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ELEVEN GODS

AND A

BILLION INDIANS

THE ON AND OFF THE FIELD STORY OF CRICKET
IN INDIA AND BEYOND



Boria has documented the history of Indian cricket with precision and elegance.

SOURAV GANGULY, FORMER INDIAN CAPTAIN

Sampler

**ELEVEN GODS & A BILLION
INDIANS**

*THE ON AND OFF THE FIELD STORY OF CRICKET
IN INDIA AND BEYOND*

BORIA MAJUMDAR



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Challenging the Chappell Shenanigans

It was all going well for Sourav Ganguly and Indian cricket until the arrival of Greg Chappell. India had beaten world champions Australia at home in 2001, won the NatWest Tri-series and a famous Test at Headingley in England in 2002, and had drawn 1-1 in a Test series against Australia on Australian soil in 2003-04, before beating Pakistan in their backyard in March-April 2004. The reversal against Australia at home in late 2004, and the dip in form in early 2005 notwithstanding, Indian cricket under Ganguly and John Wright was in reasonable health. At the back of some good results, Ganguly was keen to take his team to the next level, and Chappell, he felt, was a possible answer to do so. Ganguly and Chappell were good friends, and the former had great respect for Chappell for his understanding of the game and had even written the foreword to one of his books, *Greg Chappell on Coaching*. A few months ahead of the Indian tour to

Australia in December 2003, Ganguly, determined to change India's poor record Down Under, decided to spend time with Chappell to get himself tour-ready. Impressed with Chappell's insights, especially the suggestion that one should not bat expecting bouncers in Australian conditions, Ganguly asked Chappell if he was interested in a long-term Indian role if the opportunity presented itself. Chappell, understandably, was keen. Coaching India was the most high profile job in world cricket, and he was eager to take up the challenge.

'John Wright was at the end of his tenure and had made public his intentions of not seeking an extension. The situation was ripe to get a new coach. Having trained with Greg in Australia, I felt he could take Indian cricket to the next level and recommended him for the job in April 2005,' said Ganguly of a decision he regretted later.

The statement had a note of resignation attached to it. Each time he speaks of Chappell and his stint in India, Ganguly knows he had blundered. A great judge of men had made a serious error in judgement, and it could have ended his career. That it did not was partly fate and partly the steel that Ganguly had infused in the Indian side during his period at the helm. It was steel that separated men from the boys and allowed Ganguly to stand up to Chappell when the odds were heavily

stacked against him. In this classic manager-versus-superstar clash, Ganguly did have a final ace up his sleeve—his ability backed up by self-belief on the twenty-two yards with a bat in hand. Unlike David Beckham, whose football skills had deteriorated when the Manchester United boss, Alex Ferguson, wanted him out of the team, Ganguly could still go back to the basics and come back stronger in the most hostile environment in South Africa against the likes of Shaun Pollock, Makhaya Ntini, Jacques Kallis and others. Ganguly's life is classic Bollywood—an ageing legend who knew he was left few final hurrahs—a biopic if the directors in Bollywood have the time to read the next few pages of unadulterated drama.

With Jagmohan Dalmiya still in power at the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), and given Ganguly's proximity to the BCCI and former International Cricket Council (ICC) boss, it was no surprise that Greg Chappell emerged as the top man for the job based on Ganguly's recommendation in April 2005. Other candidates in the fray included Tom Moody, Mohinder Amarnath, Dav Whatmore and John Emburey. A veteran cricket administrator still associated with the game confirmed to me that some senior players like Rahul Dravid preferred Moody to Chappell. 'When we asked Rahul who he thought was best-suited for the job, he mentioned Tom Moody but went on to add that eventually it was Ganguly who would take the call,' said

one of Indian cricket's perennial go-to men. It is quite an irony that Ganguly, who was instrumental in getting Chappell to India, ended up having a bitter fallout with him, while Dravid, who had initially preferred Moody over Chappell, ended up being close to the Australian.

At a time when Chappell assumed charge as head coach in July 2005, Ganguly was serving a six-match ban imposed on him in March 2005 for a slow over rate. Dravid was interim captain, and it was for the Zimbabwe tour in September 2005 that Ganguly was once again given back the reins of Indian cricket.

'Something from the very start of the tour was not right. I don't know what had happened, but something definitely had gone amiss. I think some people whom Greg had become close to may have told him that with me around, he would never have his way in Indian cricket, and that may have triggered a reaction. Whatever it may have been, he was not the same Chappell in Zimbabwe compared to the one who had helped me get ready for the Australian tour in December 2003,' Ganguly stated.

While Chappell's side of the story is out in the public domain—his issues with Ganguly mentioned in detail in the confidential email to the BCCI written at the end of the Zimbabwe tour and a story broken by my very good friend and senior journalist Gautam

Bhattacharya—Ganguly's side of the story has never been written about fully. 'It will again create unnecessary controversy,' he said when I asked him to clear the air on Greg Chappell. Readers, I insisted to him, needed to know what exactly happened and a definitive history of Indian cricket had to document what had gone on between him and Chappell. With Ganguly, it is never easy to understand if he is in agreement, but gradually, after some more cajoling over tea and some excellent bhujia, which Dona, his wife, had sent down to us, he started giving me his side of the story.

'It all started with a side game in Zimbabwe against the Zimbabwe "A" team. I was hurting from a tennis elbow, and the injury was starting to bother me yet again while I was batting in this match. It was an inconsequential side game, and the best thing for me was to walk out and nurse the injury. Greg wasn't around in the dressing room when I had retired hurt, and it was only after a while that he came back to ask what had happened to me. I said I had a painful elbow and with a Test match coming up did not want to risk playing on. He was unrelenting. To my surprise he insisted I go out and bat and I was forced to tell him I wouldn't because I was in good touch and did not want to jeopardize my chances of playing the Test match. I even said that the pain notwithstanding, I was sure to turn up for the Test.'

Ganguly's version stands in contrast to Chappell's portrayal of events in the practice game in Mutare. In his email to the BCCI written at the end of the tour, Chappell talks about this match at length. 'Sourav batted in the match against Zimbabwe "A" team in the game in Mutare. I am not sure of the exact timing of events because I was in the nets with other players when Sourav went in to bat, but the new ball had either just been taken or was imminent when I saw Sourav walking from the field holding his right arm. I assumed he had been hit and made my way to the players' area where Sourav was receiving treatment from the team physiotherapist, John Gloster.

'When I enquired as to what had happened Sourav said he had felt a click in his elbow as he played a ball through the leg side and that he thought he should have it investigated. Sourav had complained of pain to his elbow at various stages of the one-day series, but he had resisted having any comprehensive investigation done and, from my observation, had been spasmodic in his treatment habits, often not using ice-packs for the arm that had been prepared for him by John Gloster. I suggested, as had John Gloster, that we get some further tests done immediately. Sourav rejected these suggestions and said he would be "fine". When I queried what he meant by "fine" he said he would be fit for the Test match. I then queried why then was it necessary to be off the field now. He said that he was just taking

"precautions".

'Rather than make a scene with other players and officials in the vicinity, I decided to leave the matter and observe what Sourav would do from that point on. After the loss of Mohammad Kaif, Yuvraj [Singh] and [Murali] Kartik to the new ball, Sourav returned to the crease with the ball now around 20 overs old. He struggled for runs against a modest attack and eventually threw his wicket away trying to hit one of the spinners over the leg side.

"The next day I enquired with a number of the players as to what they had thought of Sourav's retirement. The universal response was that it was "just Sourav" as they recounted a list of times when Sourav had suffered from mystery injuries that usually disappeared as quickly as they had come. This disturbed me because it confirmed for me that he was in a fragile state of mind and it was affecting the mental state of other members of the squad . . . When we arrived in Bulawayo, I decided I needed to ask Sourav if he had over-played the injury to avoid the danger period of the new ball as it had appeared to me and others within the touring party that he had protected himself at the expense of others. He denied the suggestion and asked why he would do that against such a modest attack. I said that he was the only one who could answer that question,' Chappell had written.

He went on to conclude, 'I was so concerned about the effect that Sourav's actions were having on the team that I decided I could not wait until selection meeting that evening to inform him that I had serious doubts about picking him for the first Test. I explained that, in my view, I felt we had to pick Kaif and Yuvraj following their good form in the one-day series and that Sehwag, Gambhir, Laxman and Dravid had to play. He said that his record was better than Kaif and Yuvraj and that they had not proved themselves in Test cricket. I countered with the argument that they had to be given a chance to prove themselves on a consistent basis or we would never know. I also said that their form demanded that they be selected now.'

In Sourav's version, however, the discussion was never restricted to him or his place in the Test team. 'Greg came to me one evening and showed me a team he had picked for the Test match. Some key players were not in his playing XI and I was a little taken aback at what he was trying to do. I rejected his suggestions and said to him clearly that the people he wanted out had done great things for Indian cricket while he had just been there for three months. He needed to spend more time to fully understand the situation before he started taking tough calls. He, it was clear to me, was in a hurry to make the team "Greg Chappell's team". The problem with some coaches is that they come with a preconceived notion. They have a pattern in their mind,

and unless you fit the pattern you are out. These people are very rarely successful and have had to give way soon enough. Good coaches are those who come with a free mind and adapt to the system they are exposed to.'

Chappell, it is known, had asked Sourav to stand down from captaincy two days ahead of the first Test at Bulawayo, a suggestion that was understandably not received well by the Indian skipper. Coming two days before the Test started, it had the potential of impacting the team morale. The captain-coach divide was out in public when Ganguly spilled the beans in a press conference during the Test match.

'I got a hundred in the Test match and had batted for nearly six hours. Soon after I was back in the dressing room and was icing my elbow did Greg come and ask me if I had any pain. I said to him, how does it matter, for I had just scored a hundred. With or without pain, I had done a job for India.'

Angry and frustrated, Ganguly opened up in front of the press when asked if Chappell had asked him to step down ahead of the Test match.

Amitabh Chaudhary, manager of the team in Zimbabwe and BCCI secretary in 2016-17, helped me put the events in sequence. Chaudhary, a career bureaucrat, is one of the few BCCI members who is articulate and

eloquent. Sitting at the ITC Sonar in Kolkata over coffee, he had a wry smile on his lips when he mentioned to me, 'It is impossible to forget the tale of events in Zimbabwe in 2005. I remember the whole thing frame by frame and can still visualize every little detail. I was sitting in the dressing room with my feet up on the balcony, writing something, when the team was out practising. That's when I could see Sourav come into the dressing room,' Chaudhary said.

He did not make much of it because players, every now and then, would come to the changing room to do minor things. In this instance, however, Ganguly had stayed back for an inordinately long period of time and only because of that did Chaudhary turn curious. 'I went back and asked Sourav what had happened. He was leaning on the glass front overlooking the ground and had a look of shock on his face.

"The coach tells me I don't have a place in the playing XI," Sourav told me. I wasn't expecting anything like this, and it took me a minute or so to understand the significance of what he was saying.'

Once he had composed his thoughts, Chaudhary suggested to Sourav that the coach had no right to take a call on the captain and this was not something within his remit. Thereafter, he also suggested to Ganguly that it was best to take Vice-captain Dravid into confidence

on the whole issue and figure out where he stood on it.

'Sourav agreed, and I went out to the field to attract Rahul's attention. When Rahul met my eye, I indicated to him that we needed to have a word and it wasn't possible on the ground. Rahul and I walked back to the dressing room, and I asked Sourav to tell Rahul exactly what Greg was suggesting. And once Sourav had done so, I mentioned to Rahul that this was not something Greg could or should have said and it was beyond his jurisdiction. He was not in a position to change the captain or vice-captain in the middle of the tour.'

Dravid, Chaudhary confirmed, agreed with his view, and it was decided that the manager would speak to the coach and diffuse the situation.

'When I spoke to Greg, he did confirm to me that he had suggested to Sourav exactly what had been reported to me. He was holding his ground till I informed him that he was not the one to take this call. I also said to him that Sourav continued to be captain and would indeed play in the Test match.'

In Chaudhary's version, it was after a couple of hours that Chappell had seen sense in what was being said and had resigned to the situation. He even apologized to Ganguly and Dravid, and the matter, Chaudhary was confident, was dead and buried.

"The dressing room was one with a transparent glass front, and you could see everything from outside. The Indian media had seen us talking and whispers had started about what could possibly be the subject of conversation. Why should the manager talk to the captain and the vice-captain when the team was out practising? But with captain, vice-captain and now Greg all in sync, I was confident the matter was over.'

Clearly, it wasn't and snowballed into a major controversy once the tour was over and Chappell's email to the BCCI was out in the public domain.

Before I get to Sourav on the Chappell email, it is important to state once and for all that the email wasn't leaked. It was a superb newsbreak, and Gautam Bhattacharya deserves credit for breaking the story. How he managed to do it has remained a secret for a decade, and it was after much prodding that he agreed to explain his side of the story.

"That not all was well between Sourav and Chappell was known to a number of us in the media. If I remember right, there was also an agency copy on the brewing misunderstanding between the two,' said Gautam when I sat him down on the issue. 'It was only natural that I would want to probe the matter further. And that's how I got the story. It was a tip-off from Zimbabwe, and I can tell you it was a player who first called me and informed

me that Chappell had written this email against Sourav (Gautam wouldn't reveal the name of the player, and I must say I respect his decision not to). And I must also tell you that the very same fact was corroborated to me by another source associated with the team in Zimbabwe. The significance of the story was such that I just could not go ahead and do it without getting it confirmed by the BCCI. I clearly remember there was a BCCI meeting at the Taj Bengal Hotel in Kolkata the next day, and the hotel lobby was full of journalists. I could not go to Dalmiya because if he requested me not to do the story, I would find it impossible to go ahead given the nature of our relationship. So Dalmiya as a possible source was out. I finally got my opportunity, believe it or not, in the washroom of the Taj Bengal when Ranbir Mahendra and I were the only two people there. To be honest, I had followed Ranbir to the washroom and, like a journalist often does, innocuously asked him if this email was likely to become a major thorn in the flesh for the BCCI. Mahendra, to my relief I must say, confirmed the story and, in fact, added to my understanding and gave me a few more points alluded to by Chappell in the email. My story was right, and all I needed now was further meat. I then approached Gautam Dasgupta, senior Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) official and someone who has wrongly been maligned all these years for giving me the story. Dasgupta was startled to know I had prior knowledge of the email and, in fact, repeatedly requested me not to

write anything. He also asked me to speak to Dalmiya once before I decided to publish anything on the issue. To set records straight, let me also tell you, Dasgupta called me as late as midnight that day and urged me not to publish anything about the Chappell email. I feel bad when he is picked out by people as my possible mole, for he was the one who did his best to stop the story from getting published. Once I had the details of the story in place, I called Sourav in Zimbabwe and mentioned the email to him. To my complete surprise, he mentioned to me that he was aware of it. I was startled to say the least. Sourav informed me that it was Virender Sehwag who had notified him about the email, having read it while he was on his way to practise at Harare after taking a bio break. How Sehwag had managed to see it, however, I don't know. Nor did Sourav tell me about it. What I do know is Sourav knew about the email and was fully aware of its contents. As a result, I asked Sourav to react to my story, but he refused to do so. All he said was if Chappell wants all of this to be played out in the media, it is his choice, but Sourav would not want to discuss such confidential issues in the public domain. He preferred to give his point of view to the BCCI when he was asked to do so. I respected his stance and went ahead with the story the next day and must say it will forever rank as one of the biggest stories I have done in my journalistic career,' recounted Gautam.

I did ask Sehwag for a corroboration of Gautam's

version of events, and he did confirm that he had seen Greg's email, or at least a part of it, and had reported it to Sourav. Sehwag was on his way back to the dressing room for a bio break when Chappell was writing the email to the BCCI. And when Sehwag had come out of the washroom and was sitting next to Chappell for a few minutes before going back to the ground, he did notice what was being written.

It was undoubtedly a huge story and had taken the cricket world by storm once it was published.

Reacting very strongly to some things Chappell had mentioned in his email, Ganguly went on to tell me, 'He mentioned in the mail that I had this habit of pacing up and down the dressing room and it had the effect of unnerving the rest of the players. As a matter of fact, V.V.S. had this habit of dosing off in the dressing room before he batted. That's how he has always been. In Zimbabwe, Greg literally shouted at him one day as he was dosing off. He said V.V.S. was lazy and India was suffering as a result. Laxman was stunned at the rebuke, and most in the dressing room felt uncomfortable on seeing a senior player being spoken to like this. Things were going from bad to worse.'

That Laxman wasn't treated well by Chappell has also been corroborated by Sachin Tendulkar. 'On one occasion, he asked V.V.S. Laxman to consider opening

the batting. Laxman politely turned him down, saying he had tried opening in the first half of his career because he was confused, but now he was settled in the middle-order and Greg should consider him as a middle-order batsman. Greg's response stunned us all. He told Laxman he should be careful because making a comeback at the age of thirty-two might not be easy. In fact, I later found out that Greg had spoken to the BCCI about the need to remove the senior players.'

The temporary truce arrived at in Zimbabwe did not last long. The leaked email meant the captain-coach spat had caused the BCCI more embarrassment as the team returned to India. In an attempted damage control, the BCCI summoned the two to a meeting in Mumbai attended by the top management and three of India's former captains in Srinivas Venkataraghavan, Sunil Gavaskar and Ravi Shastri.

'We were asked to bury the differences and move on. That was the best thing for Indian cricket under the circumstances. Greg wanted to see me for a personal chat at the end of the meeting, but I refused. I was angry at what he had done and for having embarrassed us both. Bringing out dressing room talk in public wasn't the best thing for team morale, and that's what had happened. I said as much to him and informed him that I would see him in a few days and it was best I had a little time to myself. That meeting, however, did not take

place as I was not picked for the forthcoming One Day International (ODI) series against Sri Lanka on grounds that I had not fully recovered from the elbow injury,' Ganguly said while describing the completely unexpected turn of events.

The pain in the elbow had not fully gone away and Ganguly decided to skip the Challenger Series ahead of the next ODI contest against Sri Lanka. To his surprise, he was not picked despite being India's most successful ODI player in the nine years from 1996–2005. 'I called Greg to ask why I had not been picked and was told I had to first prove my fitness and only then could I make a comeback to the team. He said I had missed the Challenger Series and he was not clear if I was fully fit. It was surprising because the Challenger had never been looked upon as a selection trial. I had scored more ODI runs than anyone in the team in the last few years, and it was a shock not to see my name in the team. It was the first time I felt Greg was trying to end my career. At thirty-three, I knew I had years of cricket left in me and immediately went back to playing domestic cricket to prove my fitness. I can also tell you that I was angry at what was happening. More so because I felt helpless. One day, I was so angry that I just went to Eden Gardens and started running. I eventually stopped after doing twenty-one laps of the Eden Gardens which will be at least ten kilometres. I had no idea I had run twenty-one laps and only realized when someone pointed it out to

me.' Ganguly did reasonably well against a strong North Zone attack and got a 100. In fact, on 30 November, when the Indian team was playing South Africa in an ODI in Kolkata, he was away in Maharashtra playing domestic cricket. He scored 159 after picking up 5/75, but it wasn't considered good enough for a spot in the team that was to tour Pakistan. Jagmohan Dalmiya, Ganguly's patron and backer in the BCCI, had lost the BCCI elections to Maharashtra strongman Sharad Pawar and there was more at play than simple cricketing ability.

Though Ganguly was eventually picked for the Pakistan tour at the back of some hectic behind the scenes parleying within the BCCI—including a meeting with the newly elected BCCI President Pawar, who had beaten Dalmiya camp's Ranbir Mahendra in the elections—he did not get too many opportunities in Pakistan to prove Chappell wrong. Rather, what the country remembers is a hostile conversation between Ganguly, Dravid and Chappell on the morning of the first Test at Lahore—a conversation in which Ganguly was seen animatedly arguing his point of view. 'In Pakistan, the talk was about opening the batting. Greg had made it clear to me that Rahul was to bat at number three, Sachin at four, Laxman at five and Yuvraj at six. The opening slot was vacant, and I was told that was the only spot available. I was more than happy to take up the slot and the challenge. On the morning of the first Test, I

had an argument with Rahul on this, which, we did not know, was being shown on television.' Ganguly informed Dravid there was absolutely no need to change the batting order for him and that he was happy to open the innings. He had opened the innings in one-day cricket and it had changed his career forever. 'I believed I could get runs opening the batting in Test cricket and there was no need for the team to make an adjustment in trying to accommodate me in the middle.' Dravid, however, was adamant it wasn't the best thing to do and would send a wrong signal that he was forcing Ganguly to open on his return to the team. He eventually announced his decision to open the innings himself with Ganguly batting at number five. 'Greg did not say much and concurred with Rahul that he should open and I would go in at number five.'

Despite being included in the team for the first Test, Ganguly was not required to bat, with the match meandering to a dull draw. Sehwag stole the headlines with a blazing 254, with Dravid scoring 128 not out. Ganguly was left out of the side in the second Test with India opting to play an additional bowler and was eventually brought back for the third and deciding Test match in Karachi. In a match India lost rather tamely, Ganguly did not do too badly scoring 34 and 37 in the two innings and picking up the wicket of opener Salman Butt in Pakistan's second innings. As proof of his statement—'Greg Chappell did not want me to

continue'—he was dropped subsequently for the ODI series against England and the tour of the West Indies, only to make a comeback for the year-end Test series in South Africa. In the interim, India had won ODI contests against Pakistan, England and the West Indies but were pummelled in South Africa 5–0. And while they beat the West Indies away from home in the Test series—only for the second time in India's history—it was largely owing to the individual brilliance of Captain Dravid. In difficult circumstances, Dravid led from the front in Jamaica with a gritty 81 and later 68 in the two innings in a relatively low-scoring game.

Unceremoniously booted out of the team, Ganguly had spent the whole time pushing himself and scoring runs and picking wickets in domestic cricket, eyeing one final comeback, if possible. 'I had seriously started to doubt if I would ever again be recalled. Greg did not want me, and self-doubt had started to creep in. I knew there was cricket left in me but until I was given an opportunity, there was very little I could do. I pushed myself hard in these months and did all I could to make myself a better player. If I did get an opportunity, I had to make it count.' The opportunity did finally come in the Test series in South Africa in December.

A very senior photojournalist, who had covered Ganguly's career since 1996, called him and asked him not to go to South Africa. He was sceptical of Ganguly's

chances of success and said South Africa had the best fast bowling attack in the world and it would not be easy against four fast bowlers. 'I remember saying to him I appreciated his concern, but if I had to play a few more years of international cricket, I had to do well in South Africa in difficult conditions. You can't be scared and get away in international cricket. You will soon be exposed, and I was not one to run away from this challenge.'

The next few weeks can be labelled as the most interesting phase in the Ganguly-versus-Chappell face-off. The Indian team was in Potchefstroom when Ganguly boarded the flight to South Africa and, on landing, went straight to the ground to join the team practice. 'Greg was cold, not that I expected anything else. It actually worked well for me. I knew it was just me out there in the twenty-two yards with my bat. I could approach the situation with a very clear mind and must say it helped me become a better player. I had overcome every sense of fear, and my mind was free of all clutter. In the practice game, I went in to bat at 69/5 on a wicket that had a very healthy layer of grass and scored a valuable 83.'

There was visible excitement in Ganguly's voice as he talked about this innings. Speaking appreciably faster than at the start of the conversation, he said he felt overjoyed and was eagerly looking forward to playing in the Test match, having got runs under his belt.

Dileep Premachandran, who has closely followed and covered Indian cricket for a decade and more, describes this comeback thus: 'A fellow journalist and I were in Chappell's room at the team hotel. He had opted not to take the team bus to practice, so that he could field a phone call from the BCCI . . . Chappell, a man who could talk passionately and at length about the sport he had graced three decades earlier, was clearly on edge. When he did eventually pick up the phone, his responses were almost monosyllabic. When he hung up, he turned to us and said just three words: "He is back."

"The "he" in question was Sourav Ganguly, instrumental in Chappell being chosen as coach, but deposed as captain within a couple of months of him taking over. The Chappell-Ganguly feud was the ugliest Indian cricket had seen, and its after-effects were being felt more than a year later. When Ganguly eventually arrived, in time for a pre-Test series tune-up in Potchefstroom, the two exchanged a handshake as ginger as that which two South African-born English batsmen exchanged after Textgate more than half a decade later. Ganguly would go on to be India's leading run-scorer in a 2-1 loss . . .' wrote Premchandran.

In the Test match at the Wanderers, Ganguly walked in with the score at 110/4. The top order had been creamed up, and the South African fast bowlers were making the best use of the conditions on offer. India badly needed a

partnership to remain competitive, and Ganguly was the last recognized batsman to go in to bat. The similarities with his debut match were uncanny. In England, in 1996, he was sent in to bat at number three in very difficult circumstances, with the team struggling against the moving ball. One failure and it could all be over for him. Labelled a 'quota' player who had been pushed in at the behest of Dalmiya, Ganguly had to prove himself in the only available opportunity.

In South Africa, he was yet again back to square one. He was no longer the boss who could call the shots. He had made it back to the team against the wishes of the coach, and a failure at the Wanderers could mean curtains for his Test career. To everyone's surprise, and much like England 1996, he played a solid hand of 51 not out. Against a very good South African pace attack in helpful conditions, this half-century turned out to be a very important innings in the context of the match, which India went on to win by 123 runs. 'Most of my teammates were very happy for me, and I must say Greg, too, did come and congratulate. All he said was, "I do not know what happened in the last few months was good or bad but welcome." All I did was smile back at him. Words were not needed,' he said with a wry smile.

India went on to lose the next two Tests, and as Ganguly suggested, "The team was not in the best mental space. Almost every senior player in the team was unhappy

and felt claustrophobic. Players who may have earlier felt that I was the problem element now knew what the reality was. Sachin, Sehwag, Harbhajan, Laxman, Zaheer were all unhappy with Greg and surprised at what he was trying to do. Greg kept telling some of his friends in the media that they had forever overhyped Sachin as god and he was never as good as he was made out to be. It was shocking to hear these stories and what all he was doing. He would get dressing room talk recorded for a documentary being made on him, and no player could freely express himself with Greg around.'

That Ganguly had reasons to be concerned was confirmed by Harbhajan Singh. '*Main yeh nahi janta ki woh kyun aaya tha.* [I'm not sure why he had come to India.] Our cricket did not move forward under him. Rather, we went back by a few years as a result of all he did to Indian cricket. He instilled a fear factor among the boys, and no one was comfortable. He wanted us out of the team and even targeted Sachin! It was a forgettable period in our cricket,' said Harbhajan, while recounting the Chappell era in Indian cricket.

Sehwag and Laxman, two other cricketers I spoke to in the course of writing this book, had similar things to say about the time. While Sehwag was more aggressive and forthright, much like his social media avatar, Laxman, a measured and composed individual, also had some scathing observations to make about the Australian

who had once wanted him out of the team.

Tendulkar, normally soft-spoken and politically correct, was visibly upset and angry each time I brought up the topic of Chappell in the course of co-writing his autobiography, *Playing It My Way*. I remember asking him why Chappell was such a sore point in the course of one of our conversations, and for the first few seconds all he could do was stare at me. He was angry and was trying to compose himself before he started speaking again. Tendulkar, people who know him well will testify, rarely loses his cool, and this was one rare occasion. 'Greg had pushed our cricket back by at least four years,' he said and went on with his outburst, 'Someone like Greg should never talk about ethics. He would give out dressing room talk to the media and often got team meetings recorded for his own documentary. I had suggested to the BCCI not to send him with the team to the Caribbean for the 2007 Cricket World Cup. This was based on a premonition it would all end badly for us with him around. It wasn't possible for the BCCI to do so, and the campaign ended in a disaster.'

Tendulkar, who was pushed down the batting order with Chappell in charge, was forced to bat at number four in the 2007 World Cup, a campaign that will rank as the worst in India's cricket history. While it is unfair to blame Chappell alone for the failure, it has to be said that a team which is mentally not in the right frame

ahead of a big tournament has very little chance of doing well. While the loss to Bangladesh in the tournament-opener was a shocker, India was below par in the knockout game against Sri Lanka and failed to make the second stage of the competition.

What came as a huge surprise to me was Tendulkar saying Chappell had come to his house a few months before the World Cup to ask him to take over the captaincy. This is how the incident has been described in his autobiography: 'Just months before the World Cup, Chappell had come to see me at home and, to my dismay, suggested that I should take over the captaincy from Rahul Dravid. Anjali, who was sitting with me, was equally shocked to hear him say that "together, we could control Indian cricket for years," and that he would help me in taking over the reins of the side. I was surprised to hear the coach not showing the slightest amount of respect for the captain, with cricket's biggest tournament just months away. He stayed for a couple of hours, trying to convince me, before finally leaving.'

Chappell, however, has contested the claim, saying, 'During those years, I only ever visited Sachin's home once, and that was with our physio and assistant coach during Sachin's rehabilitation from injury, at least twelve months earlier than what was reported in the book. We enjoyed a pleasant afternoon together, but the subject of captaincy was never raised.'

Having known Tendulkar well for a decade-and-a-half and having worked with him on the autobiography for close to four years, I find it hard to believe that Tendulkar would have 'lied' about Chappell and the incident was a complete figment of his imagination, as Chappell claims it was.

Soon after the publication of Sachin's autobiography, Ganguly in an interview to Rajdeep Sardesai had this to say: 'In 2005, when I lost my captaincy, the issue was the same. And in 2007, just before the World Cup, the issue was the same. I really feel sad for Dravid because it is not right when you have a captain and then you go at his back and ask or talk to somebody about captaincy. Am sure he did the same thing when I was the captain, he did that with Rahul. It's a very sad situation for anyone and I really feel sorry for Greg Chappell and Indian cricket, that they had to go down to this level.'

Eventually, Chappell was asked to resign from his position as India coach in the immediate aftermath of the 2007 World Cup disaster. Senior players led by Tendulkar complained to BCCI President Pawar that Chappell wasn't helping the team and fans were fast losing patience. In all honesty, the BCCI had no option but to sack Chappell.

It has now been a decade and more since Greg Chappell was removed as India coach. That he is still bitter about

the whole episode and has not been able to forget the humiliation he had to bear is borne out from time to time. Commenting on Anil Kumble's appointment as India coach in June 2016, Chappell suggested to *The Hindu* in an interview: 'Anil Kumble's appointment is inspired. He [Kumble] was the heart to Rahul Dravid's soul of the Indian teams in which they played with such distinction. If they had been blessed to have been surrounded by other selfless individuals whose only aim was to serve the team, the Indian teams in which they played would have been impossible to beat.'

This was clearly an attempt to indict Ganguly, Tendulkar, Sehwag, Zaheer, Laxman and Harbhajan, players Chappell had issues with and wanted out during his tenure as coach. However, it must also be said that despite his statements in the media, each of which is meant as a veiled defence of sorts, his tenure as coach between 2005 and 2007 will be remembered as a period when egos took centre stage to the detriment of the game.

It can also be argued that in the game Chappell was playing, to take control of Indian cricket, he was always fated to lose. Cricket, unlike football, is not yet ready to accept a manager or coach as the real boss. It is, unlike football, very much a captain's team. It was Ganguly's India that lost to Australia in October 2004 or competed in Australia in 2003-04. Ganguly's India won in

Pakistan in 2004 and beat England at Headingley in 2002. John Wright, who was integral to the success of this team, was always a man in the background. Even for inspired decisions like sending Laxman to bat at number three in the second innings of the Kolkata Test match in March 2001, Wright was never given full credit. It is in the very nature of the game to credit a captain for a decision he takes but to credit the team for a decision inspired by the coach. Chappell, during his period as head coach, tried to change this and paid the price for it. Taking on legends like Tendulkar and Ganguly could never have been easy, and it was only a matter of time before Chappell faced the ire of the BCCI. That he did all he did—record dressing room talk for his documentary and speak about Tendulkar to a select few in the media—hastened his dismissal. In a way, Chappell was self-destructive. He was taking on cults like Tendulkar and Ganguly and was doing so without sound logic backing his reasoning. He wanted to drop Zaheer, who, within months of Chappell's ouster, went on to win India a famous Test series in England under Dravid. Zaheer, for the record, was the Man of the Series. He further targeted Harbhajan, who turned out to be one of the architects of India's win in the World T20 in South Africa in September 2007—a tournament that heralded a revolution of sorts in Indian cricket. Finally, he was against Laxman batting in the middle-order, a position he dominated over the next four years till his retirement in 2012.

It is very rare that Tendulkar speaks with such venom. But when he did in April 2007—with Ganguly, Laxman, Zaheer and Harbhajan all backing him—Chappell was a dead duck.

That other coaches, too, have had to give way—John Buchanan in 2009 and more recently Anil Kumble in 2017—in slightly different circumstances, proves beyond doubt that in the Indian cricket set-up, the coach is better off leaving the captain to enjoy the limelight with the rest of the players. Speaking out or courting controversy or pushing their own vision in disregard of the captain's doesn't always work. John Wright, Gary Kirsten and now Ravi Shastri understand this well.

Written in Boria Majumdar's inimitable lucid style, this book is an accurate description of what has transpired on and off the field. His narrative is remarkable for its objectivity and brings forth his undiluted love for the game. The book is a rare addition to the literature available on cricket in India and in the world. A great read and a must for all cricket lovers.

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Releasing this April