



ISSN: 2456-0057  
IJPNE 2019; SP1: 55-59  
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(Special Issue- 1)  
**International Conference**  
**“Sports: An Integral Component of Nation-Building”**  
(February 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, 2019)

## Socio-economic environment of sports

**Dr. PE Somaiah**

### Abstract

The oldest definition of sports in English language, of the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD, defines sports as “anything humans find amusing or entertaining”. Sport (British English) or Sports (American English) includes all forms of competitive physical activity or games, which through causal or organized participation aim to use, maintain or improve physical ability and skills while providing enjoyment to participants and in some cases entertainment for the spectators. Sports can be physical, ball based, mind based, motorized and animal supported.

Sports during the present time are no longer considered as an activity associated with ‘leisure’, ‘entertainment’ or ‘amusement’. It has emerged as a profession for many a people; a status symbol for a Nation; an investment opportunity for a business house; a yardstick to measure the national character, national pride, national health and patriotic fervor; an indicator of a nation’s progress; a symbol of national unity and a global industry worth up to thousand billion dollars. Different sporting events are organized at the International level to enable the nations to compete with each other.

India is the home to a diverse population playing many different sports and games. Cricket is the most popular sport in the country. India, a country with second largest population with immense human diversity, has not made any remarkable impact in the International sporting arena. India’s performance and achievements in the international sporting competition is quite dismal.

India does not have a rich sporting culture. Sporting traditions are very poor in India; Academics tend to be the highest priority for an average Indian household for their children; Sports and physical education are not so prominent in the school and the college curriculum; Few Sports Academies are there to nurture young sporting talents in the country; The country lacks a proper system to identify budding and young sporting talent; Most of the sporting activities happen in the cities and towns; villagers and the tribal people have no access to train and play different sports and games; country lacks Proper sports infrastructure and world-class sports coaches and trainers; Management of sports in the country is quite bad and distressing; A good number of Indian sportspersons lack killer instinct; Social stigma is a hidden feature of Indian sports; Making a career out of sports in India, is quite risky and a challenging task; Promoting and marketing a sport is very important to attract talented men and women to take up sports; The Indian sports are gradually getting elevated to a Sports industry; India is slowly getting transformed from a sports frowning nation to a sports playing nation.

**Keywords:** History of sport, sport in culture, sports and society, management of sports and sports industry

### Introduction

The word Sport comes from the old French word ‘disport’ meaning leisure. The oldest definition of sports in English language, of the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD, defines sports as “anything humans find amusing or entertaining”. According to Sports Accord an association of International sports federations a sport should – have an element of competition; be in no way harmful to any living creature and not rely on any luck element specifically designed into the sport.

Sport (British English) or Sports (American English) includes all forms of competitive

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physical activity or games, which through causal or organized participation aim to use, maintain or improve physical ability and skills while providing enjoyment to participants and in some cases entertainment for the spectators. Usually a sport means a contest or game between two sides, each attempting to exceed the other. Hundreds of sports exist from those between single contestants and those with hundreds of simultaneous participants, either in teams or competing as individuals. Sports are usually governed by a set of rules or customs which serve to ensure fair competition and allow consistent adjudication of the winner.

Sports can be primarily physical such as (Wrestling, boxing, athletics, gymnastics, kabaddi, rugby, judo etc); Primarily ball based such as (Field hockey, cricket, football, tennis, badminton, golf, volleyball handball etc); Primarily mind based such as chess; predominately motorized such as Formula I, Power boating etc; Primarily animal supported such as equestrian.

Artifacts, monuments, structures found in different parts of the world viz China, Egypt, Greece, Iran, India indicate that a number of sports existed even during the ancient times. Greeks created Olympic Games, which during the ancient times were held every four years in a small village in the Peloponnesus called, Olympia.

### Current Trends in Sports

Sports during the present time are no longer considered as an activity associated with 'leisure', 'entertainment' or 'amusement'. It has emerged as a profession for many a people; a status symbol for a Nation; an investment opportunity for a business house; a yardstick to measure the national character, national pride, national health and patriotic fervor; an indicator of a nation's progress; a symbol of national unity and a global industry worth up to thousand billion dollars.

Different sporting events are organized at the International level to enable the nations to compete with each other, show case their sporting talents and prove their sporting strengths to the world. The prominent International sporting events are the Olympics, World championships, European championships, Commonwealth Games, Asian Games, Pan- American Games, Afro-Asian Games and many others. The Olympic Games held once in four years is rated high by the nations of the world. Every nation whether rich or poor, big or small makes it a point to send its best sportspersons to compete in this sporting event. A nation's achievement in the field of sports is judged by the number of medals it wins in the Olympic Games. USA, China, Russia, Japan & South Korea have time and again proved that they are the great sporting powers of the world. At the same time even the poorer countries of the World like Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, etc. have also proved they are no pushovers in the field of sports.

### Indian Sports Scenario

India is the home to a diverse population playing many different sports and games. Cricket is the most popular sport in the country. Football and hockey are popular sports in some states of India. Hockey is the National game of India. Wrestling and Kabaddi two indigenous games are popular in rural India. Many other sports like Tennis, Badminton, Table tennis, Boxing, Volleyball, Handball, Archery, Cycling, and Gymnastics are played across the country. The central and state governments are promoting different sports and games in a big way. Each sport is managed by a Federation with

affiliated units at the state and District level. Launching of the Professional league with the participation of professional clubs in a few games is a new sporting trend. India has hosted and co-hosted several international sporting events over the past few decades, like the Asian Games, Commonwealth Games, South Asian Games, Afro-Asian Games Cricket world cup, Field Hockey world cup, Kabaddi world cup etc.

India, a country with second largest population with immense human diversity, a much better living standard when compared to many other Afro-Asian countries and with a permanent sports administration apparatus at work, has not made any remarkable impact in the International sporting arena. India's performance and achievements in the international sporting competition is quite dismal. Indian sportspersons and teams have not won enough medals at the international level sporting competitions. It is disappointing that a country that has world class talent in various other spheres has not been able to produce world class champions in the area of sports.

India first participated at the Olympic Games in the year 1900 at Paris. Indian athlete Norman Pichard won silver Medal in the 200mts and 200mts hurdles events. The nation first sent a team to summer Olympic Games in the year 1920 and has participated in every summer games since then. India has so far won nine gold medals, seven silver medals and twelve bronze medals, all totaling to twenty-eight medals in the last thirty Olympic Games. The Game wise medals won by India in the Olympic Games are presented in the table below:

S. No	Game	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1.	Hockey	08	01	02	11
2.	Athletics	00	02	00	02
3.	Wrestling	00	01	04	05
4.	Shooting	01	02	01	04
5.	Tennis	00	00	01	01
6.	Weightlifting	00	00	01	01
7.	Badminton	00	01	01	02
8.	Boxing	00	00	02	02
	Total	09	07	12	28

All of India's medals in the Olympic Games have been won by individual sport persons in individual sporting event, except hockey which is team event. The second most populous nation in the world holds the lowest rank in terms of medal per capita in the Olympic Games.

India's medals tally in the Asian Games held since 1951 to 2018 is not very satisfactory either. India has won a total of 671 medals in the Asian Games, while china has won 3187 medals, Japan 3056 medals and South Korea 2235 medals during the same period stated above.

India's performance in the World cup and World Championships in the different sporting events is not so impressive either. Indian hockey team won the World Cup only once, in the year 1975. The Indian cricket team has won the world cup twice. It is only the Indian kabaddi team which has won the World Cup kabaddi title multiple times. There are a very few individual sports persons who have won gold medals at the world Championships like Mary Kom in boxing Sushil Kumar in Wrestling and P.V. Sindu in Badminton.

### Socio-Economic Environment of Sports

India does not have a rich sporting culture. Sporting traditions are very poor in India. The families, societies, communities, educational institutions etc lack interest and zeal in organizing, promoting and encouraging sporting activities amongst the children and the youths. Regular & frequent

sporting events and competitions are a rarity in India, if one takes note of the size and population of the country. Many people think sports is just a time-pass activity or a way to keep oneself physically fit. Some little sporting traditions could be found amongst the Punjabis, Keralites, Kodavas and the tribes of the North East. Only those areas and regions which have some kind of sporting traditions, have contributed quality sports persons for the country and only these have won the medals for the country at the highest level of the sporting competitions. For example the smallest district of Karnataka, Kodagu (Coorg), which has rich sporting tradition has contributed nineteen Olympians to the Nation.

Academics tend to be the highest priority for an average Indian household for their children. Very few households encourage their children to pursue other activities like sports and games during their spare time. A popular Hindi saying roughly translated to English says "If you study hard you will live like a king, but if you play sports you will ruin your life." The public at large believes that sport as a profession for their children offers low remuneration and has a bleak career prospect. As a consequence, very few youngsters get associated with sports and games at very early age. A good number of sports persons who have brought laurels for the country, are in fact late entrants to the field of sports. For instance, Hima Das became an athlete only at the age of seventeen and went on to become a junior world champion at the age of twenty.

Sports and physical education are not so prominent in the school and the college curriculum. It is a part of the school curriculum only in schools affiliated to ISCE. About eighty percent of students in our country are deprived of an opportunity to acquire knowledge about sports and games at a very tender age and also take a decision to pursue a career in the field of sports at a later age. The nation lacks proper sports education system for the students. Due to this factor students are not very passionate about sports and games and also lack inclination towards any sport later in their lives.

There are very few Sports Academies to nurture young sporting talents in the country. The existing sports academies are restricted to a few sports like tennis, swimming, athletics, hockey, shooting and cricket which are beyond the financial reach of many talented youngsters.

The country lacks a proper system to identify budding and young sporting talent. The only programmer which people are aware of is the Sports Authority of India (SAI) National Sports Talent contest (NSTC) scheme. The NSTC scheme scouts' talents in the age group of 8-14 years from the school and nurtures them into future medal hopes by providing scientific training and other facilities. It is often alleged that, many a times the best and talented youngsters are deprived of a chance to get selected under these programmes, due to favoritism and nepotism by the officialdom.

Most of the sporting activities happen in the cities and towns involving the young people residing there. The villagers, the tribal people and others who are physically fit, sturdy with natural stamina and natural talent to play a sport, have no access to train and play different sports and games. Many of the city youths are not able to fare well in sports, as most of them lack physical fitness and stamina. Many of the sport persons who have brought laurels to the country are from the rural and tribal background, who got access to all facilities and training very late in their lives. A large sporting talent found in the rural and tribal areas remains untapped even today.

The country lacks Proper sports infrastructure. The

playgrounds, stadiums, gymnasiums, training centers where our sports persons train is in very pathetic condition and also few in number, for a country of India's size. This apart, the modern sports training equipments are in short supply. Many sportspersons cannot afford to possess these modern training equipments due to the high costs. As a consequence of these factors our sports persons are not able to attain the international standards and compete with other sports persons from other countries who get trained under very advanced sports facility. A good number of Indian wrestlers who have won medals for the country trained on the mud during the initial years of their career.

Due to other pressing problems before the successive Governments like poverty, malnutrition, poor health care, lack of schools, unemployment etc, they were not in a position to give adequate importance and attention to the promotion of sports in the country during the last five decades. As the economic position of the country is quite satisfactory during the last one decade, the governments are showing inclination towards the promotion of sports and games and also towards improvement of the sports infrastructure. About a dozen hockey stadiums with synthetic playing surface spread across the country stands as a testimony to this. The Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), the flag ship programmer of the Ministry of Youth affairs and Sports, Government of India, meant to provide assistance to India's top athletes who are potential medal prospects in the 2020 and 2024 Olympics, launched in the year 2014 is another example in this regard.

Sports training methods have become very scientific and advanced during the present times. The core principles of science are applied to train the sports persons. The inputs from the scientists, medical practitioners, dieticians, physiotherapists and sports psychologists play a key role in enhancing the performance of the sports persons at the international level. The training methods in India are not as advanced as in the west. This is the prime reason why Indian sportspersons are not able to match the international standards. All the Indian sports persons who have won medals for the country at the Olympic Games and World championships during the last twenty five years were either trained by the foreign coaches or got trained abroad in countries like USA, Russia & Cuba. For instance, Sushil Kumar, double Olympic medalist in Wrestling trained in Russia and Ukraine, before competing in his two Olympics. The Central and State Governments have funded the training programmes of many these sports persons.

India lacks world-class sports coaches and trainers. Our coaches lack adequate knowledge and skill in training the sports persons in their respective disciplines. Individuals with good academic record and communication skills opt for other careers and professions in India. As a consequence, individuals with just average or poor academic record and improper sports background get into sports coaching and training. However, there could be a few exceptions in this regard. The institutions and bodies which train coaches lack standards and infrastructure. The very few good coaches who are capable of imparting some good training are not paid adequate monetary rewards, for all the hard work they put in. Many of the coaches hold ad-hoc posts lacking security of tenure. This is one of the serious impediments of the Indian sports system.

Administration and management of sports in the country is quite bad and distressing. Many sports bodies, associations and federations are manned by people without any sports background and adequate knowledge about the sports itself.

Many of the sports bodies are under the total control of Politicians, bureaucrats and rich businessman. Some of the office bearers of these bodies are holding positions continuously for more than a decade. Groupism and politics is rampant in many of the sports bodies. Added to this, is the lack of funds for the conduct of tournaments, holding of coaching camps and sending of teams to tournaments. The selection process of sportsmen and teams for international competitions are severely hampered due to the poor state of affairs in these sports bodies. Due to favoritism many a times an undeserving player finds place in the National team at the cost of the best and a deserving player. Even selections to the University teams are not done in a fair way. This is costing India medals at the international level competitions. In spite of having a good pool of Kabaddi players, the Indian Kabaddi team was not able to win a Gold Medal in the 2018, Jakarta Asian Games.

Sports science has emerged as an independent discipline in several universities of the west. Subjects like sports management, sports technology, sports psychology, sports medicine etc have all now become a part of the college and university curriculum. Talent is groomed in many countries by obtaining inputs and advice from the sports universities and research centers. Students from the sports science background are preferred for sports coaching and training assignments. In India this kind of system does not exist. There is no one high class sports university, which the country can boast of. Establishment of an elite Sports university of international repute requires a huge financial investment by the Government, as the private sector is not very much inclined in this regard, at least for the time being.

A good number of Indian sportspersons lack killer instinct and are very weak in handling pressure and stressful situation in big matches and tournaments. This is a reflection of the Indian psyche and attitude in general. Indians lack the character to fight back when the chips are down. The same has been proved by our national sporting teams time and again. The Indian hockey team conceding goals at the last minutes and loosing crucial matches in the Rio Olympics, 2016, stand as a testimony for this.

Several sports persons pursue sports seriously till they succeed in getting a secured job in the Government. The ultimate goal of a majority of National and International sports persons belonging to middle class and below middle class families is to secure a job in the government, on the basis of their sporting achievements. Once they succeed in this effort, they become lethargic and disinterested in the very sport which has given them everything in life. Some give up the sport within no time instead of enhancing their performance, once they get a secured job. There may be a few exceptions in this regard!

Social stigma is another hidden feature of Indian sports. It is quite evident that sporting events like wrestling, Kabaddi, Kho kho, boxing, weightlifting, football, hockey, archery, gymnastics etc., are pursued by youngsters belonging to poor, middle class, below middle class and tribal families. While sporting events like tennis, cricket, swimming, shooting badminton etc are opted by youngsters and individuals belonging to the rich and the elite families. There may be a few exceptions in this regard too.

Making a career out of sports in India, is quite risky and a challenging task. Sports persons have to spend a lot of money on their diet, sporting gears, training, travel, nurturing injuries and sometimes even on major surgeries. Some of the top sportspersons are given jobs by the Government and top

firms, while other sportspersons of the lower grades are completely ignored and sidelined. This makes them to give up sports once for all at a very young age and sometimes even at the peak of their sporting career. When sports persons retire from active sports they do not have anything to fall back upon. No financial assistance is extended to them either by the government or by any institution to take care of their livelihood. These people are forced to take up coaching jobs for a meager salary or to take up some other job elsewhere to eke out a living. Many sports persons curse their fate later in the life for pursuing a career in sports, which was not so successful. This is the most pathetic aspect of the Indian sports system. Sports persons from rich family background and those supported by good sponsors are able to sustain for long in the sports.

Many a times outstanding and talented sports persons who are the bright medal prospects for the country at the International level competitions, encounter severe hardships in getting adequate support and assistance from the Governments, Associations and Corporate houses. There are several instances where sports persons are forced to borrow money from their friends and relatives and even avail loans from the banks to take care of their training, diet, travel and other requirements. However, when these sports persons succeed in winning a medal at the International competitions they become national heroes overnight and will be glorified and appreciated by all. They are honored with huge cash awards and costly gifts. It is common trend in India to encourage and reward only the sports persons who are medal winners and not the others who miss a medal by a whisker, in spite of a record breaking performance. For instance, Manjit Singh the athlete from Haryana who won a gold medal in the 800 meter race for India, at the 18<sup>th</sup> Asian Games held at Jakarta, Indonesia, in August, 2018, was jobless when he competed in the Games. His contract was terminated by his employer ONGC, just before the Games. He was able to compete in the Games and win a medal for the country, as his family stood by him.

Promoting and marketing a sport is very important to attract talented men and women to take up sports. Except for a few sports like cricket, hockey and badminton no other sport is promoted in a big way by the private sector groups and other corporate houses. Cricket is undoubtedly getting the best management and sponsorships due to its popularity and the craze for it amongst the people. Cricket players are given so much attention by the media and advertising companies, a result of which they have become millionaires in a short span of time. This trend has made many a youngsters to take up the game of cricket and make a career out of it. The total outcome of this is other sports have lost their appeal and is being opted only by a limited number of youngsters.

### **Estimate**

It can be construed from the above, that the present socio-economic environment of sports in India is not so satisfactory. All these could be attributed as the reasons for the poor performance of Indian athletes and sports persons at the international level competitions and poor medal tally. Indian sportspersons have not failed this country; instead it is poor state of affairs in sports administration that has failed the sportspersons. Many a sportspersons from very humble background have made the country proud by winning medals at the Olympic Games and the World championships. Olympic medalists Mary Kom, Sushil Kumar and Yogeshwar Dutt are the standing examples. The achievements of these

sports persons are mainly due to their strong determination and personal commitment to the sport which they have pursued.

Sports in India may be in a dismal state at present, but everything is not lost forever. People of India have excelled in different spheres of activity during last three decades; the day of their excellence in the field of sports is not too far off. There is no dearth for sporting talent in the country. A sincere effort by all concerned to look into the problems and issues pertaining to sports, highlighted above and finding remedies and solutions to overcome them, can go a long way in making India an emerging sporting power in the next one decade.

Sports are no longer an activity or an amusement. The Indian sports are gradually getting elevated to a Sports industry during the last one decade. Its enormous potential to generate employment and revenue has drawn the attention of the Government, Industry, corporate companies and the business houses in a big way. The Indian sports industry which was worth Rupees 43.7 billion in the year 2013 became a 48 billion rupee industry in the year 2015. New Initiatives like the launching of the Hockey India League, Indian Premier League (Cricket), Pro Kabaddi league, Indian super League (football) and Indian Badminton league have all given a new direction and fresh hopes to the Indian sports. These initiatives are helping many a sports persons earn a decent living and stay focused on their respective sport. It is also bringing people closer to sports in the form of players and spectators. India is slowly getting transformed from a sports frowning nation to a sports playing nation.

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