



# **Pundits from Pakistan: On Tour with India, 2003-04**

*Rahul Bhattacharya*

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### **Pundits from Pakistan: On Tour with India, 2003-04** Rahul Bhattacharya

A cricketing romp through Pakistan In early 2004, the Indian cricket team set out for Pakistan. Pundits describes the subsequent tour, detailing the matches, the moods, the games and the players. More than merely that, though, it is also a book about the first major sporting encounter between India and Pakistan in 15 years - a period in which the two countries had fought one war and come close to another. What emerges is a fascinating contemporary account of a beautiful game in its most crucial setting, captured through the eyes of a young Indian discovering Pakistan.

### **Pundits from Pakistan: On Tour with India, 2003-04 Details**

Date : Published January 1st 2005 by Picador USA

ISBN : 9780330439794

Author : Rahul Bhattacharya

Format : Hardcover 344 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Sports and Games, Sports, Cultural, India, Travel

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## From Reader Review Pundits from Pakistan: On Tour with India, 2003-04 for online ebook

### Dipra Lahiri says

Rereading after maybe 10 years, and the book still felt fresh, bringing back memories of what perhaps is India's finest tour, vs. arch rival Pakistan in Pakistan. Superb performances from many players in both sides, both the ODI and Test series could have gone either way. The warmth and generosity of the Pakistanis towards their guests are still remembered. Bhattacharya is a gifted writer with an easy turn of phrase and wit.

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### Jashan Singhal says

My first cricket memory is undoubtedly Indian team touring Pakistan in 2004. This book is an amazing amalgam of cricket writing and travelogue. The author, quite glamorously weaves a complete story out of the 2004 tour while carefully setting the stage as to why this tour was important for both countries, going through each and every match intricately and peppering the chapters with a few interviews here and there.

This book has basically three main facets -

1. **Travelogue** : This book can also be considered as a travelogue for Pakistan where we get to see a major chunk of day-to-day life in Pakistan through the eyes of the author. He creates a certain milieu about each Pakistan city which he visited and the reader starts associating those characteristics with that particular city. He also interacts with a lot of locals in each city so as to get a general understanding of the air around it. In particular his vivid juxtaposition of Karachi and Bombay was stoking. He describes the city of Multan like this :

‘CHAR CHEEZE tofa-e-Multan/gard, gada, gurmee-o-goristan.’ There are several English versions of this Persian doggerel. The more literal would be: Four things have been gifted to us by Multan/Dust, beggars, heat and graveyards.

2. **Cricketing Interviews** : The author has a knack for asking the right questions and extracting the right answers from the person being interviewed. He interviews a large number of Pakistani players (of then past and present). He drops by at Danish Kaneria's (the only Hindu player in Pakistani team) home for a chat and cheekily asks his family of which team do they support when India and Pakistan are playing against each other. He talks with the fast bowler prodigy Aaqib Javed and asks him the reason behind the formidable pace attack of Pakistan team since its conception. Then he also interviews the leg-spin legend, Abdul Qadir at his academy and tries to eke out Pakistani secrets. The only Indian cricketer he interviewed was Sourav Ganguly and I was left gasping for more.

3. **Cricket Matches** : Whatever I say would not be enough about the graphic and evocative description of matches given by the writer. It was almost like I was watching the matches with the eyes of my mind. Since I am out of touch with cricket for a few years now, I had to revise my fielding positions to make sense of the different shots played by the cricketers. Hands down, the author nailed this part of the book. He describes player with such stimulating images (sometimes funny) that it pierces your heart.

Author on VVS Laxman:

Or put it this way: strip away the context, strip away the circumstances, strip away the competition and all the rest of the stuff that really make sport ... strip it, strip it, strip it down to a man and a stick and nothing more and the art of VVS barely resonates any less.

Author on Sehwag's carefree style of playing:

Sehwag was still in, still paying heed to the voice of Rafi in his head, 'Barbadiyon ka sog manana fizul tha/Barbadiyon ka jashn manata chala gaya' (Futile it was to mourn my ruin/So I kept on celebrating my ruin), and accordingly raised fifty in fifty-five balls with ten fours, none badly hit.

In short, a great book for all cricket lovers and those who want re-live those glorious days of Indian cricket.

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### **Siddharth says**

Perceptive, breezy, and delightful. Heavily recommended for lovers of cricket and travelogues.

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### **Ashnil Dixit says**

Really fun trip down memory lane. Having been a keen follower of both teams over the years this is a rare book that manages to shed some new light on them and also capture their essence

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### **Vaidya says**

This is my second book by Rahul Bhattacharya. The first one 'The sly company of people who care' was semi-fiction and although his writing was excellent, it suffered from a severe shallowness of plot. But, when you are writing about an India-Pakistan tour with enough twists and sub-plots to bamboozle even fiction writers, you only have to worry about your writing style. And when that's covered, you already have a good book on your hand.

The 2003-04 series is one of my all time favourite India tours. India won both the ODI and test series after much talk of them being made to wipe the floor. But looking back they probably were lucky to run into one of the weakest Pakistani sides while being at one of their strongest ever themselves. And they were also lucky that Gul got injured before the Pindi test.

Bhattacharya starts right at the political winds at that time, with a now on-now off tour before the PM has to step in and say the final word on it. Then he moves on to his struggles to get a visa to cover the tour, finding the hotel, the team landing, etc. Apart from match reports - which are excellent and almost relive the whole series for you, there are interviews of Shoaib Akhtar's family, Aaquib Javed, Abdul Qadir etc in between the matches that keep things interesting.

Yes, there are quite a few pages dedicated to *that* declaration. And thankfully he writes from his own

perspective. How the media and former and current players were happy to jump on it. (The infamous 'Declaration of Independence' by Ian Chappell and Ponting of all people saying "I wouldn't have declared") This is one incident who's resolution Wright, Dravid and Tendulkar would probably take to their graves. And rightly so. Even Wright goes evasive about what really was talked about. But then for the good of the game it was resolved and they got on with it. Kudos to both Dravid and Tendulkar for that.

The best features are of course the match reports and the press conferences. After all these years can appreciate Ganguly's captaincy much better now. You can't help laughing at the excellent playing of the media using his own coterie of journalists. The Nehra 'injury' incident was superbly played. And Bhattacharya's writing style of course only adds to it. He knows how to draw a laugh out. Even about regular things like Inzy's runing, the Dravid-Ganguly running fiascos, etc.

Good stuff! A must read for any cricket fan, I'd say.

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### **Arvind says**

4.5/5 As a teenager, one of my favourite authors was - Sunil Gavaskar. Have read all his 4 books atleast twice. Also, "Sunny Days" was the first cricket tour diary that I read describing India's famous victory in an away series in West Indies in 1971.

While "Sunny Days" allowed me to feel and share d excitement felt by d previous generation, this book made me relive those iconic series wins over Pakistan in 2004. Also, this is part travelogue where d author wanders into the street meeting ppl, and former Pak cricketers/columnists.

The book starts with a brief history of India-Pak cricket and (political) background of this series. And then it is a sophisticated match-by-match coverage interspersed with off the field happenings n travelogue.

The Tendulkar-Dravid controversy over the Multan test declaration was covered in quite some depth. Shoaib Akhtar's nautankis, Inzy quotes, Aaqib Javed, Qadir interview were all fun to read. Commentary n sports-writing is difficult - how not to overstate d obvious without avoiding it altogether, how to add valuable insights for d viewer/reader. This book has done it well.

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### **Nanta says**

4.5 stars. I am shamefully late at reading this but the distance in time I think enhanced my experience of the book. I love reading RB's writing on cricket and was already a fan going into this book. This cricket series is one of my favorites that I remember following closely and the book brought back the heady nostalgia of all the hullabaloo that surrounded it. The book is funny, thoughtful, thrilling, sensitive, part travelogue, part match analysis, part memoir and such a fantastic read overall. Despite knowing the outcome of all the matches, the cricketing bits were also thrilling to read. It made me cry and laugh and just soak in the wonderfulness of that time. Pure gold!

P.S - Popsugar 2018 - A book about or involving a sport.

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### **Ravi Mathur says**

Coming from one of the finest cricket writers this country has seen, this book goes beyond runs scored and wickets taken. Interviews with Aaqib Javed and Abdul Qadir shows that to become a good writer, you need

to have a good ear along with a good eye. He conjures up the poetry of cheap hotels and late-night bus stands, the anguished search for Cybercafes in provincial towns, the charm of fleeting but intense human encounters. It's a bit long but it has a life and a youthful energy. Read it for the vital mix of history, humour and insight.

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### **Aroonav Das says**

The best book/travelogue/reportage on subcontinental cricket ever written. Bhattacharya's prose is mesmerizing.

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### **Ramesh Prabhu says**

In October 1991, I was in the press box at the Sharjah Stadium watching Pakistan's Aaqib Javed decimate the Indian batting line-up in the final of the Wills Trophy.

Aaqib claimed seven wickets for 37 runs, a world record, including a hat-trick: Ravi Shastri, Azharuddin, and Sachin Tendulkar -- all three given out LBW. Two of these decisions were apparently questionable, but that's not the point of this post.

Aaqib Javed was only 19 at the time. How did he even get to play for his country at such a young age and with hardly any cricketing experience?

Here's the story in Aaqib's own words:

"One day when I was in college, Wasim Raja held trials at the Gaddafi Stadium for some camp. I landed up there almost as a joke. Some of my friends were pulling my leg, doing zabardasti. It was the first time in my life that I had entered the Gaddafi Stadium. The system at that trial was that fast bowlers had to bowl two deliveries and bas, that was it. I had my turn, I bowled my two balls. I was sure that nobody was even watching. There was such a crowd, people were talking, hanging about. It was easy not to get noticed. After I finished I kept watching the trials from the sidelines. The more boys that I saw, the more I began to realise that I was actually quite good. But for some reason, I never made it to the short list.

"So I went to Wasim Raja later and told him, 'I think you weren't looking when my turn came. I think I'm not bad. Why don't you give me another chance?' He was a bit surprised, but he said, 'Okay, go ahead.' I bowled three-four balls. They were good balls, outswingers. He selected me for the camp. The camp ran for one month. And at the end of that month, he said, 'Aaqib Javed is the most talented bowler in this camp.' I think that was a huge moment in my life. It was Wasim Raja who unearthed my hidden talent; he made me aware of my potential. That's the point when I became serious about cricket."

Aaqib soon found himself leaving for Australia with the Pakistan team in 1988. And three years later, he was wreaking havoc in Sharjah, winning the final against India almost single-handedly. None of this would have happened if Aaqib had not chosen to make things happen instead of waiting for things to happen.

Because he had confidence in his own ability -- "The more boys that I saw, the more I began to realise that I was actually quite good" -- he had the chutzpah to go up to the "boss" and question his non-selection.

How's that for initiative?

Many of the young people I know would be so much more successful in their lives and careers if only they had more confidence in themselves, and took the initiative and made things happen instead of waiting for things to happen. Like Aaqib Javed.

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This fascinating insight into the rise of a modern fast bowler comes from Rahul Bhattacharya's Pundits from Pakistan, one of the best books I have read about cricket. Bhattacharya began writing on cricket in 2000; this book, which also works wonderfully as a travelogue, was written after India's tour of Pakistan in March-April 2004, which he covered for the Guardian and Wisden.

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### **Manas Barpande says**

From 'Multan ka Sultan' to 'Balaji zara dheere chalo', from the match coverage to press conferences, from the travelogue to inside scoops, this nostalgia-generating machine will take you for a walk down the memory lane while tickling your funny bone all along. Simply the best book on sports that I've read till now.

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### **Wsm says**

An Indian cricket team was coming to Pakistan for a full tour after fourteen years. Until then, Pakistan had dominated India in bilateral matches. On this tour, the tables were turned. For the first time, India beat Pakistan in Pakistan. Pundits from Pakistan is a first rate cricket book. It is also a look at Pakistan through the eyes of a young Indian journalist. It isn't jingoistic as a book of this sort could easily have become. I found myself engrossed, seldom have I found a cricket book so entertaining and in the Indo Pak context, so unbiased.

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### **Amlan Mostakim says**

Cricketer is a great leveler indeed. At least for the India's historical tour of Pakistan. The memories became vivid through Rahul's intriguing writing once again. Actually, it is a more than a sports story, a travelogue, a deceptive voyage to the land of complexities and collisions. And Rahul felt it immensely effortless. A wonderful read!

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### **Umesh Kesavan says**

Tours to Pakistan have a way of discovering talent. On an earlier occasion, it was Sachin Tendulkar. On this one it has to be Rahul Bhattacharya' — Suresh Menon, Deccan Herald

Enough said.

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## **Avishek Bhattacharjee says**

Thanks Rahul for helping us to relive those moments of the memorable victory over Pakistan. As books on cricket tour is almost gone,Rahul's effort on bringing the stories entangled in nook and corner of the cricket crazy nation,from the cricketing brains of Pakistan along with the match events was equally enthralling and fresh as the trip which happened after so many years.By any standard, it was a historic tour, crammed with political significance, significant cricket, and overflow of emotions(mentioning-Food joints,eateries and the immaculate description of meat preparation makes it more apt for a reader). This literary treatment has been paid off successfully and it is one of the finest cricket tour books i have read so far.

Good Job!!

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