

By Sidharth Mishra



India's long-serving cricket Captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni has decided to give up the job of skipper. Ever since he announced his decision last week, just ahead of the meeting of the selection committee, which chose the teams for the one-day internationals and T20 matches, articles eulogising his contribution have flooded the newspaper pages. Today's Notebook will also be in the same genre. In the autumn of 2007, I was in Dehradun to drop my daughter at her boarding school. To overcome the pangs of separation from our child that awaited us, we went out for a family dinner. Cricket was the last thing on our minds. Dehradun then used to be, and still is to an extent, a sleepy city. The restaurant was across the road (the arterial Rajpur Road) from our hotel.

As we came out from the restaurant, we saw a huge procession of cheerful bikers passing on the road, making us wait a while before we could cross and reach the hotel's lobby. It was here that it sank into us that the Indian team under Mahendra Singh Dhoni had won the T20 World Cup beating arch-rivals Pakistan.

Dhoni was the hero of the moment as he had handed over the ball to most underrated, and rightly so, bowler Joginder Sharma to win the day for us.

Poker-faced and slow paced Sharma lived up to the trust which the Captain had reposed in him. From thereon, Dhoni as the Captain of the most loved sports team was to give this country many a moment to cheer. Four years down the lane, he took another unconventional decision. In the 50-over World Cup finals at Mumbai, he promoted himself ahead of Yuvraj Singh in the batting order and won the match and the World Cup.

Soon after India had won the inaugural T20 World Cup, I was in Ranchi on a reporting assignment. A hoarding had gone up outside Ranchi airport. It said, 'Welcome to the city of World Cup winning Captain'. Mahendra Singh Dhoni belongs to Ranchi, a city that was not known as a cricketing destination till this boy with long golden locks from the HEC Colony broke onto the national scene. His locks and helicopter shots mesmerised no less than Pakistan's martial law administrator Parvez Musharraf, who once famously said that he would not 'cede even an inch' to make India happy.

Musharraf's appreciation of Dhoni left millions living east of the Wagah border proud. By December 30, 2014, when Mahendra Singh Dhoni decided to retire from Test cricket, Ranchi had become a cricketing pilgrimage in East Zone, next only to the vintage Eden Gardens of Kolkata. He used his resources and network to get the better of no less than Tatas, who

Man of many moments

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 11 January 2017 00:40

controlled cricket in undivided Bihar and then Jharkhand from their industrial capital at Jamshedpur.

The English language media has hailed Dhoni's decision to retire without a fuss as a representation of his enigmatic personality. If the small town boy from a lower-middle-class family decided to remain aloof from the glamour and glitz that courted him, considering that he held the second most important job in the country, the decision was not meant to be an enigmatic one. It only showcased his temperament to remain focused on the task at hand. He built his dream home in Ranchi, drove his Hummer and superbikes on the roads of the town he loved and married a middle-class girl after an "unnoticed by media" courtship at another small town, Dehradun, away from the metropolitan pizazz. No wonder, under him, a bunch of 'aam cricketers' blossomed into Team India.

Boys from Meerut, Kanpur, and Ghaziabad, away from the known cricketing Meccas of Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru made their way into the team. True to his roots, he did not forget to honour his mentor Saurav Ganguly. Dhoni invited the Prince of Kolkata to lead the team in the last session of his last test. Only an enigmatic Dhoni could have done it. Mahendra Singh Dhoni, the small-town boy who took Indian Cricket to magnificent heights in every form of the game, has become a living legend.

It is seldom that a biopic is even planned for a sportsman who is still playing. But such has been this small-town boy's story that a biopic was not only planned but the film even went on to become one of the biggest grosser of the year at the box office. And it was not charisma of the Khans of Bollywood which brought people to the cinema halls but the magnetism of the personality of the living legend. As the biopic tells us, Dhoni's career was built on making decisive moves at right moments.

As a reporter on his retirement wrote, gut feeling and a sense of timing have always marked Mahendra Singh Dhoni's decision-making process in his illustrious captaincy stint, and he once again showed that when he 'stumped' one and all with his decision to step down as skipper of India's limited overs team. He did not care that the one-day match at Pune beginning on January 15 would have been his 200th as Captain. His gut feeling said that Virat Kohli was ready for the job, and he decided to make way for him.

Having won two World Cups and one champion's trophy for the country, nobody can take away the fact that Mahendra Singh Dhoni would remain India's greatest limited overs matches' Captain. The cricket lovers would never forget the many moments of joy, happiness and pride he has given them.

(Sidharth Mishra is Consulting Editor,
[Millennium Post](#)

.)