



ISSN: 2456-0057
IJPNE 2019; SP1: 85-89
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(Special Issue- 1)

International Conference

“Sports: An Integral Component of Nation-Building”

(February 19th-20th, 2019)

Issues, obstacles and strategies to build ‘Fit India, Behtar India

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Abstract

Sports in India is considered to be an extra-curricular activity unlike other countries where it has already been included in mainstream curriculum. The reason behind this is simple i.e., the economic conditions of our country makes it difficult for us to think of sport as a primary source of earnings. Indian parents simply ignore the talents of their children thinking it would not help them in earning their bread and butter. Many such talents are subsided in the race of earning money through higher education.

Therefore, there is a great need for the government to build such a nation which is healthy and pro-active in sports. This cannot be done in one day or in a year, but the appropriate strategies of building ‘Fit India and Behtar India’ can be adopted to make this dream come true in long run.

The purpose of this paper is to find out the problems and obstacles in the way of ‘Fit India and behtar India’. It will also compare the governmental provisions of the foreign countries (mostly the nations which win gold and silver in Olympics) for its children. It has been understood that population is the biggest cause of poverty in India and hence there is a need to analyze the situation in other nations with same issues and find out their policies to overcome this situation.

The authors would be using primary and secondary data for the analysis. Secondary data will be taken from various research articles based on experiments on Nudge. For primary data the interviews of parents would be taken across to find out the existing personal issues they face in pursuing the talent of their children. The recommendations of this study will be based on the analysis and findings from different data sources.

Keywords: Sports, Strategies, Health Economics, Role of Government, Curriculum, Extra-curricular activities, Population, Poverty.

1. Introduction

Sports play an important role in the socio-economic development of a country. It is very important to develop sports eco-system in our country. Further it is necessary to bring sports into the main stream curriculum. To give the importance, that sports deserves in the country it is necessary to understand the various issues and obstacles that hinder the development of sports and in turn - ‘Fit India and Behtar India.’

One of the best ways to measure the fitness of India is to look at its position in sports and related activities at global level. Therefore checking its Olympics report card will help us in building the base on which we can develop our analysis and strategies. ‘Sports’ in India is considered under the extracurricular activities unlike in many nations where it has already included in mainstream curriculum.

Let us start this discussion with the most popular sports event, ‘Olympics’. We all are aware of India’s position in Olympics since it has taken part in Olympics. India’s first participation in Olympic Games happened to be in 1900, in athletics by the only athlete Norman Pritchard. Pritchard won two silver medals in athletics and for which the credit goes to his rich British

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parents and their attitude towards sports ^[1]. Out of total 32 appearances in Olympics India has won total of 28 medals. To express this misery we must also add that India has the largest population in the world only next to China ^[2]. India's one-sixth share in the world's population translated into a 1/929 share in 2004 Olympic medals ^[3]. There is a great need to analyze the issues and the obstacles which come in the way of our potential players.

There is a great need for the government to build such a nation which is healthy and pro-active in sports. This cannot be achieved instantly but appropriate strategies of building 'Fit India and Behtar India' need to be adopted to make this dream come true in long run. "India needs to invest in the long term, not expecting miracles at the touch of a button ^[4]."

2. The Issues

The population of 1.34 billion country definitely has no dearth of talented sports persons, but these talents are either hidden due to excessive poverty and competition for jobs in the market or are subsided due to the lack of nutritional food habits by average Indians. Indians are overloaded with responsibility of getting higher education and some jobs in government or private sectors to run their family. The two issues which we find in India's Olympics report card very clearly depicts the health and fitness vulnerability of Indians. From the statistics available on sports in India it can be inferred that there are basically two issues:

- A. Low rate of participation in sports (except cricket) and health activities;
- B. Poor Performance of sportspersons who rarely makes it to finals or even semi-finals.

The reason behind this looks simple, the economic conditions of our country makes it difficult for us to think of sport as primary source of earnings. Indian parents simply ignore the talents of their children thinking it would not help them in earning their bread and butter. Many such talents are subsided in the race of earning money through higher education. Anirudh Krishnan in his article mentioned about poverty rate and lack of information/guidance as one of the reasons for low participation rate in sports at the international level ^[5].

Though the sources behind these two issues are interlinked but still it is wise to find out the reasons separately to keep it clear and simple. It will also help us in finding out the strategies to make India fit and better with respect to health and education.

A. Low rate of participation in sports and health activities

Every sixth person in this world is Indian, and only 0.0010 person of India participates in Olympics ^[6]. After reviewing different existing literature and interviewing a cross-section of students and parents of different economic backgrounds we are able to deduce the reasons behind low participation rate by Indians in different sports activities. These are: corruption, poverty, lack of motivation from family, no proper earnings from sports as major obstacles for converting talents into achievements which are discussed below:

- a) **Corruption:** The first and foremost problem hampering health conditions of Indians is the high level of corruption prevailing in India. Due to corruption at the various levels in the Indian Political system the funds are not diverted properly and do not reach the sportspersons

who are entitled to the funds. The rampant corruption has stunted the talented pool and has held India from reaching new heights. In spite of the Parliament passing the Prevention of Corruption Act, corruption has not been curbed in the Indian bureaucratic system as per the report of India Corruption survey, 2018.

- b) **Poverty:** Despite the remarkable progress in the attempts to reduce poverty in India it still maintains Poverty to be at 13.4% at the International Poverty line. Over 176 million Indians were living in extreme poverty in 2015. Poverty reduction programs are also unable to reduce inequality among the Indian States. It has unevenly benefitted the States and social groups which were already better off ^[7]. As Poverty looms large in the society it makes it difficult for the aspirants to afford the facilities available in India for their training and health purposes. Many Indian players are living a poor life after opting for sports and even won medals for our country. According to one of the articles of India times there are many award winning sports persons now are living in poverty. For instance, India's fastest woman Asha Roy is living in abject poverty. Another woman Nisha Rani Dutt after realising that her career as an archer could not help her support her family left the sport two years back to earn some money for her family. This obviously becomes quite demotivating for the potential sportspersons to opt sports as their career ^[8].

- B. **Indian Mind-Set:** Upon interviewing approximately 100 working Indians who very good in sports and health activities about why they did not pursue this as their career. 80% of them responded family pressure to pursue higher education seriously and choosing an elite career option as doctor, scientist, and engineer etc. 10% of them responded it as their hobby and 10% did not get proper guidance or chance to follow it up even though they have put efforts. These responses clearly show that sports were considered as secondary activity or just hobby which could not earn them their daily bread and better. Of course the reason to have this sort of mind-set among Indian is lack of health infrastructure and career options available in India. Also due to the fact that they learned how pathetic life our retired Indian players are living. The mindset of Indian people towards Sports can be understood in Niti Aayog's popular phrase: "*Kheloge Kudoge to honge kharab, padhoge likhoge to banoge nawab.*" which highlights the societal barriers that views sports as a lesser field when it comes to pride and prestige ^[9].

C. Poor Performance of Sports Persons

Not only the participation rate is poor in India, but the Olympic records clearly show poor performances of Indian players at the international level. The level of sports such as football, hockey, gymnastic, swimming, which needs high level of stamina and physical activities are performed below standard by our players. This is due to various reasons mentioned below:

- a) **Trade-off between sports and higher education** 'Practice makes the man perfect.' unless you practice you cannot perfect your talents. We asked students who are inclined towards sports and are playing at university level about why Indians performing below standards at

international level. On an average their responses were 'no time and place to practice' to reach to the standards of international level players. They are facing 'trade-offs' between the time spent on higher studies and practice for their favourite sports. On their response to 'no time to practice', it has been observed that most of the curriculum of the universities in India carry loads of syllabus with hundreds of books to be read, to pass the exam (mostly written exam). The health activities (like, yoga, sports, gym, meditation etc) are not given any credit in the main curriculum. These activities get their place in extra-curricular column that too as an optional activity. Even if the talented Indians try to pay more attention towards sports activities they tend to lose their educational grades and therefore do not get better jobs. Because of the curriculum which is inclined toward higher studies. Makes it difficult for the students to pay attention towards health and sports activities. Health and Sports activities are always been added as an extracurricular activity which tend to reduce the interest for such activities among Indian students.

- b) Poor health and sports infrastructure:** The Indian sports infrastructure and the health facilities are not up to the international level. It is very important to have good sports infrastructure if our sportsperson need to excel in the sports at the international level. Games like, football, hockey, wrestling, running, tennis etc. requires lot of practice and a proper designated area. India rarely has such facilities available. The forward States in India may have few good stadiums but the backward States do not have it in proper shape and size ^[10]. Sports come under the State list, and the States have not invested much in building sports infrastructure. Not much initiative has been taken up the government to promote sports as a philosophy of life. The non-availability of land is another major obstacle which faces trade-off between building homes or sports area in poverty ridden States.

3. The Existing Strategies

The National strategy for sports in Scotland has emphasized the importance of sports and stressed that when one participates in sports it helps in improving the quality of life of people. It also promotes social inclusion, improves health, counters anti-social behaviour, raises individual self-esteem and confidence and widens horizons ^[11]. Article 1 of the Charter of Physical Education and Sports adopted by UNESCO in 1978 emphasizes that, "Every human being has a fundamental right of access to physical education and sport, which are essential for the full development of his personality. The freedom to develop physical, intellectual and moral powers through physical education and sports must be guaranteed both within the educational system and in other aspects of social life ^[12]. The Charter stresses on the fact that: "the practice of physical education and sport is a fundamental human right for all" ^[13]. The Convention on the Rights of the Child also recognizes the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child. It further provides that not only do children have the right to play, they also have the right to the provision of opportunity to play, requiring states to encourage the provision appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity' ^[14]. The United Nations Inter-agency Task force ^[15] on sport for development and Peace recommended that sports must be included in the

development agenda of national and international development agencies. It also recommended governments to identify and make available resources for sport initiatives and to maximize participation in and access to 'sport for all' within their own countries ^[16]. It is very important for any country to promote sports as it can serve as an effective model for peace and development.

Many ills like political interventions, corruption, low quality infrastructure, favoritism, lack of good coaches, meagre budgetary allocation has further worsened the situation. Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, the Union Sports Minister has observed that the word, 'Authority' should be dropped from the Sports Authority of India as the word has lost relevance in the modern sporting scenario.

Despite the size of our country and the population the performance in the international sports is not up to the country's potential. Except for few sports like cricket, badminton, hockey, boxing and wrestling the performance of India in other sports is poor. In the recently concluded Rio Olympics, 2016 the country did not fare well in spite of sending the largest contingent comprising of 118 athletes. Despite the number, India was ranked 65th in the total tally of medals and it could manage to bag only two medals- one silver medal in badminton and one bronze medal in wrestling. India has to carve a niche of being an internationally sporting power. It can draw lessons from countries like China which has recently emerged as an ardent competitor in Summer Olympics. China has proved itself to be a global power in international sports which is evident from the fact that it has been ranked second in total medals tally and bagged around 204 gold, 148 silver and 134 bronze medals. This can be attributed to State-driven approach to international sporting competition and the pro-active role of the Chinese government in strengthening the governmental policies and programs.

One can see a ray of hope as the Indian government has taken some positive steps to remedy the situation. The Khelo India policy focuses on the bringing physical education in the mainstream by incorporating it in the school curriculum. Grants for the creation of sports infrastructure and training facilities have been provided for under the policy. Khelo India has a budget of \$ 350 million over three years. A step in the positive direction is the idea of setting up India's first National Sports University and funding of the existing universities to deliver degrees in sports science and sports medicine. In order to improve the quality of high performance coaching and athlete training, Mission Olympic cell has been formed. In order to professionalize the management of elite athletes the idea of remodel the sports bureaucracy has been mooted. Twelve Indian players of international eminence have been appointed as government National observers for the development of various sports in the country. These observers have also been given the responsibility of assessing the existing sports and health facilities and to report on the various gaps at the venues of the national coaching camps. To train girls and women to participate at the national and international level the government has made provisions for financial help to recognized National Sports Federations under it the scheme of, 'Assistance to National Sports Federations.' The government has also approved the appointment of foreign coaches and supporting staff to provide best possible help and support to athletes in their training for the upcoming 2020 Olympics.

The NITI Aayog in its 20 point action plan titled, '*Target 50 Olympic medal action plan for revitalizing sports in India*',

has laid down short term and long term action plans. It also lays emphasis on harnessing the potential of indigenous and regional sports. Coaching and mentoring are fundamental skills required for the development of any sportsperson and hence it emphasizes the need for world class coaches and also qualitative-cum-quantitative grading system for coaches. The short term targets focuses on having insurance scheme for sports injuries; strengthening and improving the existing Sports Training Centres.

4. Suggestions for Further Action Plan

It's been seen that much is been already in line to make India fit and behtar but somehow these don't seem to be really effective for the country like ours. We need something more than this. From our analysis discussed above we have come up with suggestions which can be complimentary to the strategies already adopted by our country and its states.

a) Revamping our Curriculum

To make India a fit India and *behtar* India, we need to adopt a multi-pronged approach to build a sports ecosystem. It is important to bring sports in the mainstream education system rather than being considered only as an extracurricular activity. It must be included in the core syllabus and marks or grades need to be allotted for the sports like any other subject. This will bring about seriousness in students towards sports and change the mindset of people to take sports as a career option.

b) Optimum Budgetary allocations for training and development:

Optimum level of investment needs to be increased for developing sports. The representation of the country in Olympics has to be increased to gain more visibility and accolades. To train our sports persons to participate in Olympics and other sports at the international level, it is necessary to provide the training of international standard for which the infrastructure needs to be revamped.

c) Health facilities:

A fit and healthy person can only perform well in the sporting activities and hence maintaining the health of sports personnel is of utmost importance. Proper nutrition, medical care, diet plans for the players to improve their health needs to be focused upon.

d) Nudging:

Nudging is a concept provided by the noble laureates Richard Thaler and Cass Sustain. This can be done to enable human behavior to achieve the required goal. Thaler in his book 'Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness' has examined how the gut instincts can deviate human beings from opting for rational choices. He suggested curing this inefficient behavior of human beings by nudging them for the right choice. This way we can also promote liberalism over force decisions which come from formal institutions. For instance, The motto adopted by Star Sports new film emphatically states, 'Kheloge Kudoge toh banoge lajawab' to nudge youngsters into sports. The film had been launched to promote the pioneering initiative of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports Government of India, "Khelo India School Games", which will be broadcast on the Star Sports network and Holstar in January, 2018^[17].

Sports minister's releasing a video of doing push-ups in office was quite fascinating and represents that there is no trade-offs

between work and being healthy. It has nudged and motivated many to follow up with their health along with their work.

In addition to the above, there is a need to develop individual sports there is a need to create more sports academies. Creating a digital database for sports in the country will help the sports person as it increases access to data and information on the sporting activities. Implementation of the National Sports Code and Sports bill is the need of the hour. A periodic review of the sports persons, bodies and infrastructure should be done. Training the children for sporting activities from young age, including sports in school curriculum, training for coaches, development of sports infrastructure through the private and public mode are some of the medium to long term action plan^[19]. Sports data repositories and a library of videos of best international practices of sports must be developed. Implementation of anti-doping measures as suggested by National Anti-doping Agency must be done. Investment in marketing and promoting sports can be drawn from the success of the IPL. The cost of sporting equipment can be decreased when they are manufacture under the 'Make in India' program in the special economic zones. Financial support to experienced coaches and other support personnel will help in getting better quality coaches. Sports which are not very popular should be brought into the forefront through investment and media coverage.

In order to encourage girls to participate in sporting activities special schemes should be announced by Government. Tax benefits can be given for investment in sports and games to the private sector in order to encourage investment in sports. Strengthening the legal regime in India will play a crucial role in the development of sports as at present there are no national or State legislations in place for regulation of sports in India. The Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports set up by Govt. of India contributes to the creation of infrastructure and capacity building and for achieving excellence in various events both at the national and international levels. The promotion of sports in India is done by autonomous bodies like the National Sports Federations. For the purpose of regulation of National Sports federations, the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs issues notifications and guidelines from time to time. At present, Sports in India is governed and regulated by National Sports Policy; Sports Law and Welfare Association of India; Sports Authority of India; The Sports Broadcasting Law in India^[19]. Hence there is an urgent need to adopt the above suggestions to build 'Fit India, Behtar India!'

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