

# SACHIN TENDULKAR

Playing It My Way

My Autobiography



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*with Boria Majumdar*

  
HODDER &  
STOUGHTON

First published in Great Britain in 2014 by Hodder & Stoughton

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781473605190

Hodder & Stoughton Ltd  
338 Euston Road  
London NW1 3BH

[www.hodder.co.uk](http://www.hodder.co.uk)

To all my fellow Indians.

The author's proceeds from this book will be used to support two charitable causes: the alleviation of malnutrition in children and the provision of clean water to the underprivileged.



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Who do I acknowledge first and how do I acknowledge the millions of cricket supporters who have stood by me throughout my career? My simple answer is to dedicate this book to those fans for their unwavering support and encouragement.

The others who need to be thanked profoundly must quite obviously start with Anjali, my devoted wife and partner in everything, who felt I could and should tell my story for posterity. My readers will know if I have managed to do so well enough.

Sincere thanks must also go to the following:

Ajit, who grew up with me and made me the cricketer I was, and who shared my passion for telling my story. Thanks to him for reading and commenting on the drafts.

Arjun and Sara, who when they read this book will know how much I have always loved them and how I felt at not being with them more in their growing-up years.

Aparna Santhanam, family friend and much more, who was a real inspiration at the writing stage. She read each chapter and her suggestions proved invaluable.

Vinod Naidu, my manager and good friend, for putting the idea of an autobiography to me in the first place and more importantly for being someone I have always been able to depend on for guidance in commercial matters over the past decade.

Amit Bhangar, for constantly but gently reminding me of the deadlines and pushing me to complete the book in the time frame we were given.

Roddy Bloomfield, my publisher, who has worked closely with me on the book from start to finish and who is a man whose judgement I have been able to trust; Fiona Rose, his able and helpful editorial assistant at Hodder; Tim Waller, the external editor, who has helped to shape and refine the manuscript.

Finally, to Boria Majumdar, friend and co-writer. By sheer persistence he managed to persuade me over the last three years to spend endless sessions reflecting on every aspect of my life. His infectious enthusiasm and intelligent questions got me fully involved in animated, thoughtful and enjoyable discussion. Through his commitment and focus he has been able to convey the whole story in my own words, impressively expressing my thoughts.



# PROLOGUE

On 16 November 2013, my cricketing journey finally came to an end at the Wankhede Stadium. After somehow managing to complete my farewell speech, I was having a conversation with my family, trying to soak in every moment, when my team-mate Virat Kohli walked up to me. He said, '*Paaji aapne kaha tha aap ko yaad dilane ke liye ki aapko pitch pe jana hain.*' (You asked me to remind you that you had to go to the pitch one final time.) To be honest, I hadn't forgotten; I was just trying to put the moment off for a little longer. It was to be my final visit to the 22 yards that had nurtured and cared for me for so long.

As I walked across the outfield I knew so well, my mind was a complete blank. A lump was forming in my throat as I reached the pitch to pay my final regards. I was there for barely fifteen seconds and all I said was, 'Thank you for taking care of me.' As I headed back to the pavilion for the last time, my mind was suddenly a muddle of memories. In a matter of seconds I had traversed the entire twenty-four-year journey of my career – from my first net session with my coach Ramakant Achrekar, to getting out for 74 in my final Test innings against the West Indies.

It seems to me that no autobiography can claim to document every detail of the author's life. That's impossible. There are bound to be issues that can't be written about for one reason or another, events that are too personal or perhaps too sensitive. Yet I have set out to make this account of my career as close to the full story as I can. Many of the events I describe are, of course, well-known to cricket fans, but I have also tried to talk about a number of things I have not addressed in public before, some of them a little embarrassing, and I hope that readers will find plenty to interest them.

Before starting this book, I had to think long and hard about whether it was the right thing to do. It wasn't an easy decision. I am not in the habit of being sensational for the sake of it or saying things to ruffle feathers. That's just not me. However, I knew that if I agreed to write my story, I would have to be completely honest, as that's the way I have always played the game.

So here I am, at the end of my final innings, having taken that last walk back to the pavilion, ready to recount as many incidents as I can remember from a career in which I was lucky enough to be able to spend my time Playing It My Way.

## CHILDHOOD

*‘Son, life is like a book. It has numerous chapters. It also has many a lesson in it. It is made up of a wide variety of experiences and resembles a pendulum where success and failure, joy and sorrow are merely extremes of the central reality. The lessons to be learnt from success and failure are equally important. More often than not, failure and sorrow are bigger teachers than success and happiness. You are a cricketer and sportsman. You are fortunate to be representing your country, and that is a great honour. But never forget that this too is just another chapter in the book. Typically, let’s say a person lives for seventy or eighty years or so. How many years will you play sport? Twenty years; if you are very good, maybe even twenty-five years. Even by that yardstick, you will live the majority of your years outside the sphere of professional sport. This clearly means that there is more to life than cricket. I am asking you, son, to keep a pleasant disposition and maintain a balanced nature. Do not allow success to breed arrogance in you. If you remain humble, people will give you love and respect even after you have finished with the game. As a parent, I would be happier hearing people say, “Sachin is a good human being” than “Sachin is a great cricketer” any day.’*

My father’s words, which I often heard while growing up, encapsulate my life’s philosophy.

I was born to a very close-knit Maharashtrian family in Mumbai’s Bandra East and lived in the Sahitya Sahawas colony, a residential co-operative for writers. I am one of four children, with two brothers and a sister. Nitin, Ajit and Savita are all older than me, and not only am I the youngest in the family but I was also the worst behaved.

My father, Ramesh Tendulkar, was an acclaimed Marathi poet, critic and professor, while my mother, Rajani, worked for the Life Insurance Corporation of India. Humility and modesty were their hallmarks and I owe a lot of my personality to my upbringing. Despite all my unreasonableness and all the embarrassments I caused them, my parents never gave up on me. In fact, I have often wondered just how they managed to cope with such a naughty child. Though he must have been pushed to the limits sometimes, my father would never shout at me and was always patient when dealing with my mischief. This added to my respect for my father as I grew older. Losing him during the 1999 World Cup in England remains one of the most traumatic moments of my life and I will forever remain indebted to him for helping me become the human being that I am.

My mother, the best cook in the world for me, will do anything to see a smile on my face. She used to make the most delicious fish and prawn curry, *baigan bharta* and *varan bhaat* (lentils and rice) for us at home, and I owe my appetite and love of food to her. I fondly remember lying on her lap after eating delicious home-cooked meals, as she sang the most beautiful songs while trying to get me off to sleep. Listening to her while dozing off at the end of the day instilled in me a love for music that has remained with me to this day.

My brothers, Nitin and Ajit, have always backed me in my endeavours and, on the cricket side, I owe a lot to Ajit, who is ten years older than me and was a good club cricketer himself but decided to

sacrifice his own career to help me achieve my potential. As I said in my farewell speech after my final Test, Ajit and I lived the dream together and he was always my most trusted critic and sounding board. I may have scored the runs, but Ajit was always there with me in spirit, trying to put me right whenever I made a mistake. Even after my last Test innings, we had a discussion about how I had got out and what I had done wrong, despite knowing I'd never play for India again. Ajit is not just my brother, but my closest friend as well. He was always available when I needed him and always put my cricket before his own work.

My eldest brother, Nitin, easily the most creative of the siblings, was the strict disciplinarian in the Tendulkar household and helped rein in my exuberance when my mother had almost given up on me. He not only sketches really well, but is also an accomplished writer and poet and has recently written songs for a movie. Nitin, initially a chemistry teacher, subsequently worked for Air India and I remember on one occasion, when I was ten, his flight was delayed and he had to wait at the Centaur (now Sahara Star) hotel in Mumbai. Ajit and I went to have dinner in his room and for the first time in my life I tasted tandoori chicken, which subsequently became one of my favourite dishes.

Savita, my sister, gave me my first cricket bat. She travelled to Kashmir for a holiday when I was five and brought me back a Kashmir willow bat. She is easily the calmest of the siblings and has a very reserved and composed demeanour. She stays unruffled in difficult situations and we often consulted her on critical matters while growing up. When she got married, I, not knowing much about rituals and customs, tried to insist that my brother-in-law should come and stay with us rather than Savita having to go away. I did not want to let her go and I must say I missed her terribly when she left home.

## **Never sitting still**

Undoubtedly I had a fascinating childhood. My early years were never boring; in fact, quite the opposite. I can trace a lot of the stamina and inner strength that sustained me during my cricket career to those early years, which were full of fun.

We had moved to Sahitya Sahawas in 1971. In my growing-up years, there was a great deal of construction work taking place there. This gave me and my friends the opportunity to play quite a few pranks on our neighbours. While we were never violent and never caused bodily harm to others, I'm ashamed to admit we sometimes enjoyed having a laugh at the expense of other members of the colony. For us it was fun, plain and simple, but looking back at some of the mischief we got up to now is rather embarrassing.

One of our regular tricks was to dig a deep hole in the sand left behind by the contractors and cover it with newspapers before disguising it with sand. Then we'd deliberately lure people to walk over it. As they sank into the crater, we'd be in fits of laughter. Another was to pour water on unsuspecting passers-by from our apartment on the fourth floor, and I remember that feasting on mangoes picked from trees we weren't supposed to touch was also a favourite pastime. The forbidden nature of the act made it even more compelling and the complaints that would follow did little to put us off. Finally – and this is very embarrassing, looking back now – my friends and I would take pride in locking people in their flats. It wasn't dangerous, but the resulting delay, which must have caused them immense frustration, seemed very funny at the time.

As a child I was first enrolled at the Indian Education Society's New English School in Bandra. I was a reasonable student and though I was never a class-topper, I did not languish at the bottom either. While school wasn't altogether boring, the best time of the year was the two-month-long summer

break. During the holiday period, I'd hurry down from our apartment at 9 a.m. and would be out in the sun playing for the rest of the day. The domestic help, Lakshmibai, (a common phenomenon in households where both parents were working) would have to bring down my glass of milk and sometimes she would also have to bring out my lunch, because I'd refuse to go up to our apartment.

The sweltering heat was never a distraction and I'd be out playing till late in the evening. In fact, even after most of my friends had disappeared to their apartments, I would be out alone trying to amuse myself. There were seven or eight blocks in the colony and sometimes I'd just run around them to expend energy. I'd run seven or eight laps on the trot and do so barefoot. Only when my brother Nitin instructed me to go up would I rush back. I was a little scared of him. He generally didn't say much to me but when he did it was always the final word. If my mother grew tired of trying to persuade me to come in, she would ask Nitin to perform the task.

In our two-bedroom apartment, the four children would all sleep together in one of the bedrooms. I was always the last one to drop off and would keep tossing and turning as the others drifted off. Often, while they'd be lying north-south, I'd end up stretched out east-west, and I'd receive a mouthful when they woke up to find me lying across them. The reprimands were part of the bonding and I never took them to heart. The whole experience brought us closer together.

## **A first taste of Chinese food**

As a child I loved food. I grew up eating my mother's wonderful Maharashtrian home cooking and it wasn't till I was nine years old that I first tried Chinese food. In the early 1980s Chinese cuisine was becoming popular in Mumbai and, having heard so much about it, my colony friends made a plan to go out for a meal together. We each contributed ten rupees – which was a lot of money for me at the time – and I was excited about trying something new. The evening, however, turned out to be a disaster as I paid the price for being one of the youngest in the group.

In the restaurant we ordered chicken and sweetcorn soup as a starter. We were sitting at a long table and by the time the soup travelled to me at the far end, there was hardly anything left. The older members of the gang had finished off most of it, leaving very little for us younger ones. The same thing happened with the fried rice and chow mein and I barely managed to get two spoonfuls of each. The older boys had a great evening at our expense but I returned home hungry and thirsty.

## **Dreaming of a bicycle**

As I kid I could also be quite obstinate. While most of my friends had their own bicycles, I did not and I was determined to have one. My father didn't really like saying no to me and tried to placate me by saying he'd buy me one in a few weeks. From a financial point of view, it wasn't easy to bring up four children in Mumbai, but our parents never let us feel any pressure. Not knowing what they had to go through, I remained determined to have my bicycle and refused to go outside and play till I had a new one to show off. It seems a little ridiculous now, but the truth is I didn't go out to play for a whole week. I just stood on the balcony and sulked and tried to guilt-trip my parents into buying me a bicycle.

It was on one of these days that I gave them a real scare. Ours was a fourth-floor apartment with a small balcony with a grille. As a small child, I couldn't see over the top and, with curiosity often getting the better of me, I would try to get my head through the grille. On this occasion it resulted in disaster. While I succeeded in pushing my head through, I couldn't get it back in and was stuck there

for more than thirty minutes. My parents were flustered to start with, but quickly regained composure. After plenty of oil was squirted on my head, my mother finally pulled me out.

Seeing my desperation and worried about what I might get up to next, my father rearranged his finances to buy me a brand-new bicycle. I still don't know what adjustments he had to make to do so. Nor was I concerned at the time. All I cared about was the bicycle and I immediately showed it off to all my friends. However, my joy was short-lived as I met with a serious accident within hours of getting my precious new bicycle. A fruit and vegetable seller pushing a cart had come to the colony. As we came face to face, I was riding too fast and couldn't slow down in time. New to the bicycle, I applied the wrong brake and, bang, I hit the cart head on, lost control and was tossed into the air. As I looked down on the world, my only concern was what would happen to my new bicycle. When I came crashing back down, one of the spokes went through the skin just above my right eye. The cut was deep and blood was gushing out of the wound. Far more importantly, my bicycle was badly damaged.

News soon reached home that I had hurt myself and my parents were very concerned. I tried to be brave and made out that it was only a minor wound. It wasn't, and my father had to take me to a plastic surgeon friend of his, who put eight stitches just above the right eye. He gave me a couple of injections and I returned home feeling sorry for myself and frustrated. My mangled bicycle was parked close to our apartment, but my father told me that I wasn't allowed near it until the wound had healed and that he'd get it repaired in the interim. This time I had to give in, knowing it was the only way I'd get it back.

As soon as I'd recovered, I resumed cycling, and within a few months had become an accomplished biker. I could slow-cycle better than most kids and even went on to win a race organized in the colony. I rode with passion and within a few months had developed the ability to slide on one wheel, which took all my friends by surprise. In areas of the colony where there was sand on the concrete, I could get the wheels to slide for ten to fifteen feet, with my body bent at forty-five degrees. I wasn't bothered about what this was doing to the tyres, of course, as the larger the distance covered, the better I felt. Showing off my skills used to give me a thrill and what added to the fun was that I had learnt these tricks in quick time.

Nevertheless, things went wrong sometimes, causing me plenty of embarrassment and pain. In fact, I think I can trace my ability to withstand pain to my exploits as a child. I'd often get cut or hurt but rarely mentioned these minor accidents to anyone at home. So much so that my father got into the habit of examining my body when I was sleeping to check whether I'd injured myself. If he saw me wince in pain, he'd know I'd done something to myself again and he would take me to the doctor the next day.

No matter what I'd done, though, my father would never shout or scream at me. More often than not, he'd try to set out the reasons why I should or shouldn't do certain things, and his explanations left behind a lasting impact. My father's sense of reason was his biggest virtue and I try to act in the same way with my children.

## **In the wars again**

I had a lot of adventures as a child, but one that stands out is when I was cut under my eye while playing at Shivaji Park, the breeding ground of cricketers in Mumbai, and had to return home covered in blood. I was captaining my team in a match at Shivaji Park when I was twelve and after our wicketkeeper got injured I asked my team-mates if anyone could keep wicket. No one volunteered and somewhat reluctantly I stepped up to the challenge, even though I'd never tried it before. I was

uncomfortable standing in the unfamiliar position behind the stumps and soon missed a nick. The ball came at me fast and, even before I could react, it hit me smack in the face, just missing my eye. The cut was deep and there was a lot of blood.

I didn't have the money to pay for a taxi home and was embarrassed at the thought of getting on a bus with a bloodied face. I asked a friend of mine to give me a lift on his bicycle, and anyone who knows Mumbai will realize what a difficult task that is, especially with heavy cricket kitbags in tow. There was a busy flyover between East and West Bandra, which my friend found too steep with such a heavy load. As a result, I had to get off and walk, with commuters gaping at me in shock. A young kid with a bloodied face and bloodstained shirt lugging his cricket kit over a flyover wasn't an everyday sight.

When I got home, I was relieved to find my parents out at work. My grandmother was in the apartment, but I asked her not to panic and told her it was a minor injury. She said she knew how to handle it and put warm turmeric over the cut, an age-old Indian Ayurvedic treatment for cuts and bruises. I did not bother telling anyone else and the injury healed faster than I expected.

Suffice to say, that wasn't the only time I got hurt while playing cricket as a kid. Injuries were frequent because we played on half-baked and overused pitches and our coach insisted we should bat without helmets and learn to leave balls by swaying out of the way. On such wickets, injuries were a certainty, but they hardened us for the grind in the future and as a result I was never scared of getting hurt. It was all part of being a professional sportsman. However, the ability to withstand pain didn't mean I didn't take due precautions and exposed myself to injuries unnecessarily – something I was once surprised to be questioned about as a fourteen-year-old during a match at the Wankhede Stadium.

The match, which involved Mumbai's Ranji Trophy Probables, started early in the morning and the plan was for a pair of fast bowlers to bowl at the batsmen for five or six overs before they were rested and a new pair were asked to bowl with a new ball. The aim was to give batsmen practice against a fast swinging ball. To make things even more difficult, a lot of grass had been left on the track. I went out to bat early in our innings and was wearing my Under-15 cap. I didn't have a helmet at the time and the Under-15 cap was the only headgear I possessed. Raju Kulkarni, who was by then an accomplished Test bowler for India, was livid when he saw me taking guard in just a cap. All the senior batsmen had helmets, so how dare I, a fourteen-year-old, wander out without proper head protection? At first, I couldn't work out why he was so upset. He bowled a barrage of bouncers – though in hindsight I realize they were intended to teach me a lesson rather than to hurt me – but I managed to stay calm enough to sway out of the way. When I finally understood the reason behind his anger, I did not know how to explain to him that Achrekar Sir had not allowed me to wear a helmet in school cricket – I wasn't attempting to be brave at all. It was only later, when I was selected in the Mumbai team and came to know Raju well, that I finally told him the real reason for not wearing a helmet.

## **Music: my second love**

Music was a constant presence in the Tendulkar household. All my siblings would regularly listen to the radio and always followed the weekly Hindi film music programme *Binaca Geetmala* (Garland of songs), anchored by the well-known radio personality Ameen Sayani. As a result, while I was too young to understand much, I was exposed to music from a very early age. The exposure increased when my father bought a cassette player, which miraculously allowed everyone to listen to music of their choice. Both my brothers were fans of the famous ghazal singer Pankaj Udhas. I couldn't really

appreciate his songs then, but I was always in the room when they were played and was privy to discussions on the nuances and finer points of music. On one occasion Nitin went to Dubai and brought back Pankaj Udhas's newly released album. Even though he didn't get home till midnight, we all waited up to listen to the cassette as soon as he got back, with our grandmother making us tea well past one in the morning.

It was natural that music should soon become my second love after cricket and it has remained that way ever since. I enjoy listening to all kinds of Indian music, ranging from film songs to the more classical variety, and I always feel relaxed with my headphones on. Later, during tours abroad, I began to pick up on Western music and I now love listening to Pink Floyd, U2, Dire Straits and a host of others. I passed that taste for Western music on to Ajit, and it is now an important feature of the Tendulkar household.

## Turning to cricket

Besides cricket and music, I was also a big fan of tennis as a child. John McEnroe, the legendary American player, was my favourite. As a ten-year-old I would mimic McEnroe's look and antics, to the extent that I grew my hair into a curly mop and walked around wearing a headband. I was fascinated by the battles between Björn Borg and McEnroe and for a while I even contemplated choosing tennis over cricket.

Ajit knew about my obsession with tennis but had also seen me play cricket with my colony friends. He had observed my natural bat swing and that's what led him to believe that I might turn out to be a good batsman if groomed properly – though he never imposed anything on me.

What he would do is give me both a tennis racket and a cricket bat and take me up to the terrace to have a hit. He threw tennis balls to me while I took turns at tennis and cricket. We didn't have too many balls then and if they bounced over the walls of the terrace, I would quickly run down four floors and fetch them (there were no elevators then, something that explains the secret behind my strong legs!). It was clear to Ajit that I enjoyed myself far more while playing cricket. However, the episode that led him to take the next step and bring me along to Ramakant Achrekar's summer cricket camp in 1984, at the age of eleven, had nothing to do with cricket.

The turn to cricket was prompted by a group of friends – myself, Sunil Harshe and Avinash Gowariker – getting into a spot of trouble. At the time in India Doordarshan, the national broadcaster, would show a classic film every Sunday, and on this fateful day it was *Guide*, starring Dev Anand, one of India's legendary actors. Most of the residents of our colony were engrossed in the film, allowing us three the opportunity to climb up one of the trees and take some mangoes. Sunil, who was on the heavy side, and I were on a branch together, but it broke and we fell with a crash from quite a height. As we got up and tried to run away, we were caught and brought to book. It was evident that something needed to be done to channel my energies, especially during the school summer holidays. Ramakant Achrekar's coaching camp, where a lot of Mumbai's top cricketers had learnt their game, was Ajit's answer.

## LEARNING THE GAME

From a very early age I played tennis-ball cricket with my colony friends. I loved watching cricket on television and in our games I often tried to emulate the mannerisms of my favourite players, Sunil Gavaskar and the West Indian legend Viv Richards. But it wasn't just the batsmen that I studied. I also loved bowling and tried my hand at different kinds of deliveries – medium pace, off-spin and leg-spin – all with a tennis ball, of course. I even experimented with tactics like the slower ball and bowling from wide of the stump. Throughout my career I have actually bowled a lot in the nets. As soon as I'd finished with my batting I'd pick up a ball and start bowling to whichever batsmen were around at the time.

The transition from playing with a tennis ball to playing with a cricket ball happened under the watchful eyes of Ramakant Achrekar, then cricket coach at Shardashram Vidyamandir school. Achrekar Sir, as I refer to him, started playing cricket at the age of eleven in 1943, which is the age I was when I went to him for the first time. He played for a number of Mumbai clubs, including the Gul Mohar Mills and Mumbai Port, and played a first-class match for the State Bank of India against Hyderabad in 1963. When I was growing up he was undoubtedly one of the most accomplished coaches in Mumbai.

From his own schooldays at Balmohan Vidyamandir, my brother Ajit knew that compared to other schools in Mumbai, Shardashram was by far the best organized in its approach to cricket, and that's why he took me along to Achrekar Sir's nets in Shivaji Park to try my luck at being a part of his summer camp.

Anyone could come for a trial at the camp but then it was up to Sir to decide who to accept. There were nets for players from all age groups, starting with the sub-junior (Under-15) and junior (Under-17) levels. I was eleven years old and trialled at the sub-junior nets to start with. The Mumbai Cricket Association had an Under-15 team and most candidates from the sub-junior section eventually vied for a position in that team.

I had never batted in nets before and felt somewhat overawed with so many people around. When I was asked to bat, I was not at all comfortable. With Sir watching me so closely, I failed to make an impact. After I had finished batting, Sir called Ajit aside and informed him that I was perhaps too young to make the camp and suggested that he should bring me back when I was a little older. I wasn't party to this conversation and had no idea what was discussed at the time. My induction into the Mumbai cricket circuit could have ended in failure – but for Ajit's insistence.

Having seen me play in the colony, Ajit knew I was capable of performing far better than I had in front of Achrekar Sir. He explained that I was nervous and asked Sir to give me one more opportunity. However, he suggested that while doing so Sir should pretend to go away and then watch from a distance. Sir agreed. Before long I was asked to bat again and, without Sir's trained eyes scrutinizing me – or so I thought – I felt more at ease and soon started to hit the ball well. This time, Sir agreed to



let me join the camp. I was delighted and I must say it was an opportunity that transformed my life.

Participants in the summer camp had to pay an admission fee of 65 rupees (less than a pound) and a monthly fee of 10 rupees (10 pence). In my case I don't remember having to pay the monthly fee after the first few months. The camp involved a session every morning and evening at Shivaji Park. I would practise between 7.30 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. before making my way home for lunch, then I'd come back in the afternoon and train till late evening. The schedule was rigorous and I would be exhausted by the end of the day. Travelling to Shivaji Park took forty minutes from my house in Bandra and I had to catch an early-morning bus to make it on time.

For the first few days Ajit accompanied me, to get me used to the routine, but once I was familiar with the journey, I'd travel to the camp on my own. During the bus journeys he would talk to me about the nuances of batting, and I always enjoyed these conversations a lot. In fact, the one thing that I have kept with me all my career is a note that Ajit gave me containing some thoughts about batting. It served as a very personal coaching manual.

As a child I had only one set of cricket clothes and the routine was to wash them as soon as I'd returned from the morning session. While I had my lunch, the clothes would dry out in the sun and I would wear them again in the afternoon. The pattern was repeated in the evening, so that I could use the same set of clothes the following morning. The system worked well – apart from my pockets. There was never quite enough time for the pockets to dry out completely and for the entire duration of the camp I played with wet pockets.

## Changing schools

By the middle of the summer camp, Sir had started taking an active interest in my batting and at the end of the two months informed Ajit that I had the potential to be a good cricketer if I practised all year round. He had made a few changes to the way I batted and the impact was immediate. I was now practising with the older boys from the junior section. However, my school – the New English School in Bandra – did not have cricket facilities and Sir was keen for me to change schools if I wanted to pursue cricket seriously.

One evening Sir called my father and asked if he would speak to me about changing schools. Ajit was in the room with my father at the time and they both accepted that it was necessary, if cricket was to be my priority. However, neither of them ever forced anything on me and when I got home they asked me what I thought of the suggestion. By that time I had started enjoying my batting and was keen to play throughout the year. Without any hesitation I agreed to the move. My father sat me down and explained that while he did not have any objections to me changing schools, I should do so only if I was really serious about playing cricket. I assured him I was, and so it was agreed that I should move to Shardashram Vidyamandir, where Achrekar Sir was a cricket coach.

The move meant I lost contact with a lot of my New English school friends, but I soon made new ones at Shardashram, mostly through cricket. All the cricketers in the school were friends with each other and even though we were in different divisions and sections, such things hardly mattered. We played together during lunch breaks and discussed cricket all the time, and Achrekar Sir would coach us after school. Cricket was fast becoming my first love. All my excess energies were getting channelled into cricket, which acted as a kind of a safety valve. Everyone at home was very supportive, but my father always said that all he wanted me to do was give it my best effort without worrying about the results.

Joining Shardashram undoubtedly helped my cricket a great deal. It allowed me the opportunity to

play competitive matches regularly and my game rapidly improved as a result. There's nothing like playing matches to get better, because only in competitive situations are you forced to out-think the opposition and improvise. Net practice can never be a substitute for matchplay and Achrekar Sir was an ardent believer in this principle.

I did not excel in my first ever match for my club, the Kamath Memorial Club, run by Achrekar Sir, which a host of my colony friends came to watch, I was out for a golden duck. I was the star batsman in the colony and it was natural that my friends would come to see me play. It was embarrassing to be bowled first ball and I had to make a series of excuses, saying the ball had kept low and the pitch wasn't good enough for batting. In the second match I got out for another duck and it was only in our third game that I managed to score my first run, having survived seven deliveries. I was seriously relieved to get off the mark. I used to keep a diary at the time that contained all the information from these games, but unfortunately I don't have them any more.

My debut for the school wasn't quite as bad and I managed to score 24 runs in the match, which we won comfortably. However, I will always remember the game for other reasons, because I learnt a very important personal lesson. It taught me never to resort to unethical ways and to play the sport with honesty and integrity at all times. The incident in question involved my first appearance in a newspaper, which should have been a happy occurrence. The rule in Mumbai at the time was that a player's name only appeared in print if he had scored 30 runs. I had made 24, but there were a lot of extras in the team's innings and the scorer decided to credit six extras to me, increasing my score to 30. The scorer's logic was that it didn't matter because the overall score did not change. I had consented to this without appreciating what I was getting into. The next morning, when my name duly appeared in a Mumbai paper, Achrekar Sir was seriously unhappy with what I had done and told me off for consenting to have runs added to my personal tally when I hadn't scored them. I acknowledged my mistake and promised never to allow such a thing to happen again.

The first-match jinx continued in my first season for the Mumbai Under-15 team in Pune in 1985. I was only twelve then and travelled to Pune with just 95 rupees in my pocket. This was to be supplemented with the little allowance we were given during the tour, which lasted more than a week. In my only match for Mumbai I was run out. I was batting with someone from my school who was older than me and because he was a faster runner he completed the runs quicker and pushed for a third run that was not on. As a result I was run out and I returned to the pavilion with tears in my eyes. Thoughtfully, two veteran Mumbai cricketers, Milind Rege and Vasu Paranjpe, consoled me, saying the run just wasn't there and I shouldn't have been called to go for it.

It rained a lot in Pune in the next few days and as it turned out this was my only innings. As a result I was not picked for the West Zone Under-15 team and was upset because a few of my team-mates who had not played a single ball had been chosen ahead of me. To add to my distress, I ran out of money because I spent it all on snacks and fast food – and arrived at Dadar station with no fare for the bus home. I had to walk back to Shivaji Park to my uncle's carrying two big bags and cried all the way. My aunt was very concerned when she saw me and asked what the matter was. I did not tell her that I hadn't been selected for the West Zone team and all I said was I was not feeling too well.

## **My first earnings from cricket**

Playing for my school regularly helped me learn the art of scoring big runs and batting for a long time. During school holidays I played practice matches for my club almost every day. In fact, in my first year at Shardashram I played fifty-five practice matches during the summer break of sixty days. My

summer sessions used to start at 7.30 a.m. and I'd bat for two hours, split into five net sessions. All of these sessions were rigorous and required intense concentration. After the morning session, I would go straight into the practice match, which would end at 4.30 p.m., then my evening session would start at 5 p.m., after only a thirty-minute break. During the break Sir would often give me some money to go and have a *vada pav* (a popular Mumbai fast food) or a soft drink as a treat.

Between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. I'd have five more net sessions, before a final session of fifteen minutes, when Sir would place a one-rupee coin on top of the stumps and if I managed to avoid getting out, the coin was mine. In this session every bowler in the camp would come and have a go at me, with some sixty to seventy boys fielding. Even if the ball was caught 90 yards away, which was a distance bigger than the boundary length at any school ground in India, I was out. It meant I had to hit every ball along the ground to survive those intense fifteen minutes. It was a serious challenge but with time I started enjoying this session the most. Winning the one-rupee coin used to give me immense satisfaction and taught me how to concentrate even when physically drained.

At the end of it all, Sir would tell me to run two full circuits of Shivaji Park with my pads and gloves on. That was the last part of my training and I'd be completely exhausted by the end of it all. It was a routine I would repeat right through during my summer holidays and it helped me to build up physical and mental stamina.

Occasionally my father came to take me home and I would always ask him to treat me to a special fruit cocktail at a juice centre near the club. While this regular demand was a little unreasonable, because at the time I did not realize that my parents also had to take care of the needs of my brothers and sister, my father would invariably end up giving me what I wanted, just to see me happy.

On other days, when I made my way home from Shivaji Park on my own, I'd often fall asleep on the bus – if I managed to sit down, that is. Anyone who has been on a Mumbai bus at peak hours will know just how difficult it is to get a seat. On days when I wasn't so lucky, it was still a challenge just to stand with the kitbag, because the bus conductors would inevitably complain about me taking up the space of another passenger. It could be embarrassing because the conductors were often rude and would sometimes ask me to buy two tickets. I didn't have the money for a second ticket and I had to learn to take these remarks in my stride. Dirty clothes often added to the embarrassment. After I'd played in them all day, the clothes were usually in quite a smelly state and this was the cause of a lot of discomfort and guilt on the way home. With time I evolved a way of wrapping the kitbag around me. Just as the helmet and pads became a part of me while batting, so the kitbag became an extension of me on the bus.

So when people ask me these days if I have ever been on public transport, I tell them I used to travel on crowded buses and trains four times a day during my first year at Shardashram. And from a very young age I used to do it alone. I'd often take the bus or train from Bandra to Churchgate, and it was all a great learning experience. Within a few months I had made a lot of friends and we had great fun travelling together to matches.

## **Moving to Shivaji Park**

After a year of commuting between Bandra and school, my family realized that the daily travel was getting too much. I had to catch a connecting bus midway into the journey and if I missed the connection I'd be late for school. Also, the one-and-a-half-hour journey would end up exhausting me and it had started to have an impact on my training time. More worryingly, I had twice fallen sick in the first year of my daily commute to Shardashram and had also contracted jaundice.

It was decided that I should move in with my uncle and aunt, Suresh and Mangala, because they lived at Indravadan Society, an apartment block close to Shivaji Park. In the end, I stayed with them for four years and they were hugely supportive of my endeavours and had a formative role to play as I grew up. In fact, there were times when I even made my aunt throw balls to me in our living room. I had bought a couple of golf balls and transformed them into an oval shape with the help of a blade. I had done this intentionally, so that when my aunt threw one to me, the ball would change direction after pitching, either coming in or going away. The whole idea behind this was that, while killing time at home, I would learn to play with soft hands without damaging things in our living room. Throughout the drill, my aunt would sit on her chair, and after playing the ball I would collect it and hand it back to her. When my aunt wasn't around, I would hang up the ball in a sock and hit it with the edge of my bat. Hitting it with the bat's full face was much too easy and when I hit it with the edge I would try to middle it as many times as possible. When it did not hit the middle, it would come back from different directions (it became an inswinger or an outswinger) and it was fun to negotiate the challenge. These drills helped my hand-eye coordination and also my awareness of which direction the bat should come from to meet the ball.

My uncle and aunt's house was a thirty-minute walk from school. It meant I could get more rest in the morning and could come home for lunch around 1 p.m. and go back to play a practice game at my club by early afternoon. Sir would invariably schedule three practice games a week for me and would ensure that I batted at number four in each one of them. He could do that because it was his club. I would bat in my favourite position in all the matches I played and if I got out I'd have to change quickly and go out and field. This was a good incentive to keep batting and not get out at all, as I didn't enjoy fielding anything like as much as batting. After the match I'd resume my own training in the evening before calling it a day at 7.30.

On days when there was a school match, we'd try our best to stretch it to a second day. For example, if we were set to chase 300 we'd score 260–270 runs on the first day and keep the remaining runs for the next morning. This would allow us to miss school on the second day, and after quickly wrapping up the match in the first half an hour, the team would head off to the beach to play cricket. Playing beach cricket was always a lot of fun and we would all have a great time.

Both my parents would visit me at my uncle and aunt's almost every day after they finished work. For my mother in particular it was an arduous journey, since travelling there from her office in Santa Cruz in peak-hour traffic on public transport was a real challenge back then. The fact that both of them would happily put in the time after a full day's work, just so I would not feel neglected, was remarkable.

In the 1986–87 season I started to make runs consistently and also scored my first hundred. We were playing Don Bosco School at Shivaji Park and I was not out on 94 at the end of the first day. A few days before this match I had invited Sir to my house for dinner. Sir, however, said he would come only when I had scored my first hundred in school cricket. Feeling excited and anxious, I decided to sleep with my father that night and kept tossing and turning till late. My father tried to comfort me, saying I should go to sleep and that my body needed rest after batting all day. I couldn't and only managed to get a couple of hours' sleep before waking up very early the next morning.

Sensing my anxiety, my father took me to a Ganapati temple in Bandra to seek the blessings of Lord Ganesha and only then did I leave for Shivaji Park. On my way I visited another Ganapati temple, the one I regularly visited before games. There was a water tap inside the temple premises and I regularly used to drink from it before I went to the ground. I did the same that day and in the very first over hit two boundaries to reach my hundred. True to his word, Sir came for dinner that night and it was a

deeply satisfying moment.

One of my best early seasons was at Shardashram in 1987–88, when I played in both the Giles Shield and the Harris Shield. For those unfamiliar with the intricacies of Mumbai cricket, the Giles Shield is meant for boys under the age of fourteen and Harris Shield for those under sixteen. Looking back, it seems remarkable that I played in both, but I didn't think much of it at the time. These tournaments are acknowledged as breeding grounds for young talent in Mumbai and good performances tend to get noticed in the city's cricket circles.

In the Harris Shield that season I scored a record 1,025 runs in five matches and was out only once. It now seems extraordinary, but my scores in the quarter-final, semi-final and final read 207 not out, 326 not out and 346 not out. What's more, after scoring 326 not out in the semi-final of the Harris Shield, I walked right across the Azad maidan (recreation ground) to the other side to play in a Giles Shield match, in which I made 178 not out, winning us the game.

I started out with a hundred in the first match of the season, scoring 125 before getting out, and it was a dismissal I have never forgotten. I was out stumped to an off-spinner who was hearing-impaired and I vividly remember the expression on his face when I was beaten by a beautifully flighted delivery. But the ball went on to elude the keeper and within a fraction of a second the bowler's expression turned from euphoria to despair as he saw the missed stumping opportunity. Yet I did not go back to the crease and instead started walking back to the pavilion, allowing the wicketkeeper to complete the stumping. It was the only time I was out in that season's competition. While I didn't consciously mean to show sympathy to the bowler, it was one of those moments that are difficult to explain. It was not an act of charity exactly. Rather, it was a good ball and I knew I had been comprehensively beaten. The keeper fumbled the take and the bowler looked distraught at the missed opportunity. He had done everything for the wicket and deserved the dismissal.

In the semi-final of the Harris Shield against St Xavier's in February 1988, a three-day game, we were 84–2 when I went in to bat at number four, with Vinod Kambli, an extremely talented youngster in Mumbai's cricket circles at the time, already at the crease, having gone in at number three. We immediately plundered the St Xavier's attack and never let up all the way through what would become a record-breaking partnership. With the Azad maidan being an open ground and a very big one, the opposition had to run long distances to retrieve the ball after a hard-hit boundary and we found ourselves singing songs and enjoying ourselves in the middle of the pitch. It was our way of switching off while batting together for long periods. At the end of the day we were both not out, with Vinod on 182 and me on 192, and, needless to say, Shardashram were in a commanding position in the game.

The following morning, we both made our double centuries and then just kept on batting – despite Achrekar Sir wanting us to declare the innings. At one point he sent our assistant coach to the boundary to instruct us to declare. We could hear him scream our names and shout instructions, but we pretended not to hear and tried not to look in his direction. He kept at it for ten minutes before he realized that it was a futile attempt and returned to the dressing room. We just wanted to carry on batting and enjoy ourselves in the middle.

At lunch we had reached 748–2, of which I had contributed 326. As soon as we left the field I was informed by the assistant coach that I was in serious trouble. When I asked why, he told me that Achrekar Sir had wanted us to declare in the morning and I had disobeyed him by carrying on. Sir was of the opinion that we had more than enough runs to declare, and if we weren't able to bowl the opposition out for less we did not deserve to be in the final. I decided to declare right away to save

myself from Sir's ire that evening. Vinod asked me not to, however, because he was not out on 349. He pleaded with me to give him one more ball so that he'd reach 350. I said that it wasn't my call and we needed Sir's permission to continue. So I rang Sir from a public phone next to the ground and the first question he asked was how many wickets we had managed to take before lunch. That was Sir's style. He was well aware that we hadn't declared and hadn't taken any wickets, but he wouldn't say so. I informed him that we had batted till lunch and that I was about to declare. With Vinod pleading beside me, I quickly mentioned to Sir that Vinod wanted to speak to him and handed over the phone. But Vinod was scared of Sir and ended up not saying a word about batting on for another over.

I duly declared the innings and, despite having batted for a day and a half, went on to open the bowling with the new ball and bowled a lot of overs in the innings. I did not feel the least bit tired; all the hard work in the summer camps had started to pay off. I started out bowling medium pace, then changed to off-spin when the ball was semi-old and leg-spin when the ball had lost all of its shine. Vinod too bowled very well and picked up six wickets as we dismissed St Xavier's for 154 to make the final.

That partnership of 664 was the highest in any form of cricket in the world at the time. Coming in the semi-final of the Harris Shield made it all the more significant in the local cricket community. It gained us both a lot of recognition. We had become quite a pair and what made batting with Vinod fun was that I never knew what he'd get up to next. In one match in the same season he actually started flying a kite while we were batting together. Suddenly I couldn't see Vinod, because he had walked 20 metres away from the pitch and was holding the string of a kite – right in the middle of the innings! It was his way of enjoying himself and I knew he'd get a severe reprimand from Sir for doing so.

Sir wasn't to be seen on that day, however, and Vinod was confident of getting away with it. I wasn't so sure. I had a feeling that Sir was watching us from somewhere and would surely pick up the issue at the end of the day's play, as was his style. Sir was known to hide behind a tree on occasions to watch us play, and in fact it rarely happened that he'd miss a game of ours. At the end of the day he would then give us a 'demonstration' session, so called because Sir would demonstrate what we had done wrong in terms of footwork, stance or stroke selection. Sure enough, at the demonstration session at the end of that day, I was given a chit to read aloud and the first item was 'Vinod kite'. Sir, upset at what Vinod had done, asked him what he thought he was doing flying a kite while batting and warned him never to do so again. He promised, but with Vinod nothing could be taken for granted.

Having defeated St Xavier's comprehensively, we were runaway favourites in the final against Anjuman-I-Islam, which was to be played at the Cricket Club of India, which is India's equivalent of the MCC, established in 1933. It was my first competitive game at CCI and a number of Mumbai cricket luminaries were present to see us bat in the final. They had heard about the world-record partnership and wanted to see if we were good enough to have a career in cricket. Dilip Vengsarkar, Sunil Gavaskar and CCI president Raj Singh Dungarpur were in attendance and I did not want to disappoint them.

On the eve of the final I was given a superb gift by Hemant Kenkre, Sunil Gavaskar's nephew, which served as an added incentive to perform well. At the time I did not have good pads to play with and Sir had a word with Hemant about it. Hemant had with him a set of pads used by Sunil Gavaskar, the really light ones with blue padding inside, and decided to give them to me. I was delighted and humbled and went with Ajit to his house to collect my gift.

I felt very proud to wear pads once used by Sunil Gavaskar. I went in to bat thirty minutes before lunch on the first day of the final and kept batting for close to two days. I was eventually unbeaten on 346 when we were bowled out before tea on the third day. It was a very significant innings in the

context of my career, for shortly afterwards I was included in the list of Probables for the Mumbai Ranji Trophy team.

In my early days as a cricketer another person who helped me considerably was Hemant Waingankar. Hemant, a student of my father's, knew me as a child and has followed my career from start to finish. It was at Hemant's initiative that Anil Joshi, Vijay Shirke and Sanju Khamkar of Sungrace Mafatlal, a well-known Indian company, came forward to support both Vinod and me with cricket equipment. I am glad that our friendship, which is now close to three decades old, continues even today.

## **My Sir**

Looking back at these years of cricket, I must say I owe a lot to my coach Ramakant Achrekar – as well as his assistants, Das Shivalkar and Laxman Chavan. Had it not been for Sir, I would not be the cricketer I turned out to be. He was a strict disciplinarian and did everything he could for me.

On certain days he would even drive me all the way across Mumbai on his scooter to get me to matches on time. Even though I loved cricket, there were still occasional days when playing with my friends at home was such fun that I would conveniently forget I was supposed to go to the nets. If I didn't turn up, Achrekar Sir would jump on his scooter and come to find me at Sahitya Sahawas. Inevitably, I would be outside, engrossed in some game or other with my chums. Sir would spot me in the melee and virtually drag me to our apartment. I would come up with excuses but he would have none of it. He would get me to change and put on my shoes and then I'd ride pillion with him as we headed off to Shivaji Park. On the drive he would tell me, 'Don't waste your time playing inane games with these kids. Cricket is waiting for you at the nets. Practise hard and see what magic can transpire.' At the time, I hated being dragged off but as I look back I feel sheepish about my actions and can only admire Achrekar Sir's farsightedness.

Sir also punished me on one occasion when trying to teach me a very important lesson. Shardashram English and Shardashram Marathi schools had made it to the finals of the Harris Shield and the match was to be played at the Wankhede Stadium. I was at that stage a Giles Shield player and had nothing to do with the Harris Shield. Knowing that I'd want to go and watch the game, Sir had arranged a practice match for me and warned me not to miss my own match and go off to the Wankhede. However, I disobeyed and went along to the final, not anticipating that Sir would be there. He was as angry as I'd ever seen him and he said it wasn't for me to come and watch other people play, for if I practised hard enough, one day people from across the world would come and watch me play.

Achrekar Sir has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to cricket in Mumbai and India. I am by no means the only pupil of his to go on to represent India; others include Lalchand Rajput, Vinod Kambli, Pravin Amre, Ajit Agarkar, Sanjay Bangar, Balwinder Sandhu, Chandrakant Pandit, Paras Mhambrey, Sameer Dighe and Ramesh Powar. Not for one moment has he been interested in financial gain, however. Quite the opposite, in fact – there were many occasions when he would help out those who were so poor they could not even afford the few rupees normally charged for his summer school.

Throughout my career, before each tour and each series for India, I would make four visits that were very important to me: to two temples in Mumbai, the Ganesh temple in Shivaji Park and the Siddhivinayak temple in Prabhadevi; to my aunt and uncle; and to Achrekar Sir.

## **My short career as a fast bowler**

My first good season for Shardashram earned me a trial place at the MRF Pace Foundation in Chennai in 1987 under the legendary Australian fast bowler Dennis Lillee, who was head coach there. The MRF Pace Foundation had been set up with the explicit aim of grooming local fast-bowling talent, something that we have always lacked in India. Coaches from across India had been asked to name talented youngsters and my name was suggested by Vasu Paranjpe, veteran Mumbai cricketer and one of India's best coaches. Vasu Sir has always been extremely supportive of my efforts and has been a kind of mentor to me. Though the camp was primarily meant to identify talented fast bowlers, Ajit advised me to take my full kit to Chennai. The thought was that if I wasn't selected as a bowler I could benefit from batting in the nets there. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given my build and height, I didn't stand out as a potential international pace bowler and Dennis Lillee jokingly advised me to focus on my batting instead. As it turned out, I was always a batsman who wanted to learn the art of fast bowling.

## **The first break**

All the hard work under the watchful supervision of Sir finally paid off when I was picked in the squad to represent Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy on 14 November 1987. The Ranji Trophy, the premier domestic competition in India, was started in 1933–34 and named after the famous KS Ranjitsinhji, Indian cricket's first global figure, who played for England against Australia in 1896. It is an important platform and consistent performances in the Ranji Trophy can earn a player a national call-up. In the 1980s it was played on a zonal basis. First-class teams from each zone, West, North, South, East and Central, played each other before the top teams advanced to the knock-out stage.

Despite making the Mumbai squad, I did not make it to the final XI in any of the matches. This meant I narrowly missed out on playing alongside Sunil Gavaskar, who retired from all forms of cricket after the 1987 Cricket World Cup, a few months before I made the Ranji squad. When I was growing up, Mr Gavaskar's thirty-four centuries for India had always served as a huge inspiration. It was the ultimate benchmark for a batsman, and not to have played alongside him remains a regret. However, that season I did get a little taste of the Ranji Trophy, as a substitute fielder – and also of international cricket, while fielding at the Brabourne Stadium for a Pakistan team against India!

It was a festival match and two Pakistan cricketers, Javed Miandad and leg-spinner Abdul Qadir, had gone off the field at lunchtime. I was asked to substitute and was deployed at wide long on by skipper Imran Khan. Within minutes Kapil Dev hit a skier and, despite running in 15 metres, I wasn't able to reach the ball. I remember complaining to my friend Marcus Couto that evening on the train home that I could have taken the catch if I had been positioned at mid on instead of long on. I don't know whether Imran Khan remembers the occasion or has any idea that I once fielded for his Pakistan team.

One incident I remember from my Ranji Trophy debut season took place when we played in Baroda in one of the West Zone encounters. I was just fourteen then and was sharing a room with Suru Nayak, a former India international. The team had reached Baroda a few days in advance and on one of the days we had dinner a little earlier than normal. Afterwards Suru Nayak asked me to go to bed, suggesting that I should take some rest while the other players went out to offer pujas at the local temple. I had no reason to disbelieve him and went off to sleep in my room. Only later did I find out that the other players had gone out partying at night and because I was only fourteen I had been conveniently left out.

I wasn't always so well behaved, of course. In 1987 I remember playing for the Mumbai Under-15



team at Cuttack in Eastern India. We were staying in a college dormitory and there were fifteen beds aligned in a row. Next to the dorm was a balcony and beyond it lay the college sports field. Two of my friends in the team were Jatin Paranjpe (who went on to play one-day international cricket for India) and Vinod Kambli, and together we had planned that after lights-out we would sneak around and gather up all the other players' shoes, including their spikes. With the dorm pitch-dark, we started throwing them at Kedar Godbole, one of our hapless team-mates. Other players were also in our line of fire and before they could figure out what was going on they were hit by a barrage of shoe missiles. When they started throwing them back at us, we ducked and their shoes flew over our heads and over the balcony into the adjoining field. Finally, at two in the morning, the whole team was down on the ground looking for their shoes and chappals!

## **Ranji Trophy debut**

The following year, I was watched closely by Mumbai captain Dilip Vengsarkar in the Cricket Club of India nets when the Indian team came to play a match against the touring New Zealand team. Vengsarkar was impressed with the way I played against Kapil Dev and sometime later, on 10 December 1988, when I was fifteen, he told the selectors that I was ready to play for Mumbai against Gujarat, giving me my first big break. Vengsarkar himself was busy with national duty and I filled in for him. In my debut match I scored 100 not out and in the process became the youngest Indian to score a century on his first-class debut. I finished the 1988–89 season as Mumbai's highest run-scorer and made half-centuries in six of the seven matches I played. Mumbai lost a hard-fought semi-final against Delhi and I ended my debut season with a respectable batting average of 64.77. In the semi-final, Madan Lal, former India fast bowler and coach, was playing for Delhi and I remember playing a straight drive to him that was much talked about that evening. It was a shot that got me noticed, adding to my stock at the time. Everything about the shot was perfect – balance, head position, timing – and the ball raced to the boundary.

My performances for Mumbai got me selected for the season-opening Irani Trophy match at the beginning of November 1989. The Irani Trophy, between the Ranji Trophy champions and the Rest of India, is a key component of the Indian domestic cricket calendar and is a major opportunity to get noticed. Playing for the Rest of India, I scored a hundred against Ranji champions Delhi in my first Irani Trophy game and it was during this match that the Indian touring team for the much-awaited tour to Pakistan in November–December 1989 was announced.

Before I knew it, at sixteen years of age, I had been picked to play for India.

## MY FIRST TOUR

I had always dreamed of playing cricket for India. Getting an opportunity to fulfil my dream at such an early age was indeed very special. What made it even more significant was that we were playing Pakistan in Pakistan and their bowling attack included fast bowlers of the quality of Imran Khan, Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis and Aaqib Javed, not to mention the leg-spinners Mushtaq Ahmed and Abdul Qadir – quite a test for any debutant.

It was baptism by fire. So much so that after my very first innings in Test cricket, during which I was all at sea against Wasim and Waqar, I began to doubt my ability to bat and questioned whether I was ever going to be good enough to play at international level.

Before describing my debut series, I want to go back to that first Irani Trophy game for the Rest of India against Delhi. I had scored 39 in the first innings before I was bowled by Maninder Singh, India's ace left-arm spinner at the time. The disappointment did not last long, however, because it was that evening when I learned I had been named in the Indian squad for the Pakistan tour. Ecstatic at my inclusion, I was determined to make a mark in the second innings.

The occasion was particularly special because my brother had come to see me play. In fact, since I was a minor and could not sign the tour contract, Ajit had to sign it on my behalf. Vasu Paranjpe had also mentioned to my father that morning that I would surely get a hundred and said that he should come and watch me bat. My father did just that and, to his satisfaction, what Vasu Sir had predicted came true. However, the century would not have happened but for the contribution of Gursharan Singh, the Punjab batsman who later played a Test match for India against New Zealand in 1990.

Gursharan had fractured his finger while batting against the bowling of Atul Wassan, a Delhi fast bowler who also made his debut for India against New Zealand in 1990. He was sitting in the dressing room injured and there seemed to be no way he could play a further part in the match. I was batting well and was unbeaten on 86 when our ninth wicket fell. Knowing that Gursharan couldn't bat, I started walking back to the dressing room, assuming it was the end of our innings. Just then I saw Gursharan walking towards me, ready to bat one-handed.

It was later revealed to me that Raj Singh Dungarpur, then chairman of the national selection committee, had asked if he would go out and help me get to my hundred. In an exemplary show of courage, Gursharan had agreed. In fact, when we met at the wicket I felt distinctly embarrassed seeing him there in such severe pain. I told him that it would be perfectly understandable if we called off the innings. Showing tremendous grit, he told me, '*Ab to tera hundred kar ke hi jayenge.*' (I will get back to the pavilion only after you get your hundred.) He doggedly stuck to his task, and I'm glad to say that his bravery was respected by the opposition bowlers, who did not resort to bowling bouncers.

It was a favour I would never forget. It was a show of remarkable resilience by Gursharan and I tried to repay the debt by doing what I could at the time of his benefit match in Delhi in April 2005. I had promised him that as long as he gave me a few days' notice, I'd turn up to play, no matter where I

was. I am glad I was able to keep my promise.

## **India in Pakistan, November–December 1989**

Encouraged at having got a hundred against India's domestic champions, I headed to Pakistan soon after feeling reasonably confident. Maybe because I was still a teenager, I didn't feel any extra pressure about playing against Pakistan. The whole political baggage of India–Pakistan cricket meant nothing to me. I was simply treating it as my first tour, which was challenge enough. In any case, no one really expected me to be a part of the playing XI at such a young age, certainly not in any of the Tests. Some thought I might get a chance in one of the one-day games, depending on the team's performance in the series, while others believed I was there only to get a feel of international cricket.

To be honest, all the talk passed me by. I just wanted to do well for India and score a lot of runs. Other than that, everything else seemed unimportant. That was natural enough, because everything had happened rather quickly in my life. Just five years after I took to playing competitive cricket, I had become a part of the Indian squad – it was a pretty quick move from school to international cricket.

On arrival in Pakistan I didn't sense any tension and went out for regular meals in the evening with some of the other cricketers. Their friendly approach helped put me at ease and it was not until we reached Lahore that a curfew was imposed on going out in the evenings. On my travels around India I had always bought gifts such as sarees for my mother and aunt and shirts for my father and uncle, and so in the first few days in Pakistan I did the same. This time I bought them some local shoes and slippers.

There was tension within the squad, however, as a result of a dispute that had blown up before the tour between the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and the players over the issue of players' involvement in a few unsanctioned matches in the United States on the way back from the West Indies tour in 1988. The matter had gone right up to the Indian Supreme Court and was eventually settled when the court lifted a ban imposed on the players by the BCCI. The other controversy that arose on the eve of the tour was over the issue of match fees. It had escalated into a serious dispute, with the players opting to give up their match fees altogether as a mark of protest. Fortunately for the junior players in the team, skipper Krishnamachari Srikkanth instructed us to stay away from the problems and concentrate on the job at hand, which was to evolve a strategy to tackle Imran, Wasim, Waqar and Abdul Qadir.

I had a good start to the tour and in one of the two games before the first Test, against the Pakistan Board Patron's XI in Rawalpindi, scored 47 before getting out to Iqbal Qasim, a left-arm spinner who played for Pakistan in fifty Tests. It was a decent innings and I received a standing ovation from the crowd. I began to feel I had a slim chance of getting into the Test team and dared to dream of my first Test cap. I finally heard the news of my inclusion in the playing XI from skipper Srikkanth on the night before the first Test in Karachi.

It is very difficult to describe the feeling. I was part of a band of eleven fortunate men who had been given the duty of representing close to a billion Indians. It was an honour every aspiring cricketer lives for, to play for his country against the best of world cricket. And with the honour came responsibility. I was going to be accountable to the cricket fans back home and was expected to give my best for them. In fact, I could imagine nothing more significant than doing something worthy for the national team and the passionate Indian cricket fans.

I was sharing a room with Salil Ankola, the fast bowler who has now gone on to become an actor. Salil was bowling well at the time and was also making his Test debut. Neither of us could sleep the

night before the match. We were both about to start a new chapter and were aware that it was an opportunity that could change our lives for ever.

## **First Test, Karachi, 15–20 November 1989**

Pakistan won the toss and opted to bat first on a greenish wicket so I didn't have long to wait to walk onto the field for the first time as an India player. My life had taken a giant leap and it is a moment I will always remember. It also happened to be Kapil Dev's 100th Test match and we were all excited for him. Only Sunil Gavaskar and Dilip Vengsarkar had achieved the distinction before.

My first day of international cricket wasn't without drama and one incident in particular left an unpleasant feeling. In the post-lunch session a bearded man clad in salwar kameez entered the field and went straight up to Kapil Dev, abusing him for being in Pakistan. Kapil, who was preparing to bowl at the time, later recounted to us that he asked the fellow to leave him alone and allow him to continue with the game. After his exchange with Kapil, the intruder then went over to mid off, where Manoj Prabhakar, our top fast bowler on the tour, was fielding. He abused Prabhakar before moving on to skipper Srikanth – and with Srikanth he got physical. In those days, with the sport far less commercialized, players could choose what kit to wear. Most of our team preferred T-shirts, but Srikanth liked to wear a buttoned shirt and this was torn open in the scuffle.

I was fielding at point and I was scared I would be next and was ready to run to the safe confines of the dressing room if the intruder came towards me. Up to this point, no security personnel had done anything to stop the intruder from disrupting things in the middle. It was only when the Indian captain was being manhandled that security finally came onto the ground to drag the spectator off. It was a serious security lapse, yet the organizers seemed hardly perturbed. The truth is that it was much more than a cricket match that was being played between the two teams. The political history of partition has always cast a pall over India–Pakistan cricket and it was my first taste of this unfortunate reality. The next day we were even more astonished to find the Pakistan press suggesting that the intruder had actually been trying to congratulate Kapil Dev on playing his 100th Test match. The issue of Srikanth's torn shirt didn't merit a mention by the local media.

## **All at sea**

On the second day of the match, Pakistan were all out for 409, with skipper Imran Khan scoring 109 not out. Finally, it was our turn to bat. The pitch was lively and we didn't get off to a good start. We were soon reduced to 41–4, with Srikanth, Navjot Sidhu, Sanjay Manjrekar and Manoj Prabhakar out cheaply. Wasim and Waqar were bowling really fast and it was a trying time for every Indian batsman. I hadn't quite anticipated what awaited me out in the middle when I went out to bat at number six. There's no harm in admitting that I was all at sea against Wasim and Waqar in my first innings in Test cricket. I was trying to be aggressive to almost every ball, as that was how I had always played the game. I was trying to get on top of the bowlers, but more often than not I was comprehensively beaten. The pace was far greater than I had ever faced and the skill on display was of the very highest standard. The guile of both bowlers left me thoroughly confused.

An account of one Wasim over will give an idea of my plight in the middle. I was on strike to him for the third ball of the over, which turned out to be a vicious bouncer. Having studied Wasim's bowling, I was convinced the next ball would be a yorker and was mentally prepared for it. It turned out to be another bouncer, which I left. While I kept expecting a fiery yorker, balls five and six also

turned out to be bouncers, and at the end of the over I said to myself, 'Welcome to Test cricket.' Not without reason is it acknowledged as the most challenging format of the game.

My stay at the crease was short and not sweet. I had lasted only twenty-four balls, at least half of which I had missed. I had hit two boundaries but not for a moment had I felt comfortable. It was only a matter of time before I was dismissed. I was finally bowled for a rather lucky 15 by another debutant, Waqar Younis, and on my way back to the pavilion my mind was riddled with self-doubt.

It was a very important moment in my career. I had come to the international stage after blazing my way through domestic cricket. I had managed to score a hundred on debut in the Ranji and Irani trophies, but here I was on the international stage unable to put bat on ball. I was struggling, plain and simple. The difference in standard between domestic and international cricket was colossal.

I batted only once in that first Test match, which ended in a draw, and in the following days I approached our coach, Chandu Borde, and a number of senior team-mates to discuss what I needed to do to improve. I had a long chat with Ravi Shastri, already an established star at the time, who advised me to be patient for the first fifteen or twenty minutes, which were bound to be uncomfortable. Ravi was of the opinion that once I had played out the initial burst from the Pakistani bowlers, things would turn easier. The key was to spend time in the middle. But would I be given another opportunity to do so? I could easily have missed out on the second Test, not only because of my low score in the first but also because of the way I had batted.

It came as a huge relief to see my name in the playing XI for the second Test at Faisalabad.

## **Second Test, Faisalabad, 23–28 November 1989**

I knew it was a chance I could not afford to squander; it would be a big test of my ability and temperament. What made the task considerably more difficult was that Pakistan won the toss on a green-top and put India in to bat. The stage was set. All through my career I have relished these moments of adversity. It is no good just performing on a docile track against weak opposition. A cricketer gets true satisfaction only if he is able to perform in difficult conditions against the best bowlers.

Once again we lost early wickets and I went in to bat with four top-order wickets down for 101. This time around, although it really wasn't my style then, I forced myself to stay at the wicket for the first fifteen minutes to get used to the conditions. I have no qualms about confessing that it was difficult. The bowlers were definitely on top at the start of my innings, but with time things turned easier. I was able to adjust to the pace and bounce of the wicket, and my confidence was gradually coming back.

I managed to play 172 balls en route to my first half-century in Test cricket and was finally dismissed by Imran for 59. I was involved in a 143-run partnership with Sanjay Manjrekar and though I hit only four boundaries, the innings gave me a lot of satisfaction. It also taught me a good lesson: there was no point in trying to blaze my way through every innings. Most importantly, this knock convinced me that I could actually cope with international cricket, though I knew I still had a lot to learn. In the second innings I ran myself out for eight, sacrificing my wicket for Mohammad Azharuddin, who was nearing a well-deserved hundred. In the end, we managed to thwart a Pakistan victory. After two Tests the series was still drawn and it was evident that Pakistan were feeling the pressure. Many had predicted a 4–0 scoreline in their favour and it was starting to play on their minds.

## **Third Test, Lahore, 1–6 December 1989**

From Faisalabad we moved to Lahore for the third Test. Unable to venture out of the hotel in the evenings, the players and the touring Indian media were feeling a little restless and this called for some original thinking. For the first and only time in my career the media and the players got together for what was decreed a ‘Sunday Club’. It was to be an evening of stories, music, food and fun and everyone had to wear something fancy. It turned out to be a very successful experiment, but sadly it hasn’t been repeated since. It definitely helped to create a bond between the team and the media, so necessary during an arduous away tour.

I wore a blue pullover to the Sunday Club and that’s where the often published picture of me with a thick moustache, Aussie fast bowler Merv Hughes-style, was taken. The food served that evening was unbelievable. Lahore is a foodie’s delight and I wolfed down all the delectable kebabs on offer and I loved the *haleem* (a stew of meat and lentils). In fact, I had a voracious appetite throughout the tour. My body was still growing and I ate huge amounts. On non-match days I used to eat *keema parathas* (mincemeat parathas) and *lassi* (yogurt drink) for breakfast and by the time I went back to India I had put on a few kilos and had also grown much stronger.

The Lahore Test was local hero Javed Miandad’s 100th and in a change from the first two Test matches in Karachi and Faisalabad, we were faced with the flattest of batting decks, which had obviously been prepared to help Javed score a hundred, which he duly did. Even after five days, the first innings of both teams had still not been completed.

At the start of my innings in Lahore I misjudged the bounce of a straight delivery from Imran, which hit me on my biceps. I was furious at allowing myself to be hit on a flat pitch. The point of impact instantly turned numb and my first instinct was to step out and dispatch the very next ball over the boundary. However, the lesson learnt at Faisalabad came to my rescue and I reined myself in.

I had worked my way to 41 off ninety balls when I tried to play an on drive to Abdul Qadir and was bowled. I had been batting well and I regret not going on to play a long innings. It was an opportunity missed. It has to be said, though, that the match, a tame draw, was not the best advertisement for Test cricket.

## Sweet dreams

The fourth and final Test of the series was at Sialkot and we knew that we’d be given a green-top, which offered Pakistan’s best chance to take the series. By now they were desperate to win; a draw would have been considered a series defeat for Imran and his team. When we arrived at Sialkot, I was invited to the MB Malik bat-manufacturing company. Sialkot has quite a tradition of bat-making in Pakistan and at the time I didn’t have a contract for my bats and could pick up any bat and play. I went to the factory with a few of the other players and chose two or three bats for myself.

I was so excited about my new bats that I even dreamed about them one night. Apparently, it was around midnight and I walked straight out of my room asking for my bats. Maninder Singh and Raman Lamba saw me advancing down the corridor and said to me, ‘*Tere bats to tere pass hi hai.*’ (Your bats are with you only.) When I didn’t respond, they realized that I was sleepwalking. They helped me back into the room and put me back to bed. By that stage of the tour, Raman and I had struck up a good friendship and spent many hours together discussing the nuances of batting. He was fun to be with and it was absolutely tragic that he died after being struck on his head by a ball while fielding during a first-class match in Dhaka in 1998.

## Fourth Test, Sialkot, 9–14 December 1989

What made the Sialkot Test special was that my brother Ajit had travelled to see me play. It was an added incentive to do well and both Ajit and I still remember the kindness the locals bestowed on him the moment they became aware that he was from India and had come to watch cricket.

As expected, the wicket was green, but the December weather was also heavy, resulting in a lot of early-morning fog. So much so that play never started on time and it ended early each afternoon. This meant the four Pakistani fast bowlers could come at us all day, hoping to roll us over and secure the upper hand. In the first innings I played pretty well for my 35 and was feeling good before falling lbw to Wasim. I wasn't so uncomfortable at the start of my innings and the initial apprehension was no longer an issue. I hit some pleasing shots and scored at a good clip in the course of my 51-ball stay at the wicket.

India managed a 74-run first-innings lead, with Vivek Razdan, a fast bowler who played two Tests for India, picking up 5–79 in the Pakistan first innings. We had bowled them out for 250 and understandably Pakistan came back at us hard at the start of our second innings. We lost a cluster of early wickets and I went in to bat at 38–4, with a day and a half still to go in the match.

Waqar was bowling from one end and it was absolutely essential to survive the initial burst. I had just scored my first run when Waqar bowled a short delivery, which I expected would rise chin-high. I misjudged the bounce of the ball. It rose six inches higher than expected and hit me on the flap of my helmet before deflecting and hitting my nose. At the time I was the only batsman besides Srikanth not to wear a grille. It wasn't an act of bravado; I just wasn't used to playing with one. Ajit, who was sitting right in front of the Indian dressing room, later said to me that he had clearly heard the sound of the ball hitting my helmet and deflecting on to my nose.

My vision was blurred and my head felt heavy. After impact, the ball went towards the slips and my natural movement was to see where the ball had gone. It was then that I noticed all the blood spattered on my shirt. As I was trying to recover from the blow, I was amused by Javed Miandad's comments. In an attempt to psych me out, he was saying things like '*Arre tujhe to abhi hospital jana parega; tera naak tut gaya hai.*' (You may have to go to the hospital; your nose is broken.) To add to my discomfort, a banner in the stands read, '*Bachhe ghar ja ke dudh pie kea aa.*' (Kid go home and drink milk.)

I ignored all this while our team doctor, Vishwas Raut, inspected the injury. He put some ice on my nose and asked if I wanted to go off. I did not, for I considered it a moment of reckoning. Going off would suggest I was scared. And truly I wasn't. It wasn't the first time I had been hit, though the impact was much more severe than anything I had suffered before. I decided to carry on and said, '*Main khelega.*' (I will play.) It was important for my own self-esteem, and by staying in I felt I had made a statement to the opposition.

Seeing me continue, Imran asked Javed to move away and all the Pakistani players went back to their respective field positions. Soon after the resumption, I got a full ball from Waqar on my legs and flicked it to the boundary. I followed it up with a drive on the off side and felt genuinely good about myself. I had treated the balls on merit and wasn't just being aggressive to avenge being hit. Soon it was time for tea and I had an opportunity to regroup. After the break I started to bat really well. I was feeling confident and was determined not to give my wicket away. Importantly for the team, I managed to play out the day and we were on course to force a draw.

Shortly after going back to the hotel, however, I felt heavy in the head. We had a team function in the evening but I asked permission from manager Chandu Borde and went to bed early after taking a few painkillers and having dinner with Ajit and Navjot Sidhu, which helped me calm down. When I got up the next morning after a good night's sleep, I was feeling ready for the challenge of the final

day. We were on 102–4 overnight and needed to spend at least two more hours at the crease to deny Pakistan any opportunity of winning the Test.

Navjot Sidhu and I held out until I was dismissed by Imran for 57. It was my second half-century in Test cricket. Denying Pakistan a win on home turf was a big achievement for India, especially with the kind of bowling attack they had, and it served as a major confidence boost for the team. We were all elated at the performance.

## The Abdul Qadir over

After the Tests, we played a five-match one-day series in which none of the matches was played for the scheduled fifty overs. While some of them were affected by rain, the third match was abandoned because of crowd trouble after Pakistan had been reduced to 29–3 by some good swing bowling from Manoj Prabhakar. The first match was due to be played in Peshawar on 16 December 1989 and had to be called off at the last moment because of rain. However, a large crowd had braved the inclement weather and it was finally agreed between both teams that a twenty-over-a-side exhibition game, perhaps the first ever Twenty20 game, would be played for the sake of the crowd. It was a good call, as the fans deserved to be given their money's worth. They are the ones who make the game what it is, after all, and they are pivotal to its health around the world.

Most people will agree that even an exhibition game between India and Pakistan can't help being a serious cricket match. At Peshawar Pakistan had scored 157 in their innings, and when I went in to bat with three wickets down, the asking rate had climbed to well past 11 runs an over. Srikanth was batting with me and suggested we should dig in and get some practice for the following games. I was determined to go for the bowling and felt we still had a chance to make a match of it if we played our shots. That's what I suggested to Srikanth and while he was a tad surprised, he told me to play the way I was comfortable with.

Mushtaq Ahmed, an up-and-coming Pakistani leg-spinner at that stage, was bowling and I hit him for a couple of sixes and a boundary in the first over I faced. While both sixes were hit over long on, the second went a fair distance and hit the dressing-room window, breaking the glass. The Pakistanis hadn't expected me to hit it so far and Abdul Qadir, an experienced old hand at the time, walked up to me and said, '*Bachhe ko kyun mar rahe ho; dum hai to mujhe mar ke dikhao.*' (No point in hitting sixes off a newcomer; if you have the skills, try and hit me.) I said to him that he was a great bowler and that I was sure he wouldn't allow me to hit him.

With just two overs left we needed more than 40 runs and Qadir was to bowl the penultimate over. Our only chance was to attack. I had made up my mind that if the ball was in my zone I'd go for my shots. As it happened, most of the balls were in my hitting arc and I took 28 off the over. I hit the first ball for six over long on and followed it up with a four off the third ball. The fourth ball resulted in a second six, which I hit straight over the bowler's head. Seeing me hit straight, Qadir bowled the fifth ball wide outside off stump in an attempt to get me stumped. I had anticipated the move and hit the ball over long off for the third six of the over. For the last ball he went even further outside off stump and I stretched out to hit the ball wide over long off, to make it four sixes in the over.

The crowd, which had been confident of a Pakistan victory till an over earlier, was roused by this unexpected turn of events and started making a lot of noise. There was a sudden increase in energy levels at the ground. The match was now being played in full seriousness and no one really knew which team would win. We needed 14 runs off the last over, bowled by Wasim Akram. Eventually we fell short by three runs. Straight after the match, Abdul Qadir walked up to me in true sportsmanlike



manner and said ‘*Bahut ala batting.*’ (Very well batted.)

That innings of 53 off eighteen balls at Peshawar had a defining impact on my career. In the eyes of the public, it had overshadowed my effort at Sialkot, which was far more difficult and far more significant as far as I was concerned. The Sialkot innings had allowed us to save the Test match and also the series. But for people at home the innings at Peshawar was the real talking point. It had given me instant recognition and made me a household name. For the first time I was asked for autographs, which was a strange feeling. Before we went to Pakistan I had been able to go out with my friends and have *bhel* (a type of fast food loved all over Mumbai) and do all those normal things. Afterwards, when I went out with my friends, people would come up and ask if I was Sachin Tendulkar. And it was all down to that one innings at Peshawar. While it would have been premature to suggest I had established myself at international level, it had certainly given me a toehold.

When I got home, I could tell that my parents were proud of my achievements, but there has never been any over-the-top celebration in my house. While I knew that my father was extremely happy and satisfied, he wouldn’t ever show off his emotions in an extravagant manner. When I did well, my mother would always light a *diya* (a kind of candle) and offer sweets to God, but that’s as far as it went. Sometimes people are kind enough to compliment me on my off-the-field behaviour more than my on-field performance. They say that I seem to have managed to keep my feet grounded. If that’s true, then I have no hesitation in saying that all the credit goes to my family.

Ajit’s presence in Pakistan was a great help and we talked every evening about my game and how I could improve. While there were many senior team-mates who I could go to, I was most comfortable discussing things with Ajit, as he knew my game better than anyone. He had watched me grow up as a cricketer and it was natural that his observations would always be pertinent.

After coming back from Pakistan, I felt much more positive about myself as a cricketer and was looking forward to India’s next away tour, to New Zealand at the start of 1990. I was pretty confident of getting picked but was still delighted to see myself in the squad when the touring side was announced.

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## India in Pakistan 1989

### 1st Test. Karachi. 15–20 November 1989

Pakistan 409 (Imran Khan 109\*, J Miandad 78, S Mohammad 67; M Prabhakar 5–104, Kapil Dev 4–69) and 305–5 dec (S Malik 102\*, S Mohammad 95; Kapil Dev 3–82)

India 262 (KS More 58\*, Kapil Dev 55. **SR Tendulkar 15**; W Akram 4–83, W Younis 4–80) and 303–3 (SV Manjrekar 113\*, NS Sidhu 85)

*Match drawn*

### 2nd Test. Faisalabad. 23–28 November 1989

India 288 (SV Manjrekar 76, **SR Tendulkar 59**; Imran Khan 4–45) and 398–7 (M Azharuddin 109, SV Manjrekar 83, NS Sidhu 51, **SR Tendulkar 8**)

Pakistan 423–9 dec (A Malik 117, S Malik 63, R Raja 58; M Prabhakar 6–132)

*Match drawn*

### 3rd Test. Lahore. 1–6 December 1989

India 509 (SV Manjrekar 218, M Azharuddin 77, RJ Shastri 61, **SR Tendulkar 41**; A Qadir 3–97)

Pakistan 699–5 (S Mohammad 203\*, J Miandad 145, A Malik 113)

*Match drawn*

**4th Test. Sialkot. 9–14 December 1989**

India 324 (SV Manjrekar 72, M Azharuddin 52, **SR Tendulkar 35**; W Akram 5–101) and 234–7 (NS Sidhu 97, **SR Tendulkar 57**; Imran Khan 3–68)  
Pakistan 250 (R Raja 56; V Razdan 5–79)  
*Match drawn*

**Series drawn 0–0**

## FOREIGN CONDITIONS

New Zealand has always been a very difficult tour for an Indian cricketer. It's often windy and chilly and that, coupled with the short boundaries in most of the grounds, makes it very different from conditions back home in India. In 1990 the challenge was doubly difficult, with Richard Hadlee, one of the finest ever exponents of swing bowling, close to his best. As a seventeen-year-old on his first tour away from the subcontinent, I was excited about the opportunity.

### **India in New Zealand, February–March 1990**

The first few days in New Zealand were not easy. The accent of the locals there was very strange to our ears and the food took some getting used to. The accent problem resulted in an incident involving Manoj Prabhakar very early in the tour. Prabhakar needed an adapter to charge his gadgets and for some reason decided to put on what he thought was a New Zealand accent while speaking to the housekeeping staff in the hotel. When asking for the adapter on the intercom he was almost chewing up the first 'a', as a result of which the word was sounding like 'dapter' and the staff were having difficulty understanding what he was asking for. Prabhakar got angry after a point and said he needed the 'dapter' immediately. In a few minutes there was a knock on his door and he opened it to find a doctor standing there. The staff had heard 'doctor' for 'dapter' (partly because they pronounced 'doctor' as 'dactor') and had sent the resident physician to Prabhakar's room.

The first game of the tour was in New Plymouth and the ground was surrounded by hills. It was as if a stadium had been planted in the middle of mountains and Bishan Singh Bedi, our manager, decided to make the most of the conditions. Bedi, one of the best left-arm spinners of all time, was a really hard taskmaster and liked to make us run huge distances to improve our fitness. At New Plymouth our fitness drills involved running in the mountains and by the end of the training sessions we had absolutely no energy left.

As in Pakistan, I did not start particularly well and in the first Test at Christchurch, which started on 2 February, I was dismissed by Danny Morrison for a golden duck. It was a good delivery but the send-off was interesting, to say the least. I could hear most of the New Zealand players calling me a schoolboy, with plenty of F-words thrown in. They kindly advised me to go back to playing cricket with my school chums, suggesting that I wasn't fit to compete at international level. I kept my mouth shut.

The second innings was an improvement in that I managed to stay at the wicket for close to an hour, playing forty-four balls. My 24 runs were enough to give me confidence that I was capable of holding my own in strange conditions. Although I had fallen to John Bracewell, trying to cut a ball close to my body, I had successfully negotiated Richard Hadlee, which I counted as an achievement. Hadlee's first two deliveries to me were bouncers, but each was profoundly different from the other. The first was an

outswinging bouncer that went away after pitching; the second came in from the same spot and I had to keep my eye on the ball till the last moment to get my head out of the way. Such was the ability of the man that you had to be at your best at all times to keep him at bay.

New Zealand won the first Test by ten wickets and the second Test match at Napier started only a few days later, on 9 February. We decided to bat first after winning the toss but the first day was completely washed out by rain. The match finally started on the second day and I was unbeaten on 80 by the end of the third day's play. The ball was doing a little and batting wasn't particularly easy, but not once did I try to dominate the bowling the way I had in domestic cricket.

When I went in to bat on the fourth morning the possibility of a hundred was on my mind. I was just 20 runs short and was determined to take my opportunity. I started well and hit the very first Danny Morrison delivery for four. For the rest of the over he bowled short and I was content to leave everything. In his next over, I again hit a boundary off the first ball. The next was pitched up and I had already made up my mind to go for a big drive but the drive was uppish and I was caught by the New Zealand captain John Wright at mid off for 88.

I was heartbroken. As I walked back to the pavilion I couldn't control my tears. Why on earth did I play that shot when I was just twelve runs short? By the time I reached the boundary rope, tears were flowing down my cheeks. I'm glad there weren't too many cameras then, as these days a cameraman would definitely have picked up an embarrassing shot of me in tears. On reaching the dressing room, I went straight to the bathroom and cried for a good few minutes. Missing out on what should have been my first Test hundred was just too painful. It was only later that I was told I would have been the youngest Test centurion ever. It was a missed opportunity and I remember telling John Wright, after he took over as coach of India in 2005, that he really shouldn't have taken that catch!

We eventually lost the three-Test match series 0–1 and then played the Rothmans Cup one-day tri-series, with Australia as the third team. As in the first Test, I was out for a duck in the first ODI against New Zealand at Dunedin on 1 March, caught and bowled by Shane Thomson, who was bowling medium pace. The only difference was that this time I had lasted one more ball. In the end, we lost the game by 108 runs.

I made a better fist of it in my next match, on 6 March 1990, an important one in the context of the tournament. We had lost to Australia in the second game and now needed to beat New Zealand to stay in contention for the final. I made 36 runs off thirty-nine balls, in the process attacking their seam bowlers for the first time and hitting them for quite a few boundaries. We won the game by one run, with Martin Snedden run out and Richard Hadlee bowled in the final over by Kapil Dev, who was declared Man of the Match for his all-round performance. For the first time my innings had been of use to the team in an official ODI. I couldn't do much celebrating, though, because I damaged my right quadriceps during the game and had to be carried off the field. I couldn't walk at all by the evening and was on crutches for the next few days. It was the first serious injury of my career and my tournament was over.

While we were in New Zealand, Asha Bhosle, one of the all-time great Indian singers, happened to be performing in Wellington and the team decided to go to her concert. It was the first time I had seen her live and I just loved the experience. Asha Bhosle and Lata Mangeshkar, another of India's finest singers, are still two of my favourites and to see them perform is always very special.

On my return to India, my father told me that I had to hone my God-given cricketing ability. He was right. It was time for more hard work to master the skills needed to face the fast swinging ball and I was determined to put in the hours in the nets.

# **India in England, July–August 1990**

After the New Zealand series, India travelled to England for what was our most important assignment of the year. India had won a Test series in England in 1986 and we were all looking forward to repeating the feat. We had a training camp in Bangalore just before the series and Bishan Bedi continued with his policy of making us run miles every day. We had to jog in a line at Cubbon Park, opposite the Chinnaswamy Stadium, and the last man in the line had to sprint to the front. The same drill was followed for all the players and the exhausting routine finally resulted in Manoj Prabhakar jokingly suggesting that he was so fast now he would reach the batsman before his delivery did.

I had been to England twice before, in 1987–88 and 1988–89, as part of the Star Cricket Club, the team of Kailash Gattani (a former fast bowler who played first-class cricket for Rajasthan in Indian domestic cricket). In the first instance, I was sponsored by the Kolkata-based Young Cricketers Organization, who contributed my airfare. Among other things, I remember the tour for the food we ate. We stayed in school and college dormitories and had breakfast in their dining halls. For the first time in my life I was served cold meat for breakfast. That meat could be eaten cold was a revelation to me!

I was also amazed to see so many different types of cars. I have always had an interest in cars, though we didn't own one at the time. Kailash Gattani had hired a luxury sedan and I was keen to find out as much as I could about the engineering details of these fascinating machines. Besides playing cricket, these were things that kept me occupied and I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity of exploring a foreign country. Visiting Lord's, the mecca of world cricket, was a dream come true, and it all added to my ambition to play at such venues as a member of the Indian cricket team.

In 1990, the tour started with a few first-class fixtures, which were followed by two one-day internationals. While I was in good form at the start of the tour and scored runs in the first-class games, I didn't do so well in the first ODI at Leeds on 18 July, making only 19. Happily, it didn't matter because the team won – thanks to the batting of Manjrekar and Azharuddin – and we had a chance of victory in the series if we won the next game at Nottingham on the 20th.

In the second match England produced a better performance, batting first, with Robin Smith, the South African-born middle-order batsman, contributing 103 to their total of 281. We needed to bat really well to close out the series. When I went in to bat at number six we needed a further 145 off twenty overs. In those days, that was considered a stiff target. I scored a quick 31 off twenty-six balls and was dismissed with the score on 249, with 33 still needed to win, but we won the match and the series 2–0, with Azhar seeing us home with an unbeaten 63. It was a perfect start to the tour, giving us some welcome confidence going into the Test series.

## **First Test, Lord's, 26–31 July 1990**

The first Test at Lord's will always be remembered for Graham Gooch's heroics with the bat. After being dropped on 33, he went on to make a triple hundred. He was eventually out for 333 and then produced another century in the second innings. For India, the highlights were Azhar's hundred and Kapil Dev hitting four successive sixes off Eddie Hemmings, the off-spinner, to save the follow-on.

My only significant contribution in the match was a catch off leg-spinner Narendra Hirwani's bowling to dismiss England's batting mainstay Allan Lamb in the second innings. It remains the most memorable catch of my career. Hirwani had beaten Lamb in the flight as he stepped out to hit straight down the ground. Despite failing to get to the pitch of the ball, Lamb went through with the shot and

the ball went high into the air, looking as if it was going to land some 25 yards behind the bowler.

As soon as Lamb hit the shot, I started sprinting from my position at long off. There was very little chance that I would make it, because I had been positioned a few yards wide of the conventional long-off position. It was only during the last few steps that I realized I had an outside chance. I had covered a distance of more than 25 yards and was still short. I could dive forward, but I knew I would not have enough control to catch the ball. The other option was to carry on sprinting and try somehow to get a hand to the ball, which was dying on me. I chose the second option and to my surprise felt the ball land in my fully outstretched right hand at knee height.

Having completed the catch, I threw the ball up in the air in sheer ecstasy. My team-mates were naturally delighted. Hirwani rushed to congratulate me and I felt thrilled at having pulled it off. The crowd appreciated the athletic effort and I vividly remember the warm applause as I walked back to my fielding position. The key to taking catches like these, it seems to me, is not to be afraid of taking the initiative and deciding quickly, while always keeping an eye on the trajectory of the ball.

We lost the Lord's Test by the huge margin of 247 runs and needed to tighten our game before the second Test at Old Trafford a week later to remain alive in the series.

## **Second Test, Old Trafford, 9–14 August 1990**

In the first innings at Old Trafford, England once again put together a total of more than 500, with centuries from Gooch and Mike Atherton, and we simply had to get as close to their score as possible in our reply. We were due to bat fourth in the match and any total in excess of 250 would be difficult to chase down on a wearing pitch. Azhar made another hundred and almost everyone in the top order contributed to our first-innings effort. Had the lower middle order scored runs, we may have got closer to the English total and even managed a first-innings lead. It might also have given me an opportunity to go for my maiden hundred. But they got out in quick succession and I ran out of partners. I went in to bat at number six with the team score on 246 and was last man out for 68, trying to play a big shot off Eddie Hemmings. As Hirwani would I am sure agree, he was not the best number eleven in the world. I felt I had to go for my shots sooner rather than later and I holed out to Chris Lewis at deep midwicket as a result.

Hirwani was always fun to bat with and when he came in he said to me at the wicket that he would be fine as long as the balls were pitched up. He said he had a problem facing bouncers and I assured him that the English bowlers would not bowl bouncers at him because he wasn't a recognized batsman. He managed to bat on for a while and gradually gained in confidence. So much so that he suddenly charged out to Chris Lewis to give the ball a real whack. Chris's expression said it all. He did not take kindly to a number-eleven batsman giving him the charge. He was fuming as he walked back to his bowling mark and a bouncer was now inevitable. However, in charging out Hirwani had somehow broken his bat and it took a bit of time to get a replacement from the dressing room. Luckily, the few minutes that were lost in the bat change had a calming effect on Chris Lewis and Hirwani survived his innings unscathed.

We were finally all out for 432, conceding an 87-run first-innings lead. It was evident that England would want to score quickly and set us a target. Allan Lamb made a hundred in the England second innings and on the final day they declared on 320–4, leaving us ninety-two overs to bat out. The English attack, consisting of Angus Fraser, Chris Lewis, Devon Malcolm and Eddie Hemmings, had some variety, and while the fast bowlers used the cloud cover to good effect, Hemmings extracted considerable purchase from the fifth-day track. With all the bowlers performing at their best, we were

soon reduced to 109–4. Then Azhar fell with the score on 127 and Kapil Dev was yorked by Eddie Hemmings, leaving us at a perilous 183–6.

## **My first Test hundred**

When Manoj Prabhakar joined me in the middle we badly needed a partnership to save the game. I had been lucky at the start of my innings, with Eddie Hemmings dropping me when I had tried to play an on drive. The ball had hit the outside part of my bat and spooned back to Hemmings, who failed to hold on to it. I learnt my lesson and decided not to play any more uppish strokes. At the same time I was determined to play some shots and not go into my shell. Getting ultra-defensive would allow the English bowlers to put more and more fielders round the bat, and by trying to score I would be able to keep the field spread out. Every time I got a chance to score runs, I did so. Most of my scoring strokes were in the nature of punches played with minimum risk. The balance between aggression and caution was crucial and I was trying to focus on each and every ball. My fifty came up but it did not excite me. The match was far from saved and that was the goal.

At the other end, Manoj Prabhakar was playing well and after a while it was clear we had succeeded in frustrating the English bowlers. The first task had been accomplished. When trying to save a match, the important thing is to set small targets. These can be as little as batting the next five overs, or the next hour, or even a session. If a wicket doesn't fall for close to a session, the opposition, however much they are in control, are bound to feel pressure. Time was gradually running out for England and restlessness was creeping in.

When I passed 90 runs, it was obvious that the thought of scoring a hundred would start to affect me. After all, it would be my first international century and the crowd had already started expecting it from me. I reminded myself of what had happened in New Zealand and was conscious not to repeat the same mistake. There was still some time left in the day's play and England could press for victory if I got out.

In the mid-nineties I got a lucky reprieve against Angus Fraser. He bowled me a bouncer and I ducked under it with my bat held above my head like a periscope. The ball hit the back of the bat and went along the ground to fine leg. It could have gone straight into the hands of any of the close-in fielders or to the wicketkeeper. But it didn't. I was glad and thanked God for the reprieve.

At Old Trafford luck seemed to be with me. I batted patiently until I finally played a punch off Angus Fraser through mid off when on 98. Chris Lewis chased down the ball but by the time he threw it back to the bowler I had run three, completing my first Test hundred. The crowd stood to applaud but I was extremely uncomfortable about acknowledging them. I had never been in that position before and was acutely embarrassed about raising my bat to the stadium.

Every time I look back at the footage of my first century, I realize that celebrating was not something that came naturally to me. It was only with time that I became more confident of my presence in the middle. 'Presence' is actually very important in international sport. It is one thing just being there in the middle, but it is another making people aware of your 'presence'. It is about body language and radiating confidence, something that the West Indian batting legend Viv Richards would personify. With me it happened after I had scored a few hundreds and felt more established in international cricket. As I grew more assured of my presence, I came up with my own signature style of celebrating an achievement by showing the bat to the dressing room. Most cricketers develop their own style of celebrating. For example, the way Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne showed the ball to the crowd after picking up five wickets in an innings was something they evolved over the course of

their careers.

At Old Trafford I continued to bat on after reaching my hundred and with every passing over it was becoming apparent that the match would end in a draw. When the match was finally called off with two of the twenty mandatory overs still to be bowled, we had reached 343 for no further losses. Prabhakar and I had put together an unbeaten 160-run stand.

I remember walking back to the pavilion to a standing ovation. Both umpires, John Hampshire and John Holder, congratulated me on my hundred and all the England players walked up to me to offer some kind words. In the dressing room my team-mates congratulated me – not just on my maiden Test hundred but also for batting through the day and saving the game for the team, meaning that it was all to play for in the third Test. It was the second occasion I had done so. This one was more satisfying, though, because this time I played a central part in the effort, unlike in the fourth Test in Pakistan, where I had a supporting role.

Just when I was about to relax after a good day's work, I was informed that I had to face the media. It was going to be the first time I addressed a press conference. I asked our manager Madhav Mantri, a former Test cricketer who toured England with India in the 1950s, if it was compulsory or if I could just skip it. He assured me it was a routine matter and said that the journalists would only ask me questions about my performance and about the match. My team-mates, however, started pulling my leg, saying they'd ask me questions I couldn't answer and that it was going to be a really difficult session. Looking back, I must admit that I quite enjoyed the experience. I was uncomfortable to start with, but it was quite straightforward really. I just needed to share my thoughts and it wasn't such a daunting task after all. Most of the questions were pleasant and it felt good to receive compliments from well-known cricket writers.

I was declared Player of the Match – my first such award – and once again felt awkward at the ceremony. I was handed the bottle of champagne but, not being eighteen, I didn't drink at the time. I just wanted the presentation to be over and to hurry back to the dressing room with the award as soon as possible. In the end I brought the bottle home with me to Mumbai and finally opened it on the occasion of my daughter Sara's first birthday in 1998.



# England v India

(2nd Test)

Played at Old Trafford, Manchester, on 9, 10, 11, 13, 14 August 1990

Umpires: JH Hampshire & JW Holder  
Toss: England

## ENGLAND

GA Gooch*	c More b Prabhakar	116	c More b Prabhakar	7
MA Atherton	c More b Hirwani	131	lbw b Kapil Dev	74
DI Gower	c Tendulkar b Kapil Dev	38	b Hirwani	16
AJ Lamb	c Manjrekar b Kumble	38	b Kapil Dev	109
RC Russell†	c More b Hirwani	8 (7)	not out	16
RA Smith	not out	121 (5)	not out	61
JE Morris	b Kumble	13 (6)	retired hurt	15
CC Lewis	b Hirwani	3		
EE Hemmings	lbw b Hirwani	19		
ARC Fraser	c Tendulkar b Kumble	1		
DE Malcolm	b Shastri	13		
Extras	(b 2, lb 9, w 1, nb 6)	18	(lb 15, nb 7)	22
<b>Total</b>	(160.5 overs)	<b>519</b>	(for 4 wkts dec)	(81 overs) <b>320</b>

## INDIA

RJ Shastri	c Gooch b Fraser	25	b Malcolm	12
NS Sidhu	c Gooch b Fraser	13	c sub (CJ Adams) b Fraser	0
SV Manjrekar	c Smith b Hemmings	93	c sub (CJ Adams) b Hemmings	50
DB Vengsarkar	c Russell b Fraser	6	b Lewis	32
M Azharuddin*	c Atherton b Fraser	179	c Lewis b Hemmings	11
SR Tendulkar	c Lewis b Hemmings	68	not out	119
M Prabhakar	c Russell b Malcolm	4 (8)	not out	67
Kapil Dev	lbw b Lewis	0 (7)	b Hemmings	26
KS More†	b Fraser	6		
A Kumble	run out (Morris)	2		
ND Hirwani	not out	15		
Extras	(b 5, lb 4, nb 12)	21	(b 17, lb 3, nb 6)	26
<b>Total</b>	(119.2 overs)	<b>432</b>	(for 6 wkts)	(90 overs) <b>343</b>

INDIA	O	M	R	W	O	M	R	W	Fall of wickets:			
Kapil Dev	13	2	67	1	22	4	69	2	Eng	Ind	Eng	Ind
Prabhakar	25	2	112	1	18	1	80	1	1st	225	26	15
Kumble	43	7	105	3 (4)	17	3	65	0	2nd	292	48	46
Hirwani	62	10	174	4 (3)	15	0	52	1	3rd	312	57	180
Shastri	17.5	2	50	1	9	0	39	0	4th	324	246	248
									5th	366	358	-
ENGLAND	O	M	R	W	O	M	R	W	6th	392	364	-
Malcolm	26	3	96	1	14	5	59	1	7th	404	365	-
Fraser	35	5	124	5	21	3	81	1	8th	434	396	-
Hemmings	29.2	8	74	2	31	10	75	3	9th	459	401	-
Lewis	13	1	61	1 (5)	20	3	86	1	10th	519	432	-
Atherton	16	3	68	0 (4)	4	0	22	0				

Close of play: Day 1: Eng (1) 322-3 (Lamb 20\*, Russell 7\*, 92 overs)  
Day 2: Ind (1) 77-3 (Manjrekar 21\*, Azharuddin 4\*, 27 overs)  
Day 3: Ind (1) 432  
Day 4: Eng (2) 290-4 (Smith 40\*, Morris 15\*, 76 overs)

Man of the Match: SR Tendulkar  
Result: Match drawn

On returning to the hotel after the match I got a call from home and remember speaking to what must have been thirty or forty people on the phone. It was a spontaneous gathering of all my friends at our neighbour's apartment to celebrate the hundred and it was really touching to know that people in the colony were so thrilled at the accomplishment. Some of them jokingly mentioned to me that as I wasn't old enough to drink, they were enjoying a drink on my behalf. My parents were extremely happy with my performance and my brother too felt vindicated.

The third Test match, at The Oval at the end of August, was another draw, which meant that we lost the series 0-1, but I was still reasonably satisfied with my performances in England and felt I had taken a few important strides. I returned to India a better Test cricketer and far more confident of myself as a performer, ready for the next big challenges: a tour of Australia at the end of the following year, followed by the World Cup jointly organized by Australia and New Zealand.

## India in Australia, November 1991-February 1992

We began the tour with a couple of one-day practice matches in Perth in November 1991, the first at Lilac Hill and the second at the WACA, one of the fastest cricket wickets in the world. At the WACA we were bowled out for just 64 and it was clear we had to adjust to Australian conditions as soon as possible if we were going to be competitive in the series.

Our first three-day tour game was against a full-strength New South Wales team at Lismore between 23 and 25 November and it was in that game that I got my first taste of real Australian competitiveness. It was a fast, lively wicket and Geoff Lawson, the NSW captain, had no hesitation in putting us in after winning the toss. In addition to Lawson, their bowling attack included Mike Whitney, Steve and Mark Waugh, Greg Matthews and Wayne Holdsworth, and it was a tough test for us. The team also included Mark Taylor and five players – Whitney, Lawson, Steve Waugh, Mark Taylor and Matthews – had already played Test cricket for Australia.

I was looking to be aggressive from the very beginning and played a number of horizontal-bat shots over point and gully. It was in this match that I had my first exchange with Steve Waugh, who didn't seem keen on the idea of an eighteen-year-old attacking the bowling like that. A lot of things were said to me and they were the first of many over the years.

It was in the course of this match that the Australian Test team for the first Test at Brisbane was announced. Steve Waugh was not included in the side, so I said to him that if he wanted to fight with me, he first needed to get into the Australian team. It was all done in good spirit and throughout our careers we had great mutual respect; in fact, the banter, it must be said, was a result of this. We knew how important it was to get Steve Waugh out early and tried all we could to unsettle him. There were occasions when we even resorted to observing total silence when Waugh batted as we came to believe that saying things to him actually strengthened his resolve to do better.

## **A tough start**

In the first Test at Brisbane, starting on 29 November 1991, the Australians beat us convincingly, thanks in large part to superb bowling from Craig McDermott and Merv Hughes. Like most of our team, I didn't do much with the bat and we knew we had to bounce back in Melbourne in the Boxing Day Test. At the MCG we remained competitive till the middle of the third day, with Kiran More coming to the rescue with 67 in our first innings and Kapil Dev and Prabakhar both bowling well, before a batting collapse in our second innings dampened our hopes. I managed to stay in for a reasonable time and scored 40 off 107 balls, but I was disgusted with myself for trying to hit a big shot and getting out caught by Allan Border against the off-spinner Peter Taylor after doing all the hard work and playing myself in. I was so fed up that I didn't eat lunch in the dressing room and was on edge for the whole day!

Something else happened in Melbourne that has never happened again in my life, I'm pleased to say. When I went back to the dressing room I realized that my abdominal protector had been broken into three pieces when I was hit by a Bruce Reid delivery. Reid, the tall left-arm fast bowler, got a lot of wickets in the series and I was lucky that no major damage was caused by the accident!

## **Fighting back**

Down 0–2, we went to Sydney for the next Test on 2 January 1992 knowing it was our last chance to get back in the series. It was a typical SCG wicket, helpful to the batsmen to start with, and I thought our bowlers did very well to bowl Australia out for 313 in the first innings. It was essential for us to

take a substantial lead and give our bowlers a chance to bowl Australia out again in the second innings. I didn't sleep much the night before batting. I was sharing a room with Sourav Ganguly, who later captained India and is a very good friend. I remember a startled Sourav waking up in the middle of the night and seeing me shadow-practise. Sourav wasn't playing in that game and was surprised to see me up so late. I told him I was planning how to play McDermott and the other bowlers.

Unsurprisingly, the next day I was feeling rather tired. India were batting and I was batting at number six, so I decided to take a nap on the dining table inside the SCG dressing room – asking Sourav to wake up me up at the fall of the next wicket. He did so when Azhar got out. By then I was feeling refreshed and was ready to go out and bat.

For the first time in the series our top order had fired and by the time I went in, the score was a healthy 201–4, with Vengsarkar having contributed a half-century. We needed another good partnership to push on for a lead and, with the opener Ravi Shastri playing extremely well at the other end, that's what we managed to do. The second innings at Melbourne had definitely helped me and I was now able to middle the ball from the very start. There was a phase halfway through when I began to lose concentration and feel edgy, but I forced myself to exercise restraint and it soon passed.

After reaching my half-century, I began to play a lot more shots and was soon close to my second Test hundred. I vividly remember the glance to fine leg that brought up my century. I ran two and the second run was the fastest I have ever run. Ravi went on to score an excellent double hundred, the first by an Indian in Australia, as we put on 196 runs for the fifth wicket. Sydney continues to be my favourite ground outside India and to score my first hundred in Australia at the SCG was special. I had grown up watching cricket in Australia on the TV and used to wake up early to watch the Victoria Cup in 1985. Now I was playing at the actual venues and scoring runs.

The SCG Test is also remembered for the debut of a plump Australian leg-spinner with a mop of blond hair. Though Shane Warne took only one wicket in the match, it was evident to us all that he could give the ball a fair rip. While no one could have predicted the 708 Test wickets he would take in his career, the fact that he had talent was obvious from the very first day he took to the field in January 1992.

Knowing that we could bat only once – because of valuable time lost to rain and bad light on the third and fourth days – we batted for close to an hour on the final day and declared with a lead of 170 runs. With the track doing a fair bit and the bounce turning variable, we had a good chance of closing out the game in the time remaining. A win still seemed on the cards when Shastri's bowling helped reduce Australia to 114–6 and it was only some dogged rearguard action from Allan Border and Merv Hughes that saved Australia.

In the one over I bowled I picked up the wicket of Hughes and it was a big moment for me because it was my first wicket in Test cricket. He was caught by Prabhakar in the slips for 21 after playing seventy-three balls, and if we had got his wicket a little earlier, we might have been able to close out the game.

## **Learning some lessons**

The fourth Test of the series started at Adelaide on 25 January 1992 and for the first time I was going to bat at the home ground of the legendary Sir Donald Bradman, the greatest batsman to have played the game. While I did not do much at the Adelaide Oval, the team played some good cricket. We lost the match by 38 runs in the end, but we remained competitive throughout and dominated the first two days of the match. Kapil Dev had a good match with both bat and ball and in our second innings Azhar

played a wonderful captain's innings, scoring 106. He and Prabhakar, who made 64, had brought us to the brink of victory, but we were eventually all out for 333 chasing 371. With a bit of luck, the series could have been 2–2 at Adelaide. Instead we went to Perth for the final Test 0–3 down.

I scored my second hundred of the series in the fifth Test, which started on 1 February, and I count it as one of the very best I have scored. It was a quick wicket and for the first time since my debut I was going in at number four in a Test. I relished the opportunity from the outset and hit sixteen boundaries in my 114. By that stage of the tour I had mastered a back-foot punch. While most batsmen favoured the cut shot at Perth because of the extra bounce, I used the back-foot punch at every opportunity and because I was able to do so against good-length balls, it was making the bowlers' job that much more difficult. It would usually bring me at least a couple of runs and when I timed the ball really well it would even go all the way to the boundary.

Earlier, the Australian media had talked up the fast, bouncy WACA wicket and how difficult it would make it for us to cope with the Australian quick bowlers. But I never had a problem batting at the WACA. This was because I managed to adjust to the bounce. Every time the ball got big on me, I stayed on the back foot and played the ball with soft hands at the last moment, standing up on my toes rather than playing a flat-footed defensive stroke.

One incident at the WACA brought home the intensity and competitiveness of the game in Australia. I had just played a ball defensively and had no chance of a run. In what I thought was the spirit of the game, I was about to pick the ball up and throw it to Allan Border, the Australian captain, who was fielding at gully. When AB spotted me bending down he screamed at me, saying, 'Don't you dare touch the ball.' After that I never tried to pick up the ball and throw it back to fielders. It was a lesson in how international cricket is played and I remembered it till the last day of my career.

## Meeting a hero

It was on this tour of Australia that I first saw a batsman who had been my hero when I was growing up – though it wasn't on the cricket field. I was in a hotel lobby in Adelaide with Sanjay Manjrekar when a cab pulled up outside. A guy wearing a cap got out and I immediately said, 'I've seen him somewhere before.' As he got closer I said, 'I don't believe it – that's Viv Richards!'

When he walked past us and headed up to his room, I turned to Sanjay and told him that I just had to meet my hero. So we went to Reception and found out his room number and I made Sanjay call him – Sanjay had played a series against him in the West Indies in 1989 – and before long we were on our way to his room. That was my first meeting with Viv. I spent only three minutes with him, just to say hello, but it was a very exciting moment for me.

## 1992 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand

After the Test series we stayed in Australia, as the World Cup – my first – was just a few weeks away. The idea was to help us acclimatize to the conditions, not that this was necessary after being in Australia for close to three months. We had a few weeks to ourselves and with Vinod Kambli around there was never a dull moment. Vinod and I shared a room and one thing that always stood out about him was his dress sense. Vinod's clothes were as colourful as they could possibly get and on one occasion our manager Ranbir Singh Mahendra even said to him, '*Arre India ke liye khel rahe ho, aise clown jaise dress kyun pehente ho tum? Kuch dhang ka kapda pehna karo.*' (You are playing for India. Why do you dress like a clown? You should wear some decent clothes and dress sensibly.) Not that it

had any impact on Vinod, though!

Those few weeks were relatively stress-free and we spent a lot of time relaxing in each other's company. On one occasion the leg-spinner Narendra Hirwani and I were having tea in our physio Dr Ali Irani's room. Ali used to make special tea for us, with a particular kind of sugar. In the middle of our conversation Ali got a call from Ranbir Singh Mahendra, who was a vegetarian, asking if he could get him some garlic bread. After the call Ali turned all philosophical and said, 'There will come a time when you guys will be there and will think about old Ali Irani who used to take care of us and make us really nice tea.'

Hirwani and I found it funny that he had turned unnaturally thoughtful and Hirwani asked him to repeat what he had just said. Ali was reluctant to do so but when Hirwani insisted, he said it again. At this Hirwani jokingly said to Ali with reference to his efforts to keep Ranbir Singh Mahendra in good humour, '*Tu to har din 200 marta hai. India team mein tera naam pehle likha jata hai. Uske baad hamara naam aata hai.*' (You score a double hundred every day by being in the good books of the manager. Your name will come first in an Indian team and only then will our names be listed.)

In the World Cup, India failed to make the semi-finals, despite being competitive in most of the matches. We lost to England and Australia by the narrow margin of nine runs and one run respectively and our second match against Sri Lanka at Mackay on 28 February was washed out because of rain.

The high point of the tournament for us was the match against eventual winners Pakistan on 4 March 1992 at Sydney. After two consecutive defeats, we were determined to turn things round against Pakistan. Batting first, we had to negotiate a hostile spell of fast bowling from Wasim Akram. At one stage he was bowling magnificently to Vinod Kambli and, batting at the other end, I just kept telling Vinod to nudge the ball and run. We put together an important partnership and I followed it up with another with Kapil Dev, who scored a valuable 35 off just twenty-six balls. I was unbeaten on 54 at the end of the innings.

Our total of 216 wasn't a big score to defend, but we started well and Kapil Dev and Prabakhar picked up two early wickets for very little on the board. Our bowlers and fielders were charged up and there was a lot of chat out in the middle. We were cheering each other on and giving the Pakistan batsmen a hard time.

This match is often remembered for the tussle between our wicketkeeper Kiran More and Javed Miandad. Javed, if I remember right, was having back spasms and could not play his strokes freely. He was finding it difficult to bat but was performing an uncharacteristic job for his team, trying to anchor the innings and hold up one end. Behind the stumps, Kiran was constantly up and down, shouting out instructions to our bowlers, saying Javed was in no position to play his shots. Infuriated at the continuous chatter, Javed imitated Kiran's actions by doing a frog jump. We were all stunned and amused at the same time and this tiff between Kiran and Javed made the eventual victory even sweeter.

I bowled my full quota of ten overs, conceding just 37 runs and picking up the vital wicket of opener Aamer Sohail. It was a satisfying win and by the end of the match I had completely lost my voice because of all the shouting. It was the first time India had played Pakistan in the World Cup since the inception of the tournament in 1975 and it was the start of a string of victories against them in World Cups. The 1992 victory was particularly pleasing because I was also Player of the Match.

When we returned to India at the end of March after four and a half months in Australia I was a transformed cricketer. The 1991-92 Australia tour undoubtedly had a fundamental impact on my career.

# A brave man

The story of the Australia tour is incomplete without a story that has stayed with me over the years. It involves Venkatapathy Raju, our left-arm spinner, and Merv Hughes. They were great pals and on a flight to Perth, which is a little under four hours from Sydney, we dared Raju, one of the skinniest cricketers in the team, to go and grab Hughes's famous thick moustache. Merv, a huge man, was known for his volatile temper and most of us were convinced that Raju would chicken out in the end. To our surprise, he boldly went up to Merv and pulled his moustache, a feat of incredible bravery – or foolishness. Merv took it all very sportingly and the act was applauded by everyone on the flight, making Raju an instant hero.

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## India in New Zealand 1990

### 1st Test. Christchurch. 2–5 February 1990

New Zealand 459 (JG Wright 185, KR Rutherford 69, AH Jones 52) and 2–0

India 164 (NS Sidhu 51, M Azharuddin 48, **SR Tendulkar 0**; DK Morrison 5–75) and 296 (f/o) (WV Raman 96, **SR Tendulkar 24**; RJ Hadlee 4–69)

*New Zealand won by 10 wickets*

### 2nd Test. Napier. 9–13 February 1990

India 358–9 dec (M Prabhakar 95, **SR Tendulkar 88**, KS More 73; DK Morrison 5–98)

New Zealand 178–1 (JG Wright 113\*, TJ Franklin 50)

*Match drawn*

### 3rd Test. Auckland. 22–26 February 1990

New Zealand 391 (IDS Smith 173, RJ Hadlee 87; AS Wassan 4–108) and 483–5 dec (AH Jones 170\*, MD Crowe 113, JG Wright 74)

India 482 (M Azharuddin 192, AS Wassan 53, KS More 50, **SR Tendulkar 5**; DK Morrison 5–145) and 149–0 (M Prabhakar 63\*, WV Raman 72\*)

*Match drawn*

## New Zealand won the series 1–0

## India in England 1990

### 1st Test. Lord's. 26–31 July 1990

England 653–4 dec (GA Gooch 333, AJ Lamb 139, RA Smith 100\*) and 272–4 dec (GA Gooch 123, MA Atherton 72)

India 454 (M Azharuddin 121, RJ Shastri 100, Kapil Dev 77, **SR Tendulkar 10**; ARC Fraser 5–104) and 224 (SK Sharma 38, **SR Tendulkar 27**)

*England won by 247 runs*

### 2nd Test. Old Trafford, Manchester. 9–14 August 1990

England 519 (MA Atherton 131, RA Smith 121\*, GA Gooch 116; ND Hirwani 4–174) and 320–4 dec (AJ Lamb 109, MA Atherton 74, RA Smith 61\*)

India 432 (M Azharuddin 179, SV Manjrekar 93, **SR Tendulkar 68**; ARC Fraser 5–124) and 343–6 (**SR Tendulkar 119\***, M Prabhakar 67\*, SV Manjrekar 50)

*Match drawn*

### **3rd Test. The Oval. 23–28 August 1990**

India 606–9 dec (RJ Shastri 187, Kapil Dev 110, M Azharuddin 78, KS More 61\*, **SR Tendulkar 21**)  
England 340 (GA Gooch 85, RA Smith 57, EE Hemmings 51; M Prabhakar 4–74) and 477–4 dec (f/o)  
(DI Gower 157\*, GA Gooch 88, MA Atherton 86, AJ Lamb 52)

*Match drawn*

**England won the series 1–0**

### **India in Australia 1991–92**

#### **1st Test. Brisbane. 29 November–2 December 1991**

India 239 (M Prabhakar 54\*, **SR Tendulkar 16**; CJ McDermott 5–54) and 156 (RJ Shastri 41, **SR Tendulkar 7**; CJ McDermott 4–47, MG Hughes 4–50)

Australia 340 (MA Taylor 94, DC Boon 66; Kapil Dev 4–80) and 58–0

*Australia won by 10 wickets*

#### **2nd Test. Melbourne. 26–29 December 1991**

India 263 (KS More 67\*, **SR Tendulkar 15**; BA Reid 6–66) and 213 (DB Vengsarkar 54, **SR Tendulkar 40**; BA Reid 6–66)

Australia 349 (GR Marsh 86, IA Healy 60, DM Jones 59; Kapil Dev 5–97, M Prabhakar 4–84) and 128–2 (MA Taylor 60, DC Boon 44\*)

*Australia won by 8 wickets*

#### **3rd Test. Sydney. 2–6 January 1992**

Australia 313 (DC Boon 129\*, MA Taylor 56) and 173–8 (AR Border 53\*; RJ Shastri 4–45, **SR Tendulkar 1–2**)

India 483 (RJ Shastri 206, **SR Tendulkar 148\***, DB Vengsarkar 54; CJ McDermott 4–147)

*Match drawn*

#### **4th Test. Adelaide. 25–29 January 1992**

Australia 145 (DM Jones 41; SLV Raju 3–11, Kapil Dev 3–33, **SR Tendulkar 2–10**) and 451 (DC Boon 135\*, MA Taylor 100, AR Border 91\*; Kapil Dev 5–130)

India 225 (Kapil Dev 56, **SR Tendulkar 6**; CJ McDermott 5–76) and 333 (M Azharuddin 106, M Prabhakar 64, **SR Tendulkar 17**; CJ McDermott 5–92)

*Australia won by 38 runs*

#### **5th Test. Perth. 1–5 February 1992**

Australia 346 (DC Boon 107, AR Border 59, TM Moody 50; M Prabhakar 5–101) and 367–6 dec (DM Jones 150\*, TM Moody 101)

India 272 (**SR Tendulkar 114**, KS More 43; MR Whitney 4–68, MG Hughes 4–82) and 141 (K Srikanth 38, **SR Tendulkar 5**; MR Whitney 7–27)

*Australia won by 300 runs*

**Australia won the series 4–0**

### **India in the 1992 World Cup**

**2nd match. England v India at Perth. 22 February 1992**

England 236–9 (50/50 ov); India 227 (49.2/50 ov)

*England won by 9 runs*

**9th match. India v Sri Lanka at Mackay. 28 February 1992**

India 1–0 (0.2/20 ov)

*No result*

**12th match. Australia v India at Brisbane. 1 March 1992**

Australia 237–9 (50/50 ov); India 234 (47/47 ov, target: 236)

*Australia won by 1 run (revised target)*

**16th match. India v Pakistan at Sydney. 4 March 1992**

India 216–7 (49/49 ov); Pakistan 173 (48.1/49 ov)

*India won by 43 runs*

**19th match. India v Zimbabwe at Hamilton. 7 March 1992**

India 203–7 (32/32 ov); Zimbabwe 104–1 (19.1/19 ov, target: 159)

*India won by 55 runs (revised target)*

**24th match. India v West Indies at Wellington. 10 March 1992**

India 197 (49.4/50 ov); West Indies 195–5 (40.2/46 ov, target: 195)

*West Indies won by 5 wickets (with 34 balls remaining) (revised target)*

**27th match. New Zealand v India at Dunedin. 12 March 1992**

India 230–6 (50/50 ov); New Zealand 231–6 (47.1/50 ov)

*New Zealand won by 4 wickets (with 17 balls remaining)*

**32nd match. India v South Africa at Adelaide. 15 March 1992**

India 180–6 (30/30 ov); South Africa 181–4 (29.1/30 ov)

*South Africa won by 6 wickets (with 5 balls remaining)*

**Final. England v Pakistan at Melbourne. 25 March 1992**

Pakistan 249–6 (50/50 ov); England 227 (49.2/50 ov)

**Pakistan won by 22 runs**



## ANJALI

As I was trying to establish myself as an international cricketer, my personal life changed dramatically in August 1990 when I met Anjali, my future wife. It was the beginning of by far the best partnership of my life.

I had just landed in Mumbai on our return from the 1990 tour of England and was waiting to pick up my bags when I first saw an extremely attractive woman looking down from the viewing gallery in the airport. Little did I know then that I had just seen my life partner. She was standing with a friend of hers, Dr Aparna Santhanam, now a well-known dermatologist in Mumbai. We had fleeting eye contact and then she disappeared.

The next I saw of the two of them was when I was making my way out of the airport. I spotted Anjali, dressed in an orange T-shirt and blue jeans, running out of the gate, apparently chasing after me. That was not all, because she soon started yelling, ‘He is sooooo cute!’ I felt awkward and started to blush, as I knew both Ajit and Nitin were waiting outside to take me home. My childhood friend Sunil Harshe was with me and he murmured in my ear that a very good-looking girl was calling my name and seemed keen to meet up with me. I had of course seen her and found her particularly attractive, but I told him there was no way I could speak to her at the time, not with Ajit and Nitin around.

### **The years of courtship**

Anjali and I courted each other for five years between 1990 and 1995, a commitment that led to engagement and finally marriage. It has to be said that the two of us come from very different backgrounds. Anjali is half Gujarati, half English and is a South Mumbai girl from a very well-to-do family. She went to St Xavier’s College and then studied medicine at JJ Hospital. She was well-spoken and had an upbringing fundamentally different from my own. In her family, wearing Western outfits was the norm. My situation was completely different. I had hardly ever been out of my colony and had always mingled with cricket friends. I had never gone out with a girl, let alone brought one home. Unlike most men of my age, who were able to meet girls at college, I had been playing for India from the age of sixteen and simply hadn’t had the opportunity.

While I first saw Anjali at Mumbai airport, it turns out that she had actually seen me a few weeks earlier on 14 August, when I got my first Test hundred at Old Trafford. At the time she was in England with her parents, and her father, Anand Mehta, a former national bridge champion and a serious cricket fan, had called her to catch a glimpse of the innings on television. However, she had no interest in cricket and didn’t watch at all. Soon afterwards she came back to India and it was when she went to the airport to receive her mother, Annabel, who is English but has worked in India tirelessly as a social worker for more than three decades, that we ran into each other for the first time.

The day after she saw me at the airport – and this is her version, by the way – she asked a friend of hers, Mufi Muffazal Lakdawala (who played club cricket and is now a very well-known surgeon), if he could get her my phone number. After coming home from the airport, she apparently jokingly declared to her parents that she had seen the man she wanted to marry.

Mufi did get her my number but it was pure chance that I happened to pick up her call. There were no mobile phones then and I was hardly ever at home to pick up the land line. The stars, I can say in hindsight, were aligned. She said she was the girl from the airport and asked if we could meet. While not trying to sound too eager, I told her that I remembered her and could meet with her at the Cricket Club of India, where I was playing. At first she did not believe me and asked if I could remember what she was wearing on the day I had first seen her. When I mentioned the orange T-shirt and blue jeans, she was impressed.

She came along to the CCI, as we'd arranged, but we couldn't really meet up and talk properly with so many people around. Being discreet was the best thing under the circumstances. All we did was exchange numbers and after that we started talking on the phone fairly regularly. It wasn't long before my sister-in-law Meena began to suspect that something was cooking between the two of us. She often asked me about this girl who kept on calling me but I tried to avoid answering. I wasn't used to discussing private things with my family and felt distinctly uncomfortable.

Our first proper meeting finally happened at my house when we came up with the idea that Anjali should come over posing as a reporter wanting an interview. That was her first and last foray into journalism. A female reporter had never come to my home for an interview before and, in light of all the phone calls, my sister-in-law was particularly suspicious about who this special reporter was.

For that first visit, I was keen to offer Anjali something to eat and was disappointed to see that hardly any of the chocolates I had brought back from England remained. In fact, there were only two left and in my keenness to salvage the situation I carefully cut them up and set a plate of chocolate pieces in front of her. She couldn't stay for long, however, and our first meeting was much too brief for my liking.

Despite being brief, it left a lasting impression. I simply felt happy in her presence. I can't really pinpoint what I liked about her but what I can say is that I was able to relax and be myself with her from the very first day. I had intentionally spoken very little because I was worried about embarrassing myself by saying something stupid. She did most of the talking and that was fine with me. In any case, at the time I wasn't as fluent with my English, which was the language of conversation. It was perhaps a defensive act, but Anjali never made me feel self-conscious. She was just the most ideal soulmate I could have asked for.

While we continued to speak for long periods on the phone after our first meeting, we hardly ever got a chance to meet. On some occasions we did plan to meet at around 8.30 p.m. and go for a drive. However, it turned out that Anjali's parents, who were unaware of the relationship then, were watching television and so, despite wanting to meet, Anjali was unable to leave the house without arousing suspicion. For my part, I drove all the way from Bandra to Warden Road, a journey of about forty minutes, and waited in the car until I was finally forced to turn back. Because of the risk of people recognizing me, I couldn't even call her from the public phone close to her house (there were no mobiles then) and had to go all the way back to Bandra to find out what had gone wrong, then I'd ask her to try again and drive all the way back. Needless to say, I am now an ardent advocate of mobile technology!

The second time we met was when Anjali suggested I pick her up from her house and we go for a drive in her Maruti 800, India's most affordable small car in the early 1990s. She wanted to have