

History of the Bombay Cricket Association

1. THE PRE - NATAL DAYS

Exactly a year back, when I wrote the brief history of the Board of Control for Cricket in India for its Golden Jubilee Commemoration Volume, I began the article with the following statement :

"The meaningful event of the birth of any organisation is a beautiful culmination and redemption of all preceding events that give a vision and a dream a physical appearance, a name and a reality. History does not always begin at a point, it is a process of continuity."

If this was true of the Board, it is more so of the Bombay Cricket Association. A historical review of this premier organisation, with its head quarters in the Urbs Prima in India, would not be complete unless the event of its birth is placed against the perspective background of the past, however remote or near it might be.

Cricket in Bombay had already attained such a distinct popularity and status ever before the birth of the Association, that Bombay was already being hailed as the Nursery of Indian Cricket. This fact and also the control of the game in India which was nebulous in character needed bodies both at the National and Provincial levels in order to give it a safe and smooth flow and conduct. The Board was born out of this desire, and so was the Association.

It was the British soldier that brought the game to India, it was, therefore, natural that the pioneers who played this game and also managed it were the White men. A first friendly fixture between a Military XI and an Island XI was played in Bombay in the year 1797, almost two centuries ago ! The affluent Parsi Community immediately took inspiration and the lead from the British rulers and began to play the game with interest and skill. They formed the first Cricket Club the Oriental Cricket Club - 1848, which for reasons mysterious did not live long. They then formed another club in 1850 and named it The Young Zorastrians Club, which exists even today.

The Hindus of Bombay were impressed by the strides the Parsee Community was making and taking a leaf out of their book formed in the year 1866, the Bombay Union Hindu Club, a forerunner of the illustrious P. J. Hindu Gymkhana.

In the year 1884, Sir Dorab Tata formed the Parsee Gymkhana and helped an All Parsee team to make the first ever tour of England in 1886. 'Wisden' unwittingly wrote that 'from a cricket point of view, the tour of the Parsees was a failure'. This probably was a correct estimate from a 'Cricket point of view', but Wisden showed total ignorance of the historical perspective in as much as it did not realise its significant historical impact. This was an important milestone, a harbinger of many more tours to come.

The Parsees, undeterred by the failure of their first team, rallied to send another team to England in 1888. The effect of these two visits became evident, when the first English team under the captainship of G. F. Vernon visited India in 1889. Lord Hawke followed suit and brought another team in 1892. The importance of this second visit must not be lost sight of, as Lord Hawke was to preside over the destinies of the M.C.C. during the years' 1914 to 1919, at a time when anaji was making a gigantic indelible impression in England by his superlative performances. For this there was an alarming lull till the end of the first decade of the new country, probably because of the absence of a central federal organisation to control and organise such visits.

In Bombay, however, the popularity remained unwaned, the main reason being the annual competitive festivity in the form of the famous Triangular and Quadrangular tournaments. The origin of the Triangulars could easily be traced to the Presidency matches played in Bombay annually between Parsees and Europeans. Lord Harris, who was Governor of the Bombay Presidency from 1890 to 1895 was to a great extent responsible for the inauguration of these matches, which were played from 1895 to 1906 in Bombay and Poona in alternative years. The Hindus entered the fray in 1907, to make the event Triangular and the Muslims joined in 1912 to make it Quadrangular. Although communal in character, these tournaments never whipped communal tensions. For 10 continuous days, it was a gala carnival and everyone, players and spectators alike, looked forward to the event with keen interest and great expectations.