slot. I also made full use of this opportunity & smashed 4 fifties. The next call was SA which provided us another big batsman & more importantly an opener. Viru made his debut & became another batsman to hit a century on debut. 3 of us - Sachin, Viru and me hit centuries in the opening Test and helped the team pose a total close to 500 & save the match. In the next match also, we managed middle level scores in both the innings & saved the match.

The next tour was the best of the year with us sweeping England clean in both Tests & ODIs. England didn't pose much challenge in any match & we managed to win all the matches with most of our players managing reasonable level scores in each of the innings.

The Test score of 3-0 was one that for India after a long time & the ODI result of 6-0 was perhaps unprecedented for any team. In the first Test Deepdas Gupta knocked a century in our I innings to take us to 400 in reply to which Eng faltered to low totals in both the innings. In the second match England produced reasonable but not very challenging totals in both the innings which India chased down competitively with me scoring 50s in both the innings. The third match was a negative tactic one on part of the English captain as he made Ashley Giles bowl a negative line to Sachin of outside the leg stump in the first inning to prevent him from making runs. Sachin however fought harder & managed 90. Both teams made around 300 in both the innings & with some rain interruptions in between we won the match easily.

Sachin was the Man of the Series for his close-to-100 scores in all the matches.

In the ODI series, India produced reasonable totals of 281 & 250 in the first two matches & won comfortably. The third match was a blower in which India became the first team to score 400 in an ODI. Sehwag & Sourav put up a tormenter partnership of 200 in 25 overs & in Sachin's absence, Sehwag smashing 164(129) & Sourav 63(63), enabled India to put up 400 easily. But the match got abandoned due to rain before the start of the English inning. The next 2 games were low scoring ones with England giving us low

targets of 217 & 218 respectively which we chased easily. In the final two encounters we were handed targets of 269 & 251 respectively which we managed to chase easily with my contribution of 50s in both the innings. The scorelines of 3-0 and 6-0 were unprecedented and indicated we were heading towards something new.

In the West Indies 2002, we played 5 Tests. West Indies was a comparatively weaker opposition & we partied on its expense with result of 3-0. The first & fourth matches were uninteresting with first innings of both teams only consuming up all the time. In the second match Sachin equalled Sir Bradman's tally of 29 Test hundreds & won the match for us. In the third match we got bowled out for 204 in the first inning but pulled things back in our bowling. I hit three centuries in the series aggregating 474, joint-highest for us with Laxman & second highest in the series after Chanderpaul. In the fifth match, we dismissed WI for 222 & secured 412 ourselves which suppressed them below our mat.

The next mission was Natwest. A triangular contest enclosing Ind, WI & Eng which filled the ODI leg of the WI & Eng tours. The league games of this series were all high scoring with both the teams scoring big. We won 4 of our 6 league games & set up the final with England. Sachin had scored heavily in this series with 60s & 80s in all the matches. But the final turned up to be an uphill task with England giving us target of 326 which was unchased yet in ODIs. We started decently with Sachin & Sourav setting up an opening partnership of 106 but the wickets tumbled thereafter & we're reduced to 146/4. We weren't being able to think of anything then. We just went through the tranquility. And that clicked. I and Yuvraj had a partnership of 160 for the fifth wicket with me smashing 69(63) & he 87(75). We didn't need to think of anything in that partnership also, it was just to be a zone of concentration. And that sufficed. We reached the target in the penultimate over with some lusty shots from Harbhajan & Zaheer. This was a big win with the WC round the corner.

The victories of the last three years along with the 2-0 in the English Test summer set up our rhythm for the WC.

Chapter 9: My big leap >> WC 2003

We had practised enough for the WC & needed only some special strategisation. Our coach Sandeep Sir was a mind-expert & guided us well for the mega event. We were introduced to a sports psychologist in the month of January who provided us some tricks to increase our mental strength & will power.

This was after the 4 month rest that we had after the England series to prepare our bodies fully for the championship. We were fresh with it & raring to go into the tournament. Dr. Gordon asked each of us to pick up a one-liner motivater slogan to motivate ourselves & keep it in our minds - Each one of us whatever we wanted. All the guys chose the best they could. With this key in our minds, we were motivated further to print our code on the ground. I chose "Where there is will, there is way."

The final camp for the WC setup in February 2003, where we rehearsed our last preparations & pulled the guns for the ultimate show.

The opening of the WC wasn't very good for us with us getting out against Holland in the first game & losing to Aus by a mammoth margin in the second. The tournament however came as a promotion for me as Sourav promoted me to the opener slot to open with Sachin. He found me to be fit for the job. However we started our campaign with this bit of rustiness. We couldn't stand full 50 overs in the Holland game & got bowled out for 198 against the hostile Aussies. Sachin top scored with 38 in the first game and me with 62 in the second. The target of 198 was chased by ten wickets. We had faith in ourselves however still & applied ourselves anew again. The third and fourth games were easy with Namibia and Zimbabwe giving us little competition. Sachin had got into a momentuous run of form with 116 and 81 in these games. In the fifth and sixth games also although we didn't bat to our full potential but played out the opposition in bowling. Against England Nehra assailed us with a 6-fer & against Pakistan it was an only-Sachin show to take us to the target of 274. In both these games both me &

Sachin hit fifties. We finished second in the group & reached the Super 6 facing SA, SL & NZ. SA was a tough task with us falling short of the target of 282 by 20 runs & the SL & NZ battles were one sided. SL succumbed to 109 to our 292 & NZ gave us target of only 146. I knocked a confidence giving 70 in the SA game & Sachin 97 vs SL. We were now in a patchy run of form with Australia being the only team looking like challenging us. The semifinal clash came again with SA with similar circumstances & the same target. I anchored the chase successfully with 88. The final war was a heart-beating embattlement with Australia giving us a challenging target of 307 which was enough to scare us against the great Aussie battery. We didn't have many ideas as to how we could manage this task but we had belief in our batsmen. If we got a good start, the rest could be taken care of. & This is where we clicked. Both we openers struck long & made 90(106) & 102(99) respectively. The next batsmen were Sehwag & Yuvraj who followed up the good work with a close-to-target reaching partnership. Sehwag unearthed a blazing 52(44) & Yuvraj a 39(43). The task was reduced to 34 off 18 balls by the time they got out. & Rahul completed this task with the fastest 13 runs of his career (off 4 balls). The tussle went till the last ball & Dravid hit the winning double. The WC '03 brought me the big opportunity to open in the ODIs & I utilised this opportunity to the best planting the second most (451) runs of the tournament & took a big leap in my career with this.

Chapter 10: Getting SMC from Adidas

The triumph of the World Cup was a big one with glorification of our might soaring high everywhere. Our victory was well-fought, well-deserved & well-attained. We had performed comprehensively in the entire tournament. We didn't believe this earlier but we applied ourselves fully in the games, submitted ourselves to the fire of penance & played well together. The win was bringing India laurels everywhere & was hoisting the flag of our greatness at every stage. BCCI had given us prize of Rs. 1 cr. each for the WC winning team & Sahara a house to each one of us in the Ambi Valley. Commercial contracts were flowing in to the players & all corporate houses were wanting to associate with us. One such contract came my way in September when Adidas offered me a proposal of sports management for five years. Before this I gave my body full rest in seven months & slept well & recharged all my energies for the next season. My mom-dad had given me my first mobile phone in Oct 2000 & my first car in Nov 2001 when I returned from the then-last tours of those times realising that I might be needing them now. The Adidas contract was worth Rs. 60 crs. & I now had the money to purchase a big house. I wanted to purchase a big house and two cars for my parents as my gift to them for my new success. I told dad that I want to purchase a big house & will do it after the Newzealand tour. He told me that he will see houses on letout for me by the time I come back & help me in my job of searching. I succeeded in both these series excellently & reached the no. 1 position in ICC rankings for mens in both Tests and ODIs. I was the world's most consistent batsman at this time & was being looked up to by many teams.

The plan from Adidas came in August 2003 when I was taking full rest since 5 months & was preparing my body for the missions ahead. They told me the entire plan & told me that they will be taking care of all my needs under it & will provide me a whole set of solutions.

I was very elated at the offer & told them that I was wanting something like this only at this stage & pronounced to them that I will be having some conditions. I had some inhibitions which I will

want to abstain from & I will read it out to them in the next meeting. They agreed for it & I told them in the next meeting that I will not dance, tattoo, hair colour, body colour, smoke, drink, do ads of them etc. or do any act of undignifiedness & would like to do ads of important commodities like electronic items & commercial services extramittently. They were pleased at my outlook & said that they accept all my conditions without any reduction in the pay & look forward to having a profitable partnership with me in the five years. My Dad also read the contract before I signed it & Adidas presented me a token gift in the form of their exercise gear as a gesture for my deal & I took 2 sets of each including 1 for Dad.

We purchased a house in UPDA Society which was large enough for my needs & good enough in design to please me. Then I bought a Skoda for myself & a Merc & a BMW for dad & mom respectively.

Chapter 11: My accomplished performance in Tests

We had a challenging season ahead with Australia waiting to take revenge from us & Pakistan to redeem the ghosts of 1999 in the pipeline. Australia were still a superior team to us & were sure to set up a threatful task for us in the Tests. All Australian players were fuming with aggression in the practise games. What turned out was a glorious Test series which was in my opinion our greatest Test series ever contested till then. Steve Waugh was to retire after this series & the Aussie team were desperate to give him an honourable farewell.

But destiny had something else in store. All of our batsmen clicked in each of the innings & we posted totals in excess of 400 in each inning.

The first match hosted in Brisbane. Australia over-confident & got bundled out for 329. We replied with 409 & Sourav's giant 144. Australia fought back with 421 but we didn't have enough time to even go out in the middle.

In the second match, Australia set up a mammoth 556. We were in the race with 85/1 by stumps, day 2 but never imagined what we will do the next day. Me & Dravid both struck double centuries leading India to 406/2 when I got out. We declared at 620/4. Australia tried to show false confidence in their second inning & attempted to play fast. They were bundled out for 196. Our task was only 132 which we attained easily. This was an extraterrestrial fightback & Steve Waugh was forced to say 'This is the greatest fightback I have ever seen' & he even picked up the ball on India's winning shot & handed it over to Dravid as a mark of honour. With this humiliating defeat & 0-1 down in the series, Australians were frustrated to the hilt & struck back harder in the third match. They laid a green pitch in Melbourne & made India bat first after winning the toss. But the destiny was even brighter for us this time with Sehwag & me heaping a blazing 300 partnership, Sehwag played a pacy knock & smashed 195 before the end of the day. I was on 125 at that time & ended up 180 the next day. We finished at 546. They made 558.

Ponting was in purple form in this series & had struck 200s in both of the second & third matches. All the experts were elated at this form from Ponting & Hayden & were declaring them the no. 1 and no. 2 batsmen in the world respectively. Ponting had amassed 1548 Test runs in 2003 in 11 matches. The match ended in a draw with conclusion not reachable in time. In the fourth match we were in the upper position with only a draw needed to win the series. Sachin & Laxman ensured this for us as they drove us to 610 with 241 & 178 personally. The rest was a formality with Kumble running through the lineup & dismissing them around 400 & then 200 respectively.

This was India's first overseas series win vs Australia & the greatest one. Australia were embarrassed unboundedly & accepted that we were a superior team at the time.

I was now developing as an accomplished batsman in Tests & people in the world were seeing keenly how far I go.

The VB series was also a tight contest as both us & Australia won evenly in the league round but Australia won both of the first two finals. The first final was an Ajit Agarkar show with him saving India out from a 75/6 with the bat & taking to 261 with a partnership with me & in the second final Australia set a tall target of 332 which we couldn't chase.

After the win vs Australia we were put on cloud 9 by the Indian media & Dravid & me were being declared as the new gods of Indian cricket. Pakistan series was a fortnight away & it was being hyped much with the super form of India batsmen. All the pundits were predicting a 3-0 washout for India in the Test series & 5-0 in the ODI. This is just what happened. The first match at Multan was a one-man show by Sehwag with his becoming the first Indian to hit a triple century & Sachin continued from his 241* from Sydney & stretched a record 495*. India crushed them in this match.

The second match saw Pak coming back with a rebellion with a green top & they put us to bat in after the toss. Our batsmen got complacent & some of them played loose shots & lost their wickets cheaply at the top of the order. I & Yuvraj rebuilt with a 139 & 112 & took the team near 400. Pakistan slipped under the pressure of this fightback & ended up at 300. Sehwag & I again opened form in the second inning & gave Pakistan a target of 341 which they couldn't chase.

The third match again was a Dravid special with his hitting the third double century of the season & ending up at what won him the Player of the Year award at the inaugural ICC awards.

This was our second washout in 2 years & we were now the masters of the universe. The ODI series was also a washout with some or the other batsmen striking hard in every match.

The next matter of happiness in the team was the wedding of one of our teammates Virender Sehwag who had contributed heavily in the 3 series this season. The Sehwag wedding was a grand party for the nation with who's who of all the fields present at this function.

The ICC started the Awards of the Year from this time & instituted the first ceremony in July with Dravid, me & Flintoff taking the Player of the Year, Test Player of the Year & ODI Player of the Year of this year respectively.

India were now in an extra-imaginable form with success of all players touching the sky. Sourav had anchored the team really well & Dravid had led with his performance. The dividends of our works were paying in jewels & we were being placed on eyelids by all. Honourable programs like Seedhi baat and Jeena isi ka naam hai were felicitating us like no one before & we were being recognised in every moment of the going time.

Expert appreciations were also pouring in from every nook & corner of the country. Ravi Shastri Sir said that he had considered only three Indian batsmen great till now - Sunny Sir, Vishy Sir and Sachin. Dravid was the fourth one to move into this club & he said that Dravid was one of the best batsmen in the world at this time joint top with Hayden & Lara. Sunny Sir had said at the time of the inauguration of the NCA that the academy was being presided by the best Indian player of his generation (Vishy Sir) & it is only apt that it is being inaugurated by the best player of this generation (Dravid). Sir Vivian Richards had said that he felt that Dravid was the most stylish player of this time as he was a dark horse - he was never at the top of the contest but always in the top 3-4 & no one thought he would come first but he raced to the top finally.

Finally, we reached the end of our another hectic season & got into what was just needed at this time - a rest of four months.

The 2004-05 season was an ODI dominated one with 4 tournaments lined up back to back. We began as favourites in the Asia Cup with the tournament hosting 6 nations this time. Hongkong and Bangladesh were easy preys with SL and Pak bowing under our pressure. The final was a close tie with us chasing SL's 229 with 1 wicket remaining. The next dish was England in the Natwest series with the 3-match contest serving a varied taste in all the 3 encounters. The first one witnessed England scoring 240 with we bundled out for

170. In the second clash England posted a hardscored 307 with Flintoff's 93(92). I smashed 107(93) in this taking the team to 307. The third tie was again a Nehra show with his 6-fer wrapping up England to 181 against our 266.

Videocon series was the third of this queue with Pakistan, Australia & us battling it out in Amsterdam & rain marring all the 3 games. First clash against Pakistan was reduced to 32-overs per side with our target being 192. Second clash against Australia was reduced to 37-overs a side with our target being 175. And in the final we were given target of 240 vs Pak in a revised target. We chased all the three targets with success & won the third consecutive title of the season.

The fourth CT was also a bit of upsets one in which we upset Australia in the semifinals & England in the final. I scored two centuries in the trophy leading the team to wins in all of them. In the final we were reduced to 140/8 against 218 & I snatched victory from their jaws playing a match-winning inning. Winning 4 back to back tournaments in a season was a phenomenal success & we were poised far ahead of all others in both Tests and ODIs now.

ICC then planned a return tour of Australia to India with high emotions & intensity involved. The Aussies must have been boiling with frustration at that time to take revenge from us. It was a 4 match series with the Australian team in full strength under Ponting & a talented debutant Michael Clarke adding to their power. We won the first & final games outclassing the Oz despite a competitive performance.

The first match they put up 474 which we equalled with my 218. They then gave us target of 228 which we chased. In the second game we bundled them out for 235 & made 370. Damien Martyn then braved a classy 104 which was called by the cricket media as one of the greatest Test innings ever. Australia fought to 370. We got target of 235 which we could follow only till 19 as the rain marred the final day of the game.

The third was a green top again where they made 398 & we equalled it. The target of 342 given in the second inning was saved by Kaif valianting with a gallantry 117.

The fourth match was a low-scoring one with spinning condition dominating the Test & we outclassed Australia in that.

The next project was Pakistan - they were visiting us for the first time since 1999. This was a Sehwag series as he smashed big hundreds in all the three matches. He struck a 173 in the first

match, Dravid hundreds in both innings of the second & me & him knocked a partnership of 300 in the third. We won the series 3-0.

It was a again a 5-month break. We did lots of fun in this period. We, the young guns, were invited to walk the IFW in Delhi. Yuvraj, I, Harbhajan, all walked the ramp for Manish Malhotra & I was the showstopper. We were given bountiful dresses by the designers. I then did some designing myself & got printed 6 T-shirts of my choice from a firm.

The September series was full of drama as we faced Zimbabwe & New Zealand in a tri-series. We were reduced to 44/8 in a clash against New Zealand chasing 214 where I and 2 tailenders rescued the team with partnerships of 100 each.

All this was possible due to some really mighty players in our team. It was because of the senior pros like Sachin & Rahul that the rest of the lineup had confidence & played their heart. The strength of Sachin & Rahul assured that there is life till the last moment & we can express ourselves as we like. Due to this reason these players are my idols & I rank them at top among my role models.

Meanwhile, in between this series decisions of changing the captain were taken. Voices to this effect had arisen from within some factions that India now needed a change of captaincy & Dravid was a fitter captain than Ganguly at this time & the decision was taken to make the amendment after this series.

Dravid was my favourite player in the team & I was very happy to see the appointment. I was also appointed the Vice-Captain which was a very big honour for me as I hadn't attained many leadership roles in life. Two new entries had also happened in the team in the form of Gautam Gambhir & MS Dhoni. Gambhir was a sound batsman & Dhoni a flamboyant keeper.

This was also the time of Jacques Kallis when he smashed 2100 Test runs in a span of twelve months around 2005.

Sehwag & me were now developing as very good opening partners & enjoyed each other's partnership much with big stands. A similar one we struck up here in the first test against SA where both of us struck 164 & 162. We won the series 2-0 with some solid bowlings from Anil Kumble & Harbhajan Singh.

The ODI leg of the tour was a tie with the final match ending in a tie after a 2-2 result in the first four matches.

I was feeling very happy under the new captain as he was also a classical player like me.

In the winter break, Kapil Sir organised a celebrity match for the benefit of the Tsunami victims in which we played against the Film Stars XI of Bollywood. The match was a fun as the film stars displayed a class potential & rubbed shoulder to shoulder with us. Some of them were good cricketers.

2006 was again a WC-penultimate year & we needed to develop some ability for the WC. Some teams were again raising the performance level to challenge at the championship & we needed to par the balance. The first series of the season was a Pakistan with Viru showing his class again & hitting a mammoth 254* against the Pak score of 679. Pak had declared at 679 & we were fearing a collapse. But Viru & Dravid struck a brilliant 414 opening stand to neutralise the effect with Dravid opening the inning due to some reason & the match was washed out from there.

The England & West Indies series following were Yuvraj specials with his commanding the MoSs in both the victories of 6-1. The summer saw us face some competitive cricket as Australia reduced us to 35/5 in a chase of 234 in the DLF Cup from where I rescued the team with a big hundred & big partnership for the sixth wicket. We faced some tough opposition in the England bilateral also.

At the end of the year, SA were waiting for us with tough preparation to take revenge from us of the 2005 Tests & the WC defeat. In the Tests, they gave us difficulty only in the second & third matches as Harbhajan ran through their order in the first one reducing them to 84 in the first inning & making it a cakewalk for us. In both of the remaining two matches I smashed double hundreds & took our side to victories in challenging SA conditions. In the ODI series, they gave us steep targets in all of the first three ties & we chased them with good contribution from my side.

All this once again was anchored by the two senior pros of Sachin & Rahul. I hence salute them again & hail their roles in the Indian batting department.

I am happy that I was executing my role as a batsman in the team successfully & to the team's satisfaction & had established myself as a competent Test opener & I made runs in bulk in the years ahead also, about which I am sharing in different chapters.

Chapter 12: Winning 4 WCs

The 2007 WC came as a tough challenge for us as we encountered a jolty combat by Bangladesh in the group stage losing which game we could have failed to qualify for the Super 8s. We were us, SL, Bermuda & Bangladesh the four in our group. We got all out for 191 against Ban after which Dravid had to ask the bowlers to bowl for their life to win this match.

The Super 8s from there was a fresh challenge with some teams finding super form from the beginning. Australia was at the top of the bunch crushing all teams ruthlessly & we needed to play some hard cricket to take ourselves forward.

We beat SL, WI and Ireland easily to earn some points in the schedule. But Aus, SA, NZ & Eng made us sweat with our blood to attain our S/F berth. We played well in all the matches but had to be content with loss against Aus & SA who were the better teams of the time. We got clash with SL in the semis where we got to chase a target of 325. It was a good batting track & we achieved the aim by the end.

Australia was again a hilly task in the final with rain helping us to ease some ground. The rain washed out 12 overs from each side reducing the tie to 38-overs per bunch. Hadn't it been a reduced match we could have lost to the Aussies easily. In the reduced tie, we got to bat first on a good batting track. Hayden & McGrath were in brilliant form in this tourna and ended up with 622 runs & 26 wickets respectively. We posted 274 in our 38 overs & batting second made Australia's task tough as they tumbled under the pressure & ended at 273. This was the first time that a team had won a World Cup the third time and we were World Champions for another four years.

The WCs 2011 & 2015 were also glorious ones as we dominated emphatically in home conditions & Australian conditions respectively. In the 2015 WC we passed unbeaten in the group stage & overcame a challenging target of 329 from Australia in the SFs.

We did well to avoid the loss of wicket till 76 in that chase, but consumed 16 overs in this. I then stitched up a century partnership with Kohli & took the team's total to across 230 with 8 wickets intact. The score at that time was 38 overs. I stretched to 129 & we managed to chase it with 2 balls remaining. India were now playing some extra-universal games & this was our 5th WC with the second highest being 2.

Chapter 13: Our intense rivalry with Australia

The competition with Australia has been the cream of our game since the last two decades. Australia is the most potent team in the sport & we have enjoyed domineering contest with them since the beginning of this period. It all began from my debut series which sowed the seeds of competitiveness in me. My debut Test series taught me how big this game is, how educative & impactful its all things are & how much scope of greatness, glory & class is there in it. Australia being the toughest team in the work, beating it gives the maximum satisfaction & earns the maximum recognition. Hence Australia has been my favourite opponent since the beginning. The fact that we have been able to match ranks with it in this period, has made it the favourite of all people, ourselves, the public, the media, the other sections of the fraternity & Australia too. Laxman's 167 in the 2000 series only had sown dreams in me that I will be knocking similar scores against this opposition some day. The 2001 tour escalated the level of that dream with Laxman's 281 & the coming together of the all in 2003-04 showed what we could do as a team. Meanwhile we played some one day series also against them like the TVS series, DLF cup & bilateral series in 2007. Both the sides were always pumped up to deliver the extra feat in our contests & it gave a lot of pride to produce so much enormity.

The generation of Aussies which consisted their most talented players like Ponting, Hayden, Gilchrist, Langer, McGrath & Warne retired in the first half of my career but the successor generation was also equally diligent & dedicated. The Oz-India competition has become the cream of the entire international cricket now & it is more popular than even the Ashes. The brand of BGT has got a bigger stamp & marketable value in cricket & India & Australia deserve credit for making cricket a bigger business in the cricket playing countries. It is due to the increased popularity of this game in the late years that it is now being included in the Commonwealth Games & Olympics. Cricket is a game of much power, attitude, rigorousness, beauty & elegance & credit goes to its makers & evolvers over the years to make it like this. I believe the

Australia-India rivalry will go a long way still & enthrall & enchant the sportslovers & people across this globe. I had some personal big successes against the Aus in my time & I rate my performance vs them as the cream of my career. Some knocks which are close to my heart are my three hundreds in the three chases of 300+ in the 2007 bilateral ODI series, my all four MoM performances in the 2008 Test series, the first double century of the career in 2003-04 & the supportive roles in the 2013 bilateral ODI series to Rohit & Virat. I think this period of cricket & the great players of this generation will stay in the minds of people forever & will be remembered as GOATs of different departments for all times. My salutes to my fellow team mates for supporting me in this endeavour vs Australia the way they have done & to the Aussie team for presenting the quality of challenge they had which made our war worth savouring. Ricky Ponting is my all time favourite player although I accept Sachin is a better player than him but I love Ricky for other reasons. He was at the prime of his career in the period in which I was in the prime of my youth, he was expressively aggressive all as a player, captain & person & led the Australian team by example. Due to all these reasons, I rate him as the best player of the decade 2000-09. The Australian unit was full of such players of this quality. Even their bench was as good. Glenn McGrath is someone who will perhaps remain the GOAT bowler always. Shane Warne will remain the most potent spinner along with Murlidharan. Gilchrist has no match in agility. Langer was a champion opener, his opening partnerships with Hayden are unvaluable. Steve Waugh was a captain better than whom noone can be. Hayden was a bonus to Australia. He came from nowhere & added another unbeatable weapon in their armoury. & Now, they are having a Steve Smith & David Warner. I think if ever GOAT awards are conducted, Australia will give India a tough competition to win the GOAT team award. The legacy of Don Bradman never dipped shallower & this team has met all expectations of a sporting business & stardom, & I take this opportunity to say this at this time when I am writing this chapter that I am a die-hard fan of that Australian team & I would choose only Australia any day to play a match which I have to play for my heart or life. All great players perform their best in tough situations, important matches & against strong teams. It is true for Sir Don Bradman, for Sir Sobers, for Sunny Sir, Viv & Sachin. The best of Brian Lara, Steve Smith & Kohli has come against Australia. As VVS Laxman once said, difficult situations get his juicy fluids flowing. I will remember my battles with the mighty Aussie team as my best after I retire, although there has been much input from my other teammates & support staff in enabling this best. I fear Glenn McGrath equally today & he is a terror to me faced any day & scares my willowing aspirations. Pigeon is really a hawk or vulture & his balanced attitude of staying unnerved in difficulty & not getting carried away by success makes him a lovable person. I in my early years secretly

wished that Australia should lose only to India so that we can say that we have beaten the team which doesn't lose to anyone else.

Chapter 14: Our skyrocketing show

Our skyrocketing show of the 2000s continued with the Virat & Rohit episodes. They carried the legacy of Sachin & Rahul forward. In my time there were five batsmen of us who were profound in our merit - Sachin, Rahul, Laxman, Sehwag & me. & Today, they are 3 batsmen in Virat, Rohit & Pujara & one bowler Ashwin who is in the category of greats. Courtesy to them our heritage has lived yet. Our major exploits in this phase also have been the WCs, the BGTs, the bilateral One-Day series with Australia, England Tests & the multi-national series. Thanks to all these new stars our success has been supermount in all contests. India kept getting talented youngsters in all generations. After the 7 of us of the 2000 batch, there came Gambhir, Dhoni & Munaf Patel in 2005. Then the foursome of Kohli, Rohit, Raina & Dhawan. & Now Pant, Pandya, SKY & Ishan. The bench is bursting with energy. SKY is someone who seems out of this planet at present. & Ishan is an icing on Indian cake. My batchmates Sehwag, Yuvraj, Kaif, Zaheer, Nehra & Harbhajan & myself came into this team when it needed fresh blood. Dhoni, Gambhir & Munaf Patel entered when we were in a period of transition. One key of our boundless triumph has been our policy decision of playing aggressively & we have prepared our players according to it & backed them in bad times. The world currently goes in the aggressive style, hence following this pattern counters them. Although I am myself a classical batsman, who goes mostly by the book, but I support aggressive approach in the contemporaries & juniors. This WC, as I have already said, might be my last appearance in international cricket, so I want to end on a high, finishing with my fifth WC. There are some other important series also in between, the WI bilateral in Nov, the BGT in Dec-Jan & the WTC in Feb-Mar. The offering on the plate is of feasts if I succeed, but I will have to record my best to dine this feast. By the time this book comes out, we might have begun our WC preparations. I guess my teammates also might be wanting to win it for me & the World Test Championship in between is also a world cup of Tests, so as important. It would have been more right to write this book after my retirement, as then I would have had idea of my entire career, but I got so tempted over the last one month, that I sat down to ink it right now only. Australia & England have better

pasts than us in the history of the game, but we have become GOATs with the density of our win in three decades only. If you ask me which is the turning point of Indian cricket, I will say there have been two turning points - One the 1983 win & the other Sachin's beginning of opening in the One-Dayers. If we go a bit ahead, the Rahul Dravid bulk of Test runs in the 2003-04 season also becomes a turning point. Among the captains, Ganguly ranks no. 1, with being the turnarounder of our cricket, Dravid the second, with the scorer of the bulkiest wins & Kohli the third, the modern dynamite. I have played under four captains, Sachin if he was given a chance sometime later also, I think he also might have succeeded well & Dhoni also I think had leadership skills, though he never got a chance under the presence of stalwarts. All these players, actors & entities have been the infrastructure of our skyrocketing show & we are proud to represent the Mother India in our field.

Chapter 15: My house & website

After I got my first SMC, I thought that I can now purchase a big house. I was waiting for something of this sort to make the buy, as then I would have sufficient funds to pump the cash. It was September 2003, I was preparing to go for the practise camp for the 2003-04 season. Dad asked me, do you intend to buy a big house now. I said yet, I might see some explorations once I return from the NZ tour. He said he can help me in this search & shortlist a few houses behind me till I come back if I tell him my preferances & budget. I was happy. I intimated him a few of my conditions & he said he will send me the snaps if he likes some building. He started the scan when I went for the BGT tour, & told me in January that he has found a compound which is fit as per my criterions & economical too. This was a bungalow built on a double plot in the UPDA Society of sector 26. The economic level of the people of this society was middle-class which my dad selected due to being one of values. I saw the house when I returned from Australia in February & found it to be much beautiful due to being equipped with extra-normal facilities like terrace, balcony, servant room, flower bed at the front & a backyard for additional parking. All this was a tailor-made fit for my requirements & I nodded for the deal in the first look. We signed in April & took the possession from Mr. M.K. Dhariwal in May. I thought of shifting into this house a few months later as I wanted to soak in the experiences of my growing up house for some time before leaving. Dad & mom did the new furnishings purchase for the house in February next & got done important works alone like polishing of the surface, distemper, pest control & earthing. I used to come with them daily here in this month & they did all the works & I sat in a corner alone with my laptop having fun of the work. It was during this period that I got this idea of developing a site for myself. A site is an interesting thing for anyone & it provides an identity & a forum to broadcast oneself's information. I had studied a bit of web designing in my college studies & thus thought of developing much of this site myself. I drafted a rough layout of it in this period & planned the things I will include in it. Before the start of the Pakistan series, my blueprint was ready. After I returned from the Pakistan tour, Mom-

Dad asked me what my plan was, I told them I am planning of getting a website developed for myself for which I will be doing much of the coding myself over the next some months & then get the remaining things constructed by some developer. They were happy that I always find something new to amuse myself & were eager to see my site. The main module of the site I prepared in two months, after which I thought of adding some projects in it as a display of my academic study. This took another three months. By this time, the summer break of five months had come to an end & the Zimbabwe series had come close. I planned of getting the rest of the works performed by some developer at my home when I return from the Zimbabwe tour. I was so excited about it, that I jumped into Wipro immediately after coming from Zimbabwe & called them the next day only. They were excited to see my design & SRS. They weren't able to believe that a professional sportsperson can do so much coding himself. The manager was so elated with me that she understood herself that I would like to get the coding work done by the developer at my home as I have a lot of personalised tastes in many things & I might like to guide him from close at my site & the engineer also offered that he could work 7 days for me as I would be happy with that. With the works of Wipro for 22 days my site got ready & I learnt many things from them. The main engineer Rohit & the other projects team have become a personal friends of mine now. I saw their commitment to work & professionalism that they worked full 10 hours daily & didn't accept any of my offerings like snacks etc., just took the electric connection from my house for charging their laptops. This website has come up to be a very beautiful one & it is a sort of identity symbol of mine to some level as I have crafted it with much passion & it contains my favourite contents of my life. Web designing is my specialisation of my education & I have immense interest in it. I make projects of my interest still in my PHP folder when I get time. These two things are things of extreme importance in my personal life & I have inserted a chapter on them due to this reason.

Chapter 16: New age & emergant players

The leading World Cup score infused in us new energy & we were motivated to maintain our success despite all odds & challenges.

In between this period, one honouring incident happened for me. Mr. Sunil Gavaskar visited my house & gave me blessing to encourage me for my performance. He was in Delhi & decided to see me to give a pat on my back. He called on me & told that he is coming to my residence to meet me. I was elated & couldn't believe what a big honour it was. He told that he is visiting players wherever he can these days to give a token of appreciation for them. He remained in my house for a few hours & was happy to see how I had decorated my house well for a cricket lover. My entrance had a slogan 'Eat cricket sleep cricket drink only cricket'. I had wallpapers of his & Vishy Sir in my drawing hall & guest room respectively with beautiful captions written under them.

The drawing room had a gallery of my top 16 teammates nailed on the wall with the title saying 'Family album'. I had made some interesting collections related to cricket which I showed him. I had made a book of our scorecards since my debut titled 'Record book'. I had made a collection of important columns of India's articles from newspapers since my debut titling 'India in the newspapers'. A library of highlights of India's top matches was stored in my computer & I had created a file of my favourite players of my time titling "The league of extraordinary batsmen". I had wallpapers of my favourite players all over my walls & house with stylish & respectfull comments written on them.

I showed all this to him & he was very happy to see my love & passion for cricket. He was very happy with me overall & blessed me abundantly.

Adidas was bringing me beautiful, honouring & stylish ads under my contract & I was posting very handsome style statements under them.

Another new age that now began was that of Virat Kohli & Rohit Sharma. The biggest explosion of it that had happened was in the bilateral series vs Aus in 2013. India chased 2 targets of 350+ in this & made another score of 380. This type of performance had now become a routine & featured in every second match thanks to Virat & Rohit. These 2 batsmen really emerged as successors of Sachin & Rahul & filled in the void created under their shoes perfectly. Both are ODI legends & Virat has done the unprecedented by completing 10000 runs in just 205 innings @ 59 & Rohit also 9000+ with 29 centuries. It's difficult to count how many times these two have hit big innings whether chasing or posting. Virat is nearing Sachin's 50 ODI hundreds also. Virat has scored more centuries while chasing than all other teams combined in his time taken together. & Both now the captain & the Dy, for better having the control of the Indian team. Rohit has struck 3 ODI double hundreds, a highest of 264 & nearing Gayle's record of most sixes. With a WTC being planned the next year, I hope this pair flies highest in that also.

Apart from the captain & the deputy, Cheteshwar Pujara & Ashwin are two Indians who have climbed onto the category of legends from this generation. Pujara is no less than Kohli & Rohit in Tests & Ashwin is into the league of Murlidharan & Shane Warne. The other senior players from this generation include Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Ajinkya Rahane, Ravindra Jadeja, KL Rahul & Kuldeep Yadav. The potential youngsters are Pant, Pandya, Bumrah, Axar Patel & Mohammad Shami. All these bunch of experienced & fresh players has blended a perfect set of skills in our team like every generation.

Chapter 17: The legacy of Sachin & Rahul

Every generation seeks from its predecessors & learns from their experience & performances. Sunil Gavaskar had taken lessons from his seniors, Sachin from Gavaskar & Viv, we from Sachin & Rahul, & Virat & Rohit from me & Sehwag. The legacy a player leaves, becomes a stepping ladder for the people coming next to learn from & improvise. For me, Sachin & Rahul are the two whose legacy I inherited from being a batsman. Sachin's dessert storm innings of Sharjah are epics in the history of this game & they exposed many values he had & one should have. Those two innings became follow points for me to incorporate in my growing up years & I strengthened my determination on the basis of what I saw from them that I have to become like him. He then became a regular checkup point & a permanent part of my inside. Rahul became equal to Sachin in my books from that summer of 2002. Laxman is also a batsman I hail as my senior, but these two have left the largest legacies. I as an individual have been taught to be a good student & learn as much as possible from the seniors to build my self. I started watching cricket on TV from the 1987 WC, & the viewing of TV to learn at its maximum level came from the Sachin season of 1998. In the school, Sandeep Sir asked us to watch the Indian matches closely, observe their technique & try to learn as much as we could. By the end of 1998 Sachin had become an overwhelming god of the cricketing world in Indian lives & I had entered into I class cricket that year. So the temptation was much to emulate his styles & play like him. Rahul had risen to ranking books with his Test centuries in Toronto & New Zealand that year. Sourav had also been in purple form in ODIs from 1997 to 2001. There were many seniors to look up to, but the range of personal values that Sachin & Rahul exhibited, were superlative & I tried to imbibe as much as I could from them. Sachin's records & Rahul's unbreachable technique are still unbeaten in international cricket & they are a challenge to be broken ever.

Chapter 18: Life in the fun side of cricket

The establishment at the summit level of cricket exposed us to the recreational profile of cricket in which we could enjoy the leisures of our interest on the basis of the monetary & contact reaches that we had. We players are celebrities of the highest level & we get to represent brands in media for their advertisement & marketing. After a player reaches a good level of success, he gets SMCs from big firms & the frame of endorsement expands. In these activities we come into contact with celebrities of other fields. The dimension of media has expanded in the years of late with new forms like internet media, social media & app media coming into operation. The social media nowadays pays high remunerations to celebs for giving ads through their personal accounts. We reside in posh apartments, drive swanky cars & lead luxurious lives. All our expenses during team stays are paid for by the board. The players are stars in their own right & fashion icons as well. The SMCs provide complete solutions to sportspersens taking care of all their needs & sponsor all their requirements. They ensure players don't have to expend time & energy bothering about their other needs. All this has made cricket a high-sought profession in India & the fact that no other sport is as popular as cricket here the crave for cricket is much higher. With the opening of coaching academies in many districts & coaching facilities available in many forms, the aspirants are mobbing up in all cities to try their luck. The love for the game should be pure & it shouldn't contain lust, but I think if the love is pure, there is no harm in indulging in these things. The new players who are getting into the national team these days, are becoming millionaires within no time. Much credit goes for this to the board & administration to enable all this convenience. But there is one demerit side, it is the competition. There is space for only 11 players in the team & they may be upto 20-25 players who may be getting chance by rotation at a time, apart from which the thousands who prepare & toil, remain unreached their goal & end up on the lost side.

Chapter 19: My other interests & passions

Continuing from the fun side of cricket, I am drawn to talk about my own interests & what I like to indulge in my extra-cricket time. I am a man of much interests, a studious man who seeks pleasure in learning & indulging in arts, sciences & skills of different types rather than just chilling & partying. My inclinations had been naturally towards all subjects of my academic studies from the beginning + the extra-curricular activities. I believed in developing my talents & knowledge rather than material fun. This is what is paying me dividends in this anarchic age of social lawlessness when the world mostly is troubled with its shortages. I don't have to engage in any worldly desire to entertain myself & get satisfied just with doing some creative or constructive work whenever I have to find some happiness. & The areas of my passion are extensive, ranging from studying new technologies to crafting musical productions to engaging in social expressions on media to working with good gadgets. My room in the house still has a study table on which I sit to read something new everytime I return from a tour & then code some projects to exercise my learnings & read news & educative magazines at length & I live in peaceful mode seeking just harmony & balance in whatever I do. The program of graduation that I had degreed had taught me enough programming to script professional-level softwares & I aim to make some freelanced projects on the home PC once I retire from cricket. If I have to choose a profession other than cricket ever, it will be that of a software developer. My forte is database operations through ODBC & the discipline of web development that I expertise in, it has become the universal mode of software works. All the softwares people get made these days they get them made on websites, because it provides the facility of universal access in addition to the job of website. My language is PHP-MySQL & I code on localhost server. My other passions include movies, e-commerce, apps, news, cars, glamour, social networks, books & artistic creativity. Social media is a very powerful tool of expression & reach today & if you have strength in your content & subject you

can attract millions of supporters & endorsers for your idea. I generally write things of my heart like on the serial 'Chandragupt Maurya' & my liked songs on social media, & I appreciate people doing good works or good works done in the past by anyone in any field or social acts as a public figure & try to build good atmosphere with my inks. The union government led by Modi ji since 2014 is a very righteous & serving government in my opinion & I print messages in appreciation of it on it from time to time. Lata ji & Asha ji are two artists amongs musicians & Sachin, Sehwag, Virat & Rohit some cricketers I like to subscribe & follow their tweets. They write very positive & sensitive stuff. There are some celebs of other fields as well who do good work in their departments like Sanjana Ganesan & Mayanti Langer. I follow all these people & many of them often write about me. Yogi ji is a statesman of the contemporary era who has built an empire of justice & growth. I am proud to be a citizen of his state. My room doesn't have TV & I watch mostly contentful material on my PCs, & I get up early in the morning to feel the fragrance of the dawn. My grandmother has developed a garden of bountiful flowers & I follow her doing the gardening in it herself daily. I also do bhajan with my grandfather before sleeping when I am at home. My routine in off periods includes newspaper reading sessions with him & walking with him. Other huge passions include doing research on Pancham Da & exploring all channels which can result in new developments about him. Photography is a passion I have developed lately with tendencies of clicking beautiful pictures wherever I go.

Chapter 20: My socialist brand ambassadorship

Adidas provided me the plethora of private endorsements, & ministry of investment of UP gave me the socialist segment of my brand ambassadorship. It was in December 2017 that UP chief secretary called me on behalf of CM Yogi ji & conversed to me that the he wants me to brand ambassador a ministry which will be launching widescale programs in the coming times. To begin with, an Investors Summit had to be conducted in February next for attracting investments in UP & I had been wanted to perform ads of it. Later they could involve me in other schemes like One district one product, Vocal for local, Atmanirbhar UP & Make in UP. This was a big recognition for me & I immediately grabbed the opportunity. These rest of the programs took 2-3 years to set up & I involved in promotional events of them in phased manner. On UP Day on 24th January in 2021, the UP government also offered me an honorary position of SSP in the UP Police. It was designated for the area of Ghaziabad. All these things placed effect on my socialist wings. & I prided to be a servant of the government of UP & India. My endorsements over the years also included some government brands & I modeled on a total of 9 such brands in my career. Coming from a socialist family by ideology & background, I feel prouder to represent such socialist campaigns & organisations & ambassador them. I believe the current phase of privatisation in the Indian economy is one of experimentation & India will regain its original value once again some day in the near future.

Chapter 21: The ultimate fun called cricket as a subject of knowledge & entertainment

This book I have titled 'The ultimate fun called cricket', as also it is the name of my blog, I call it so because it is in my opinion the ultimate pleasure in the world. It is my biggest interest, passion, education, profession & business. & I consider it a subject of knowledge, skill & craft also along with fun & entertainment. In different ways, it presents different forms of the sport. The game is one of high-level skill which involves technique, art, stamina, management methods & commercialisation. In addition to the fun, it teaches lessons of all streams of study. This is the reason I rate it the ultimate fun. The dimensions of modern professional cricket include business, marketing, publicity, fame & media. The glory it encounters gets written & printed in media of all forms all over the world. For a cricketer, cricket is bound to be the ultimate fun, but in the cricket playing countries the game is the ultimate fun for the watching millions also. The commercialised dimensions extend to ancillary disciplines like commentary, presentation & coaching of the art. The skills involved in the game are both a science & an art as they include scientific technique as well as subjective exercise of it. The administration at international level covers business strategies & managerial skills & PR. I consider myself a fortunate student of cricket who has got this fortune of being a student of cricket & I say being a student of cricket is my biggest passion. With this, I end the main chapters of my book & conclude in the last with a summarising remark. Once more, before leaving, **"I am fortunate to be a student of THE ULTIMATE FUN CALLED CRICKET"**.

Chapter 22: Summarisation

My conclusion of this book is just this that what a wonderful game this game of cricket is. It arouses such immense passions in everyone & produces limitless fun. What a magnificent style its proceedings are. The bowlers bowl in speed of high speed trains, the batsmen strike the ball with weapon-in-hand like armours & the shots in batting are such huge pleasures to watch - the swinging of the bat, the body movements while striking, the motions of the ball after hitting & the speed of everything is magnetic - it has every thing - poise, grace, style. The inventers of this game must have invented it with much brain. I have heard that it was played in England since the early 16th century - the 1877 thing was only its officialisation. & The rules of the game also are such just and interesting. Everything about it is perfect. I thank the makers of it with whole heart for intellectualisation - it fulfills all kinds of thirsts - physical, mental, emotional, creative & fashionable. My last word to cricket:

THANK YOU

Annexure 1: Illustrations



(India's WC Trophy, 2011)



(A 4-0 Whitewash Of Australia, 2013)



(India's Havoc Against Aussies, 2013)



(ICC Awards Dominator, 2019)

Annexure 2: 'My choices for the period of my play'

Best Batsman	>	Ricky Ponting
Best Bowler	>	Glenn McGrath
Best Team	>	Australia
Best Captain	>	Steve Waugh
Best All-Rounder	>	Jacques Kallis
Best Wicketkeeper	>	Adam Gilchrist
Best Player	>	Ricky Ponting
Best Inning	>	Rahul Dravid's 233 vs Australia in 2003-04