

Sports and Politics in India

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• Abstract

Apart from the rich culture and diverse arts presence, India has tremendous experience in different sporting activities such as athletics, cricket, shooting, hockey, chess, badminton, boxing, golf, kabaddi, wrestling, swimming etc. Besides this the country has respectable traditional sports such as boat racing, kushti, gilli-danda and others. But the most popular sport in the country is cricket. This sport is played at all age groups starting from the grassroots right up to the international level. The game has

given rise to popular personalities such as Sachin Tendulkar, Kapil Dev, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Irfan Pathan, Rahul Dravid, Virender Sehwag, Sunil Gavaskar, Dilip Vengsarkar, Yuvraj Singh, Virat Kohli etc. Apart from the players the sport has given rise to the popularity of coaches and even commentators. Cricket players are given a lot of attention by the media and advertising companies. India wins one match against Pakistan or Australia and there goes the line of cash prices and cheque's being showered on them by ministers and state governments. Even in terms of incentives, the other sportsmen and

women lag far behind the cricketers. Involvement of politicians in sports wouldn't have been such an issue had there not been corruption everywhere our politicians are involved.

Key word- politics. Government, management

Introduction

To start with, all the major positions in the association of different sports is given out to the politicians who hold criminal records or have no background in that particular field by the Sports Authority of India. For eg. Lalit Bhanot was elected the Secretary General of Indian Olympic Association in 2010, despite being in jail for a year. Usually the ex beurocrats and the politicians (who have no idea about these sports, for eg. The Ex BCCI chief N Srinivasan) fill the pockets of the selectors and once they get the desired position, they fill their own pockets.

Once the Sports Authority releases funds for an event (which has to be a very large amount since it is usually either for cricket or for hockey), the money passes on from one hand to the other, each one stealing from it a few crores. The dates of the event come near and there's no sign of the preparations hence more funds are released. It is usually after the second or the third funding the the work is finally done (for eg. Commonwealth Games).

Moving on to the various Sports Federations, the common trend one can see is that these have been controlled by particular families (of politicians) for decades, as if it were their ancestral property. For instance, the Cycling Federation of India is under Parminder Dhindsa of Akali Dal and Sukhdev Dhindsa's son presides over Punjab Olympic Association (to be noted that maximum sum of money for weightlifting, hockey and Wrestling is

handed at Punjab Olympic Association). Similarly, the Rowing Federation has been under Kamakhya Prasad's family for almost a decade now. After he stepped down in 2008, his cousin presided over it and now it's his wife. Needless to say, neither of them held any experience in Rowing. There are many more stories like these in almost every other sport you come across

One would be surprised to know that for the preparation of athletes for each Olympic Games the Sports Authority of India releases 3,200 Crores. This might be quiet small sum compared to UK but even if 1/4th of this sum is actually put to use the results would have been much better than just one silver and one bronze in 2016 Olympics.

From the roots to the fruits, the Sports association here in India is adulterated with corrupt politicians. If rather than picking politicians to preside over

sports associations and federations we went for some people who had achieved something in that particular sport, things wouldn't have been as ugly as they are in present.

Despite the numerous revelations about fraud and forgery being made by the International Olympic Association, the same culprits still hold the offices in India. The problem needs to be addressed from the grassroot level and it lies in the lack of sporting culture here in India.

Hockey is our National sport, but has lost importance in the past few years; it even failed to qualify for the Beijing Olympics. In the London Olympics 2012 the Indian hockey team came out last losing all its matches. Not only hockey, but tennis, football, golf, badminton all shares the same pathetic condition. Neither are the sponsors interested in financing them, nor does the government raise enough

funds. The Hockey team receives a meagre sum for every goal that they score, whereas those given to the cricketers do not require a mention. Even football has lost its importance to a great extent except for Goa and West Bengal; no other states are interested in football. In short, no sport in India except cricket is well managed. Indian sports are trapped in politics. New controversies arise almost every week.

The most recent embarrassment to Indian sport is the suspension due to the fact that officials tainted by corruption charges win influential positions. For example Lalit Bhanot, who spent 11 months in prison after allegations of corruption following the 2010 games, was elected as Secretary General of the Indian Olympic Association. If the ban is not overturned, India will be banned from competing in any Olympic events,

including the 2014 Winter Olympics and, more worrisome from India's perspective, the 2016 summer Olympics in Rio. It is really shocking to see politicians and ex-bureaucrats holding positions as Chairman and Committee members for several decades most of them having no clue about the sport in general. With the government of India pumping several crore rupees into the various sports bodies for promoting sports and encouraging the sportsmen, these sports bodies have become fertile ground for the politicians and ex-bureaucrats to make money. What is even more disturbing is that even after the stinging observations made by the international Olympic association, the office bearers are still holding on to the positions and have not thought it necessary to quit the job.

Dynasties seem to rule Indian sport. There are many examples that show how politicians and their

families run committees as if it's a family get together. Parminder Singh Dhindsa of the Akali Dal is president of the Cycling Federation of India and the son of Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa is currently president of the Punjab Olympic Association. The Chautala brothers Abhay Singh and Ajay Singh have heralded an era of total politicization of the sports federations. Between them, the two brothers control the Indian Amateur Boxing Federation and the table tennis federation of India.

In 2008, Kamakhya Prasad Singh Deo stepped down as president of the Rowing Federation of India. He was replaced as president by his cousin, CP Singh Deo. When CP Singh Deo ended his term, he was succeeded by his wife Rajlaxmi Singh Deo.

Similarly is the case of N Ramachandran, vice-president of the Indian Triathlon Federation (his wife is the president). He is also president

of the Tamil Nadu Cycling Association, World Squash Federation, the Tamil Nadu Squash Rackets Association and the vice-president of the Tamil Nadu Olympic Association. Jagdish Tytler, a Congress leader, has been at the helm of the Judo Federation of India for nearly 20 years on a trot. "There is hardly anyone in the judo body who dares to say anything against Tytler.

Sport's is one area where India lags behind even some of the poorest nations in the world despite a huge pool of talented sportsperson. At the junior levels, our boys and girls can compete with the best in the world in almost every sport. However when it comes to the senior levels, where the actual capabilities of our sportsperson are tested, we fail miserably.

Those who suffer due to such sordid conditions are the athletes, who have the talent and desire to compete and excel themselves in the international

arena but they need to be given proper grooming and training which they have been denied. The ugly conditions in the sports bodies have been repeatedly revealed by several stories such as the coaches misbehaving with women athletes, selecting people in the team based on favoritism and bribes etc. People in India have been watching helplessly and with sadness, while the sports authorities have been behaving as if they are not accountable to anybody and neither the government nor anyone else can touch them.

➤ **Issue of how much the government is involved in supporting and managing sporting affairs in the country**

Goel's gaffes have especially compounded the issue of how much the government is involved in supporting and managing sporting affairs in the country. So we thought to present some facts in this regard,

some of which you might not be knowing:

Government is not involved in management of sports:

Sports is managed by respective National Sports Federations in India, which are independent bodies that organize competitive events, select sportsperson to represent the state or country at various levels, and help promote sports in different parts of the country. Government helps these federations (will be explained later), facilitates their events and operations, builds sporting infrastructure, and gives sporting awards.

Sports federations are autonomous non-government bodies:

The respective national sports federations are autonomous bodies, often registered as societies in India just like the BCCI, and the government has no role in administration or appointment of members of these federations (except liaison officers,

who are appointed in consultation with the sports ministry but are not deemed government employees). These national federations further have state level federations, all of which have their own rules, by-laws, and their own constitution or charter that guide their functioning and management.

Anyone can form a sports federation: If you are a group of people deeply passionate about a sport that you think is worth promotion in India, you can form a federation. However, that doesn't automatically give you any privileges. To gain some privileges, it has to be affiliated to the respective international sports federation, e.g. All India Football Federation is affiliated to FIFA. If the concerned international sports federation is affiliated to the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and it grants you the affiliation, your federation becomes eligible to become a member of the IOA (Indian

Olympic Association) and be recognized as a National Sports Federation by the government.

Recognized sports federations receive assistance from the government: This is where government comes into play for promotion and development of sports. The sports ministry assesses application of various national level sports federations and gives them recognized status, after which they can receive financial grants (under various schemes) and other assistance that include permission to use public infrastructure such as stadiums and sporting equipment for training and development of sportspersons.

Even non-Olympic sports federations can get recognized by the government: While recognition from the government is easy if a national sports federation is affiliated

to IOA, it is not a necessary requirement. In 2016, 49 national sports federations were recognized, which includes non-Olympic sports like “tug of war” and “body building”. Kho-kho and Kabaddi are popular examples of non-Olympic sports that are recognized by the government and are eligible to get assistance.

BCCI never bothered to apply to become a recognized national sports federation: This is where cricket is different from other non-Olympic sports. BCCI, which is essentially the national sports federation for cricket, never applied for a recognized status from the government. This is why they argue to be kept out of RTI as they don't receive direct government assistance. Back in 2011, they were invited by the then Sports Minister Ajay Maken to register as a national sports federation, but BCCI didn't oblige.

- **Conclusion**

Even though, huge amount is spent on training and grooming of the players we still have not been able to achieve the desired results. The prime reason for poor performances is corruption & political interference. Due to this many time a good player is left out. The government and the Respective athletic boards are the main culprit for letting down India. Most of them are corrupt, lack professionalism and very biased. However the fundamental problem lies in the absence of a sporting culture in India. Sports in India are considered a secondary and supplementary activity. This explains to a large extent, the apathy on the part of the government machinery towards sports. The corporate indifference too stems from the fact that they are not sure that the sponsorship money will be efficiently used in promoting the game and the welfare of the players.

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