

The Pinnacle Thrill Called Cricket

(My Autobiography)

- Saurabh Choudhary

"Foreword"

My dear friends, this is the international cricketer Saurabh Choudhary, writing my autobiography under this title 'The Pinnacle Thrill Called Cricket' narrating my story from birth to retirement. I got motivated to write this book getting inspired from Sachin's book. When I read that book in 2014 that joy of that innocent love for cricket got settled in my heart, & the spirit impressed me to write a similar book. The backgrounds & values of most of Sachin's & my upbringing are similar & we have developed on identical virtues. At this time in 2018, when I have completed 18 years in international career, I am feeling that WC 2019 will be an ideal time to retire after if we win this WC. My career after 5 WCs will be a full circle & I can then look back at my recreational desires & move onto that. This is although premature to talk about still as the WC is a tough tournament & I shouldn't be talking of it easily, & I 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 is in, Saurabh Choudhary narrating the story of what I lived as **"The Pinnacle Thrill Called Cricket"**.

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Chapter 1: Preface

"As you put in, so shall you receive. This world is an equal system of input & output. You get what 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 principles 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 & verified it to the concerned authorities for authenticity. Similarly, he judged all things in personal life also from the point of view of good-bad / right-wrong & took all the decisions and actions accordingly.

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

Our family was a typical middle class family with full practise & following of principles & 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 high school 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 Rajnagar Extension 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 1975. The house was a three-bedroom

flat where we remained from the time of my birth till my purchasing of our bungalow in 2003.

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 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 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 cricket.

Chapter 2: Formative Phase

I had left the last chapter at the point of my gaining consciousness. This happened when I was 9 years old & was in class IV. 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. When I studied multiplication & division in decimal, it occurred to me that I have studied something of importance. I had now studied the entire operation of numbers including decimal numbers i.e. addition, subtraction, multiplication & division. So when I understood this topic, I felt that numbers are of use in world, calculation & computation of numbers is important, hence by learning all the arithmetic operation of numbers I have learnt a 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 playing cricket in the campus. They were talented players & were playing intense cricket. After an evidence of few minutes, I saw how passionate the game of cricket is, how amazing it is to hit shots, how joyful it is to bat & how fun-filled it is to bat hard & long & score big & smash boundaries. 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 much 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 nothing else.

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 twelve 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 & in TV. After one & a half years, I had developed some art & could strike a few shots on leather ball. Then I determined that I'll open up to Mumma & Daddy & 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 my 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.

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 by observation. They then started enquiring about any coaching 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 Patil Sir, which was run by a Dubai-based businessman who had hired Sandeep Sir 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 the next task in this direction.

I was going on 11 now & could get admission in it only from class VI. The academy was a cricket-cum-academics school & provided full training of students from game to studies. Dad inquired about the details of this thing & he 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 in this condition of undecidability & 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 inside & 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 2 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 by them & learning grasped & result shown by the end of this period.

We appeared in this test for 55 days & 20% of us who participated in it 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 for my mom-dad who had risked everything for my dream and aspiration.

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

Our timetable was very interesting. Our school started at 7:10 am & we did exercise during morning assembly. Our coaching then happened for 3 hours. We then got a break after which we had tutorial classes.

The coaching of batting in the first few months was basic technique which we practised in the nets while later it shared time with match practice & 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, perservering & daring & this Sandeep Sir noted soon & started giving extra attention on me. He scheduled specially practice matches for me & took me to play everywhere wherever the matches were played. I also obeyed him with full submission & worked hard till I didn't feel fatigue.

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 was taught.

Soon I had attained good rythm, was meddling the ball well & was 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 levels onwards provided us some fees). 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 in my project, he enquired daily what I learnt today 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 also very easily.

Our school was not affiliated to CBSE but we were enrolled 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 travelling to new places also was a fun-filled experience.

I secured 82% marks in class X & 61% in class XII. Mom-Dad were satisfied that I was maintaining myself in 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 this. He said you should own a bike only when you are eligible for the driving lisense. So I got my bike at

the college time. By this time we travelled by flights. The income was also sufficient for my security. I was very happy with my progress. In 1999 I got to play 2 practice matches against New Zealand in the Test series as member of the BP 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 for the thirty probables of the Australia tour.

Playing for UP was a big honour & I took it to the second round in the first season & knockout stage in the second.

I had hit 12 centuries in my 2 seasons in 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 coach of India. Thus we walked some more years together.

Chapter 3: Stages Through The District & State Levels

I played under-19 cricket for 1 year from the age of 17 to 18 & first class cricket for 2 years from the age of 18 to 20. In these 3 years I played some prestigious tournaments like the Cooch Behar Trophy, NKP Salve Trophy, Universities Cup & Saurashtra Premier League. My preparation was solid & I fared through all of them. The UP Cricket Association & Ghaziabad Cricket Association had already noted me as a potential player. I won some of these trophies for my team. I missed out on playing the under-19 WC ever as I wasn't selected for it when it had happened in 1996 & had passed the age when it had happened in 2000. My state associations were very kind of me to allow me swifter connecting flights & arrange my stay when I had to play back to back matches at different places. We already had much shelter from these associations as they provided stay for us in hostels & meal in mess when we went for tours from our academy.

With these ladders forming the stepping stones of our progress, I marched on from foot to foot & reached the selection camp for Australia tour in December 1999.

Chapter 4: Things Of My Interest

Meanwhile, when all this cricket schedule was happening some things of my other interests also happened. Daddy brought home a desktop PC when I was in class X. He had received a training of MS-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 competitive 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 thereafter. He got me opened a bank account the same year when I started receiving cheques from BCCI. & I completed a senior secondary in PCM with some online tuitions from nearby teachers. All these things enchanted my life & filled colours of the brightest shade in it & I had a life much enjoyful besides cricket also.

Chapter 5: Debut & First Season

My big break came in 1999 when I was selected for the 30 probables of the Australia series. The series was set to be a tough one as India weren't at the top of their game at that time and Australia were raising the bar continuously after winning the World Cup 1999. We needed a few batsmen to face the hostile bowling attack 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 assigned me the same role here. I fared well in the two practice 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 & scoring big.

My debut happened on 07 Jan 2000. The experience of playing against the Aussies in Test cricket was more thrilling and satisfying than 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 most tough and 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, Laxman and me 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 departments. Our performance had some high points, but in all the show was dismal.

The 1st Test began with a solid Aussie post of 441 with Ricky and Steve knocking centuries. We managed 285 in the first innings but succumbed to 110 in the 2nd. The main batsmen of our team were given minimum targets for the series which they were expected to attain. My target was @35. I managed 26.5. My performance wasn't

upto the mark but the quality of my style & shots provided me grace marks.

The 2nd match was also similar with the only difference that Sachin hit hard in both the innings. I again showed some resilience knocking 32 & 21.

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 2nd match & Laxman's 167 in the 3rd were the only high points in India's side in this series, although I consider my @35 also a success considering that I was a debutant. In the 3rd 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 the team to 500. But I just maintained a decent average in the series. High scores are the biggest motivators in Test cricket. Laxman's 167 also charged me to dream of a few big ones of my own. Double centuries are what facinated 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 ODIs 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 & he took charge in a very motivated way. The Asia Cup, although we still lost before reaching the final, but the CT we smacked daringly & steered to the trophy with emphatic wins against top teams. This CT win was a big one as CT was the 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: Beginning Of Overseas Successes

Sourav Ganguly's appointment as the captain of India was a historic event as Ganguly was prominently a dominating & aggressive person. He was especially attacking in all ways and had many qualities needed for a skipper. He announced in his appointment only that he will be very strict & a hard taskmaster.

Under Ganguly, with some success beneath our feet & some new players, the team was looking confident, high-aimed & focused.

The 2001 season saw the rise of a new knight in the Indian army - the Turbanator, who demolished the Australian team single-handedly. Before this the Australian team was on a winning streak of 17 matches which Harbhajan terminated badly. The series was a dream run as we lost the first match badly but bounced back to take the series 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 inning of 120 & saved the team from batting-on. Australia managed 212 in the second inning & gave us target of 384. Harbhajan had played vital role in limiting this 4th inning target to a competable range by taking 6 wickets & 7 wickets respectively in the 2 innings. The target didn't prove challenging for us as Laxman & Rahul piled up a large partnership to take us win by 6 wickets.

The next match was also a big show as India 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.

The next ODI series was a big milestone for India as Sachin became the 1st batsman to complete 10000 runs in ODIs. India won this series 3-2 & I contributed consistently in all the five matches.

The next series brought me the opportunity to showcase my opening skills as Sachin was out due to an elbow 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 of our team & 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 first match and helped the team pose a total 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 Eng clean in both Test & 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 7-0 was perhaps unprecedented for any team. In the 1st Test Deep Das 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 2nd match Eng produced reasonable but not very challenging totals in both the innings which Ind chased competently with me scoring 50s in both the innings. The 3rd match was a negative tactic one on part of the Eng captain as he made Ashley Giles bowl a negative line of outside the leg stump to Sachin 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 easily the match easily.

Sachin was the Man of the Series for his close-to 100 scores in all the 3 matches.

In the ODI series, India produced reasonable totals of 281 & 250 in the 1st 2 matches & won comfortably. The 3rd match was a blower in which India became the first team to score 400 runs in an ODI match. Sehwag & Sourav put up a tormenter partnaership of 200 in 25 overs for Ind & in Sachin's absence, Sehwag smashing 126(90) & Sourav 63(63), enabled India to put up 400 easily. The next 2 games were low scoring ones with England giving us 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 50s in both the innings. The scorelines of 3-0 and 7-0 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 a result of 3-0. The 1st & 4th matches were uninteresting with first

innings of both teams only consuming up all the time & forcing a draw. In the second match Sachin equalled Sir Bradman's tally of 29 centuries & won the match for us. In the 3rd 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 runs joint-highest with Laxman for us & second highest in the series. In the 5th match, we dismissed WI for 222 & secured 412 ourselves which suppressed them below our mat.

The next mission was Natwest. A triangular contest encircling Ind, WI & Eng which filled the ODI leg of the WI & Eng tours. The league games of this series were all high scoring ones with both the teams scoring big. We won 5 of our 6 league games & set up the final with England. Sachin had scored heavily in this series with 60s & 80s in all the games. But the final turned up to be an uphill task with England giving us target of 326 which was unchased yet in ODIs history. We started decently with Sachin & Sourav setting up an opening partnership of 106 but the wickets tumbled there after & 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 150 for the 5th wicket with me smashing 69(63) & Yuvraj thrashing 87(75). We didn't need to think of anything in that partnership also, it was just to be a zone of tranquility. And that sufficed. We reached the target in the penultimate over with some lusty shots by 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 summer set up our rhythm for the WC.

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 will power & mental strength.

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 motivator to motivate ourselves & keep it in our minds - each one of us whatever we liked. 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 a 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 the best candidate 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 Aussie attack. Sachin top scored with 52 in the 1st game and me with 66 in the second. The target of 198 was chased by ten wickets by Australia. 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 momentumous run of form with 152 and 81 in these games. In the 5th and 6th games also although we didn't bat to our full potential but played out the opposition emphatically. Against Eng Nehra assailed us with a 6-fer & against Pakistan it was an only-Sachin show to take us to 274. In both these games both me & Sachin hit fifties. We finished 2nd 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. We were now in a patchy run of form with Aus being the only team looking like challenging us. The Semi Final clash came again with SA with similar circumstances with the target being just 1 run higher. I anchored the chase successfully with a 102. The Final war was a heart-beating embattlement with Australia giving us a challenging target of 305 which was enough to scare us against the great Aussie battery. We didn't have many ideas as to how we could manage the task but we had faith in ourselves to somewhat deeper level in our hearts. We believed that if a few batsmen could fire, the rest of the things will be taken care of by the rest of the players. Sachin thrashed McGrath for a big pull in the first over but mis-connected on the next. Sourav came in next to lift the team but could manage only 25(30). The next batsman sent was Sehwag to strengthen the inning. It was this where our luck clicked & Sehwag earthed a blazing 82(81). His partnership with me lasted 160 runs & the score was 220/3 when he got out. I managed till 127 & the score on my dismissal was 245/4 in 40 overs. This was a delicate point where things could go any way. But Dravid & Yuvraj pulled it off for us with a steady partnership of 60 & clinched the match with six wickets remaining.

**WE WERE ONLY THE THIRD TEAM IN THE WORLD TO
WIN THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP TWICE**

Chapter 7: Season 2003-04

The triumph of the World Cup was a big one with glorification of our might soaring high everywhere. Our victory was well-fought, well-attained & well-deserved. We had performed comprehensively in the 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 only 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 & refreshed 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 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 level of success. I told dad that I want to purchase a big house & I will do it after the New Zealand 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 selection. I succeeded in both these series excellently & reached the no. 1 position in ICC ranking 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.

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

We had a challenging season ahead with Australia waiting for us to take the revenge & 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 anger when we faced them in the practise games. What turned out was a glorious Test series which was in my opinion the greatest Test series ever contested. Steve Waugh was to retire after this & the Aussie team were desperate to give him an honourable farewell.

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

The first match hosted in Brisbane. Australia over-confident & got bundled 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 400/2 when I got out. We declared at 600/3. Australia tried to show false confidence in their second inning & attempted to play fast. They were bundled out for 196. Our task was only 152 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. With this humiliating defeat & 0-1 down in the series, Australians were frustrated to the hilt & struck back harder in the 3rd 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 inning & smashed a 195 before the end of the day. I was on 125 at Stumps & ended up at 180 the next day. We finished at 546. Australia made 558.

Ponting was in a purple run of form & had struck 200s in both of the last two 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 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 600 with 241 & 178 personally. The rest was a formality with Kumble running through the lineup & dismissing them for 400 & then 200 respectively.

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

The VB series was also a tight contest as both us & Aus won evenly in the league round & won a final each in the first two finals. The first final was an Ajit Agarkar special with him saving India out from a 75/6 with the bat & taking to 261 with a partnership with me although we lost the game & the second was a dream chase for us with 332 total of Australia chased with a courageous fightback. The 3rd final was won by Australia but we won the hearts.

After the win vs Australia we were put on cloud 9 by all & Dravid & me were declared 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 series. & This is what happened. The first match at Multan was a one man show by Virender 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 winning the toss. Our batsmen got complacent & played loose shots & lost their wickets cheaply at the top of the order. I & Yuvraj rebuilt with a 139 & 112 & took the team across 400. Pakistan slipped under the pressure of this fightback & ended up at 300. Sehwag again turned form in the second inning & gave Pakistan a target of 341 which they couldn't chase.

The third match again was a Dravid show with his hitting the 3rd double century of the season & ending up at what won him the Player Of The Year award in 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 fields present at the function.

The ICC started the Players Of The Year awards from this time & instituted the first ceremony in June with Dravid, me & Flintoff taking the Player Of The Year, Test Player Of The Year & ODI Player Of The Year awards 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 4th one to move into that club & he said that Dravid was one of the best batsmen in the world at that 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 time (Vishy Sir) & it was only apt that it was being inaugurated by the best player of this time (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 but always in the top 3-4 & no one thought he would come 1st & he raced to the top when noone knew.

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

Chapter 8: Sachin & Rahul - My Idols

The 2004-05 season was an ODI dominated one with 4 tournaments 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 1st one witnessed Eng scoring 240 with & we bundled out for 170. In the 2nd clash England posted a hardscored 307 with Flintoff's 93(92). I smashed 107(93) in this taking my team to 307. The 3rd tie was again a Nehra Day with his 6-fer wrapping up Eng 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. 1st clash against Pakistan was reduced to 32-overs per side with our target being 192. 2nd clash against Australia was reduced to 37-overs per side with our target being 175. And in the final we were given target of 240 vs Pak. We chased all the targets with success & won the 3rd consecutive title of the season.

The 4th CT was also a bit of upsets one in which we upset Australia in the semi final & England in the final. I scored three centuries in the trophy leading the team to wins in all of them. In the final we were reduced to 140/8 against 220 & 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 at stake. 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 the Oz aura. We won the 1st two games outclassing the powerful Oz despite a competitive performance.

The first match they put up 474 which we equalled with my 221. 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 to refight Australia to 370. We got target of 235 which we chased comfortably.

The 3rd 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 valiantly a gallantry 117.

The 4th match was again an undecided one.

After resting for 3 months in the winter break, I struck the idea of getting developed a website for myself. I needed to find something new & a website was the best thing I could have as it provided fun also & another platform for to connect with my fans. I had learnt web designing a bit in my 'A' Level & did some myself. I made a rough design of the app & scripted the draft myself. The pages contained information about different aspects of my life & I entered them all to make a website. I then contacted a developing company to do the rest of the job & they finished it up in 10 days. I had done course of DOEACC 'A' level in college.

The next project was Pakistan - they were visiting us for the first time after 1999. This was a Sehwag series as he smashed big hundreds in all the matches. He struck a 173 in the 1st match, Dravid hundreds in both innings of the 2nd match & me & him knocked a partnership of 300 in the 3rd. We won the series 3-0.

It was again a 5-month break. We did lots of fun in this period. We, the young guns, were invited for the IFW in Delhi in summer. Yuvraj, I, Harbhajan, all walked the ramp for Manish Malhotra & I was the showstopper. We were given beautiful 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 chasing 215 vs New Zealand 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 only

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 of India were taken. Voices to this effect had arisen from within some factions that India now needed a change in captaincy & Dravid was a fitter captain in the time than Ganguly & 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 change. I was also appointed the Vice-Captain which was a very big honour for me as I hadn't attained many leadership achievements in life. Two new entries had also happened in the team in the forms of Gautam Gambhir & Munaf Patel. Gambhir was a sound batsman & Munaf a very fast bowler.

This was also the year of Jacques Kallis as he smashed 2100 Test runs in a span of twelve months.

Sehwag & me were now developing as very good opening partners & enjoyed each other very much with big opening partnerships. A similar one we struck in the first test against SA where both of us struck 164 & 162 for the opening wicket. We won the series 2-0 with some solid bowling 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 preferer 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 cricket players.

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 400 run opening partnership to neutralise the effect & the match from there was washed out.

The England & West Indies series following were Yuvraj specials with his commanding the MoSs in both 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 6th 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 defeats. In the tests, they gave us difficulty only in the 2nd & 3rd matches as Harbhajan ran through their order in the 1st test reducing them to 84 in the first inning & making it a cakewalk for us. In both of the remaining two tests I smashed double hundreds & took our side to victories in challenging SA conditions. In the ODI series, SA gave a steep targets in all of the first three matches & 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.

Chapter 9: Winning WCs

The 2007 WC came as a tough challenge for us as we lost a lot of land in the group stage with losing the opening match to Bangladesh. We were us, SL, Bermuda & Bangladesh the four of us in our group. We lost the first match getting all out at 191 which BD chased making a mockery of us. Now we needed to win both of the remaining games to advance to the Super 8. Bermuda was an easy fodder but SL made us sweat full to earn our seat.

The Super 8s from there was a fresh challenge with some teams finding super form from the beginning of the series. Australia was at the top of the bunch crushing all teams ruthlessly & we needed to play some harsh cricket to take our team 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 the 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 SA in the semis where we got to bat first on a good track. We made most of the opportunity to register 325 which we could defend by 1 run.

Australia was again a hilly task in the final with rain helping us to ease the ground. The rain washed 12 overs from each side of the game reducing the match to 38-overs per side. Hadn't it been a reduced match we could have lost to the Aussie might. In the reduced tie, we got to bat 1st again on a good track. Hayden & McGrath were in brilliant form in this tourna and ended up with 659 runs & 26 wickets respectively. We posted 281 in our 38 overs & batting second made Australia's task tough as they tumbled under the pressure & ended at 217/7. This was the first time that a team had won a World Cup the 3rd time and we were World Champions for another 4 years.

WC 2015

The WC 2015 was again a big victory as India faced up a challenging target of 329 from Australia in the SFs. India did well to avoid loss of wicket till 76 but consumed 16 overs in this time. I then stitched up a century partnership with Kohli & took the team across 230 with 8 wickets intact. The score at that time was 38 overs. I stretched to 139 & we managed to chase it with 2 balls to spare. India were now playing some extra-universal games & this was our 5th WC with second highest being 2.

Chapter 10: The Age Of Virat Kohli & Rohit Sharma

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 was in store for me in the next few hours. He told that he is visiting players wherever he can these days to give a token of appreciation from his side. 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 gate had a slogan - Eat Cricket, Sleep Cricket, Drink Only Cricket. I had wallpaper of his & Vishy Sir in my hall & study rooms 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 me debut titled "Record Book". I had made a collection of praising columns for India in the newspapers since my debut time titling "India In The Newspapers". A library of highlights of India's top matches since that time was stored in my computer & I had created a file of my favourite players of my generation under the title "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 serie 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 Kohli & Rohit Sharma. These 2 batsmen really emerged as the successors of Sachin & Dravid & filled in their shoes perfectly. Both are ODI goats & Virat has done the unprecedented by completing 10000 runs in 205 ODIs @ 59 & Rohit also 9000+ with 29 centuries. It's difficult to count how many times these 2 have hit big innings whether chasing or posing. Virat is nearing Sachin's 49 hundreds also. Virat has scored more centuries while chasing than all other teams have done together. & Both now the captain & the dy, have for better control of the Indian team. Rohit has struck 3 ODI double centuries, a highest of 264 & 4 T20 centuries. With a WTC being planned the next year, hope this pair flies highest in that also.

Chapter 11: New Players

Apart from the India pair of captain & Dy, there are some other players in some other teams also who have touched the sky. There is a caption of 'Fab 4' these days, which includes the 4 great batsmen of the current era. Each of them have rocketing averages & have played high in difficult conditions. The Fab 4 are Virat, Steve Smith, Joe Root & Kane Williamson. All 4 of them are super consistent but Virat has an edge in ODI format. He is way ahead of all the rest 3 in this form. These Fab players with some more talented bunch in their respective teams are delivering the fiercest in batting arena & entertaining the modern crowds like never before.

Chapter 12: Some Unforgettable Exploits

Through these 2 decades of my play, there have been some exploits more unforgettable than others. Like India's Test run in the season 2010, the BGT 2008, the English scales of 445 & 481 & the Test highest of 400. India played 15 Tests in 2010, won 13 of them, swept the BGT 2008 3-0, England made scores of 445 & 481 in ODI & Lara reclaimed his world record of highest score with 400. All these exploits have famed cricket like no other game & there are some teams doing the same way still.

Chapter 13: Farewell to the "God Of Cricket"

The Australia series brought curtains to the international career of who can easily be declared the greatest cricket player of all times. Sachin had announced that he will retire after it & we were very happy for him to have made such an illustrious career. He finished with the highest number of runs in both formats Tests & ODIs & the most centuries also & many other enviable records. His was a dream journey & we all had grown up watching his exploits on the TV. The other matter of pleasure for us was that we had got another champion batsman in our team who was running in a purple form since Jan 2012 & had got rated as the no. 1 batsman in ODI cricket at the time (Kohli). He had smashed 1100 runs in 5 months this year including 5 centuries & had played two dream innings - one 133(86) chasing 321 of SL & career best 183 against Pakistan. The cricket was happening too much these days - we were complaining to reduce the frequency. The next few years saw the rise of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma to great levels & my consistency of supersuccess in this game. We were at the top of team rankings in all formats & were teasing all teams with our dream run of form since 2000. The 2013 season saw Kohli & Sharma glee to the peak of their careers and they played a Bradmanque series against Aus. It was a 7-match bilateral series in which 2 games were washedout. Australia gave us tough competition in 2 matches chasing our 300 in one & defending their 300 in another. But the remaining 3 were a feasts of a dragon by Virat, Rohit & Me. In one we chased their 359 in 43.3 overs with 9 wickets remaining, in one their 351 with 5 wickets to spare & in one set up a target of 384 for them with Rohit's 209. Rohit had smashed 491 runs in the series & Virat had played 2 blitzkrieg innings of 100(52) & 115(66). Virat had already gathered up 17 tons in this form by this time & was looking like breaking Sachin's tally of 50 hundreds soon. Cheteshwar Pujara was another potential batsman in Test Cricket & we had a got a talented pool of bowlers in Umesh Yadav, Mohit Sharma, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami. Virat was running through a fairytale performance hitting 5-6 centuries every year & we were

fancying a WC victory in Aus also. In 2014 Rohit took the record of highest individual score to a mammoth 264 & Virat hit a mouthwatering 641 in Australia. The record for highest score in Tests was also broken twice in this period with Hayden 380 & Lara again 400. We were now mostly a new team with the young guns forming the core of the team & the only challenge we had now for the world cup was to fit this team in the things on plate properly. Greg Chappell was our coach since 2011 & he was an able coach with technical details in everything an a tech-equipped infrastructure in his armour. We were prepared for the WC and needed to hold our nerves properly. The WC was happening in the most hailed country in the world & was therefore being celebrated & watched out the most. Our group in the WC had only one tough opponent - SA with Pakistan and WI being inferior teams for us. We made 300+ scores against both Pak & SA & they couldn't reach us under the pressure of the WC. The rest of the group was a formality & we met Bangladesh in the QFs. Banglaesh gave us a good challenge by posting 288 & we needed Suresh Raina & Dhoni to make hundreds to attain that. The SemiFinal was the Final in real sense as we met the tournament favourites Australia there & they were the toughest opponents in the tourna. They made 329 and we were again chasers as mostly to our bad luck in all ICC knockouts. Our chase was slow with us making only 76 in the first 20 overs but we were successful in our strategy of saving wickets in the early overs & blasting then. Rohit Sharma was the 1st batsman to depart at 76 then I and Kohli had a 150 run partnership taking the team to 226/2 in 40 overs. I was still unbeaten & this was a matter of relief in this situation of steep asking rate that a set batsman was available. I departed soon but we had done the groundwork for our middle-order. The remaining 4 batsmen did the job with success & took us to the target. Michael Clarke was embarrassed to take the result in the presentation ceremony & we lifted the progress proudly in our march. The final was a simple question for us as NZ didn't pose much threat & gave us a meagre target of 183. This was an unbeatable record for us - We were champions for the fifth time.

Chapter 14: World Cup 2019

The format this time was different & better than all before. We had 8 teams with no groups. All played each other once in the league round. The top four team from there went to a Super 4 stage where each one played all other once. The points of the league round were carried over to the Super 4 round & all the ties were to be stretched till decision. We won all our league games to be the table toppers & reached the second phase as the favourites. Australia, England and New Zealand were the other competitors there. A system of Super Overs was introduced to resolve the ties. The teams played Super Overs till the tie was resolved. We picked momentum from the first game in the tourna & beat all the teams coming our way. Rohit, Kohli & I were the main contributors in all the games & scored heavily. Rohit smashed five centuries in the tournament & ended up with 648 while Virat hit five consecutive half-hundreds. KL was another good contributor in the second half of the tourna & found form then. We made 350 scores against Aus & Pak & chased 330 vs England. Australia was 2nd in the points table after us, Eng 3rd & NZ 4th. All our players came good in most matches & applied their 100% to produce results. We won against NZ & Eng in this round having advantage of batting 1st on good tracks and ended up 2nd to secure our finals seat. The chase against England was a steep one with the required RR reached 10 in the last 16 overs & the setup of 347 against Australia also tough with Rohit & me needing to play very maturely. The chase against SA was also very mature with both me & Rohit scoring 122(144) against their 222 about which Kohli had said that this was Rohit's most mature knock in ODI cricket. Our opponent in the final was NZ who put up 240 in a rain interrupted game which spilled up till the next day. The target was not high but we were on the floor with 25/4 in 10 overs. It wasn't that we hadn't play well but things just didn't click for us. I made a 66 in swinging conditions & Ravindra Jadeja did good job by posting 77(55) balls & changed the direction of the game for India. He played a match changing innings taking the RRR to the other side of 6. In the end he and Dhoni took our side to the other

side of the target as we registered record 5th straight & 6th overall win. I announced my retirement in the presentation ceremony & all were happy at my career. I finished with @ 75 in tests and 44 in ODIs. The @ in tests was special & all my teammates celebrated it with full heart & aplomb. Player of the Century awards was given in the ICC awards 2020 in which the Player of the Century was adjudicated to me. My performance against Australia was the icing of my career & big-match temperament was also very high. Some players have high difficult-match quotient like Laxman and Vishy Sir & I was also one like. Difficult situations got my juicy liquids flowing.

Virat got an app developed for himself in 2018 which I followed by getting one made for myself like soon. He uploaded his interviews, quiz about himself, his records, news & wallpapers in that. I also followed similar format. I was always interested in whatever I could do in technology. I also got inspired to write a book from Sachin's & wanted to pen down a narrative of my experiences in Cricket. But when I started to ink the subject, I found the topic of the great batsmen of my generation more interesting than my autobiography & I did just that with a registration under the title "The League Of Extraordinary Batsmen". I included 19 batsmen in that & wrote one chapter on each. But I didn't make the list purely on cricketing reasons; made some decisions on the ground of my liking or disliking for some players on other reasons. I was now enjoying my experience very much & the culmination of my career had brought me great relief & I was enjoying post-retirement life at full fun home. I engaged most of my indulgences in social media, smartphones, online shopping & other internet apps. The smartphone & internet revolution had sparkled the entire world with magic & all were swinging in it with happiness. We finished our stint with some new findings like Jaspreet Bumrah & Mohammed Shami who had wreaked havoc in the WC.

Overall, ours was a supersuccessful stint in cricket & superlative with many cuts above the rest.

Now we all players were enjoying our success way beyond recognition & we were planning weekly parties in all ours' homes after the Awards. I used to get printed calendars of our team's players every year with wallpaper of 1 player in each month for myself & any of my teammates who demanded. I had also got printed a pack of Trump Cards of ODI batsmen also which I used to play with my mates whenever they came to my house. I made an online TC game also on an app. The impact of the success was permanent & its aftertaste was neverending. The govt also gave us some recognitions - we got a congratulatory note from the PMO at our WC win in 2007 & were hosted by the PM for a dinner party after our 2019 triumph. We are still partying with media & other celebrity houses fighting up for

our bites wildly. I believe this supersuccess will ease the anarchy in the society to a large extent & inspire people in Cricket & other fields to work hard like us for generations to come. This is my final word in this book & I appeal to the readers of it that this life is very beautiful, don't waste it due to other people's faults & egos, just chill out & live your life to the fullest.

Chapter 15: Sachin's Book

2014 brought another subject of fun for us cricketers as Sachin wrote a beautiful autobiographical book on his life. The book was a wonderful feast as he expressed that magnanimous journey in even more magnanimous fashion. He narrated every important incident in that book from his childhood to retirement providing us the amusements like his naughty adventures in childhood, his innocent crusades in cricket & some of his kiddish misadventures even after growing up. Every description from that book reflected his simplicity, modesty, integrity & greatness & that of his family also. We learnt more about his background & learnt the keys of greatness also. He told about every person he came across in life with utmost respect and humility & appreciated the contribution of every player who has played for India. We realised even more closely how difficult it is to be Sachin & how he manages it & doesn't let it be visible from outside.

Adidas had renewed my contract with Rs. 281 Cr. in 2008 & 500 Cr. Rs. in 2013. A new spinner had joined our team in 2011 - R. Ashwin & he was taking wickets at light's speed in Test Cricket. He was the most successful bowler since his debut till 2016 & won the 'Player of the Year' award for breaking the record for the fastest 250 wickets that year. Kallis & Ponting were chasing Sachin's record at sprinter's speed since this time & retired unsuccessful in this attempt after the WC as did Dravid & Laxman from India. Kallis had a very successful all-round career with 250+ wickets in both formats apart from the runs he scored as a batsman for which Ravi Shastri called him the Player of the Decade & the Mr. Steel of International Cricket. Dravid's exit curtailed an entire chapter in Indian Cricket where he had lived like an institution ever since his arrival in 1995. We now had to work very hard to fill this void. The year saw superannuation of many legendary cricketers like Sangakkara, McCullum & Jayawardene. India also had to find the new captain to succeed Dravid. The offer first came to me but I was not interested in the job not having the aptitude for it.

The decision was taken in favour of Virat, the second best player in the team after me, & Rohit, the next best, was appointed the Deputy.

The decision of skipper had brought new excitement in the team as Virat was a tremendous player at that time & all were interested in seeing how he fares as the captain. The interest proved rightful as he hit a series of double centuries over the time. Rohit also picked up the gear & rose to the level of a legendary ODI player who made only 100 runs less than Virat between 2015 & 2019. We achieved many envy-provoking landmarks in this decade like washingout many teams in Test Cricket, winning the Champions Trophy in all its editions & winning the inaugural T20 WC which was played in 2016 and which was a tournament of a new format started in 2016. It was a new format introduced to give more colour to the game & it came up to be a very interesting one.

In this, both teams got to play only 20 overs which offered the scope of hitting hard as the time was less. Virat was an iconic in this format also & averaged over 50. In the T20 WC we played 6 games & this tourna was a surpriser as almost every second game was an upset. We faced NZ, Pak, BD & Aus in the group stage & beat them all comprehensively. The Pak match was one-sided as Virat raced to the target against Pak's low score. BD was a close game as we had to defend 3 runs in the last over which Dhoni did very well with his intelligent keeping. The match against Australia was a great advertisement for the format as Virat led the team to the chase of 160 valiantly hitting 19 runs in the penultimate over. This win underlined Virat's majesty in the limited overs all the more & he was clear as the best batsman in the world in this field. The group round saw many more upsets also like Eng chasing SA's 247 & Gayle storming a 200 chase against England. Our SF happened against WI which was seen as an underdog, but they gave us tough competition reaching 200 against our 215 which was enabled with Wriddhiman Saha's 115. We never thought WI could come this close but their steady chase with tricky wickets in hand served their game.

The final was again an upset where we faced 155 target of Eng & needed 19 from the last over with eight down. Here Yousuf Pathan again came good & repeated his few successes in the limited overs in similar situations which he had done before. He struck 6s in each of the 1st 4 balls & created history. This format had little effect on the other formats also as batsmen were in the hitting mode all the time. We played many teams at home in Tests in the 2016-19 period & washedout all of them. The 2018 was the penultimate season of my career as I had made my mind to retire after the 2019 WC. Kohli won the Player of the Year award thrice in 2016, 2017 & 2018 & reached many landmarks in very little time like 10,000 runs in ODIs, average of 59 and 7 double centuries in Test Cricket. He broke many captain records also.

In 2018 we played the top 3 teams in world cricket overseas. SA, Eng & Aus were still strong opponents in their lands & we played tough series against each of them. The SA series was in Jan, Eng in Sep & Aus in Dec. All our players including bowlers applied extra consciousness in their efforts in these matches & won the series for us. The SA series we won 2-1, Eng 3-2 & Aus 4-0. Now we had new bowlers in the team in the form of Jaspreet Bumrah, Yuzvendra Chahal & Kuldeep Yadav, all in terrific form since this period. Bumrah rose up to be the best bowler in the world in all formats by the end of the year. 2 of our teammates - Virat and Rohit wed this season & brought us beautiful sister-in-laws. All the matches this season were balanced contests between bat & ball & gave us sufficient opportunity to win them. In SA, Dhawan created mayhem with centuries in all matches, in England we stuck to our technique of playing close to the body which worked very well & in Aus Cheteshwar Pujara bulked runs with 593 runs in the four matches & won us the series. Virat made the record of being the fastest to 10,000 runs in 205 matches bettering Sachin's of 259. He scored 1,000 runs in 2018 in 11 innings. He also scored a record 658 against SA in a bilateral ODI series. Rohit also became the batsman with most scores of 150+ this year. With Virat & Rohit in this destructive form we won the ODI series as well as the T20 series in Aus & entered the WC as the max favourites.

Chapter 16: Summarisation

My conclusion of this book is just this what a wonderful game this game of Cricket is. It arouses such immense passion in everyone & produces this limitless fun. What a magnificent style its proceedings are. The bowlers bowl in speed of bullet trains, the batsmen strike the ball with weapon-in-hand like armours & the shots in batting are such huge pleasures to watch - the swingings 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 inventors of this game must have invented it with much brain. I have heard that it was played since the early 16th century in England - 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 such intellectualisation - it fulfills all kinds of thirsts - physical, mental, emotional, creative & fashionable. My last word to cricket is just:

THANK YOU

Chapter 17: Illustrations



(India's WC Trophy, 2011)



(4-0 Whitewash Of Aus, 2013)



(India's Havoc Against Oz, 2013)



(ICC Awards, 2019)

Chapter 18: Annexure

'My awards of the period of my play'

Best batsman -> Virat
Best bowler -> Muttaiyya Muralidharan
Best captain -> Steve Waugh
Best team -> Australia
Spirit of cricket award -> Australia