



INDIAN SPORT: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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INTRODUCTION

Sports play vital role in our life in many ways. They help people in achieving physical fitness and mental strength. Like excellence in speaking is music, **excellence in movement is sports**. Thus, sports encourage us to excel in all fields of our life, be it studies or job or social relations. Besides, the statement that “the battle of Waterloo was won on the play fields of Eton”, implies that sports help to develop a spirit of sportsmanship and **inculcate lasting values** including discipline, hard work and patriotism in people.

But perhaps the most significant aspect about sports is that they are associated with **morale of the people**. Indeed, when India wins a cricket match, the whole country feels victorious. I would like to evoke an incidence in this regard. After dismantling the apartheid policy and repealing apartheid legislation, South Africa held its first universal elections in 1994. At that time, there were widespread tensions between ‘white’ and ‘black’ factions of the society. South Africa hosted 1995 Rugby World cup. The then president Nelson Mandela, realizing the importance of South African performance in boosting morale of the people as well as for racial harmony, supported his team passionately by meeting the players many times and being present in the stadium to watch all their matches. Consequently, South Africa won the Rugby World cup and in an iconic moment in the history of the sports, Nelson Mandela, wearing a Springbok Rugby shirt and baseball cap, presented Cup to South African captain Francois Pienaar. The moment is thought to be one of the most famous victories of any sport.

We are a Nation of 1.2 billion people but its excruciating to say that we stand nowhere at the world stage in sports. In **2012 Olympic Games**, India won only 6 medals and ended at **55th position** in the medal tally which is nothing short of being disgraceful for 2nd largest nation in the world and one of the fastest growing economies. In this post, I will try to throw light on major issues with Indian sports and potential solutions.



Administrative issues are the prime concern with Indian sports. There is no common code/rule/legislation/law for governing the administration (elections, funding, schedules and events, qualifications and time limit for different admin posts etc.) of different sports associations. These associations have their own constitutions and rules. As a result, they are neither transparent nor fair to athletes as well as officials. A tussle between Indian Hockey Federation (IHF) and Hockey India (HI) about which is the official governing body has caused enormous harm to Indian hockey including the worst ever show by Indian hockey in the Olympics with 12th and last position in 2012 Olympics. Another example is of Archery Association of India (AAI) which is being headed by same person since last 40 years. A law should be enacted to tackle above problem which would include guidelines for basic administration structure for all sports. Such umbrella legislation is in process but has not been put into parliament due to opposition by some sports associations.

Inappropriate representation of ex-sportspersons in administrative bodies has been a common problem with all sports in India. Most of the associations have their official staff which is alien to that sport. It leads to dissatisfaction among players as their problems are not understood and solved by that superimposed staff. A recent clash between Tennis players and All India Tennis Association (AITA) can be cited in this regard. As a solution to this problem, a minimum quota of 50% should be reserved for ex-sportspersons for administrative posts in all associations. Besides, decisions should not be imposed on the players and their advice and feedback should also be considered.

Absence of **sports hierarchy** from grass root level to national level is another major concern with Indian sports. There is no appropriate mechanism to nurture the talent at school, block and district levels and then promote the talented athletes to state and national levels. As a result, many gifted athletes are not able to reach at the topmost echelons of sports and are lost. And **dearth of sports infrastructure at grass root level** makes things worse. As a solution, sports associations should be established at block and district levels which will supervise respective sports academies at that level. These associations should have competent staff to administer sports facilities at the academies as well as other needs of athletes like proper nutritional plan, anti-doping awareness campaign, fair and timely selection trials, conditioning



camps, overseas exposure etc. These academies should become a breeding ground for the future champions.

A huge amount of money is required in contemporary sports which brings our attention to funding. In India, sports funding is inadequate as compared to global standards. For example, we spend only one-fourth of that of China does on sports. Besides, most of funding in India comes from the government as compared to USA where 90% of the endowment comes from private organizations. Though Indian corporate sector is willing to lend more financial support to Indian sports (as it's not a big deal for them to spend few crores as a part of CSR and they get publicity in return) but **due to lack of transparency** in spending and adequate incentives, they refrain away from throwing their money in a 'black box'. Improving transparency in sports spending is the only way out along with providing more incentives to corporate sector. **Technology** can be exploited in this regard as a part of **e-governance** to put all the data online regarding sports budget, sponsorships and spending. Beside, all the **sports associations should be brought under RTI**. A current such proposal by Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs is facing tooth and nail opposition by BCCI and some other regulating bodies.

Competing with world class athletes at Olympics and other stages call for **world class facilities and international exposure** of our athletes which is lacking in Indian sports. A glimpse of this was evident when world no. 1 women archer and India's finest medal hope Deepika Kumari failed even to qualify for finals in London Olympics 2012 because she was not able to cope with prevailing windy conditions and was ruled out in qualifying round. Many of our athletes find it difficult to adjust to the foreign climate and food. Regular overseas conditioning and fitness camps could be organized to fix this problem.

Today, sports have widened their dimensions and mental fitness has become an essential aspect of present-day sports due to cut-throat competition and rising professionalism in international sports. In India, unfortunately, the training is solely sports oriented with **little work done on the psychological robustness of the athletes**. Stress busting techniques and mental counseling help the athletes a lot to remain focused on the field. There is a growing trend in the world to have psychotherapists, mental counselors, dieticians and nutritionists with the teams but this practice is mostly absent in case of Indian sports.



As already mentioned, sports are an outcome of human nature to achieve excellence and perfection but in India, sport is not seen as a viable career option due to **lack of remuneration and job security** to athletes. As a result, parents hesitate to choose it as a profession for their child and focus more on academic excellence. Further, there is no reservation of seats under **sports quota in topmost educational institutions** of the country which is against the practice followed globally. For example, the prestigious Ivy League Schools are a hub of sports excellence along with academic brilliance and produce many Olympians and international sport champions every year whereas this is not the case with IITs and IIMs in India which focus only on academics. As a solution, all government enterprises including PSUs should be directed to employ sportspersons on certain percentage of vacancies. Besides, private sector should be incentivized to employ more and more sportspersons. Such incentives could be tax rebates and relaxing the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) spending under Companies Act. Further, govt. should make a provision to pay **stipend** to state, national and international level players—something similar to ‘sports allowance’ in many countries. In addition, to augment old age security for athletes, govt. should provide for **pensions** to the retired sportspersons. At the same time, certain percentage of seats should be filled under sports quota in the esteemed educational institutions of the country.

As evident in other aspects of Indian culture, sport is also marked with the problem of **gender bias** with women finding it hard to reach at the topmost echelon of Indian sports. Sports are considered ‘too rough’ for Indian women to participate and hence they remain by and large male dominated. However, the picture has changed significantly in last few years with emergence of new generation of women athletes in sports like Badminton, Tennis, Shooting, Archery, Boxing, Athletics, Weightlifting and Wrestling. But still, there is a long way to go and there remains a lot of potential which is yet to be tapped. Let’s hope that recent Bronze medal win by Indian women Hockey team in Junior Women Hockey World Cup 2013 will act as a catalyst in this regard. **Media and Cinema** can play a constructive role in transforming Indian sports by spreading awareness, popularizing and revolutionizing the women participation. Recent interest shown by Indian media and cinema (like Chak De India) to highlight the performance of women athletes is a step in right direction.



In recent times, **doping is the latest setback** to hit the Indian sports. Indian athletes are usually from poorer backgrounds and may not have had access to education and therefore depend entirely on their coaches and supporting staff for making sure they do not consume prohibited substances. As a result, a number of times they unknowingly take prohibited substances as dietary supplements. But intention is of no significance in a doping case and as a result, they face suspensions and stripping-of medals. Recently six Indian athletes faced 2 years ban including Ashwini Akkunji (double gold medalist in Asian Games), Sini Jose and Mandeep Kaur (both 400m relay gold medal winner at CWG) and Manjeet Kaur ended her career as she refused to submit samples to NADA. Spreading awareness is the only solution to this problem. **A basic course should be introduced on ‘drugs and nutrition’** at the various academies and camps for all possible sporting events. Over time, it should be made a compulsory requirement for the sportspersons to acquire a certificate from the course before they participate in state and national level tournaments.

There is enormous potential in Indian sports which remains unexploited till now. But now time has come for us to reiterate our commitment and redefine our approach towards sports. India’s quest to become a global superpower will remain incomplete until we establish our self as a sports superpower. Since sports are about excelling in our life, if India has to become a prosperous shining valley for the world, sport has to play the role of a lighthouse.

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