

## **ROLE OF POLITICIANS AND THEIR POLITICAL INTERFERENCE ON INDIAN SPORTS**

**Dr. M.P. Gaur,**

Head, Department of Physical Education, D.A.V.P.G. College, Lucknow, India.

### **Abstract:**

In 1978, UNESCO described sport and physical education as a “fundamental right for all”. But until today, the right to play and sport has too often been ignored or disrespected. Sport has a unique power to attract, mobilize and inspire. By its very nature, sport is about participation. It is about inclusion and citizenship. One of the drawbacks of industrial revolution is the sedentary lifestyle we have adapted which is directly linked to primary and secondary diseases, such as heart problems, high cholesterol, mental stress, high blood pressure and on top of all that is the environmental pollution, which is currently one of the risk factors of global magnitude. Sport leisure and recreation have become important dimensions in social and economic life. Social amenities such as the gymnasiums, fitness centers, play fields, social halls and swimming pools generate revenue for self-sustainability and therefore contribute to national development on two fronts. Research shows that investment into sport in developing countries is much less than in developed countries, as sport development is usually not a top priority in the national budget or in the education system of most developing countries. One may wonder that government of India pumping several crore rupees into the various sports bodies for promoting sports and encouraging the sportsmen but these sports bodies have become fertile ground for the politicians and ex-bureaucrats to make money.

Key words: Fundamental Right, Political Interference & Indian Sports.

## **Introduction:**

The ongoing controversy over Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's past association with Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) raises one basic question: should politicians administer sports? This question has two dimensions – “politics and sports” and “politicians in sports”. As politicians are practitioners of politics, one may think that the two are the same; but there is a major difference between them.

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 prizes 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.

Nowadays, no sport in India is free from interference of politicians. In cricket, it is not that visible as BCCI is the richest sports body of the world. Indian sports have become the rehabilitation asylum for politicians and retired bureaucrats. For them chairing an apex body of any sport is all about power, money and publicity. The main purpose of the apex body like talent hunt, providing adequate and modern training to the players, grooming next generation players and development of sports infrastructure are the second or perhaps the last priority for these bosses.

The most embarrassment to Indian sport is the suspension due to the fact that officials tainted by corruption charges win influential positions. 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.

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. 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.

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.

### **Interference of politicians in Indian Sports**

Imagine a situation: Can the best Scientist of a country be the best curator having deep knowledge of science and biomechanics? Can he help and guide the sportsperson in rectifying the skills and techniques in spite of having mastery in his own field; the answer is a big NO; he can't help the sports person in any way. Likewise Sports in India need passion, technical expertise and strategic approach from the bosses of their respective associations. Revival of sports in India requires passionate sports persons as the bosses not the politicians. Take the example of Indian Men's Hockey team. It is the team that gave 8 Olympics gold medals to India. Once its administration went to the hands of ex- bureaucrats, India could not even qualify to take

part in last Olympics. Examples of political interference in Indian sports administration is massive in number. Chautala Brothers (sons of Ex Haryana chief minister Om Prakash, Chautala) are leading the Indian Amateur Boxing Federation (IABF) and the Table Tennis Federation of India (TFI). Vijay Kumar Malhotra is the boss of Indian archery association. Political heavyweights including Natwar Singh, Satish Sharma and Yashwant Sinha have headed the All-India Tennis Association (AITA). 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. Do these people have the required expertise and experience regarding the concerned sports? The answer is again & again a big no. When the boss is ignorant what to do, the fate of the game is nothing but bleak. Hence, passion and professionalism need to replace politics for the betterment of Indian sports. In short, no sport in India except cricket is well managed. Indian sports are trapped in politics. New controversies arise almost every week.

### **Should Politics & Sports go side by side?**

Once when asked to comment on IPL spot-fixing scandal our ex-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was quoted as saying, "I only hope that politics and sports don't get mixed." The unpleasant nexus between sports and politics has been the Indian sports fans biggest dampener in recent times. Be it hockey, boxing or even cricket, no sport in the country has remained unaffected by the game of Rajneeti (Politics). Politics has played spoilsport in India over recent years. Advani, who clinched his 13th world title after defending his World 6-Red Snooker title once when asked should sports & politics be mixed, he answered "I don't think these two (sport and politics) really need to be mixed". He further added "My take on Indian sport is quite different right now. As a person who plays a non-Olympic sport I think there is a huge discrimination between sports there are part of quadrennial events versus sports that are not. The irony is that a body like the government discriminates the most".

Former Indian football captain Bhaichung Bhutia concurs. "People who are in those positions don't understand sport," he says, "When that is the case, they don't really have the heart to bring in change. You need driven people, who go to sleep thinking about how to

improve the game. And I don't think that it is just at the top level; even at the basic state to district level, the people who are in these positions are just there... I don't think they seriously think..."

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 favouritism 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.

### **IOC bans the IOA:**

The International Olympic Committee had banned the Indian Olympic Association in December, 2012 due to "government interference and bad governance" after tainted officials were elected to key posts in the IOA. The move threatened to put the participation of Indian athletes under the national flag in the Olympics in grave danger. Athletes and the public lashed out at politicians and finally, in May 2013, the IOC agreed to take India back in the Olympic fold after the then Sports Minister Jitendra Singh, visited the IOC headquarters and explained the new Sports Bill. Some hope this will be a wake-up call for Indian sport to purge itself of toxic politicians. Most others realise that it is a forlorn task.

### **The Real Political Players and Indian Sports:**

To understand the politics, consider the structure of the IOA itself. There are 35 sports in the Summer and Winter Olympics. The IOA, however, has 39 constituent and affiliate bodies, while not having specific bodies for many Olympic sports; several of the bodies — kabaddi, kho kho, snooker, squash and bowling are non-Olympic sports. Rahul Mehra, sports activist and

lawyer, explains, “The IOA, which is supposed to promote Olympic sports, has created federations for non-Olympic sports because it is easier to manage these smaller bodies and secure their votes. Since there are no stipulated criteria for becoming a member of a sporting body and the ‘be all and end all’ is to stay in power, you nurture a vote bank by appointing people close to you.” This creates an incestuous and nepotistic little club of sports administrators, scratching each others’ backs.

To put things in perspective, India won an all-time high, six individual medals at the 2012 London Olympics. But it was not thanks to the sports federations. It was the grit of individual sportspersons that did it. Of the six Olympic medal winners, four were supported by Olympic Gold Quest and one by the Mittal Champions Trust. Embroiled in internal politics, government bodies have been failing Indian sports for decades.

Fifteen of the 39 IOA constituent federations and 23 of 33 State Olympic Association presidents are politicians. “At the district level, you have local politicians and bureaucrats vying for positions,” says former *Hindustan Times* Sports Editor Pradeep Magazine. “And at the state level, you will find senior bureaucrats and politicians trying to get control of the federations. It is about clout, power and political visibility. They are not there for the sports; they are there to get political mileage out of sports.”

### **Can Indian sports ever be free from Politics?**

The question itself is a million Dollar question which can’t be answered with immediate effect. It will take an era to be answered honestly. As politics has taken root in every spheres of one’s life in India, sports in this country too have fallen for it. Be it cricket, hockey, football or tennis – no sport in India has been able to make itself free from the clutches of politics. Sadly, politics fail to leave Indian sports as corrupt officials continue to be at the helm of it. The Indian law that allows charge sheeted people to contest elections in sports body has become the biggest bane of it. Do we see any sportspersons heading important posts in sports body now?

It may be noted that as the Union Sports Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar had once proposed a new national sports policy whose principal feature was that Indian sports should be free of politicians. Predictably it did not work out, with politicians, irrespective of their party affiliations, joining hands to oppose the move. And that, perhaps, is the reason, why our overall record as a sporting nation is so pathetic.

Indian sports need a clean-up where only persons of high morals and ethics should be allowed to run it. The adoption of charge sheet clause in the IOA constitution looks the right path to go for an overhaul of Indian sports. Besides, sports should be able to transcend all barriers, political or otherwise, and be given the freedom to thrive independently.

### **Conclusion:**

The posts of sports administrators are often considered a “reserved” seat for a politician. Priyaranjan Dasmunshi headed the All India Football Federation for years and when he couldn't continue for health reasons, civil aviation minister Praful Patel replaced him. Patel was not a former football player nor a football expert but a politician. As compared to this, Europe's football governing body is headed by former French football player Michel Platini. It's not as if cricket is spared from the clutches of politicians. Sharad Pawar was the president of BCCI. Rajiv Shukla is a senior functionary of BCCI. There are many other such examples.

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.

Not many people would raise eyebrows about politicians as administrators in sports if we produced world beaters on a consistent basis. But that's far from being the case. The truth of the matter is that athletes aren't treated well, or given enough respect. And there's hardly enough infrastructure in place. Having a “long-term vision” or “grass roots development” requires real

commitment, not lip service. Thus, sports in India need passion, technical expertise and strategic approach from the bosses of their respective associations. Revival of sports in India requires passionate sports persons as the bosses not the politicians.

**References:**

1. "THE HINDU" (Sports Star), VOL.26; NO.10: Mar. 08 - 14, 2003.
2. Sources: PTIFirst Published: 23 August, 2015 - 15:25.
3. Sources: Internet "Sports and Politics in India" Steffi Ebnett.
4. Source: Internet "Politics plays spoilsport" Saloni Tandon | TNN | Aug 1, 2013.
5. Avalok Langer "Tehelka Magazine", Volume 9 Issue 51, December 13, 2012 pp.1-4.