

## Syed Kirmani (India 1976 to 1986)

On afternoons when India were batting and his services were not needed, Syed Kirmani invariably could be found in a quiet area of the dressing-room sound asleep. Once during the Indian tour of England in 1971 Kirmani was woken up roughly one afternoon by one of the Indian managers and told to watch Alan Knott's keeping. When the manager left Syed retired to the physio's room and resumed his slumbers. The manager returned to the dressing-room and was angered not to see an alert Kirmani. Covering for him, Syed's team-mates explained that he had decided to watch Knott from behind the sightscreen. Much impressed, the manager sang his praises. The alibi reflected the affection held by his colleagues for Syed; a warm and charming man, polite to a fault. Like Ray Illingworth with his explanations for cricketing calamities<sup>1</sup>, Syed provoked much mirth during his career with his excuses whenever he was late: everyone knew he had always overslept.

Syed Kirmani toured England with the Indian Schools team in 1967 as a batsman. He was not a daring stroke-player. However, Sunil Gavaskar regarded Syed as more than a useful batsman and, because he made few errors, difficult to dislodge: "Kirmani's mistakes were induced by the bowler". Sound credentials for a nightwatchman. His Test innings as nightwatchman are shown below. Entries coloured green are decisive, important (but not decisive) innings are shaded yellow and failures are shown in red. This code is used for the frequent, successful Test nightwatchmen who have made more than one decisive contribution. As well as describing those, their important nightwatchman innings are also covered.

Date	Opponents	Venue	In	Out	Minutes	Score
Dec 1977	Australia	Melbourne	40-1	89-2	82	29
Nov 1978	Pakistan	Karachi	122-2	143-3	Data N/A	4
Sep 1979	Australia	Chepauk, Madras	80-1	240-5	235	57
Sep 1979	Australia	Bangalore	61-2	120-3	81	30
Nov 1979	Australia	Wankhede, Bombay	231-3	458-8d	306	101*
Jun 1982	England	Manchester	25-3	173-6	161	58
Dec 1982	Pakistan	Karachi	112-5	113-6	6	1
Jan 1983	Pakistan	Karachi	178-4	218-5	98	18
Oct 1983	West Indies	Kanpur	29-5	90-7	Data N/A	20

### *Syed Kirmani's NWM Appearances in Test matches*

#### *Australia in India, September – November 1979*

Syed Kirmani made his mark as a nightwatchman when India hosted Australia in 1979-80. This was the first Australian Test tour of India for ten years. An agreement had been reached between the ACB and Kerry Packer, which meant that Australian players who had taken part in WSC would be available for the series against England and the West Indies in December 1979 and January 1980. Consequently, the ACB asked for an early tour of India so the tourists, none of whom had played in WSC, would be home in time to fight for representative places against the returning Packer players. Thus the India/Australia series in 1979-80 began in the monsoon season and rain affected the first two Tests. That turned out to be unfortunate for Australia who had the better of the first half of the tour. Although ten of their 15 players had never toured for their country before, they had two tour matches before the First Test and settled down admirably.

In contrast, India had been home for only a few days when the First Test started, having been in a thrilling match against England at the Oval a week before. At least Syed was fresh, as he had been dropped for the tour of England. This omission was a shock that agitated Sunil Gavaskar considerably. Srinivas Venkataraghavan sat on the selection committee and perhaps he remembered Kirmani dropping a fair few catches (painfully from the bat of Viv Richards) off his bowling in the West Indies in 1976.

<sup>1</sup> After Raymond had been caught behind, David Gower remembered the explanation; "T'umpire must have given me t'wrong guard." Illingworth would have sympathised with P G Wodehouse's character: "the least thing upsets him on the links. He misses short putts because of the uproar of the butterflies in the adjoining meadows." (*The Clicking of Cuthbert*, 1922)

Also influencing the selectors may have been the fact that Kirmani, after the 1977-78 tour of Australia, had been approached by WSC and was known to be amenable to joining. This came to nought as WSC ended. Whatever the reason, the decision to drop him stunned Kirmani. He had arranged to be married before the tour party left for England so he could take his wife with him for a honeymoon. Gavaskar reckoned Syed was dealt a tremendous psychological blow but fought back bravely when reinstated for the Australian tour.

#### *First Test, Madras, September 1979*

Everyone suffered in the extreme heat and breathless humidity in the Chepauk Stadium in Madras. Australia batted first and made 390, largely because of a record third wicket stand of 222 between captain Kim Hughes and Allan Border. Hughes was a little disappointed, telling the *Sydney Morning Herald*; "I wanted at least 450, in fact 500." Nevertheless, he was pleased with what followed, as the *Times of India* reported: "the Indian innings began with its usual alarms." Gavaskar survived the scares of edging his first ball just short of the slips and then escaping from what looked like a plumb leg-before when the score was 20. Despite these disappointments, the Australian bowlers stuck to their task. All of them suffered from heat exhaustion. Spinner Jim Higgs struggled to establish a grip on the ball, despite wearing sweat bands to stop perspiration running down his arms onto his hands, but just before the close he dismissed Chetan Chauhan. Kirmani came in as nightwatchman. He faced three balls before the close of play.

The third day started with dim prospects for a result in conditions described as brutal - even worse than the previous two days - but Australia sought the early breakthroughs that might give them a chance of establishing a winning position. Rodney Hogg dismissed Sunil Gavaskar in the second over of the day, "rich reward" (*Times of India*) as he might well have had him the day before. Gundappa Viswanath was soon out, leaving India in trouble on 122 for three. Australia then dropped Dilip Vengsarkar in the slips off Higgs, and when Kirmani had made 19 he lofted the same bowler high to fine leg. Hogg, clearly sapped by bowling in such conditions, could only manage to jog in and the ball dropped in front of him. Progress was very slow, runs being hard to find against wonderfully tight bowling in the conditions. All the bowlers, even spinner Higgs, had to go off to recover from the heat.

Kirmani and Vengsarkar batted on, adding 99 runs for the fourth wicket and "propping up the innings" (*Sydney Morning Herald*). Then Vengsarkar was dismissed by Higgs. As the heat and humidity took their toll on the bowlers, Kirmani began to play "bold and handsome strokes, cutting and pulling anything short of a length". Syed, "retrieving his reputation", reached his fifty just before the new ball was taken. Soon afterwards, cutting at Hogg, he was taken in the slips by Border. Kirmani had batted for nigh on four hours for 57, taking his side to a safe position of 240 for five. Kapil Dev and the remainder of the batting then went on to give India a first innings lead of 35. Syed had made an important contribution, but the Test was so affected by rain that a draw was likely even had he failed.

<b>Australia 390</b>		
<b>India 1<sup>st</sup> Innings (overnight 80-1: Gavaskar 44, Kirmani 0)</b>		
SM Gavaskar	c Wood b Hogg	50
CPS Chauhan	c Wright b Higgs	26
SMH Kirmani	c Border b Hogg	57
GR Viswanath	c Hughes b Higgs	17
DB Vengsarkar	c Whatmore b Higgs	65
Yashpal Sharma	lbw b Higgs	52
Yajurvindra Singh	c Wright b Yallop	15
N Kapil Dev	c Hurst b Higgs	83
KD Ghavri	not out	23
S Venkataraghavan	lbw b Higgs	4
DR Doshi	c Hogg b Higgs	3
Extras		30
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Total (130.3 overs)		425
FOW: 1-80, 2-89, 3-122, 4-221, 5-240, 6-281, 7-371, 8-394, 9-417		
<b>Australia 2<sup>nd</sup> Innings 212-7</b>		

The Second Test followed a similar script. Australia made a decent total and put India under pressure. Kirmani again was nightwatchman. This time he stayed just long enough to make sure India had a sound start to the morning. Rain intervened once more and the match was drawn. Australia continued in the starring role for the Third Test. Taking a first innings lead of 33 they then had Rodney Hogg upstage the batsmen by taking 3 for 14 at the end of a long day to reduce India to 261 for seven. The next day Australia forgot the plot, allowing the last three wickets to add 50 runs, and thus faced a stiff target of 279 to win. Then, as Border remembered: "We crashed for 125 runs ... on a pitch at Kanpur that was a horror for Australian batsmen because it was playing at heights between the knee and the ankle."

The next two Tests were drawn although Australia made an excellent effort to win the Fifth Test to preserve a chance to win the series. Kim Hughes declared on the last day leaving India 247 to win off 70 overs on a pitch that had offered some decent turn. *Wisden* reported that the heavy roller calmed the pitch, and Australia struggled to make inroads. They managed to reduce India to 123 for 4 at which point Border thought: "we can pull this off." They then dropped a catch. Yashpal Sharma began to throw the bat. Amid fireworks exploding in the stands and bells ringing, the ball went to all parts during his 85. India reached 200, still with six wickets left, but not much time. The umpires then decided that the light was too poor to continue (perhaps the smoke drifting across the field didn't help either) bringing to an end the game and several stands which the spectators ignited in protest.

#### *Sixth Test, Bombay, November 1979*

A couple of days after the conflagration at Calcutta, a long journey across India brought the teams to Bombay. Seeking to level the series, Australia could do little as India put on 192 for the first wicket. Chauhan was then dismissed, but the position remained fairly grim. In desperation, or a flash of genius, or simply because his other bowlers were spent, Hughes tossed the ball to an occasional bowler. Twenty minutes later Border had accounted for Vengsarkar and Gavaskar. India finished the day on 231 for three. The *Times of India* reported: "After looking all set for a massive score India were compelled to send Syed Kirmani in to battle out the last minutes. And it was a compliment to the Australian attack which had beat its heart out without breaking, through this long hard day."

In the morning, Australia struck hard. Higgs took a brilliant catch off his own bowling as Viswanath mistimed a drive to make the score 240 for four. "With Viswanath gone for 10 within half an hour's play it looked as if the innings would be razed to the ground, especially as Hogg was virtually at the batsmen's throats" (*Times of India*). At the other end with the score on 253, Kirmani played a cut off Peter Sleep which flew straight to slip: "[Dav] Whatmore at slip ducked and staggered like a boxer taking the count. It is possible that he lost sight of the ball against the background of the massed stands" (*Times of India*). Chance spilled<sup>2</sup> but Australia stuck to their guns. Hogg relished the new ball, bowling a tremendously hostile spell. Yashpal Sharma edged a ball to Hilditch in the slips which he could only parry, but Whatmore had no problems sighting the rebound; India 272 for five. Hogg harried Mohinder Armanath for an over with fierce bowling, and then forced him off balance when he attempted to hook an excellent bouncer: Armanath out hit wicket; India 281 for six.

Rodney Hogg had had a difficult tour struggling with asthma attacks, poor footholds, a century of no-balls, heat exhaustion and slow wickets. "A nightmare tour, but Kim never gave up on me. He had faith and I'm thankful for that." Hogg repaid his captain. With India reeling from having lost two wickets in short order, Hogg trapped Kapil Dev dead in front, leg before. The motto of the young Australians for the tour was "*To lose patience is to lose the battle*"; a slogan spotted by Higgs in the Madras slums. Kim Hughes had observed the credo, twice apologising to umpires for outbursts from Hogg during the series. But he admitted to the *Sydney Morning Herald* that he came close to losing the battle and leading his team off when the umpire reprieved Kapil Dev. He was generally not inclined to comment on decisions, "but we've had this sort of thing all along [during the series] and I'm sick and tired of it. It's time to stand up and be counted. I felt like saying to the players 'OK boys, let's pack the bags and go off'". For Rodney Hogg, Dev's escape was the disappointment that broke him.

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<sup>2</sup> Willie Watson once missed a catch off Fred Trueman at first slip. Frank Tyson remembered: "There was the usual dramatic pause which was ended by Willie saying 'Come on Fred, I've a train to catch.'. Trueman: "Doant worry, lad, tha'll miss it - same as tha' does everything else."

Kapil Dev did not have long to live however. Although dropped on 6, Higgs dismissed him soon after lunch for 17, leaving India on 327 for seven. Amid all this drama, Kirmani batted on, “the spine of India” (*Sydney Morning Herald*). After the blemish early in the morning, Syed was largely secure from then until lunch, preventing a complete collapse. In the afternoon, with Karsan Ghavri, he took the game away from Australia and secured the series. Kirmani wobbled a little outside the off stump against Geoff Dymock when he was in the eighties, but having enabled India to almost double their score, he became the third nightwatchman to score a century when he lifted Dymock to the boundary. India then declared and Kirmani returned undefeated on 101. The *Times of India* remembered: “He hit 16 fours from stunning cover-drives and well-timed pulls. A thumping on-drive off a half volley from Sleep and a square cut off Dymock stayed in the memory at the end of the day. There were numerous genuine strokes in his innings of five hours as well as a few spurious ones. But the true worth of his performance lay in the burden he shouldered. He carried the score from 293 for six at lunch to 420 for seven at tea. His presence assured that there would be no collapse and at the declaration the Australians made way to generously applaud him to the pavilion.”

<b>India 1<sup>st</sup> Innings (overnight 231-3: Viswanath 9, Kirmani 0)</b>		
SM Gavaskar	c Hughes b Border	123
CPS Chauhan	b Dymock	73
DB Vengsarkar	c Whatmore b Border	6
GR Viswanath	c & b Higgs	10
SMH Kirmani	not out	101
Yashpal Sharma	c Whatmore b Hogg	8
M Armanath	hit wicket b Hogg	2
N Kapil Dev	c Whatmore b Higgs	17
KD Ghavri	c sub (Porter) b Dymock	86
NS Yadav	not out	0
Extras		32
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Total (8 wickets declared; 149 overs)		458
FOW: 1-192, 2-222, 3-231, 4-240, 5-272, 6-281, 7-327, 8-454		
<b>Australia 160 and 198</b>		

Australia’s chance of squaring the series had gone. Indeed, they lost the Test by an innings. Umpiring decisions continued to befuddle them. Kim Hughes was given out caught and walked disconsolately back to the pavilion wearing the red rosette of the ball’s impact on the sleeve of his shirt close to his shoulder. Whatmore was given leg before to ball pitching outside leg stump. Even the local Indian press was moved to comment; “the general consensus was that Australia had been cruelly used<sup>3</sup>.” The youngsters had a tough tour but had the better of much of the play. Syed Kirmani, returning to the Indian team, justified the selectors with marvellous batting, scoring 285 runs at an average of 57 (compared to 171 runs in 12 innings in the two series before the tour to England for which he was dropped). Syed was selected for the next tour to England in 1982.

#### *England v India, Second Test, Manchester, June 1982*

India’s previous tour to England in 1979 culminated, as mentioned above, in a thrilling Test at the Oval. India, having to make 438 to win, set about the job with a will. They reached 389 for three with Sunil Gavaskar on 221. However, Ian Botham dismissed him and took another wicket too. When the last over began India needed 15 to win. *Wisden* recounted: “As the teams fought each other to a standstill, there were many Englishmen in the crowd who would not have displayed their customary dejection at a Test defeat. A target of 15 from the last over was too much, and the climax came with fielders encircling the bat.” Play ended with India on 429 for eight.

<sup>3</sup> Complaints about local umpires are a fundamental sustenance of the game, from the Test arena to the village green. W E W Collins in “Leaves from an Old Country Cricketer’s Diary” (1908): “The native umpiring in Ireland appealed to me on the whole as combining impartiality with a cheerful indifference to facts and criticism.”

The 1982 series, held after India had hosted and beaten England a few months before, began at Lord's under a cloud. India objected to David Constant standing in the first Test. They disagreed with his rulings in the tour match against Yorkshire and felt he had made a bad decision to start the *Prudential Trophy* game at Headingley on time; believing the pitch was too wet, as the covers had leaked during a storm, and the light too poor. There was a suspicion, picked up by Peter Roebuck in his journal for *The Cricketer*, that India also felt Constant had made some poor decisions against them at the Oval in 1979. The TCCB removed Constant for the series. Laurel and Hardy could have stood in the First Test with little effect on the result. India were shot out for 128 in reply to 433 and England, despite the minor hiccup of falling to 23 for three, managed to knock off the 65 runs needed to win.

Manchester rain, that constant harbinger of cricket matches, affected each day of the Second Test. The pitch was bare at one end and England played two spinners. Doubting the wicket would last England chose to bat. Dilip Doshi<sup>4</sup> and Madan Lal reduced them to 161 for five. Ian Botham marched out to the middle and in short order laid waste to India's aspirations. Deciding that whirlwind scoring was the best policy on a wearing pitch, Botham reached his half-century in a mere 46 balls; 46 of the runs coming in boundaries. England closed on 239 for five. In the morning, Suru Nayak made the mistake of dealing Botham a painful blow on the left foot. *Wisden* noted "any discomfort Botham must have felt was minimal compared to the agony he inflicted on India's bowlers." Like an injured bull Botham rampaged, rendering his runner superfluous by scoring 32 with seven boundaries to reach his hundred. Botham finally ran out of steam for 128 dissipated by two sixes and 19 fours. As if a curtain on a virtuoso performance, rain then fell. No more play was possible that day.

Rain continued to disrupt play the next morning and afternoon. England's innings of 425 finally ended just before five o'clock. With 17 overs to bowl that evening, Bob Willis set England off by dismissing Shastri (fending off a short one) and Gavaskar (brilliantly taken by Chris Tavare at slip). With India eight for two, Vengsarkar might have settled for seeing out play without further mishap. Instead, trying to force Derek Pringle off the back foot, he was snaffled by fourth slip. Syed Kirmani in as nightwatchman saw out the day's play.

Although rain had interfered with the match, England harboured hopes of running through India and forcing them to bat again. Kirmani and Viswanath started well "and saved India's innings from possible disaster" (*Times*). Syed, "providing the grit and substance all through the morning" (*Times of India*), batted safely but aggressively punishing half-volleys and cutting and forcing Pringle off the back foot. Kirmani had believed India had been unduly defensive at Lord's and his approach inspired Viswanath. "Kirmani drove with panache, persuading Viswanath to unleash his cuts", reported Peter Roebuck. The pair had coped with two needless interruptions of a few minutes for bad light to take the score to 112. Viswanath then fell to Botham top-edging a cut behind. Encouraged Botham bowled a hostile over to Yashpal Sharma, who barely survived and India lunched on 113 for four, Kirmani with 33 of them.

Syed continued through an afternoon of absorbing cricket "enterprising in attack and equally secure in defence, providing the guts of the afternoon". On 136 he lost Sharma to Phil Edmonds who was getting the occasional ball to turn sharply and keep low. Syed reached his half-century, driving through the offside "as if Viswanath had passed on the torch to him." Two and a half hours of fine batting was brought to an end by a wonderful ball from Edmonds. Kirmani's 58 included eight fours and had taken India to 173 for six. Tom Graveney observed for *Cricketer International*:

*"I suppose when India were 35 for 3 on Saturday evening facing England's big total, the majority of people, myself among them, were looking for the expected collapse. As we all know the India put on an absolutely magnificent exhibition on Sunday to make the game a very even contest ... Kirmani played [his] shots as though it was just another game. This positive play must have given a great deal of confidence to the players that followed."*

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<sup>4</sup> As well as flummoxing opposition batsmen, Dilip could floor folk with his wit. Once during his time in county cricket Dilip heard a team-mate say; "That chap's a pain in the neck". To which Dilip rejoined; "I have a rather lower opinion of him."

Syed Kirmani had made India safe. Now Sandeep Patil, confidence personified, pushed India on towards parity with a glorious attacking innings, which included mauling Willis for six fours in one seven-ball over. With Kapil Dev and Madan Lal, Patil took India to 379 for eight at close of play. The last day was lost to rain and the Test was drawn. Botham carried on his fine batting by scoring 208 in England's 594 in the final Test, which also ended in a draw.

England 425		
<b>India 1<sup>st</sup> Innings (overnight 35-3: Viswanath 15, Kirmani 0)</b>		
SM Gavaskar	c Tavare b Willis	2
RJ Shastri	c Cook b Willis	0
DB Vengsarkar	c Randall b Pringle	12
GR Viswanath	c Taylor b Botham	54
SMH Kirmani	b Edmonds	58
Yashpal Sharma	b Edmonds	10
SM Patil	not out	129
N Kapil Dev	c Taylor b Miller	65
S Madan Lal	b Edmonds	26
SV Nayak	not out	2
Extras		21
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Total (8 wickets; 104 overs)		379
FOW: 1-5, 2-8, 3-25, 4-112, 5-136, 6-173, 7-269, 8-366		

The following year was notable for Syed. In April 1983 he opened the bowling for India against the West Indies in the Fourth Test at Bridgetown. West Indies needed one to win, and Kirmani presented them with a no-ball as his first delivery. As no-balls did not then count against a bowler, Syed recorded figures in the scorebook of 0-0-0-0. Later in 1983, Kirmani won the best wicketkeeper award in the *Prudential* World Cup, sensationally won by India.

Syed was to move to Bollywood<sup>5</sup>. Sandeep Patil, dashing batsman at Manchester in 1982, was one of India's World Cup heroes in the following English summer. His charisma got him cast in 1985 as lead in the Bollywood film *Kabhi Ajnabi Thay*. Turning in a sound performance Sandeep was unexpectedly over-shadowed by a bit-part actor: Syed Kirmani, playing a karate-chopping villain who comes good. "In our original script, Kirmani was not included," wrote Patil in his autobiography. "He came in only because he was keen to perform some kind of role. We literally had to find him a place in the movie. The [fight] scene between Kiri and me got tremendous publicity." No longer on the silver screen, the image of Syed Kirmani can now be viewed in the huge mural created by Raul Dravid's mum, Pushpa, at the Chinnaswamy Stadium.

<sup>5</sup> Bollywood and Hollywood, at various times, have been subjected to keen censors. After risqué pictures had prompted individual States to introduce almost 100 movie censorship bills in 1921 and a series of scandals among the stars, the studios appointed Presbyterian Elder, Will H Hayes to clean up Hollywood. The Hays Office, established in 1922, issued moral censorship guidelines which would be adopted by the US film industry in 1930 as the Hays Code. Gene Fowler, writer of Hollywood screenplays in the 1930s, quipped; "Will Hays is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in clean postures."

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