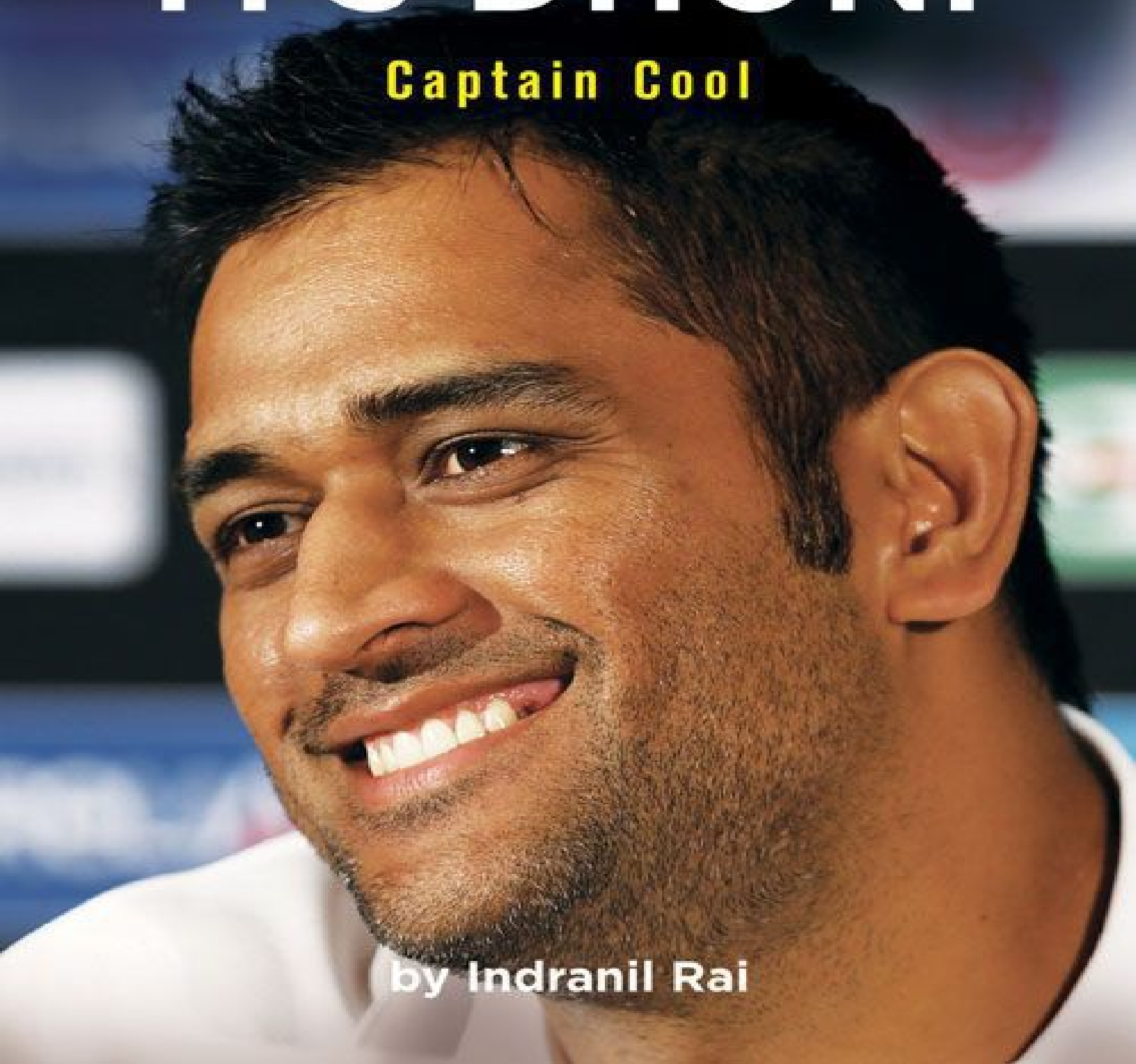


 Jaico Cricketwallah Series with
AYAZ MEMON

M S DHONI

Captain Cool



by Indranil Rai

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& Indranil Rai

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Publisher's Foreword

Cricket has always been a compelling addiction in India. But the recent past has seen a massive explosion in the game's reach, its audience and money. As a result, cricketers now compete with film stars in adoration quotient and quite often, win that battle.

With the spread of the Indian diaspora, cricket is now watched in more countries than it is played in. Cricket's ascendancy has also sparked a tremendous demand for information, where fans devour every last tidbit they can about their favourite players.

To these aficionados, Jaico Publishing House is delighted to present, with Ayaz Memon as editor, the Cricketwallah Series — a set of books that contain information, comment, statistics and much more about some of India's most admired and followed cricketers. These books are written with zest for a quick read and then to treasure, for future reference.

Ayaz Memon is India's best known sports writer with over 35 years in journalism. He has covered more Tests and tournaments than he can remember, as well as the Olympic Games, Wimbledon and more. He has authored several books over his long and illustrious career and has been a cricket commentator, in both English and Hindi, for television channels.



Editor's note

There is now near unanimity that Mahendra Singh Dhoni is not only the highest earning, but also the most influential cricketer in the world. Indeed, he has an array of outstanding achievements to his credit – as player and captain – which could stand the test of time.

Already, he is India's best performing wicket-keeper batsman apart, of course, from leading India to triumph in the World Twenty20 Championships in 2007 and the 50-50 World Cup in 2011. Add to that India reaching the number one spot in the ICC Test rankings under his leadership and it adds up to a staggering body of work.

But hark back a decade, who would have thought that he would reach such great heights? Hailing from Ranchi, pretty much the hinterlands of India and more importantly the boondocks where cricket is concerned, Dhoni looked fated to live the life of a ticket collector in the Railways – with cricket as a part-time diversion – when the first decade of this millennium began.

Indeed, a journalist who knew him well even then told me that at one stage then Dhoni was contemplating quitting cricket, seeing no future for himself. Then suddenly, it all started to change with a tour to Nairobi with the India A team in 2003-4 where he smote two hard-hit centuries.

This alerted the selectors to his potential who picked him for One Day Internationals against Bangladesh in December 2004. Dhoni was run out for a duck in his first game and his next three matches produced score of 12, 7 n.o. and 3 raising murmurs that the selectors had backed a

counterfeit coin.

Promoted to number 3 in his fifth match, Dhoni stymied all Doubting Thomases with a blistering 148. Within a year, he was to score a dazzling 183 including 10 sixes against Sri Lanka, the power and brutality of his strokes leaving not just fans but critics dazzled. A star was born.

Even so, Dhoni's early appeal stemmed largely from his uninhibited big-hitting and his flamboyant hairstyles. Why, even former Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf could not resist praising his flowing locks when India toured Pakistan in 2005-6!

But in the decade since, Dhoni has shown that he has more to him than just being a poster boy for Middle India or a style icon for the urban youth, though neither is insignificant: he has also proved himself to be a champion cricketer and captain, laced with delightful enigma that has baffled fans, opponents and critics alike.

There is so much that Dhoni does unconventionally – from the incredible 'helicopter shot' which would take the arms off other players to the unorthodox tactics that he deploys as captain to his resilience to stay away cool and unaffected even in moments of singular triumph or utter despair.

Indeed, it is almost impossible to straitjacket him as cricketer, captain or man. Let's just say that he is different, living out among the more astonishing scripts in Indian sports: very different from Sachin Tendulkar's, but every bit as compelling.

In this book Indranil Rai traces the rise and success of Dhoni from a talented and ambitious boy from the Indian subaltern to a global hero.

AYAZ MEMON
October 15, 2013
Mumbai



Career Highlights

- India's most successful captain in Test cricket with 24 wins in 47 matches
- Led India to 2011 World Cup win
- Led India to nine consecutive wins between November 2008 and February 2009 – an Indian record
- Has captained his side (India/Indians/Chennai Super Kings) in 151 Twenty20 matches. No one else has been captain in even 100 matches!
- His career average of 51.45 is the highest by an Indian in ODIs (minimum qualification: 200 career runs)
- Holds the Indian record for most wicketkeeping dismissals in all three forms of the game – 248 in Tests, 287 in ODIs and 29 in Twenty20 Internationals
- Under Dhoni's captaincy, India reached its highest test score of 726-9 (dec) during Sri Lanka's tour of India in 2009. The series

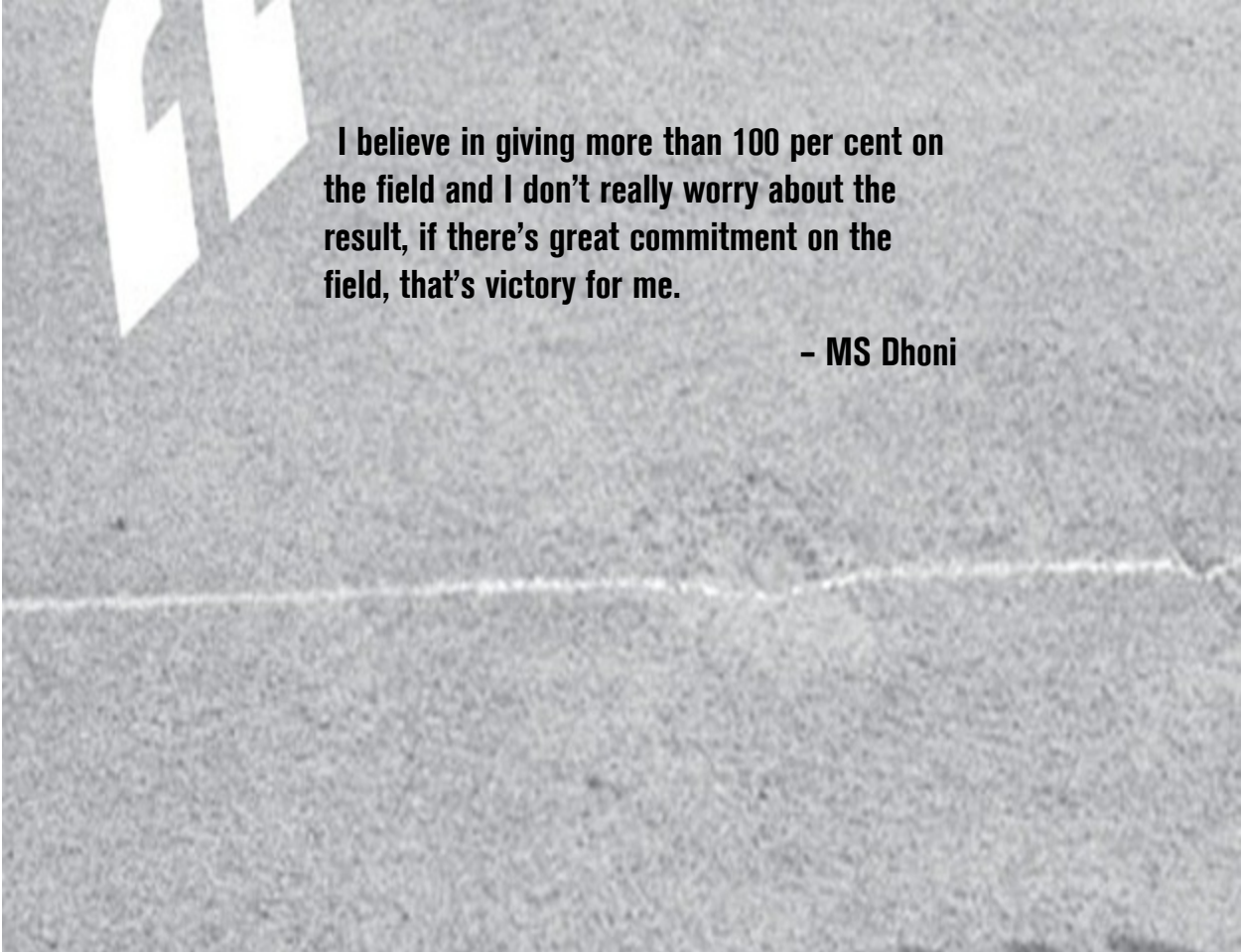
win took them to the Number 1 ranking in Test cricket for the first time in history

Compiled by Rajnish Gupta

1

CHAPTER

BEYOND THE BOUNDARY



I believe in giving more than 100 per cent on the field and I don't really worry about the result, if there's great commitment on the field, that's victory for me.

- MS Dhoni

THIS IS THE STORY OF A YOUNG MAN WHO HAS REAFFIRMED everyone's faith in Indian cricket.

We first meet him in a beautiful small town in Bihar's Chhota Nagpur. On a football field in Ranchi, a young schoolboy, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, was keeping a keen eye on a football. He was the goalkeeper guarding his goalpost. Football coach, Kesava Ranjan Banerjee, who trained the students of the DAV Jawahar Vidya Mandir School got a phone call from Chanchal Bhattacharya, a sports journalist with the *Ranchi Express*. That one call changed the fortunes of this young boy and his country.

Bhattacharya wanted Banerjee to suggest the name of a possible wicket-keeper for his Commando Cricket Club. Banerjee, who had been impressed by Dhoni's skills, wanted a larger stage for this talented schoolboy than football could provide. Apparently, Bhattacharya was initially sceptical about using a goalkeeper and risking a Ranchi League match, but Banerjee's faith was not misplaced. And what the worlds of football and badminton may have lost, cricket is still celebrating.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni was born on July 7, 1981, to a family of modest means. In the 1960s, his father had moved out of his native Almora district in the mountains of Uttar Pradesh (it is now Uttarakhand) in search of work. Pan Singh settled in Ranchi with its undulating countryside rich in minerals. It was then still part of Bihar and is now the capital of Jharkhand. Singh started as a daily wage labourer and retired as a work supervisor with Metallurgical and Engineering Consultants Limited. Mahendra's mother, Devaki Devi, comes from Nainital, a beautiful place known as the Queen of the Hills, also now in Uttarakhand.

Mahendra is the youngest of three children – Narendra is the oldest and his sister's name is Jayanti. At the DAV Jawahar Vidya Mandir School, Mahi, as he is known, played a number of sports – hockey, table tennis, badminton and football, all of which brought to the fore his natural and powerful talents as a sportsman. But his father was strict and Mahi was also expected to do well in academics. Mahi's father was the football fan (Narendra loved playing football too), Devaki Devi too

supported her youngest child's ambitions and in fact it was she who pushed him towards cricket.

From the day Bhattacharya called Banerjee with his request, Mahendra had set off on a difficult journey to become a cricketer. There were days when he had to make do with canvas balls for practice, because cricket balls or even tennis balls were not available. Wicket-keeping perhaps did not come quite so naturally to the football goalkeeper, but it was his skill as a batsman that proved to be his supreme talent. He thrilled his school friends and spectators with his derring-do.

At 18, Dhoni joined the Central Coalfields Limited (CCL) team. This earned him a stipend of ₹ 2,200 a month. ►



Three years after that phone call, Dhoni scored a remarkable and powerful 213 not out from 150 balls, with 26 fours and six sixes. With

his partner Shabbir Hussain (117 from 116 balls) he put up a score of 378. DAV Jawahar Vidya Mandir won the interschool tournament, and the spectators witnessed the sort of match-winning performance that was to become trademark Dhoni – hard-hitting, innovative and victorious. This young man's aggressive style was greatly appreciated when he played for Ranchi's Commando Club from 1995 to 1998. From here on, there was no looking back.



MAHENDRA SINGH DHONI PLAYED HOCKEY, TABLE TENNIS, BADMINTON AND FOOTBALL IN SCHOOL.

Bhattacharya was an influence in Dhoni's early cricket career and was the coach for the Bihar team in the Vinoo Mankad Under-16 Championship in Delhi. Dhoni was part of the team and his work behind and in front of the wicket helped Bihar defeat Gujarat in the first match.

At 18, Dhoni joined the Central Coalfields Limited (CCL) team. This earned him a stipend of ₹ 2,200 a month. He bought himself a second-hand bike, the start of a passion for bikes that lasts till today. It was with CCL that he got a better chance to bat, with a promotion in the batting order from his usual number 7 to number 3.

Mahi stuck to a tough regime of cricket and school. A diet of plenty of milk, rice and chicken is said to have kept the young man going. The hard work paid off because in spite of all the distractions, Mahi managed to get 66 per cent in his class 10 board exams. In 1999, he

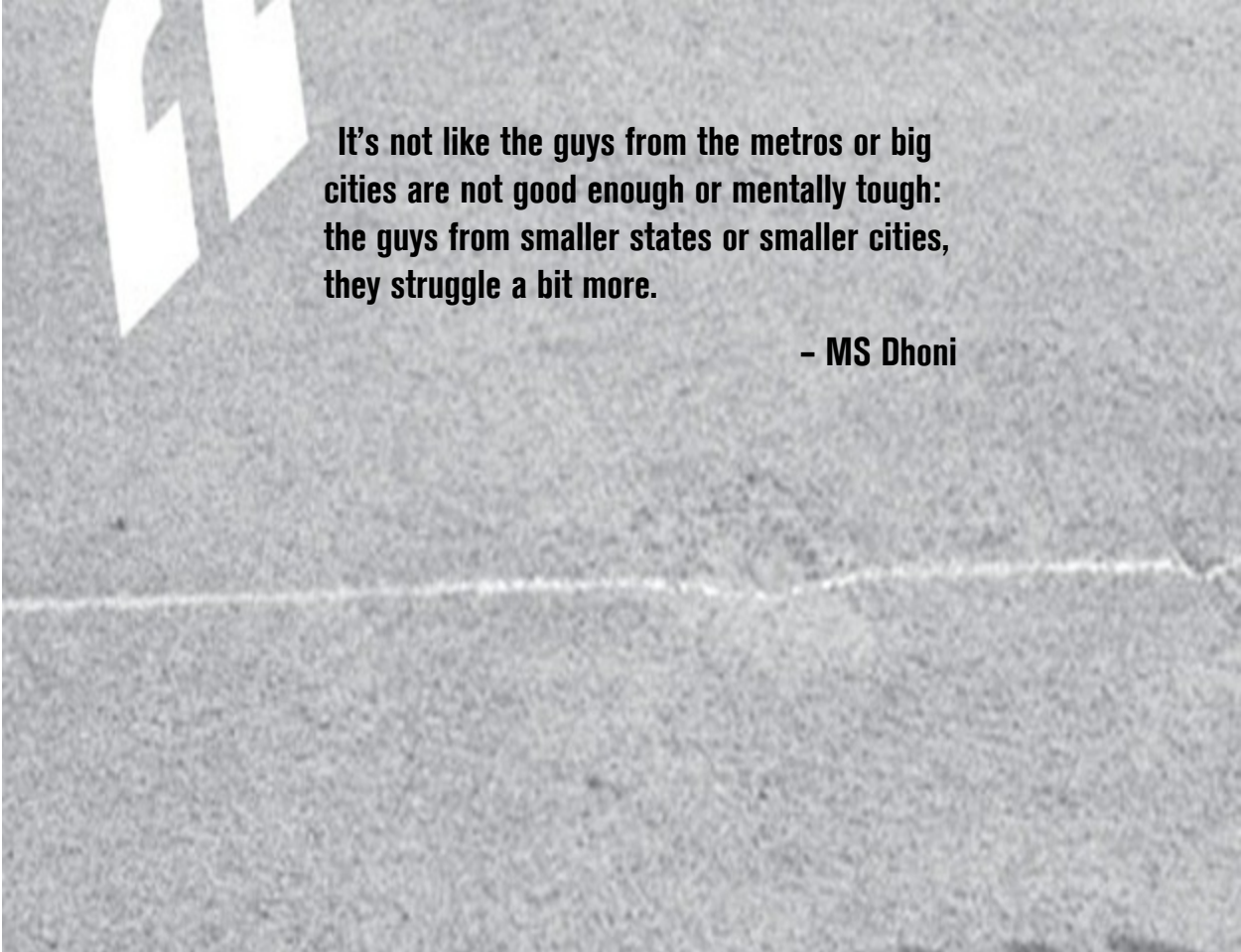
finished his HSC exams and joined Ranchi's Gossner College where he pursued a B.Com Part 1 Honour's degree in Accountancy. He captained the cricket team for the short time he spent there. But he never had time to sit for his exams (newspapers reported in 2013 that Mahi did not manage to sit for his exams once again).

India was calling.

2

CHAPTER

CUTTING EDGE

A grayscale photograph of a cricket field, showing the grass and a white boundary line. In the top left corner, there is a large, white, stylized number '2'.

It's not like the guys from the metros or big cities are not good enough or mentally tough: the guys from smaller states or smaller cities, they struggle a bit more.

- MS Dhoni

AFTER MAHENDRA PLAYED IN THE VINOO MANKAD UNDER-16 Championship, he was picked for the Bihar Under-19 team for the 1998-99 season and made 176 runs in five matches. But Bihar did not make it to the quarter-finals.

Dhoni was skipped for the East Zone Under-19 CK Nayudu Trophy. But he made it to the Bihar Under-19 team in 1999-2000, when Bihar made it to the finals in the Cooch Behar Trophy.

Dhoni scored 84 runs, contributing significantly to Bihar's total of 357. However, it was Yuvraj Singh's Punjab team that made it to the centrestage with Singh himself making an incredible 358 runs in that one match at the Keenan stadium in Jamshedpur. Dhoni racked up 488 runs, five 50s, 17 catches and seven stumpings in that tournament. In retrospect, it seems as if the new Indian team was being formed out there at the junior level.

Dhoni made it to the East Zone Under-19 squad for the CK Nayudu Trophy, but scored only 97 runs in four matches as the East Zone lost all four matches and finished last in the tournament. The journey to the big league was nothing less than a tough battle for the young man.

He made his Ranji Trophy debut for Bihar in 1999-2000 and made 68 in his first match against Assam. Dhoni's Ranji progress was hitched to the fortunes of Bihar and his first century in first class cricket came against Bengal in the 2000-2001 season, but there were no glories for Bihar there.

In 2001, Mahendra moved to Kharagpur with his first proper job – ticket collector with the Railways. This was the young man's first move away from home, and from Ranchi. It wasn't easy being away from home sharing a tiny apartment with colleagues, despite all the job security such a post offered. In Kharagpur, Mahendra took part in the various tennis ball cricket tournaments that were popular in this railway town. The audience could swell up to 20,000 sometimes and Mahendra was a huge success because of his powerful batting. Today, the Indian cricket captain ascribes many of his unique shots, especially the famous 'helicopter' shot to his tennis ball days.

Mahendra was called to try out for the Railways Ranji team at the Karnal Singh Stadium in New Delhi, but the trials did not go well since he kept for just three balls, batted for a short time and was rejected. At that time, he actually considered leaving Bihar and the rejection taught him an important lesson. Dhoni spoke to the cricket website *Cricinfo* in March 2008 and said, 'I was neglected in a big way at that trial. I got more determined to be at a level where you are performing consistently and you are recognized by everyone.'

He continued playing with his home state Bihar and made three half-centuries in the Ranji Trophy in the 2002-03 season and a couple of half-centuries in the Deodhar Trophy. He was now seen as a valuable player in the lower batting orders, because he had made good contributions and impressed everyone with his prowess. In the 2003-04 season, he scored a century (128) against Assam in the first match of the Ranji ODI trophy. He was picked for the East Zone in the Deodhar Trophy when they won the tournament and made 244 runs in four matches. He was picked over Deep Dasgupta, who was an international player for the Duleep Trophy finals, but his fighting 50 did not help the team win.



▲ *Today, the Indian cricket captain ascribes many of his unique shots, especially the famous 'helicopter' shot to his tennis ball days.*

The Railways had come back to Dhoni in 2004, when he was selected for the Duleep Trophy. This time *he* turned them down, the bitter taste from the earlier experience still remained. At the end of that year, he quit the Railways and in 2005 joined Indian Airlines as a manager. By then, the Bihar team had metamorphosed fully into the Jharkhand team after the state was created in 2000. He turned down a job as deputy superintendent of police, an offer made by Jharkhand Chief Minister Arjun Munda.



DHONI MADE HIS RANJI TROPHY DEBUT FOR BIHAR IN 1999-2000 IN HIS FIRST MATCH AGAINST ASSAM.

Recognition had come to Mahendra Singh Dhoni by then and he was now an adult. PC Podar, part of the TRDW, the BCCI's talent-spotting programme, saw Dhoni play for Jharkhand in Jamshedpur in 2003. Podar's report to the National Cricket Academy resulted in Dhoni's selection for the India 'A' squad for a tour of Zimbabwe and Kenya. Dhoni's efforts in Africa got the attention of the then cricket captain Saurav Ganguly as well as former Indian cricket star Ravi Shastri.

He had seven catches and four stumpings as wicket-keeper against the Zimbabwe XI. And in a tri-series against Kenya, Pakistan 'A' and India 'A', Dhoni's 50 helped India chase the target of 233 against Pakistan 'A'. He also scored his first international century against Pakistan with Gautam Gambhir. Dhoni's 120 had 10 fours and two sixes while Gambhir also made a century. The partnership contributed 208 runs in a total of 330, which Pakistan could not match. Indians all over Nairobi rushed to the gymkhana ground to watch the young man. Dhoni made another century against Pakistan in the final league match and Dhoni was declared Man of the Match. His 119 not out comprised nine fours and five sixes.

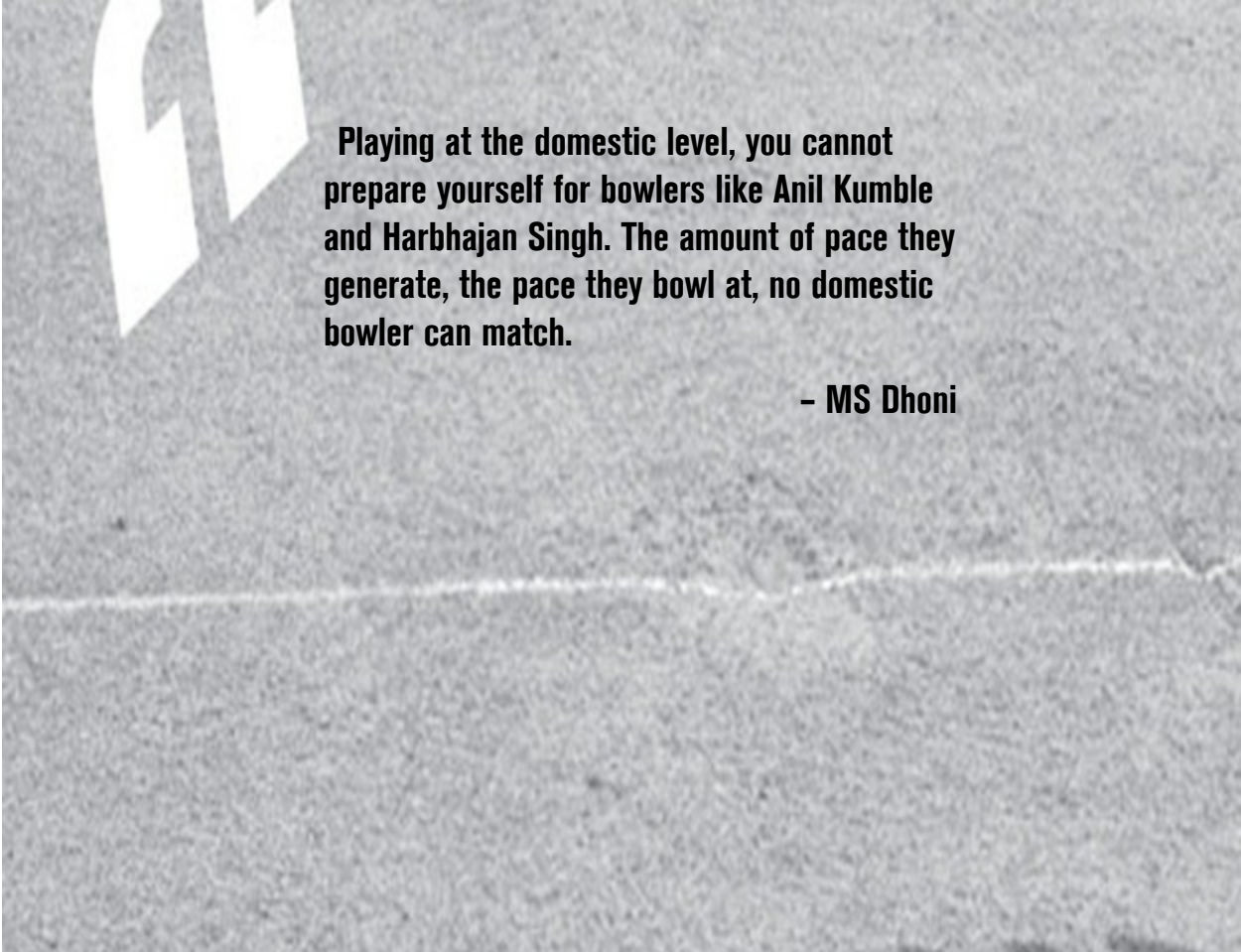
Even though he had blown Pakistan away, Dhoni's India dream was delayed. The Team 'A' coach Sandeep Patil suggested Dinesh Karthik over Dhoni as wicket-keeper for the Indian team. But, Dhoni would make it to the Indian squad in December 2004 for the One-Day

International series against Bangladesh.

3

CHAPTER

A STICKY WICKET



Playing at the domestic level, you cannot prepare yourself for bowlers like Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh. The amount of pace they generate, the pace they bowl at, no domestic bowler can match.

- MS Dhoni

WHEN DHONI ENTERED THE INDIAN ONE-DAY INTERNATIONAL team in December 2004, experts and fans saw him as one more contender for the post of wicket-keeper. Dhoni was then the 12th wicket-keeper in five years. Rahul Dravid, Dinesh Karthik, Parthiv Patel were among those who had been tried and replaced. It is still not clear if in his early days it was Dhoni's excellence as a wicket-keeper which made him stand out, even though that is the role that got him into the Indian team.

In his debut ODI series against Bangladesh, Dhoni did not manage to contribute too much – he was out for a duck. However, in the next series against Pakistan in April 2005, he did much better. In the second match at Visakhapatnam, he scored 148. Dhoni had been pushed up the batting order by Captain Sourav Ganguly from playing at number 7 to 3. He partnered with Virendra Sehwag, Ganguly and Dravid, smashing the ball around, to amass the highest score ever by an Indian wicket-keeper. His 148 runs had 12 fours and four sixes and came off 123 balls. Add to his great batting skills, his red-tinted long hair and his muscular frame, and it was easy to see why an enthusiastic cult of Dhoni fans was growing. When he won the Man of the Match award, it only added more fans to the cult.

Despite wins at Kochi and Visakhapatnam, India lost momentum and Pakistan ran away with the next four matches and the series. Even the match in Dhoni's home turf Jamshedpur did not go India's way. Dhoni had apparently asked his family to stay away to reduce the pressure on him, but the stadium was rooting vociferously for him anyway. Unfortunately, Dhoni's adventurous batting with a score of 28 from 24 balls was not enough – nor was Tendulkar's 123.

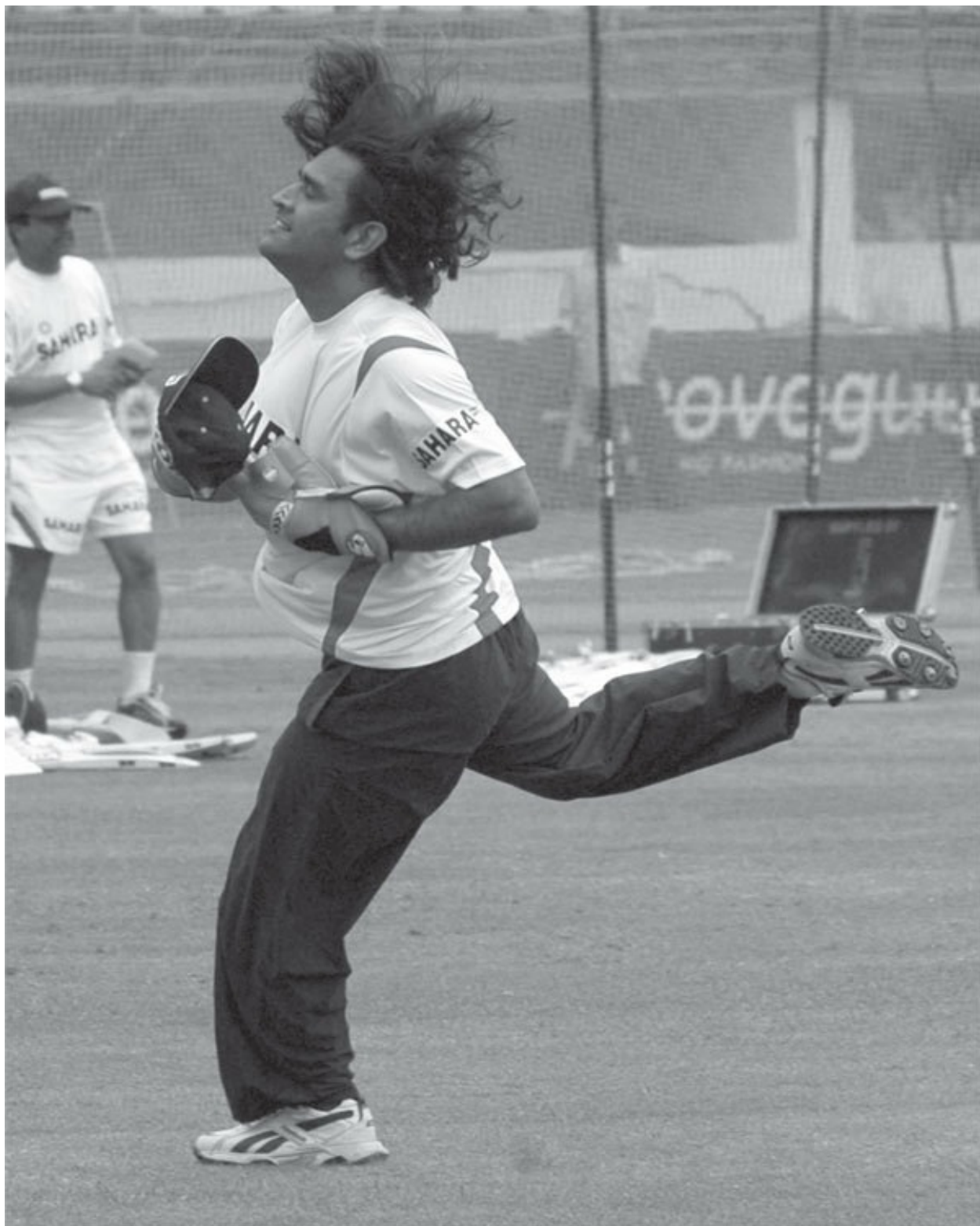
This series brought to the fore several changes to Indian cricket. It was Coach John Wright's last series with India and together he and Ganguly had managed to take India to great heights. In fact, it was only in 2013 that Dhoni managed to surpass Ganguly's success as captain. Wheels were being set in motion now that would eventually result in Dhoni's ascension to captain, but before that, an ugly interlude with Indian cricket and Greg Chappell was on the cards.

After recovering from the drubbing it had got from Pakistan, India set

off to Sri Lanka for a tri-series with the host nation and West Indies in 2005. Chappell was now the coach, his selection had been pushed by Ganguly. The Indian captain however had been handed a six-match ban in the Pakistan series for a slow over rate, which had been reduced to four on appeal and Dravid captained the first four matches.

The changes wrought by Chappell did not work for Dhoni as he went up and down the batting order. His scores were dismal – 2, 15, 20, 28 and 7. His wicket-keeping was no better. He is quoted, ‘Playing at the domestic level, you cannot prepare yourself for bowlers like Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh. The amount of pace they generate, the pace they bowl at, no domestic bowler can match.’

His great batting skills, long red-tinted hair, and muscular frame inspired a cult of fans. ►



India then went to Zimbabwe and although it was at Harare that Dhoni made his mark for India 'A' and his 67 (not out) helped the team

in the second match against the hosts, the final was another loss. Dhoni was not in the Test team so he came back to India, and was therefore not witness to the fight between Chappell and Ganguly – one of the ugliest episodes in Indian cricket history.



IN 2004, DHONI ENTERED THE ODI TEAM AS THE 12TH WICKET-KEEPER IN FIVE YEARS.

BUT, IN HIS DEBUT ODI SERIES AGAINST BANGLADESH, DHONI WAS OUT FOR A DUCK.

Sri Lanka was playing in India after eight years and was considered the favourite for the bilateral ODI series in October-November 2005. Ganguly was out with an elbow injury – while a review committee decided on Chappell's advice that the captain's lack of form meant he should step down – and Dravid was picked to lead the team. Tendulkar was back from his own tennis elbow problem, which had kept him away for six months. He gave India hope at the first match in Nagpur with a dazzling 93 while Dhoni hit a powerful 38 from 33 balls. India won at Mohali as well.

In Jaipur, at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium, Dhoni was promoted to number 3. Lanka had set India a target of 299. Tendulkar was gone early. Dhoni hit an unbeaten 183 off 145 balls, 120 of those from boundaries alone, winning the match for India. *Wisden Almanack* described his innings as 'uninhibited yet not crude'. This was the highest individual score in ODI history for the second innings. Dhoni had the

highest run aggregate at the end of the series (346) and also won Man of the Series.

Dravid has been quoted as saying that Dhoni's performance in Jaipur was good, '...possibly in a chase, this is pretty close to the hundred Sachin made against Australia in Sharjah'. He was referring to Tendulkar's 143 in 1998, seen by many as the greatest knock by an Indian. High praise indeed. Dhoni himself was confident, telling a reporter, 'Yes, that's my normal cricket. I just had to choose the right ball to hit.'

Dhoni's performance against Pakistan helped India win the series in 2006 and also led him to overtaking Ricky Ponting as number one in the ODI rankings for batsmen in April 2006. Adam Gilchrist took the position a week later.

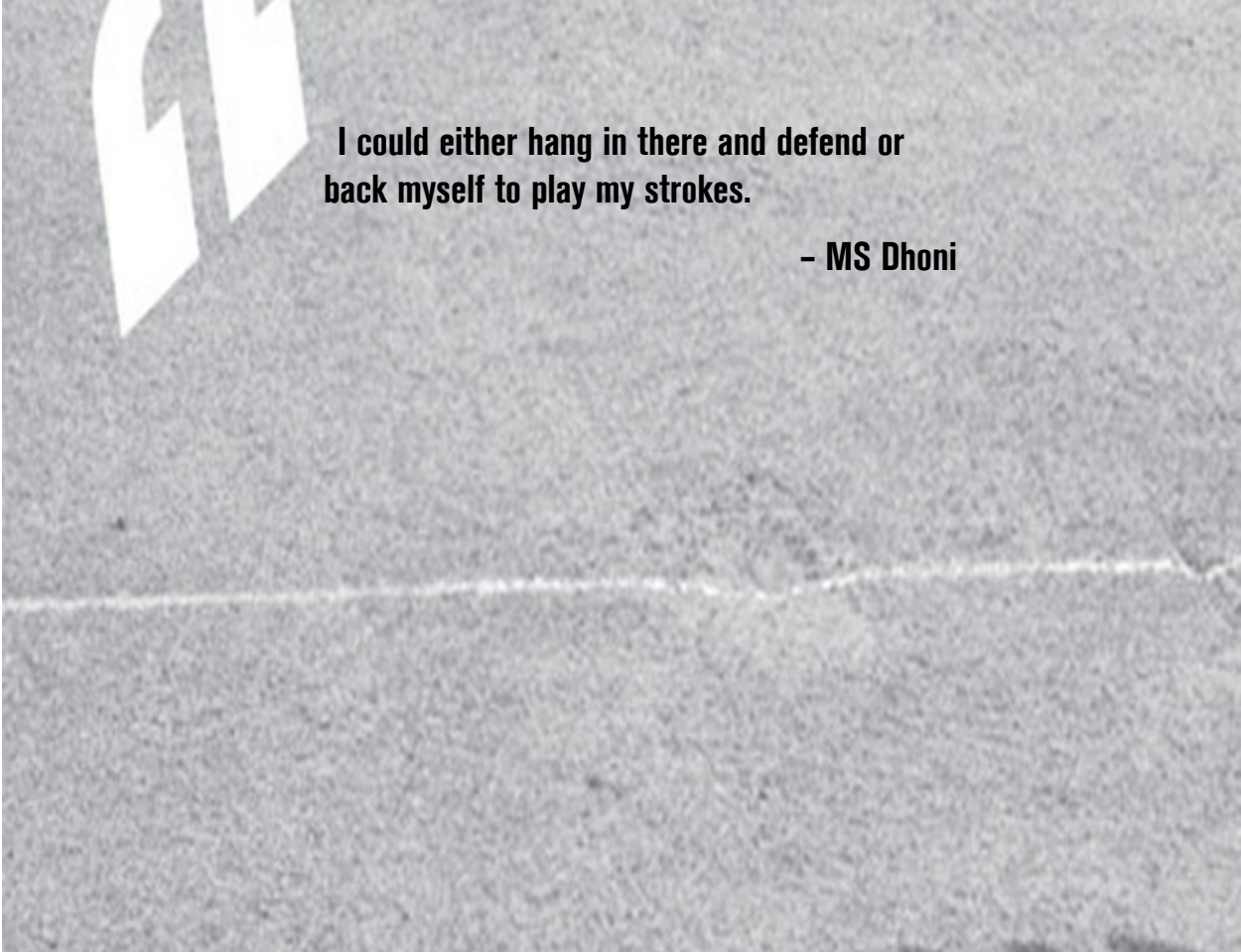
India's fortunes matched Dhoni's – in spite of efforts, there were losses in the DLF Cup, and the Champions Trophy leading up to the 2007 Cricket World Cup. Dhoni's wicket-keeping was criticized by no less than the great Syed Kirmani. India started well in the World Cup, but crashed out after losses to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Dhoni got ducks in both those matches and made only 29 in the whole tournament. In a shocking instance of fan rage, his under-construction home in Ranchi was damaged.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves in the ODI story.

Dhoni's overall performance had meant that he could no longer be ignored for the Test team. When Sri Lanka came back to India for a three Test match series at the end of 2005, Dhoni made it to the team. Another milestone had been reached.

4
CHAPTER

THE GENTLEMAN'S GAME



**I could either hang in there and defend or
back myself to play my strokes.**

- MS Dhoni

IN DECEMBER 2005, DHONI REPLACED DINESH KARTHIK as the Indian wicket-keeper in the Test team against a visiting Sri Lanka. Perhaps no one could have quite foreseen his trajectory from thereon. The match was a goner for India anyway, but the new wicket-keeper impressed everyone, especially with the way he dealt with the Sri Lankan bowling attack that had kept the rest of India's batting lineup at bay. He made only 30 runs, but he managed to neutralize the dreaded Muralitharan and made his selection worthwhile.

Murali got his revenge in the first innings of the second Test and a spectacular doosra bowled Dhoni for five runs. In the second innings, Dhoni took his chances and scored his first Test half-century – at the galloping rate of 50 for 51 balls. India made a total of 436 and the Sri Lankans were bowled out for 247. This was also the Test where Tendulkar broke Sunil Gavaskar's 22-year record by scoring his 35th Test century on the opening day. Kumble got a 10-wicket haul in the match. India was on a roll.

However, dissent and confusion was back with the news that Ganguly had been dropped for the third and final Test in Ahmedabad. Protests broke out in Kolkata, Dravid fell sick, Sehwag captained the side and Sri Lanka lost anyway. But it was not an easy win and Dhoni contributed in some measure to India's victory with his confident batting. India was now at number two in the ICC Test rankings for the first time, behind Australia.

A tour of Pakistan was next in January 2006. This time, Ganguly was back in the squad. At Lahore, in the first Test, huge scores were posted by both teams. In the second Test at Faisalabad, Pakistan put up a massive target of 588. Dravid (103) and Laxman (90) held on well, but India then lost five wickets for a mere 45 runs. Ganguly was made to sit this one out as the management picked five specialist bowlers. At 281 for five, Dhoni was sent to the crease. Shoaib Akhtar was in frightening form.

Dhoni is quoted as saying that he could either 'hang in there and defend or back myself to play my strokes'. Once he made up his mind, he hit Akhtar for a six and Dhoni's formidable aggressive instincts led to

his first Test century. He reached it in just 93 balls, having got to 50 in 34. Aided by a steadfast Irfan Pathan, Dhoni took India to a safer score of 441 for five at the close of play on Day 3.

Captain Dravid called this ‘one of the best counter-attacking innings’ he had seen in a long time. Dhoni had gained confidence, Dravid used words like ‘courage’, ‘character’ and ‘ability’ to describe Dhoni. Later, Dhoni was able to bowl his first over in Test cricket – he was hit for 13 runs! The match ended in a draw, but Dhoni had shown his mettle.

Dhoni was voted MTV’s Youth Icon for 2006, his long hair had definitely endeared him to the young cricket fans. ►



His Test exploits apart, Dhoni was at his ODI best against Pakistan with a fierce 72 off 46 deliveries, outshining even the swashbuckling

Yuvraj Singh's 79 not out from 87 balls. (Dhoni may have got the Man of the Match, but the *Wisden Almanack* was unimpressed, using phrases like 'hooligan stuff' to describe his batting!)

The next few Test matches were less exhilarating for Dhoni. Against England at Wankhede, he made a top scoring 64, but also failed to stump Andrew Flintoff off a Harbhajan Singh delivery. Dhoni's wicket-keeping and India's dismal fielding, both came in for some tough criticism. He made only five runs in the second innings and his shot selection also found itself under scrutiny.



IN THE JANUARY 2006 TOUR OF PAKISTAN, DHONI SLAMMED A CENTURY IN JUST 93 BALLS.

India went to the West Indies in 2006, where Dhoni did better in the first Test at Antigua with 69 runs. The rest of the series was unremarkable for him, except that his wicket-keeping seemed to have improved – 13 catches and four stumpings. The outing to South Africa was not much better for Dhoni either.

But all said and done, Dhoni was courageous, charismatic, and a gentleman. All reasons enough for him to make his mark on the Indian imagination. Dhoni was voted MTV's Youth Icon for 2006, his long hair had definitely endeared him to the young cricket fans. And he even got hair-styling advice from then Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf who recommended that Dhoni should not cut his hair! The advertisement contracts and sponsorship deals started to pour in and in 2006, he was

even being compared to tennis legend Roger Federer.

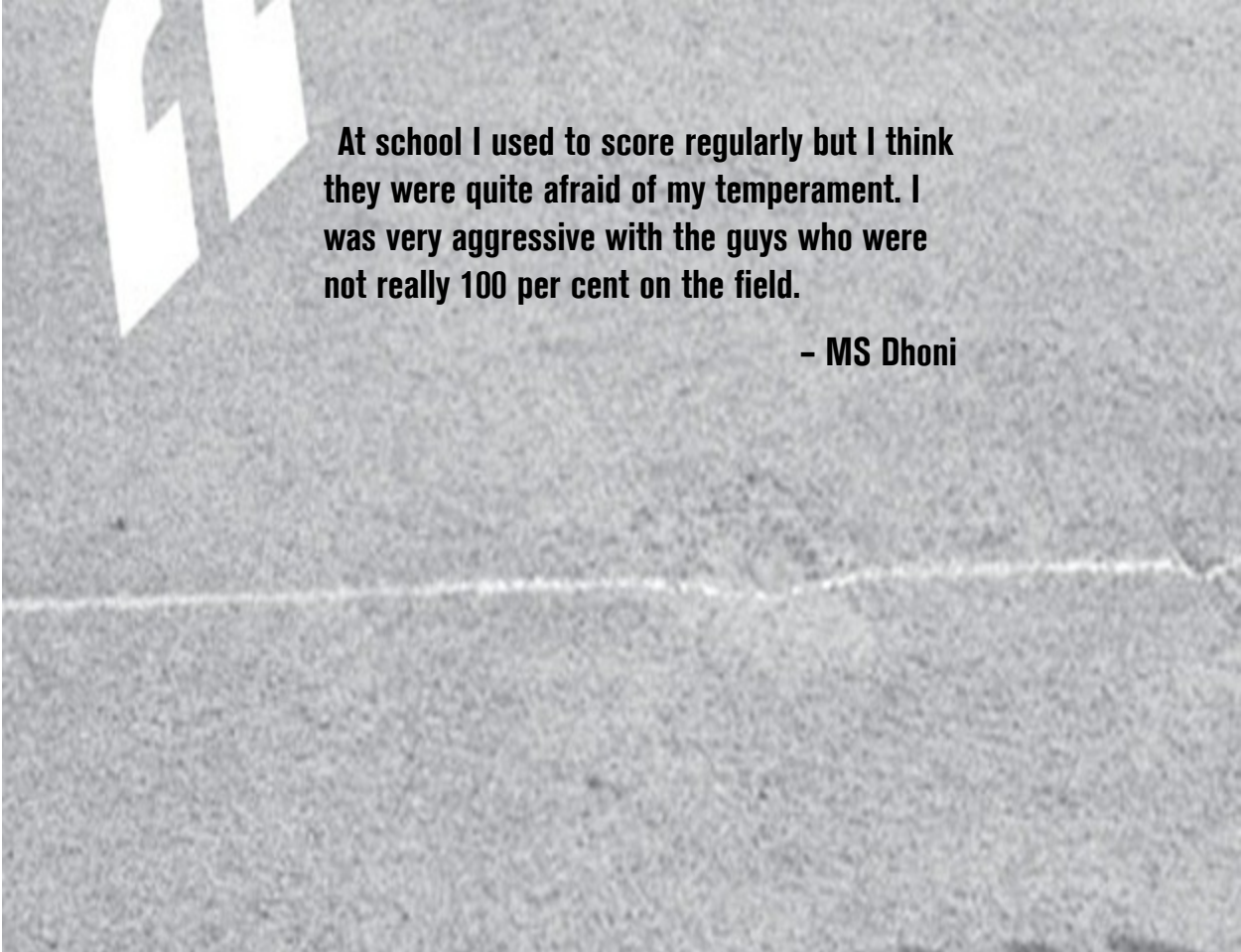
Dhoni's penchant for bikes was now a full-blown passion and by 2006 he had acquired four, making the highways around Ranchi his hunting grounds, where he could rev up to 180 kmph. The PlayStation became another of his recreational hobbies. And of course, to relax, he had his dogs – Zara the black Labrador and Sam the pug.

It's interesting that with all the time that he spends on the field, Dhoni also has very strong off-field passions – dogs and gaming! He is also a very down to earth young man, his old friends say that he still keeps in touch with them when he comes home. In fact, his parents still live in the same Mecon quarters' house where he grew up.

As 2006 came to a close, the World Cup loomed over the horizon.

5
CHAPTER

CAPTAIN COURAGEOUS



At school I used to score regularly but I think they were quite afraid of my temperament. I was very aggressive with the guys who were not really 100 per cent on the field.

- MS Dhoni

THE 2007 WORLD CUP WAS NOT GOOD FOR INDIA, but the year was better for Dhoni. He became ODI captain after India's tour of England that year. And then came Dhoni's first outstanding achievement – victory at the inaugural World Twenty20 Championships. The Indian team was still in turmoil when Captain Dhoni and his young, fresh, somewhat untested T20 team flew out to South Africa. There were rumours that Yuvraj Singh was unhappy at being made vice-captain even though he had made his international debut four years before Dhoni. Soon after they arrived, Dravid announced that he was stepping down as captain of the Test and ODI teams. Dhoni had to get his team out of all the confusion surrounding the players and their roles and on to the battlefield to play a new format of the sport.

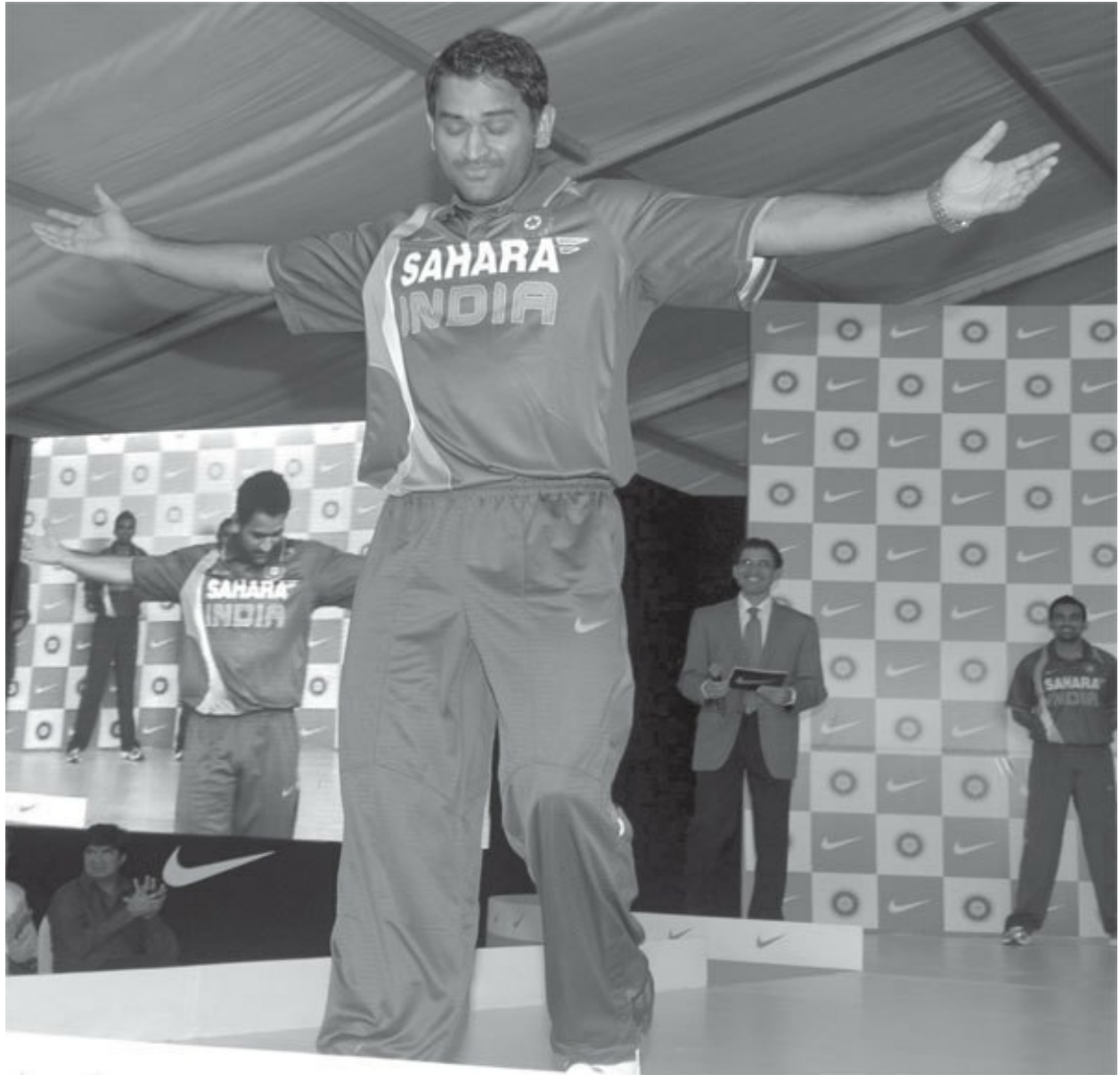
The team responded well and defeated Pakistan in a nailbiting final in September 2007. The return to India with the Cup – the first such victory since Kapil Dev's team achieved in England in the Cricket World Cup in 1983 – was one of those American-style parades. The team journeyed through the pouring rain in Mumbai on an open double-decker bus with enormous crowds accompanying them from the airport to Wankhede stadium. If anyone had any doubts about the star status of Indian cricketers, those doubts would have been laid to rest there. Dhoni had now joined, without any argument, the pantheon of India's great cricket stars.

By November 2008, Dhoni had become Test cricket captain as well, taking over charge from Anil Kumble. He was now captain of all three forms of the game. Dhoni also tasted victory as captain of the Chennai Super Kings, his IPL team, winning the league championship twice.

Dhoni's tremendous success as a captain could not have been foreseen at the start of his career. But in an interview to espn.cricinfo.com in 2008, it is easy to understand how the Dhoni mind works, 'At a bigger level, I don't think I've captained anywhere. At school I used to score regularly but I think they were quite afraid of my temperament. I was very aggressive with the guys who were not really 100 per cent on the field. Once, in a senior district tournament game, we were playing a comparatively weak side on a matting wicket. There were some guys who dropped catches and were laughing around and all that stuff. I said,

“Okay, I’m bowling.” I told those three or four guys, “You stand at midwicket and do all the talking. I’ll manage with the six others.” I believe in giving more than 100 per cent on the field and I don’t really worry about the result if there’s great commitment on the field. That’s victory for me. After that I don’t think I captained much... got selected for the first-class team and started playing for the Ranji, Duleep and Deodhar Trophy teams for my state. Twenty20 was my first opportunity.’

In the same interview, Dhoni also explained how being from a small town was an advantage for him, ‘If you are from a smaller place where the cricket infrastructure is not good, you have to struggle a lot. You don’t get good practice facilities, you don’t play too many games on turf wickets, and even to get into your home side you have to struggle a lot. All of these things do have an impact on the guy’s playing style or the way he thinks of cricket. He is very clear about one thing – if he performs, only then is he going to stay there. It’s not like the guys from the metros or big cities are not good enough or mentally tough – the guys from smaller states or smaller cities, they struggle a bit more.’



▲ In 2011, Dhoni achieved what no other Indian captain had done since Kapil Dev in 1983 – brought India the World Cup once again.



DHONI BECAME ODI CAPTAIN AFTER INDIA'S TOUR OF ENGLAND IN 2007.

Dhoni's decisions are sometimes questioned in the media, but often he comes through – like selecting Joginder Sharma to bowl the last over against Pakistan in the T20 championship or dropping Sourav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid from the 2008 tour of Australia. India not only won that World Cup of course, but also beat Australia 2-0 in the triangular event for the first time.

In 2011, Dhoni achieved what no other Indian captain had done since Kapil Dev in 1983 – brought India the World Cup once again. First, India defeated Pakistan in an exciting semifinals encounter in Mohali. And then, the cherry long coveted – the defeat of Sri Lanka in the final, in Mumbai. The captain kept his respectful distance as the team carried Sachin Tendulkar on their shoulders around Wankhede stadium – Tendulkar's long-held ambition to be part of a winning team had been fulfilled and Dhoni was one of Tendulkar's biggest fans. But the victory for the record books is credited to Dhoni and his captaincy.

India reached the number 1 Test ranking in 2009 for the first time ever, after defeating Sri Lanka 2-0 in India in 2009 – in which Dhoni hit two centuries. There was a brief time after this when India held the number 1 spot in all versions of the game.

Dhoni has topped the ICC rankings as the top ODI batsman in 2009, when he scored a remarkable 1198 runs in just 24 innings at an average of 70.43. He shared the top post with Ricky Ponting at the end of 2009

– but Ponting had taken 30 innings to get there. Dhoni was ICC ODI Player of the Year in 2008 and 2009.

Getting over the humiliation of being drubbed by England in India, Dhoni and his team brought the Australians to their knees in the 2013 Test series, with a 4-0 win. All the doubts that had surfaced after the England debacle, appear to have vanished.

6
CHAPTER

RIGHT OFF THE BAT



We all think we're Sachin Tendulkar.

- MS Dhoni

DHONI FIRST CAUGHT THE EYE OF SCOUTS AND SELECTORS because of his strong and aggressive batting. But he made his entry into cricket as a wicket-keeper. He plays mostly off the back foot and has a very fast hand speed through the ball.

But it his 'helicopter' shot, where he goes below the ball and swirls his bat around in a full circle that is the best shot in his repertoire. It has won India matches and it has cemented his reputation as a player with a definitive, if unorthodox, style. Calling it the 'helicopter' shot, was perhaps the decision of the soft drink manufacturer Pepsi, but it has now become the name of the shot that Dhoni is most associated with. He used the 'helicopter' recently to devastating effect to bag 72 runs against England in Kochi. The Indian captain ascribes the shot to his early days when he played tennis ball cricket where you went under the ball to get elevation. If properly wielded, the helicopter shot can send a Yorker for a six.

The Sun quotes Dhoni, 'It's something I used to play as a kid in tennis ball cricket, like every kid in India. We all think we're Sachin Tendulkar.'

Dhoni is the only captain to get an average of 50-plus with 2,000 runs or more. He is the only player to have an average of 100 runs while chasing successfully and is one of three wicket-keepers, together with Kumar Sangakkara and Adam Gilchrist to have a double of 7000 runs and 200 dismissals.

Dhoni's wicket-keeping skills have come in for criticism, but his stamina is evident on the field, where the wicket-keeper never gets any time off. He is one of the strongest players in cricket today and that is why opposing teams find him difficult when he comes out to bat. He uses his upper body strength to smash through their strategy.

It was Dhoni's first century in the ODIs that was the breakthrough moment for the young player, proclaiming to the world what he had to offer to international cricket. His 148 off 123 balls with 15 fours and four sixes is one of those performances that is still talked about. This was in Visakhapatnam in the 2004-2005 series against Pakistan. It is still the highest score for an Indian wicket-keeper.

For many experts, it is Dhoni's 76 against England at Lord's in 2007, which is the most important. He managed to hang on in spite of his partners falling, some edges and risky shots. This 76 which took 159 balls and started with VVS Laxman and ended with Sreesanth at number 11, lasted till the rain arrived and India avoided defeat, marking a turnaround in her fortunes.

But Dhoni's greatest skill is unquestionably his ability as a captain. India went through a terrible patch in 2012 and 2013 with many questions raised and doubts unanswered until the Test series against Australia in 2013. And Dhoni demonstrated not once, but four times how he could still steer his team through troubled waters and get a 4-0 victory. He stepped up to the pitch and played hard whenever required.

Dhoni's 'helicopter' shot, where he goes below the ball and swirls his bat around in a full circle is the best shot in his repertoire. ►



He is now India's most successful cricket captain having overtaken Ganguly after the Australia series. As India goes into IPL season six,

there are still questions about how India will fare in the tour to South Africa. But this is now a resurgent India, with a whole lot of much-needed confidence and some extremely talented new players. And this is once again thanks to Dhoni, who from his first days as captain has shown the courage to take on young players and take a few risks with choices and decisions.

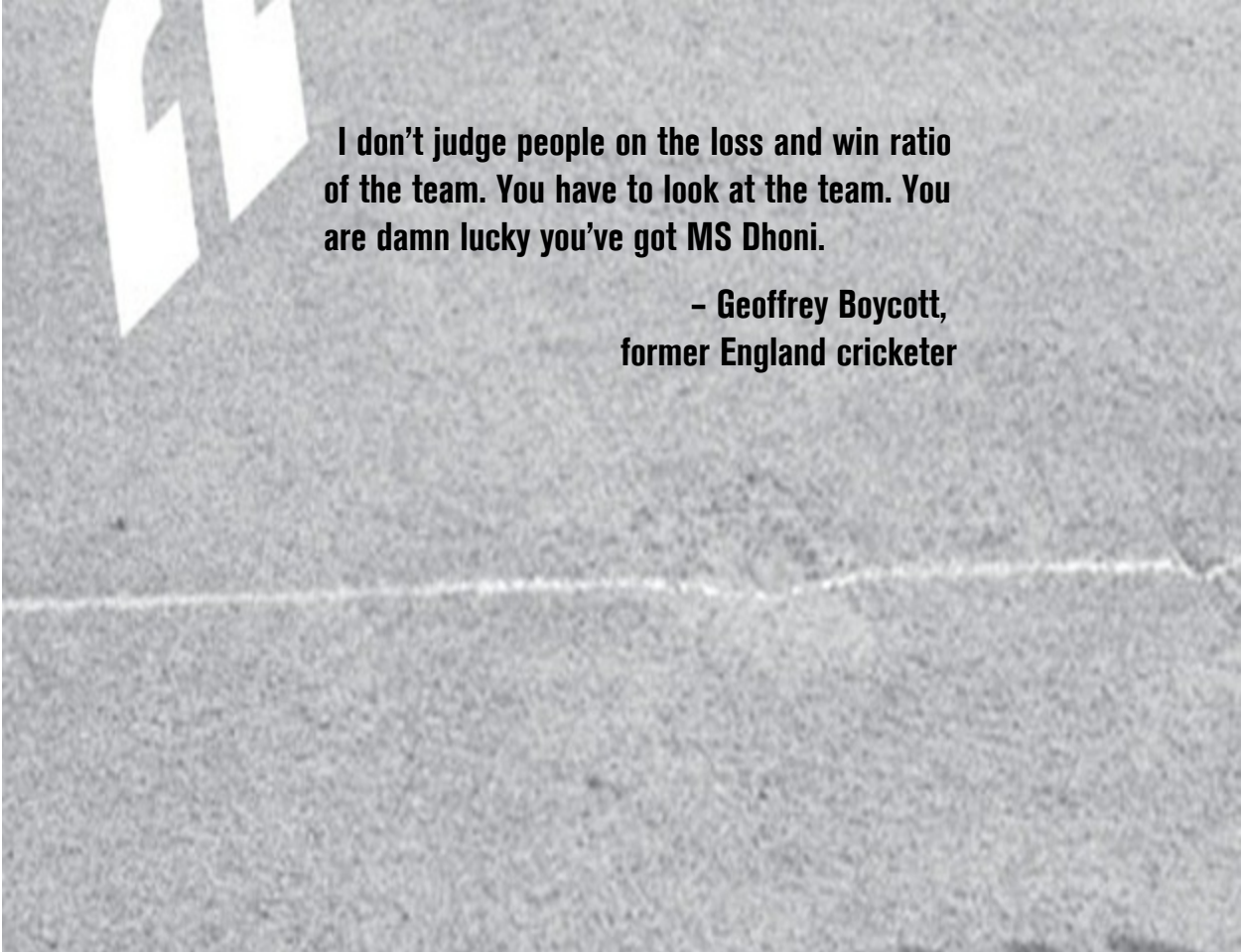


HIGHLIGHT

**DHONI'S FIRST CENTURY IN THE ODIs WAS 148 OFF 123 BALLS WITH 15
FOURS AND FOUR SIXES IN VISAKHAPATNAM IN THE 2004-2005 SERIES
AGAINST PAKISTAN**

7
CHAPTER

GENTLE RENEGADE



I don't judge people on the loss and win ratio of the team. You have to look at the team. You are damn lucky you've got MS Dhoni.

**- Geoffrey Boycott,
former England cricketer**

IN 2011, DHONI MADE IT TO TIME MAGAZINE'S LIST of the 100 most influential people in the world.

So, with all these crowns on his head – including India's captain, MTV Youth Icon, how does the world see MS Dhoni?

Alastair Cook, English skipper, after England lost in Kochi in 2013, said, 'He is probably the best player in the world in those situations, in these conditions. He does it time and time again. Dhoni is incredibly hard to bowl at and with that extra man in the circle, it's very hard to stop him on these flat wickets.'

Geoffrey Boycott, commentator and former England captain says, 'Do you judge captains on their win and loss ratio, or do you take into account or consideration the quality, or lack of quality, in his team? If you're thinking about India, there's a lack of quality at the moment – lack of quality seam bowling, lack of quality spin bowling, and in some cases your best players are beginning to retire after getting past their sell-by date. Aren't they? (Rahul) Dravid and (VVS) Laxman are gone, (Sachin) Tendulkar hasn't got any runs recently, so is it his (Dhoni's) fault?... I don't think so. I don't judge people on the loss and win ratio of the team. You have to look at the team. You are damn lucky you've got MS Dhoni.' (In 2013)

In 2013, during an interview with NDTV, Sunil Gavaskar said, 'I am very impressed with the manner in which he remains cool and unlike other captains doesn't clap and all but a little break won't be bad. Captaining India is a high privilege but the demands and pressures that come with it are incredible.'

Sunil Gavaskar also said, 'The one month he had after the home series loss against England had given him time for introspection. He has changed positively as a captain. Now, if a player is not attentive and not up to the mark, Dhoni is letting him know. He is not making too many gestures, but he is making the player know that he (Dhoni) is not happy... He is very fit and in great batting form. With the changed leadership approach I think he should not be disturbed till the 2019 World Cup. We should not even discuss it (of changing captaincy).'

In 2011, Ian Chappell suggested to espncricinfo.com, ‘India’s emphatic victory in the World Cup has proved beyond doubt they are currently the best all-round cricket team. In the process, Mahendra Singh Dhoni’s polished performance as skipper, where he pushed, prodded and cajoled his side into peaking at the right time, has shown he’s not only the best leader in the game but also one of the finest of the last 30 years. His performance ranks him with the other top-class leaders of the period – Imran Khan, Mark Taylor and Arjuna Ranatunga.’

London’s *The Times* quoted Mike Atherton in 2011, ‘The defining cricketing image of 2011 has to be the moment Mahendra Singh Dhoni stepped out of his crease and finished the World Cup with the crispest, cleanest straight drive imaginable. It was the stroke of a man utterly confident in his judgment, as he had been, or at least given the appearance of being, throughout a tournament in which his team and his leadership had been scrutinised by the expectations of a billion people.’

On July 4, 2010, Dhoni married Sakshi Rawat, then 23, in Dehradun. ►



In 2012, I had written in firstpost.com, ‘In ODIs, however, it (Dhoni’s batting) is a different ball game. The mind games are different, the

tactics are different and I feel he's two steps ahead of the bowlers. He knows what he wants to do and how he wants to do it.'



DHONI LOVES MOTORCYCLES AND OWNS AT LEAST 16 BIKES, INCLUDING THE CONFEDERATE X132 HELLCAT.

India's former captain, Kapil Dev said in 2012, 'You can say whatever you want about Dhoni's captaincy in Tests. But in T20 and ODI there is no better skipper than him. He won the World Cup last year and you cannot change him just because he's had a bad time after that.'

Nasser Husain pointed out to Daily Mail in 2013, 'When the likes of MS Dhoni, Gautam Gambhir and the rest went back to their hotel rooms after that defeat in the third Test, how much were they hurting? How much hunger for the long-haul form of the game – with its mental and physical demands – have these multimillionaire players still got? Are they thinking, deep down, "Never mind", and prioritizing instead the fun, glamour and huge financial rewards that come from the Indian Premier League?'

Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut expressed her opinion of Dhoni, 'I think Dhoni is hot enough to give any of our studs from Bollywood a run for their money. And since Dhoni can run faster than any of them, he has an extra edge. Of course I find him hot. Which normal hot-blooded girl wouldn't find him wow?'

Another Bollywood actress, Raima Sen had this to say, 'Cricketers have always been more popular than stars. I feel Dhoni's main charm

lies in the fact that he's become the captain of the Indian cricket team at such a young age. And then he brought the Cup home. That did the trick. Success is the greatest aphrodisiac. It sure has added sex appeal to Dhoni's personality. And let's not forget his hip hairstyle. Wow!'

On July 4, 2010 Dhoni married Sakshi Rawat, then 23, in Dehradun. In spite of the constant media attention, the family managed to keep the wedding a secret and it was announced just after the engagement. Rawat was a hotel management student at the time, working with the Taj Bengal in Kolkata. Her parents settled in Dehradun after her father retired from the tea gardens. Apparently, the two met at model-star Bipasha Basu's house and film star John Abraham is a mutual friend.

Having married India's most eligible bachelor at the time, Sakshi is now often seen cheering for her star husband at cricket matches. She is also apparently responsible for Dhoni cutting short his rockstar-long hair!

India's most successful cricketer doesn't really watch much cricket. 'I cannot sit in a chair and watch,' he said in an interview to espn.cricinfo.com. He said that he has learned what he has on the field – he is not a student of the game and nor is he one to keep track of statistics or records.

Interestingly, Dhoni doesn't believe that it is lack of focus or restlessness that stops him from watching cricket. After all, as he points out, he can spend hours on his video games. It is lack of interest. Focus is what he displays on the cricket field, when he's behind the wicket. When he plays, his concentration on cricket is 100 per cent. When he's not playing cricket, he has developed a range of other interests.

He's a great fan of Indian movies (as much as film stars seem to be fans of his style) and prefers to go to a multiplex to watch them in spite of the certainty of getting mobbed by fans. The connections between the film world and cricket are very old in India and in Dhoni's case, his friendships have fuelled other interests!

For instance, his big passion remains motorcycles and he owns at least 16 bikes, including a newly acquired muscle bike – the Confederate

X132 Hellcat for aficionados. And who's his biggest motorcycle buddy? John Abraham. The Hellcat costs about ₹ 60 lakh and its other fan-owners include Brad Pitt, David Beckham, Tom Cruise and Ryan Reynolds, which puts Dhoni in the league of top stars, where of course he rightly belongs. Dhoni and John Abraham ride their bikes together whenever they can, which must not be easy given their busy schedules. Abraham has been quoted saying this about the Indian captain, 'Whenever Mahi is in Mumbai, we ride bikes together. I think he is a better biker than me. He is my closest friend, whether it is from the cricketing world or from Bollywood.'

Dhoni floated his own racing team in 2012. The MSD R-N Racing Team India now competes professionally, targeting the World Superbike Championships.

Dhoni is managed by Rhiti Sports, run by his old friends and Ranji buddy Arun Pandey. Dhoni signed an ₹ 210 crore contract by Rhiti in 2010. The sports management company signed an ₹ 40 crore deal with badminton star Saina Nehwal in 2012. It also manages cricketers Harbhajan Singh and RP Singh.

Dhoni is very popular with advertisers and endorses a number of products. His earning from ads is estimated to be ₹ 70 crore a year. Some of his endorsements took a beating after India's loss to England in 2012-13 and rumours that Dhoni would lose Test captaincy were rife, but the 2013 victory over Australia would most likely stem any further bleeding. In fact, Pandey of Rhiti has pointed out that Dhoni had become too big for some small brands so his portfolio is undergoing a review. Big companies like Pepsi remain. *Forbes* magazine has Dhoni at 31 on its list of highest paid athletes. Tiger Woods, Roger Federer and Cristiano Ronaldo may be ahead of him, but Dhoni beats Wayne Rooney, Kaka and Novak Djokovic. This is what *Forbes* has to say about Dhoni,

'Total earnings: \$26.5 million

Salary/winnings: \$3.5 million

Endorsements: \$23 million

Dhoni captained the Indian national side to a World Cup victory in 2011 and led the Chennai Super Kings to a second-place finish in this year's Indian Premier League. His on-field dominance and cool demeanour have made him one of India's most popular celebrities, and in 2010 he landed a three-year deal with United Breweries that pays nearly \$2 million per year, thought to be the largest annual payout ever earned by an Indian athlete. Dhoni endorses more than 20 other brands, including Reebok, PepsiCo and Sony.'

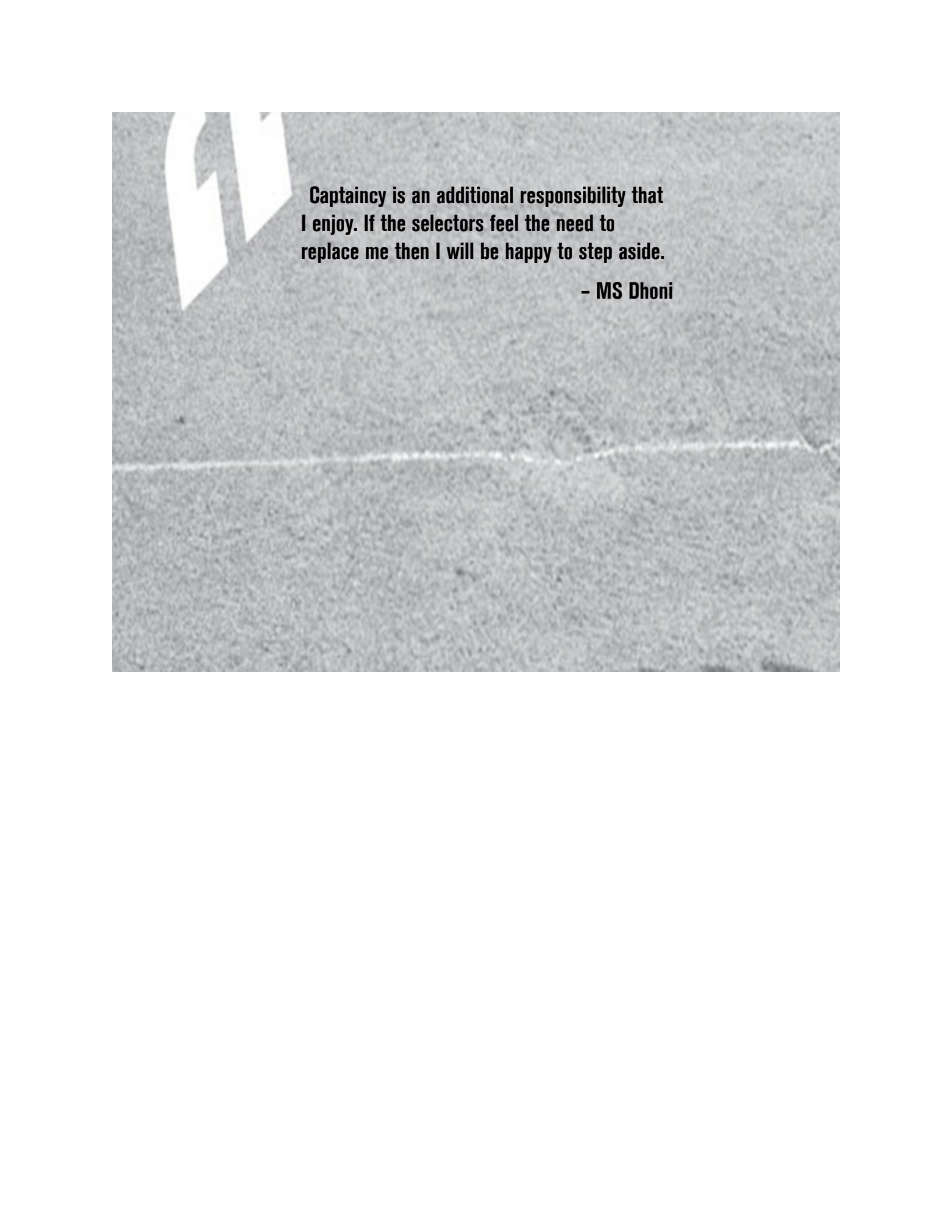
Closer to home, the Deori Temple, an hour away from Ranchi has also gained from Dhoni's patronage. Pilgrims have gone up from 50 to 500 a day and donations from ₹ 5000 a month to ₹ 1,00,000.

Unfortunately for MS Dhoni, the Chennai Super Kings, the IPL team he captains, lost the 2013 IPL final to the Mumbai Indians. This was the second loss in a row for Dhoni in the IPL and many former cricketers questioned his decisions. The fact that the IPL ended under a cloud did not help either.

The next mission for 'Captain Cool' may well be to give more attention to 'media management' as the IPL mess has left unpleasant memories all around. The hot Indian summer has been too hot to handle. Will all that be forgotten if India gets glory in England and the Champion's Trophy?

8
CHAPTER

DOWN AND OUT



Captaincy is an additional responsibility that I enjoy. If the selectors feel the need to replace me then I will be happy to step aside.

- MS Dhoni

WHEN INDIA LEFT FOR ENGLAND IN JULY 2011, it was expected that the team and its captain would comfortably win. But the tour was anything but glorious and ended in disaster. Several commentators immediately pounced on Dhoni's captaincy – usually seen as impeccable. On July 31, 2011, Oliver Brown in *The Daily Telegraph* said, some of his decision-making behind the stumps was unfathomable. Throughout a listless afternoon session, he persisted far too long with the underwhelming Harbahjan Singh, who was struggling with a stomach strain. Equally, the taking of the second new ball was hardly the moment to deploy the part-time left-arm spin of Yuvraj.'

This was the second Test at Trent Bridge, Nottingham. Dhoni got some accolades for withdrawing a run-out appeal against Ian Bell. But he had no answer for the England team running through his bowling attack. England won the Test by 319 runs. India lost the first Test at Lord's by 196 runs. Rahul Dravid, who really lived up to his nickname 'The Wall' made centuries in both Tests. But Dhoni's captaincy was seen as lacklustre.

The loss in the third Test at Edgbaston, by an innings and 242 runs, also caused India to lose its number 1 Test ranking, which went to England. Dhoni made over 70 runs in both innings but to no avail. The weather had not been helping with rain delays and shortened Tests, but India really struggled to deal with the England attack.

The fourth Test at the Oval did not even allow India and Dhoni a face-saving opportunity. Rahul Dravid made 146, Sachin Tendulkar made 91. But all happiness was dimmed by England's win by an innings and eight runs. The Pataudi Cup now belonged to England.

There was hope that the One-Day series would give India a chance for revenge. Dhoni after all had made his name as a T20 and One-Day captain. Surely, the shortened formats of the game would give him a chance to shine? The cricket gods had other ideas. England won the only T20 game by six wickets. Of the five ODIs, two were tied and England won the other three. India could not wait to get out of England as fast as they could.

Dhoni would later say that the team was afflicted with injuries.

Zaheer Khan, India's main fast bowler, got a hamstring injury in the first Test and was withdrawn. He was replaced by RP Singh. Later, Munaf Patel's ankle injury in the last ODI would also affect India's chances.

It was hoped that the 2011-2012 tour to Australia would offer India and Dhoni both a chance for redemption. In fact, India left for Australia with the same hope and expectations as it had for England. Australia was seen as a team in transition and therefore vulnerable.

Australia won the first Test at Melbourne by 122 runs. The pattern had been set. Was there still a chance for India? On the first day of the second Test at Sydney Australia slipped to 37 for 3 – all wickets taken by Zaheer Khan – in answer to India's somewhat dismal first innings of 191, where Dhoni's 57 was all that stood out. Australia recovered though and ended next day at 482 for four. Australia won the second Test by an innings and 68 runs.



▲ *Dhoni remained Captain Cool, through victories as well as major losses.*

The script did not change for the next two Tests. After the drubbing in England, India was thrashed 0-4 by Australia. Things did not get

better. India did not fare well in the T20s or the triangular ODI series with Sri Lanka.

This is what *The Australian* had to say and Dhoni bore the brunt of the ridicule, ‘Dhoni is not the only shaky pillar of what only eight months ago was the number one cricket nation in the world. VVS Laxman, once the scourge of Australian bowlers, is being flayed himself at home after scores of 2, 1, 2, 66, 31 and 0. Virender Sehwag, who warmed up for this series by scoring the fastest double century in One-Day International history, also is trending south faster than Scott and Amundsen, having followed up his whirlwind 67 in Melbourne with innings of 7, 30, 4, 0 and 10. Worst of all, Dhoni has failed with the bat. The Indian captain is no thunderer at the best of times – neither is Coach Duncan Fletcher, which may be part of the problem – but how can he demand more of his batsmen when he has nowhere to hide behind scores of 6, 23, 57 no, 2, 12 and 2?’



DHONI WAS CREDITED WITH CREATING NEW STARS LIKE CHETESHWARI PUJARA, RAVINDRA JADEJA AND R ASHWIN.

Back home in India, Dhoni found himself under tremendous pressure. There were calls for a change in captain. He himself said in an interview to NDTV, ahead of the first T20 game in Australia, ‘Captaincy is an additional responsibility that I enjoy. If the selectors feel the need to replace me then I will be happy to step aside.’

There were suggestions of having different captains for different

formats. Stories emerged of stormy discussions between the selectors where Dhoni just about hung on – selectors like Mohinder Amarnath were vocal in their criticism. Unfortunately for Captain Cool, 2012 was hardly a better year. Having been humiliated in Australia, India now faced England in India and lost that Test series 1-2.

Rahul Dravid retired from cricket and then so did VVS Laxman amidst murmurs of his unhappiness with the Indian captain. Sachin Tendulkar retired from One-Day cricket. These were farewells tinged with sadness and some doubts. But then matters became worse at the end of the year with stories of bad blood between Dhoni and Gautam Gambhir. Dhoni felt that Gambhir was being selfish. Gambhir apparently felt that Dhoni was unfit to be captain.

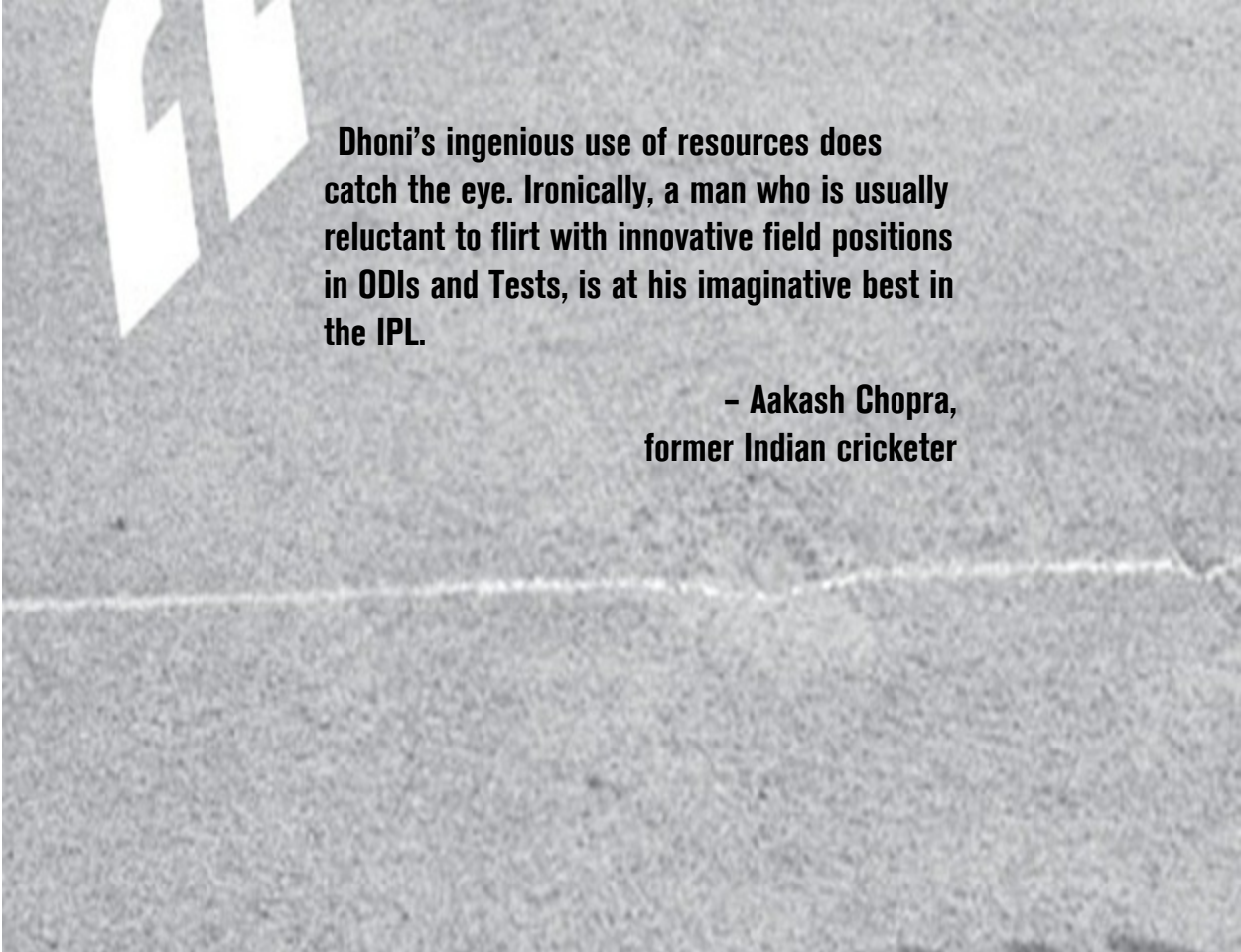
However, Dhoni responded to the doubts and the apparent ultimatum given to him by the board. The same captain who was called the best was then called the worst and was now the best again, made a 180-degree turn. The turnaround came in the ODI series against England in India, after the Test loss. After losing the first ODI in Rajkot, India won three matches on the trot in Kochi, Ranchi and Mohali. At the end of the series, India was back to the top of the ODI rankings, knocking England off their perch.

Dhoni was also applauded for creating new stars like Cheteshwari Pujara in the Test series against England and making heroes of his chosen players like Ravindra Jadeja and R Ashwin. It was now felt that those who were jealous of Dhoni's success had been gunning for him.

But from winning the World Cup to being hammered in England and Australia and then finding victory again, Dhoni remained Captain Cool.

9
CHAPTER

CHASING SUCCESS



Dhoni's ingenious use of resources does catch the eye. Ironically, a man who is usually reluctant to flirt with innovative field positions in ODIs and Tests, is at his imaginative best in the IPL.

**- Aakash Chopra,
former Indian cricketer**

MS DHONI'S VARIOUS SUCCESSES HAVE PUT HIM AT THE TOP of the list as far as Indian captains go. But he has also had a very successful run as captain of another team – the Indian Premier League's Chennai Super Kings. In six IPL seasons, Dhoni has led his team to four finals and two victories, in 2010 and 2011. Over the past six years, CSK has been one of the IPL's most formidable and consistent teams.

This is what Kevin Pietersen had to say about Dhoni and CSK, 'The reason why CSK is so successful is because MS is such a clever skipper in Indian conditions. Besides him (Dhoni) making a huge impact with the bat, CSK have also got quality spinners for the tracks on which they are playing. Their overseas recruits including Michael Hussey and even coach Stephen Fleming, have made significant contributions.'

CSK has been lucky enough to remain virtually unchanged as a team from the first season. This has given Dhoni the chance to use his captaincy skills to very good effect and lead a cohesive group. However, even when the others have failed, the captain more often than not has been there with his bat, ready to intimidate his opponents and take his team to victory. His helicopter shot has been as associated with CSK as the now famous 'whistlepodu' cry.

Dhoni is one of the most expensive properties in the IPL, valued at \$1.5 million. He is also a vice-president with India Cements, owners of the Chennai Super Kings. His consistency and his stature as Indian captain make him one of the IPL's smartest buys as far as the Chennai Super Kings are concerned, especially in the light of his international successes at T20 and ODI formats of the game.

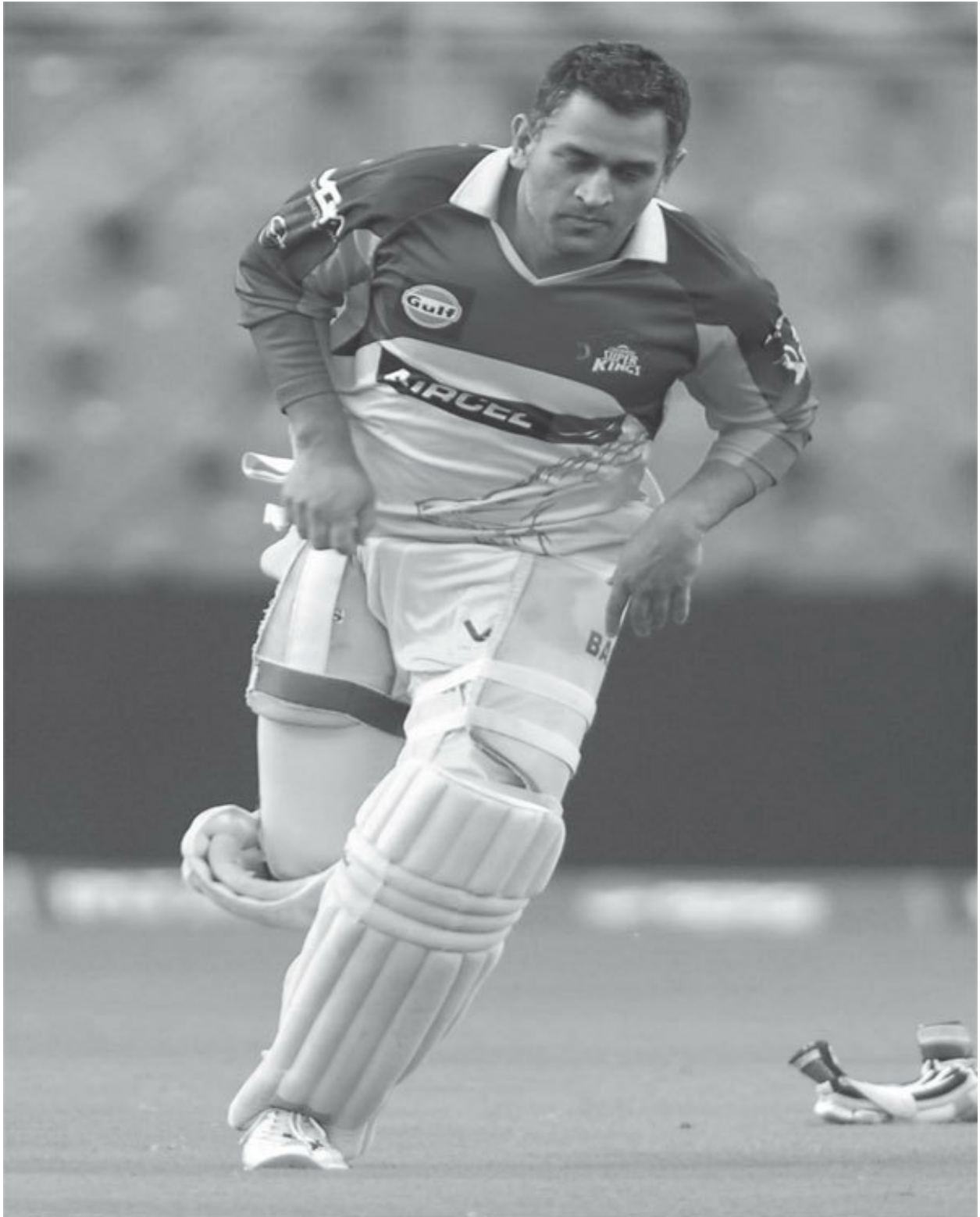
In the first edition of the IPL in 2008, CSK reached the finals in Mumbai, playing against the Rajasthan Royals. They lost dramatically by three wickets in the final delivery of the match. In 2009, they reached the playoffs again, but were defeated by the Royal Challengers Bangalore at the semifinal stage.

In 2010, luck smiled on Dhoni's team and they defeated defending champions Deccan Superchargers at a semifinal in Mumbai. They then went on to defeat the Mumbai Indians in the finals, their first victory in the IPL. At the Champions League T20 held in South Africa, CSK

defeated Royal Challengers Bangalore at the semifinals in Durban and then went on to win the tournament in Johannesburg.

CSK would enter the next season as the most formidable team in the league. Experts find that Dhoni is well-tuned to the needs of the T20 game and this is evident when he captains CSK. It is not just his bat that speaks, but his astute captaincy and his rigorous attention to detail. Says cricketer Aakash Chopra on espncricinfo.com, Dhoni's ingenious use of resources does catch the eye. Ironically, a man who is usually reluctant to flirt with innovative field positions in ODIs and Tests is at its imaginative best in the IPL, especially when dealing with his India teammates; he obviously knows a lot about their strengths and weaknesses, and leaves no stone unturned when it comes to exploiting them.'

Although Dhoni took India to the top of the Test tables, history will show that his best successes came in the T20 and 50-over formats. ►



CSK managed to defend their title in 2011, defeating Royal Challengers Bangalore. They could not do so again and lost to Kolkata

Knight Riders at the final in Eden Gardens. It is 2013 that will be remembered as the most difficult season for the Chennai Super Kings. They started out very well and reached the playoffs once again, sitting at the top of the table with their superior run rate. But as the sixth season of the IPL was drawing to a close, it was hit by a spot-fixing scandal.



DHONI IS ONE OF THE MOST EXPENSIVE PROPERTIES IN THE IPL, VALUED AT \$1.5 MILLION.

Although CSK reached the finals once again, facing Mumbai Indians (once again), this time perhaps the shadow on their own team ownership was too difficult to conquer. Mumbai Indians won, although Dhoni and his team did try to put up a valiant effort. The future of the franchise and the league itself is hopefully safe, but the scrutiny of the IPL will now be more stringent.

However, Dhoni's successes in the IPL make it clear how this short format of the game suits his style of cricket. From his early days, he demonstrated his batting strength and his quick decisions. India's win at the inaugural World T20 championships is testament to Dhoni's captaincy and to his faith in a young team. Dhoni is seen as the best finisher in the T20 format and certainly every opposing team knows that they have him to fear, at whatever position he comes out to bat. His 67 not out against Sunrisers Hyderabad in the 2013 IPL is a case in point. His team was struggling when Dhoni came out, in fact, Dhoni himself faced six dot balls before he hit out. After he was dropped, Dhoni came into his own and hit Dale Steyn for two remarkable sixes. The Sunrisers

tried to hit back and the last over required 15 runs from CSK for victory. Dhoni was there to do it. His 67 came off 37 balls – of which he made no runs for the first six balls he faced!

Test cricket is a very demanding format because it is a long-drawn out chess game and requires experience and wily minds. It needs patience, not brute strength. T20 is a gale force wind and requires its own set of skills – evidently one that suits young India and India's young captain. Although Dhoni took India to the top of the Test tables, history will show that his best successes came in the T20 and 50-over formats.

The IPL best showcases the talents that Dhoni brings to the table and his captaining of the Chennai Super Kings has been one of the talking points of the league. The record surpasses that of every other team – and they all have superlative talents of their own. But Dhoni and CSK have given the IPL a flavour of their own.

MS DHONI

Full name:	Mahendra Singh Dhoni
Born:	July 7, 1981, Ranchi
Style:	Right-handed batsman and wicket-keeper, occasional right-arm medium bowler
Test debut:	v Sri Lanka, Chennai, December 2, 2005 (made 30)
ODI debut:	v Bangladesh, Chittagong, December 23, 2004 (made 0)
T20I debut:	v South Africa, Johannesburg, December 1, 2006 (made 0)

CAREER STATISTICS: RUNS									
	MTS	Runs	HS	Avg	SR	100s	50s	CT/ST	MOM
TC	77	4209	224	39.70	60.04	6	28	212/ 36	2
ODI	226	7358	183*	51.45	88.17	8	48	212/ 75	19
T20I	42	748	48*	31.16	114.90	0	0	21/ 8	0

TC-TEST CRICKET | MTS-MATCHES | HS-HIGHEST SCORE | SR-STRIKE RATE | MOM-MAN OF THE MATCH

DHONI'S ODI TALLY INCLUDES THREE MATCHES PLAYED FOR ASIAN XI

Compiled by Rajnish Gupta

**The story of a young man who has reaffirmed
our faith in Indian cricket.**

On the football field of a beautiful small town in the Chhota Nagpur region, young schoolboy Mahendra Singh Dhoni was a goalkeeper...

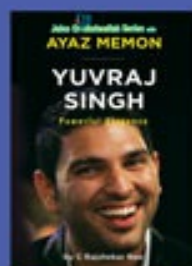
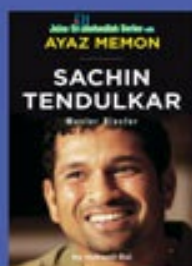
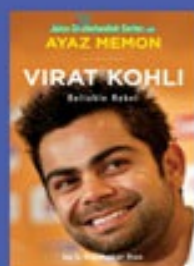
From here on, the story of Dhoni has been nothing short of magical. Not only did he become captain of a successful Indian cricket team, he moulded that captaincy to his own image, with his strength, conviction and daring strategies.

Everything about MS Dhoni, from his early years to his trajectory towards stardom, from his fearless and indomitable batting skills to his courageous captaincy is here in this biography of one of India's most recognizable cricketing icons. Not for nothing is he known as Captain Cool, for Dhoni brought home cricket's most coveted trophies to India, from the World Cup to the inaugural T20 Championship.

In the words of Ian Chappell, after India's World Cup victory, "Mahendra Singh Dhoni's polished performance as skipper, where he pushed, prodded and cajoled his side into peaking at the right time, has shown he's not only the best leader in the game, but also one of the finest of the last 30 years."

AYAZ MEMON, one of India's most prolific journalists, brings with him 33 years of experience in sports writing. He started his career covering sports and went on to edit newspapers like *Mid-Day*, *Bombay Times* and *DNA* as well as magazines like *Sportsweek*. Ayaz was also sports editor for the *Times of India* and the *Independent* at various stages. He is currently consulting editor with *NewsX*.

INDRANIL RAI is a freelance journalist with an undying passion for sports, especially cricket.



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