

MIHIR BOSE



The Nine Waves

The Extraordinary
Story of How
**India Took
Over the
Cricket
World**



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Chapter 1

THE MIRACLE OF JOHANNESBURG

ON 13 SEPTEMBER 2007, a 15-man Indian team flew out to Johannesburg to take part in the first T20 World Cup. Their departure made few waves in India. For a start they flew out not from Mumbai but London. Nobody in India expected much from this team. Indeed, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) had had to be bullied to even take part in the competition. Its very format, with each side restricted to 20 overs, had been mocked by board officials and meant little to the Indians. There had been one domestic T20 competition which attracted little attention; even the television rights for it had not been sold. This was one English idea the Indians were convinced they could do without. The English had invented T20 to attract more people to their game. The Indians saw no need to change.

INDIA DOES NOT NEED 20-OVER CRICKET

They were sure they had got the format of their cricket right. India was in love with the 50-over game. These matches played by Team India, as the national team was now called, attracted huge crowds and mouth-watering amounts of television and sponsorship income. This had completely revolutionised cricket's finances, making India the moneybags of the game. Such was India's financial power that the board earned \$8 million in television rights for each one day international (ODI) India played. A cricket match involving Team

India also made money for countries India played against. For all the emotional hold of an Ashes series, the English board earned much more money when it played India at home. It could sell the television rights for vast sums to keep the Indian eyeballs, as Indian board members called Indians who watched cricket on television, happy.

So, when, in March 2006, the International Cricket Council (ICC) met to discuss whether to adopt T20 as an international event and hold a World Cup, the Indians dismissed the idea. Snorting in derision, Niranjan Shah, the then honorary secretary of the BCCI said, 'Twenty20. Why not ten-ten, or five-five or one-one?' He went on to make it clear that as Indian players had not played T20 they would be at a great disadvantage against other sides. Shah was considered such a fool by many in the ICC that Malcolm Gray, ICC president, had described his participation at ICC meetings 'as unnecessarily depriving a village of its idiot'. However, Shah's views could not be dismissed and with Pakistan joining India in opposing the World Cup the ICC knew it faced a problem. Its solution was to award the first T20 World Cup to South Africa while giving the countries the option of not taking part if they so desired. However, it then used the fact that India wanted to host the 2011 World Cup to put pressure on India to take part and India, reluctantly, agreed. But this did not change the Indian board's view that the T20 World Cup was an irrelevance.

This was evident in the players selected, the choice of the captain and even the way the announcement of the team was made. So, the team that flew out from London did not have any of the so-called Fab Four who had played such a huge part in Indian cricket in the previous decade: Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly, V.V.S. Laxman and the god of Indian cricket, Sachin Tendulkar. Zaheer Khan, whose bowling had made the series win in England in 2007, which had just concluded, possible was also not in the team. Tendulkar had given no thought to the T20, as his mind was focused on the ODI 50-over series against Australia in the winter of 2007 followed by a full tour of Australia. Dravid, who had just led India to its first Test series victory in England in 21 years, speaking for the greats, said,

'We thought it better if the younger guys played that tournament. Twenty20 is a game for youngsters. I think it was a proper decision and the way forward for Indian cricket.' The team with an average age of 23 was four years younger than the 1983 World Cup-winning team and included one player, Piyush Chawla, who was only 18.

The selectors had chosen some seniors, Harbhajan Singh, Ajit Agarkar and, most interestingly, Virender Sehwag. However, he was not in England, not being part of the Indian touring team, and was the only member of the Indian team to fly to South Africa from India. It was as if this was a sop to him. He had some experience of T20, having skippered India to victory in the only T20 international India had played back in December 2006 in Johannesburg, also the venue for the final of the T20 World Cup. However, he was not selected as captain. Instead, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, a wicketkeeper-batsman, who in that T20 match against South Africa had made a duck, was chosen to lead India's T20 World Cup team.

DHONI SEIZES HIS CHANCE

Dhoni's rise through the ranks of Indian cricket had had a touch of good fortune about it. In 2004, he was in the Indian team which went on an A tour of Zimbabwe and Kenya. Then, the first-choice wicketkeeper, Dinesh Karthik, was called up to play for the senior side in England, thus giving Dhoni his chance which he seized brilliantly. In the three years since his debut, although his wicketkeeping still made the purists wince, nobody could doubt his batting which at times could be explosive.

In April 2005, in an ODI match against Pakistan at Visakhapatnam, he made 148 from 123 balls hitting 12 fours and four sixes and powering India to 356/9, their highest against Pakistan and the third highest ever. One commentator described him batting like 'a man possessed'. Another felt Dhoni had violently changed the settled Indian batting order 'as if an explosion had gone off that would ring in the ears for long'. The next day eunuchs invaded Dhoni's parents' home in Ranchi and demanded Rs.50,000 (£500) as they showered blessings and the police had to be called. Indian cricketing ears were

ringing very loudly six months later when in Jaipur in October 2005 against Sri Lanka Dhoni made 183 not out, the highest score by a wicketkeeper, and, what made it sweeter, passing the record set by his hero, the Australian wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist. David, captaining the side, was so enchanted he compared it to Tendulkar's 143 against Australia in Sharjah in 1998, widely seen as the greatest one-day century by an Indian. Lalit Modi, who then ran Rajasthan cricket and had unveiled a redesigned stadium, awarded him a Rs.1 million (£10,000) cash prize and exulted that Dhoni had 'nerves of steel' and that 'it seemed he was gripped by some supernatural power'. The two innings showed how Dhoni could both set a score and chase runs. His score against Pakistan had been when India were batting first, against Sri Lanka it had come as India were chasing a Sri Lankan score of 298. In the Indian dressing room Yuvraj Singh, Sehwag and Harbhajan Singh danced the bhangra to the tune *'Maahi Ve'* from Karan Johar's film, *Kal Ho Naa Ho*. Mahi was Dhoni's popular nickname used by friends and now the 50,000 people packed inside the Jaipur ground, sang, 'That's the way – *Mahi Ve'*'.

Nevertheless, none of this suggested that Dhoni would be a good captain. Yuvraj Singh, while a few months younger, had made his debut four years earlier and was the all-rounder, with his left-arm bowling supplementing his batting, and looked the more likely prospect. But Dhoni had been tipped as a future captain by John Wright, the New Zealander who had been the first foreign coach of India on his very first tour in 2004. 'I would say he has all the potential to become a team leader. He understands the game well and understands his team-mates.' Dhoni was also recommended by Tendulkar and Dravid to the chairman of the selectors, Dilip Vengsarkar, who 'liked his aggressive approach. He looked like someone who understood the game well and importantly was seen as a calm presence in the dressing room.'

Dhoni's calmness was certainly evident when he held his first press conference as captain. With India touring England then, Dhoni held it, not in his home town of Ranchi, capital of the state of Jharkhand, or the Indian board's headquarters in Mumbai, but in

London. Never before had a man from Jharkhand captained India. Dhoni, with the sort of shrewdness that would mark his captaincy, decided that, although London could never be Ranchi, he would use his first press conference to advertise his home state. Asked what it felt like to take over from the greats of Indian cricket Dhoni said, 'I am like the brand ambassador for the people of Jharkhand. It's a small state where the infrastructure isn't great for cricket. Five years ago nobody would have ever thought that someone from this state would play for India. Now, if I look back, I'm excited for the job.'

A PENALTY SHOOT-OUT IN CRICKET

There was little for Dhoni to get excited about in the first match. It was against Scotland, a team India had beaten a few weeks previously, albeit in a 50-over match in Glasgow. But in Durban, rain meant not a ball was bowled. However, with Pakistan, who were also in India's group, beating Scotland, India faced elimination if they lost to Pakistan by a large margin. India knew they would have support for the match in Durban, a centre of South Africans of Indian origin and where Gandhi had set up his law practice more than a century earlier and created his non-violent, satyagraha movement.

On the day of the match Dhoni had to convey a certain Gandhian calmness as news came in the morning that back in India Dravid had said he was quitting both the Test and one-day captaincy. Instead of preparing for the match the players huddled in their hotel first to confirm and then digest the news. Dhoni could not have anticipated this but could take comfort from the fact that he had prepared the team for likely drama on the field. He had gone through the rules, discovered that in a tie the match would be decided by cricket's equivalent of a penalty shoot-out and prepared his players. Called a bowl-out, it meant five bowlers from each side delivered one or two balls at an unguarded stump. Dhoni had divided his players into three teams and had 'fun practice sessions around who would hit the stumps and then chosen our first five bowlers in advance'. He had also chosen two batsmen, Sehwag and 21-year-old Robin

Uthappa, who had not yet played a T20 international, as two of the bowlers. Pakistan did not bother practising the bowl-out and this proved decisive. Not that, as the match progressed, a bowl-out seemed necessary.

India, through Dhoni and Uthappa, who made 50, recovered from 36/4 to reach 141/9. They seemed to have the match won when Pakistan were reduced to 87/5 and needed 39 runs from 14 balls. But then Misbah-ul-Haq took 17 from the penultimate over bowled by Agarkar and, with two deliveries left, the scores were level. The situation was made for the young Indian side to lose their heads. Instead it was Misbah who did. He missed the fifth ball and was run out on the sixth. To the astonishment of the spectators, in the bowl-out Dhoni tossed the ball to Sehwag and Uthappa, neither of whom had bowled in the match, and only after that to a bowler, Harbhajan. The Pakistanis went with three experienced bowlers, but it was the Indians who hit the stumps while all three Pakistanis, for all their experience and who had also bowled in the match, missed. This proved the first of many Dhoni decisions which at the end of the tournament made *Wisden*, English cricket's bible, describe the Indian captain as providing 'inspired captaincy'.

The victory meant India had never lost to Pakistan in a World Cup match, be it 50 overs or 20 overs, although its real significance was how calmly Dhoni took the victory, saying he did not like bowl-outs to decide matches. 'It really amuses you. Winning a cricket match 3-0. It doesn't happen every time. But it is in the record books now. I can tell my friends when I was captain my team won 3-0.' Dhoni, who as a schoolboy preferred football and was a Manchester United supporter, knew his friends would get the joke.

DICING WITH DEFEAT

That bowl-out victory established the pattern of matches for India. They were never sure of victory until they won, and in every match they faced elimination. Having lost to New Zealand by 10 runs in the first of the super eight matches, India needed to beat England. What happened could not have been scripted; it was like the classic

schoolboy fairytale end to an innings. India on winning the toss had made an excellent start but as Yuvraj joined Dhoni the pair knew they needed to accelerate if they wanted to post a really imposing total. Dhoni knew all about Yuvraj's powers of hitting, having played with and against him as he was making his mark through junior cricket. But not even he could anticipate what the Punjab player would produce under the floodlights on that September evening. And all thanks to some remarks made by the England all-rounder Andrew Flintoff.

In the 18th over Yuvraj hit him for two fours. Flintoff said something; we do not know what but it so upset Yuvraj that Dhoni had to come down to the pitch to calm things down. That the less experienced international player was calming the more experienced one was interesting, but it seemed to work. Yuvraj nodded but he well remembered the humiliation England had inflicted on his bowling 14 days earlier and he wanted revenge. Then, at the Oval, Dimitri Mascarenhas had clouted him for five sixes off the last five balls of the match. In Durban the 19th over was to be bowled by Stuart Broad, whose previous three overs had gone for 24 runs and, as the Englishman ran in, Yuvraj decided to go one better than Mascarenhas, hitting every ball of the over for six. Whereas Mascarenhas had hit Yuvraj for sixes on the leg side between long-on and deep midwicket, Yuvraj used both sides of the wicket. The first over wide mid-on was the longest at 105 metres; the second sailed over fine leg. Then he switched to the off and cleared long-off, the fourth a full toss was sent over backward point. The fifth, which saw him go down on one knee, was a mishit but cleared square leg and the last saw him return to the midwicket fence. The sixes had taken him to a half-century in 12 balls, the quickest in international cricket and considered the fastest in representative cricket at the highest level.

Stuart Broad told me, 'I was aiming to bowl quite full. I was bowling into quite a strong wind. I knew he had to be aiming to hit with the wind because he had to just get it up in the air and it would be going.'

Flintoff could not match Yuvraj, and India won by 18 runs. However, while Yuvraj had lit up the tournament there seemed no prospect of India making progress. Their last match in the group was against South Africa and the hosts did not even need to win to make the semi-final. All they had to do was make 126. And Yuvraj could not play due to tendinitis in his left elbow. India batting first made a dreadful start, 33/3. But it was now that Dhoni gave the first glimpse of what would make him the great finisher. The general view was that in a 20-over match, as opposed to a 50-over one, you did not have time to build an innings. But Dhoni had worked out that 20 overs also allowed time to pace out an innings and partnering 20-year-old Rohit Sharma the pair put on 85 runs, helping India reach 153/5 and a platform.

However, with South Africa requiring only 126 to win India had to do more than win. They had to keep taking wickets to slow the hosts down. In the two previous matches India had gone for 190 against New Zealand and 200 against England. But with the seventh ball of the innings R.P. Singh had Herschelle Gibbs lbw and so devastated the South African batting that they were 31/5 in the sixth over. South Africa were now caught in the classic position. Should they try and win or just crawl to 126? They managed neither and, despite Dhoni developing a back problem which made Dinesh Karthik move from slip, where he had taken a great catch, to don the gloves, India never loosened their hold on the match.

India played Australia in the semi-final. Dhoni was convinced that India should always bat first on winning the toss as they had successfully done against England and South Africa, and he did so now. For almost half the match it seemed India would not be able to set Australia much of a target, managing only 41/2 after eight overs. But then a fully recovered Yuvraj came in and got off the mark with a six; Uthappa, clearly inspired, came down the wicket to hit a six. All this set Yuvraj off again and he now hit the longest six of the tournament: 119 metres; and what made it magical was that it was a flick off his legs that caused the white ball to soar over square leg. But while 188 was a good score, Australia looked like they had

worked it all out. Matthew Hayden had a reputation for being a flat track bully but now he was the anchor while Andrew Symonds did most of the explosive shot-making.

What turned the match for India were three very shrewd bowling changes by Dhoni. In the 15th over he brought back Shanthakumaran Sreesanth to bowl his final over. Sreesanth would be fined 25 per cent of his match fee for excessive appealing, but there was no need for an appeal when he uprooted Hayden's off stump. Yet it still seemed doable with 30 needed from 18 balls. Now came Dhoni's second crucial bowling change. He brought back Harbhajan, who hadn't taken a wicket and in his three overs had conceded 21 runs. He bowled Michael Clarke and gave away only three runs. R.P. Singh who bowled the 19th over was only slightly more expensive, giving away five runs. Australia needed 22 from the last over and it proved too much. The Indian joy was a perhaps touch frantic with Yuvraj waving his arms in the air like a dervish. But, given how often Australia had humiliated India in World Cups, it was only to be expected. Dhoni was calmer, gently reminding Ravi Shastri that he had read his column which had said Australia were favourites. 'I think we surprised you.'

On the same day at Cape Town, Pakistan had beaten New Zealand with great ease, winning by six wickets and so the two sides, whose boards had not even wanted to be in South Africa, travelled to Johannesburg for the final.

PREPARING FOR THE FINAL

The 24 hours before the final showed how Dhoni, just weeks into the job, was maturing as captain. After the pre-final team meeting Dhoni had told his players that they should relax by watching a film. He himself liked watching movies in a multiplex. This was impossible in India as the cricketers would get mobbed but in Johannesburg they could behave like ordinary people although Dhoni advised his players to ring up the multiplexes and say they were coming so as to get some privacy. However, Dhoni found none of his players wanted to go to a Johannesburg multiplex and went back to his room. There, perhaps

his most temperamental player, Sreesanth, turned up to return the bat he had borrowed. Dhoni advised Sreesanth not to spray the ball around but concentrate on line and length.

From Dhoni's window the pair could see the Wanderers ground and the World Cup trophy and pointing to the cup Dhoni said, 'There's the trophy and loads of prestige at stake because it is a match with Pakistan.' This prompted Sreesanth to say, 'Who knew I would be involved in the final showdown of the finals?' It was meant as a joke but Dhoni, aware of how the Kerala fast bowler could lose his head, said sternly, 'Then you should certainly not mess up anything.' Sreesanth was not best pleased but he was to play a crucial part in the final. During the tournament Dhoni had told his players he did not know why the Indian media devoted so much space to cricket. 'Perhaps they need every bit of a cricketer for their daily news updates.'

However, before the night was out, Dhoni discovered it was not just the media. He was woken up twice that night. First by a Bollywood mogul, Shah Rukh Khan, telling him, 'Sleep well, you will win tomorrow.' And then by Lalit Modi, the man who was about to become the great czar of Indian cricket, 'Still awake? Sleep now and play well tomorrow. This is a big match for us.' As we shall see, it was to prove a huge match for Modi and Indian cricket as well.

DHONI'S MATCH-WINNING DECISIONS

Dhoni woke up aware he had to make a crucial decision. Sehwag had a groin strain. The coach Lalchand Rajput had left the decision to him, confident that Dhoni, who always seemed calm whatever the situation, would make the right call. Dhoni waited until after breakfast and when it was confirmed Sehwag would not be fit he opted for Yusuf Pathan. He had never played for India before in any international and had been overshadowed by his younger brother, Irfan Pathan, who had played in all the matches, but Dhoni remembered his hundred-plus strike rate in domestic cricket for Baroda. Many an Indian captain would not have felt confident that Indian performances could be replicated overseas but Dhoni was and

Yusuf Pathan, he decided, would open. Dhoni was determined not to lose having told friends that if a win was not possible he would prefer a tie and sharing the cup. As he led his team out for the match he told them, 'Jeetna hai, ab to Cup leke hi India waapas jayenge.' [We have to win, now we will return to India with the Cup.]

Pathan, justifying the faith his skipper had in him, started brilliantly, with a six in his first over but then he overreached himself and was out for 15. It required Gautam Gambhir making 75 for India to reach 157 with Dhoni himself making just six and the last five overs producing 47. This looked well below par and Dhoni, observers felt, had looked tense as he led his side out. He had more reason to feel worried in the second over of the Pakistan innings which was bowled by Sreesanth. His bowling, as if he had not taken Dhoni's advice, was so wayward that he was hit by Imran Nazir for 21. He did follow this up with a maiden. Then there was a moment that had echoes of 1983 at Lord's when Kapil Dev caught Vivian Richards for a miscued shot off Madan Lal to turn the match around. Now, Uthappa showcased modern Indian fielding. In one almost balletic movement he picked up and threw, running out Nazir.

However, Pakistan recovered from 77/6 led by Misbah-ul-Haq. He had tied the match against India in the group match, steered his side to victory against Australia and now, while others fell, he remained, pacing his innings. He reserved his explosive Dhoni or Yuvraj-style hitting for the 17th over when, with Pakistan needing 54 from four overs, he hit Harbhajan Singh for 19 runs, three of the balls going for sixes. It was now 35 from 18 balls but with Sreesanth going for 15, although he took a wicket, it became a very gettable 20 from 12.

R.P. Singh restored Indian hopes with a tight 19th over which meant Pakistan required 13 and India one wicket from the last six balls. In India everyone deserted the streets to cluster around the television sets and in Pakistan people, some even on the highway, prayed. Now came Dhoni's master stroke.

The obvious choice to bowl would have been Harbhajan – vastly experienced, the first Indian to take a hat-trick in Tests and a doughty

fighter. But Dhoni judged the 19 runs he had conceded had damaged him and he brought back Joginder Sharma. Dhoni and Sharma had made their ODI debut, together but then their paths had diverged. However, Dhoni had no doubts. 'I chose Joginder because Bhajji [Harbhajan's nickname] had gone for a fair number of runs in his last over. Besides, the opposition hadn't seen too much of Joginder, who had a good slower ball and change of pace which suited the occasion.' As he handed the ball to Joginder he told him to keep it simple and have the confidence that he could do it.

That confidence hardly seemed justified when Joginder's first ball was a wide. Misbah missed the second but hit the third, a full toss, for six. Pakistan needed six runs from four balls. On the boundary edge Rajput could barely watch and kept chanting the Gayatri Mantra, one of Hinduism's most sacred chants. Dhoni showed no reaction. He did not reprimand Joginder, merely told him to keep going. Misbah had it all planned out. He saw himself as a thinking cricketer, a big-match player, who had come into the final 'quite sure about how I wanted to score runs'. Aware a four would mean virtual victory, he had decided to scoop Joginder over square leg. 'I had scored runs off it right through the tournament.' Instead, surprised by the bowler's lack of pace, he did not connect properly and 'was careless in not checking the fielders before that ball'. The fielder was Sreesanth at short fine leg and he, with Dhoni's words ringing in his ears, made no mistake. The shot shattered Misbah, and would be endlessly replayed on Pakistan television. 'I regret it still today. It shattered my hopes of being a big-match player,' Misbah would lament.

India's joy was unconfined. In 1983, the victory at Lord's was a wonderful event in a foreign field with few Indians present in that very English setting. In Johannesburg the ground seemed full of Indians although Pakistan also had support. There were the Indians of South Africa who, as late as 1991, would have had to sit in cages, segregated from the whites while they watched the match. But there were also Indians who had benefited from the opening of the Indian economy, which had also taken place in 1991 and who thought nothing of flying in from India to watch their countrymen play. Nobody had

deeper pockets than the Bollywood stars. Shah Rukh Khan had come with his family, so had actors Deepika Padukone, Priyanka Chopra, Juhi Chawla, Rani Mukherjee, Diya Mirza and Amisha Patel. During the match the sight of these stars, particularly Khan, would send the crowd into raptures of joy. Bollywood and all of India joined in acclaiming Dhoni and his team as the sporting heroes for which the country had so long craved.

Manmohan Singh, the then prime minister, issued a congratulatory statement within ten minutes. Dhoni was the one person who was calm. As he walked back to the dressing room, he heard a young boy shout out, 'Dhoni I need your shirt, can I have it?' Dhoni identified the boy, got the security officer to bring him to where he was, took off his shirt and gave it to the boy. Millions saw his bare torso rippling with muscles which together with his long hair suggested he represented the young vibrant India. The old India was represented by his mother in Ranchi. There Devaki Devi could not take her eyes off the statue of Lord Krishna, telling her husband Pan Singh, '*Bete ne desh ko jitaya hai.*' [Our son has led the nation to victory.] As crowds gathered outside their Ranchi home this time showering flowers not throwing bricks, as they had done after the 2007 World Cup debacle four months earlier, the pair held hands and wept. The 1983 victory at Lord's, as we shall see, changed Indian cricket. But this victory changed not only Indian but world cricket.

INDIA HELP DEFEAT A FRAUDSTER'S PLANS

The day before the final there had been a meeting in Johannesburg's plush Sandton Sun Hotel between the ICC and Allen Stanford, a Texan then claiming to be worth some \$18 billion (£13.3m). Based in Antigua, his board included a West Indian Hall of Cricketing Fame: Everton Weekes, Michael Holding, Vivian Richards, Wes Hall, Lance Gibbs, Joel Garner and Desmond Haynes. He was said to be paying each of his board members \$8,000 (£5,900) a month.

Stanford had come to the meeting with Weekes, Hall, Holding, Gibbs, Richards, Garner and Haynes. He wanted the winner of the next day's final between India and Pakistan to go to Antigua

and play his team, Stanford Superstars, for \$5 million (£3.7m) in a winner-take-all prize. He was sure it would attract an audience of a billion. The ICC knew India was opposed to any such idea as it already earned \$8 million (£5.9m) in television rights for each 50-over match it played and was unlikely to travel to the Caribbean on the off chance of getting \$5 million. The meeting ended with Stanford walking out and Haynes and Richards shouting at Malcolm Speed, then chief executive of the ICC, with Haynes allegedly calling Speed a racist and Richards thumping the table in anger.

That meeting confirmed how West Indian cricket had declined both on and off the field. This was further emphasised 15 months later when Stanford was charged with fraud worth \$8 billion (£5.9m). He is now serving a 110-year federal prison sentence.

THE FRUITS OF DHONI'S VICTORY

The ICC's decision not to deal with Stanford – prompted by India – was to prove crucial. For even as their rookie cricketers were performing in South Africa, the heavyweights of Indian cricket officialdom were planning a different future for the game. The man at the centre of it was Lalit Modi. We shall hear much more of him but here let us sketch out what he had done before the tournament began and during it. On 13 September, the very morning that Dhoni and his team flew to South Africa, Modi was in Mumbai at a five-star hotel. Flanked by the greats who had not gone to South Africa, Tendulkar, Dravid, Ganguly, and foreign greats like Glenn McGrath and Stephen Fleming, he revealed that India would have a domestic T20 league. The tournament had borrowed ideas from both England and America. The name – the Indian Premier League – had echoes of the English Premier League. But the concept of city-based franchise teams taking part in the competition was introducing an American idea into Indian sport. Two days earlier, Sharad Pawar, the man who had voted against the T20 World Cup, had given Modi \$25 million (£18.4m) to prepare for the inaugural tournament.

Modi followed the Indian team to South Africa and, entering the Indian dressing room, promised any player who hit six sixes in an over

whatever present they wanted. When some players suggested a Rolex watch, Modi announced, 'I will give away a brand-new Porsche if any player achieves the feat.' When Yuvraj hit his final six off Broad he rushed towards Modi who was waving the keys, seeing it (as he put it) as 'an answer to a prayer to God. Let someone do something that no one has done. And we got six sixes in an over! It simply lit up the screens in every home. Money can't buy that kind of thing, it just made Twenty20 cricket a must-watch.'

As soon as India had won, Modi rang Pawar in Mumbai to arrange for the team to be taken in a motorcade from Mumbai's international airport to the Wankhede Stadium. Pawar was not sure. Mumbai was still in the middle of its monsoon season and he feared the celebrations would be damp and fizzle out. But Modi insisted and took an earlier flight to Mumbai arriving at 4am, two hours before Dhoni and his team. And although it rained, Pawar's fears proved unfounded. India, keen on sport but not a great sporting nation nor used to winning honours, now had a world champion in an inaugural competition and that after beating Pakistan. So many turned up to honour the team that the journey from Sahar to Wankhede took almost four hours instead of the usual one. What is more, it was telecast live to the remotest parts of India. As Dhoni and his team accepted the adulation, he realised for the first time what cricket meant for India. 'Until then we were just a group of young guys having a good time.'

Modi saw money and as he put it later, 'If I had any doubts left about the appeal of the new brand of Twenty20 cricket, the Mumbai road show settled it.' Modi was to use the win brilliantly.

The nearly 90-year history of Indian cricket, starting with the first Test in 1932, divides neatly into nine waves, with Virat Kohli at the centre of the current ninth wave. Dhoni's victory marked the start of the eighth wave, which has proved to be the most revolutionary in Indian cricket history. The previous seven waves had seen many dramatic moments. But these often proved to be one step forwards followed by a huge step backwards that wiped out all the gains. This has not been the case with Dhoni's Johannesburg miracle. It provided

an ideal launch pad for the IPL and that has revolutionised world cricket. April no longer marks the start of the English season but the start of the IPL and what happens in this great cricket tamasha means a lot more than what is going on in often damp, chilly England. In 2013, James Astill, political editor of *The Economist*, even wrote a book on India seeing the IPL as providing a window into India. No Englishman would have thought of doing that with the Ranji Trophy.

This revolution has been possible because the India of today is not remotely what the country was like during the previous waves of Indian cricket. Take India's first Test and series victory in England, exactly 35 years and a month before Dhoni's victory in Johannesburg. In Mumbai, they were celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi. Rajdeep Sardesai, son of Dilip Sardesai, who helped India win at the Oval, was then six years old. He recalls in his 2017 book, *Democracy's XI*, how, as the idol of Ganesha was immersed in the sea, he was lifted on the shoulders of his uncle.

Then Mumbai still had its old Portuguese name of Bombay. The airport was the old one at Santa Cruz and the board's headquarters were at the Cricket Club of India (CCI), a grand club that still reeked of the world the British Raj had left behind. Only two makes of car were produced in India, the Ambassador and Fiat, both of which had waiting lists of many years. In 1971, to showcase the triumphant team, the BCCI whisked them back in open-top pre-war American Buicks. Then they were seen as the most prized cars in India, driven by the affluent few. In 1971, I was a student in England and present both at Lord's where India came close to winning and also at the Oval. But Indians in India did not see a single ball of the epic Oval triumph as there was no television in India. They could only follow it on the radio and heard of Indian triumphs through English voices. The news came on the radio with an Englishman, Brian Johnston, announcing to the Indians that their team had won. Indians garlanded their radios.

The India that celebrated Dhoni's victory of 24 September 2007 was a very different place, politically, socially and in the cricket sense. India was now being talked about as a great power rivalling China

for world domination. Every ball was beamed live to millions of homes across the country and the commentators were famous Indian ex-cricketers. The fans felt they knew Dhoni and his cricketers intimately. And, unlike in 1971, Dhoni's men were rich. In 1971, the Indian captain Ajit Wadekar earned his living working for the State Bank of India; his colleagues worked for other commercial firms. The players' expectations were limited as the bank employed other cricketers. As Wadekar put it, 'The bank gave us respect and financial security. What more could we ask for as players?' The cricketers knew that just playing for India would not allow them to put food on the table for their families. Two years after the Oval triumph when Dilip Sardesai retired, he earned Rs. 2,500 (£25) for a Test match. In 2007, even before he had taken the side to South Africa, Dhoni had an agent representing him and had succeeded in building his own brand, striking a deal with NDTV, one of India's main new channels, for exclusive interviews, views and special shows. On his return from Johannesburg, and with the media branding him 'Captain Cool', he would grow so rich that by 2009 *Forbes* named him the world's most expensive cricketer. And by the first decade of the 21st century cricket was a powerful Indian soft-power tool. India and its cricket had come a long way since the British brought the game to India.

I was made very aware of this when, on 31 March 2014, I was invited to a reception held at 10 Downing Street by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda. The object was to promote a charity developing a cricket stadium in the country to help heal the wounds of that ravaged land. Among those present were the great and the good of English cricket, the West Indian batsman Brian Lara, whom some in cricket rate even higher than Sachin Tendulkar, and also a rich Indian businessman.

The businessman knew Dhoni very well and had spoken to me admiringly about the Indian captain and how focused he was on his cricket. As soon as Cameron arrived, the organiser approached the businessman: 'I have been looking for you. You must come with me to meet the Prime Minister.' The Indian businessman was whisked

away for a very private tête-à-tête, while the rest of us sipped our drinks. I later discovered that the Indian had donated money to the charity, and the hope was that a few private minutes with Cameron would make him donate even more. On one of his visits to India, Cameron had played cricket with Kapil Dev, and now he wanted to harness India's love for cricket and the money power of rich Indians to heal the wounds of Rwanda. In the 21st century, the British see this as another wonderful example of using what they trumpet as the shared history of the two nations for the good of mankind. In no other wave of Indian cricket history would the British have turned to Indian cricket to help them.