

Role and Relationship between Politics and Sports

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Received October 01, 2016; Accepted October 21, 2016; Published October 25, 2016

Abstract

Politics and sports or sports diplomacy describes the use of sport as a means to influence diplomatic, social, and political relations. It can be used by states or geopolitical blocks to display their alleged superiority or any other desired characteristic. Governments may desire athletic victories, which are meant to imply, for example, the power of the state and its political and economic system. Participation in sport can also be used for political reasons on an international scale; a number of political objectives can be achieved by states by participating (or not) in sports events. Not only is sport affected by a country's policies, but on certain occasions sports events can influence states.

Key Words: Sport, Politics, International Relations, Sport as a Political Tool

1. Introduction:

The world history is witness to the fact that in every regime the ruler has tried to promote games and sports in the country, although their objectives might not be similar. After going through the history of Physical education, games and sports of various countries, it is inferred that rigorous physical activities, games and sports have been promoted and used in various ways for different purposes by the rulers from time to time. There are instances of nations which have promoted physical culture, games and sports for making their nation physically fit as well as mentally alert in order to prepare their defence personnel for tough jobs. Even to reduce the national budget on medical expenditure of their citizens, a country like U.S.A., has passed legislation to make physical education an integral part of institutional curriculum to make school going children physically fit, and also to gain some political mileage at the national and international level of politics etc. It means it is the political set-up of the country which decides the fate of sports and games. There will be nothing wrong if it is said that prior to the promotion of sports and games, the destiny of the economy of the nation is decided by the politicians of the country. The very hard fact is that the economy of the country is now subject to politicization, and the differentiation of the economy from the politics is classical liberal theory which is no longer a fact of life as it was once. Further, the responsibility of formulation and implementation of economic policies, taking into consideration the needs of the country as well as the development of national economy matching with the rest of the world lies with national governments run by the Political leaders, Economists and Bureaucrats. It means the national politics affects each individual citizen's life. Therefore, in the promotion of games and sports in the country, political system plays a vital role. The important thing is to be seen whether the national governments are sincerely doing some thing for the promotion of this field or to get some personal benefits out of it. Indeed, the days are gone when it was believed that sports is essentially a political institution. Further, the intrusion of political considerations into sports were, and to a large extent, still are regarded as likely to have negative results. But this is also fact that there is a lack of interest in investigating the dimensions of involvement of one of the major institutions of society, the polity, into the arena of sports. This neglect becomes more astonishing when one considers the degree of public interest in spectator sports and the consequent economic strength of the sports and games entertainment industry.

2. Indian politics:

There was a time when our great leader late Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru made earnest, honest, and concerted efforts to bring the country up to the international level in all respects. He did a-lot for the promotion of sports and games in the country. Despite poor economical conditions and other alarming problems of the country he did not look back and leave any stone unturned to promote sports in the country. During his regime many attractive schemes were introduced and institutions of physical education and sports of international standard were established. It is pertinent to mention here that after the 1958 Asian games Late Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India constituted an Ad-hoc inquiry Committee to know the reasons of poor performance of our sports persons in the 1958 Asian games. He duly honoured the recommendation of the committee and took some concrete steps.

The modern political leaders have changed the side altogether to the extent that no one is interested even to takeover sports ministry at the centre as well as in states. Under some circumstances if any body is compelled to take this assignment, then least interested is shown in running the sports department to the expected level of the nation. As far as economy of the country is concerned, it is far better than the days of Late Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru. The public of India is convinced that either the sports minister is interested to make foreign trips with teams or is interested in helping his near and dear ones to be selected in the national teams and represent the country in International Competitions.

Before holding any national or international competition lot of politics is played either to cancel or to postpone the competition. If the circumstances completed to do so, then holding of International competition is cleared at 11 hour and every thing is made bound to be completed hurriedly. This practice helps top level sports ministry people to get various types of financial and employment bonanza. After the competition, no one takes pains to maintain the infrastructure and equipment. Once the competition is over, the buildings, pools, gymnasium, tracks, synthetic courts etc. are not used to regenerate funds, in order to have proper maintenance of these costly structures.

Now a days, there is a politics in all the organizations of sports, institutions of sports and among the sports persons too. The intrusion of third grade politics in these areas has ruined the Indian sports. It has gone so corrupt and low that

- Often parents are reluctant to send their female ward for coaching camps and competitions being conducted at far off places.
- In the class sport (tennis, badminton, cricket, golf etc) upcoming players belonging to ordinary family find it difficult to be selected in the state or national teams.
- Sanctioned kit, diet and pocket money of players do not reach in full-quantity and quality to the concerned player. Also there are examples of legendary international players who are finding it difficult to earn their livelihood in the old age and there is no one to listen them. Look at the condition of Parduman Singh an International Shot-putter. Another example may be quoted of Gurcharan Singh, our elite International boxer who missed bronze-medal in the Sydney Olympics 2000 on some technical grounds. After coming back from Australia he was not given his due. Consequently he got frustrated and left the coaching camp under mysterious circumstances without informing the authorities. Such happenings or behaviour on the part of the concerned federation or sports ministry send wrong signals to other budding players.
- The holding of inaugural Afro-Asian Games by the Indian Olympic Association at New Delhi as per schedule is a victim of Indian politics. Also, the participation of our teams in the international competitions relies on the mood of Indian politics. Now, it strands proved, when Govt. of India officially announced to conduct the games in Oct-Nov, 2003 at Hyderabad (AP).

Critical Analysis of above stated facts is very alarming for the sports fraternity and nation. It clearly indicates that until from the top level of Govt, sports federation, state association, players, parents and public, collective efforts are made to set the house in order and fix responsibility at every level, the days are not far when

no Indian sports person will figure at the international scene specifically in Olympics Games, Asian Games and Commonwealth Games. Further, it is a layman's excuse that we can not perform well in the international competitions because our population is beyond our means and there is a lack of funds and infrastructure. Now, the very fact is that there is no dearth of funds for a country like India, where huge amount is flushed out in commissions and various scandals. As far as population is concerned, our neighboring country China is having much more population and perhaps lesser means of natural resources of income than India but is competing with the world's fully developed countries in sports medal tally. This shows their political will and accountability being fixed at every level. China did not participate in the Olympic Games for many years together, because they were not prepared to compete up to the international standard. They re-appeared in the Olympics only when they were sure of their expected better performance. Why can not India do it?

3. International Politics:

Sports is an element of social reality, strongly anchored to the political-economical system in which it is placed, that has significance far beyond the trivial. Further, sport is related to the power structure of a society and reflects the ideology of that society and is used to extend and reinforce it. In the developed countries the politicians use sport for political mileage.

At the International level the sport is not only commercial but political too, having significant impact on both national and international levels. Sport continues to be used to promote both the political aspirations of individual politicians and the nationalism, ideology and prestige of nations. Practically all nations now consider achievement in sport as characteristic of their vitality and ideology.

First, sport has been used by political figures to enhance their image as a sport participant or performer. Possibly, two aspects are construed to be of significant benefit to the politician. One, identity with sports is supposed to provide evidence of the politician's physical strength and vigour and that they have the health to carry out the job of their office in vigorous way. Second, there exists an overwhelming desire on the part of the politician, as with so many individuals, to identify with sports persons. This somehow enhances their own self image, self importance and ego.

Secondly, sport is not used only at the community level to develop social integration locally, but also at the national and international levels to demonstrate national supremacy in ideology and economic sufficiency. At the local levels, school, college and university teams are expected to bring credit to the community. People identify with the total community and institution through the winning team. Perhaps, the best example of the use of sport for political purposes on an international level is the Olympic Games. The original noble idea of Baron Piere de Coubertin, to develop international understanding and good will among the youth of the world has never been attained so far. Originally, games were started for competition between individuals or teams but the news media and ambitious desire of nations to use the stadium and playing areas as political arenas have combined to emphasize national competition rather than the Greek ideal of individual's competition. These political overtones have turned the Olympics into a spectacle where nations strive for prestige and supremacy, and the games have gradually become spiced with an "International Ethic". The games, while conducted on a large scale, are only vestige of our heritage from the Greeks and the early ideas of the Amateur Athletic Union and Baron Piere de Coubertin. The artificial scoring of points to determine the top most, has led to bickering.

Sports also has other political meanings/connotations. Patriotism is a political concept that somehow has infiltrated in the field of sport. The national anthem is played before a sport event, the flag is presented by armed colour bearers, and in some events fighter planes fly over-head in specific formation. Such acts do stimulate an individual to think that;

- Is there a relationship here between patriotism and sport?
- Are the Rags and national anthems symbols of war ' ?
- And, is the analogy that sport is war a realistic societal norm ?

The simple answer to the aforementioned questions may be that at least war like trappings or equipment that symbolize patriotism and are used to glorify sport are rituals of the institution of sport. This is also supported by the Baron's feelings that the "Games should become true festival with its solemn ceremonies of oath, hoisting of flags, and worthy opening and closing ceremonies. He went on telling to the extent that grounds should make its contribution to the beauty of great public display." The period between 1968-2000 has been characterized by political protests. On many occasions the national anthem and the flag have been treated disrespectfully by both athletes and spectators to show their political discontentment. Therefore, it is apparent that sport has become a stage for the political activities.

Some people of the world, for instance, Jews, black American-Africans and Africans had bitter experience and they were forced to speak openly against the spirit behind the Olympic games which stood once for creating friendship among the nations and their players. This is because of the racial based politics of the country. Also in some countries politics dominated by religion has become a hurdle for the youths of the country to show their talent in the international competition like Olympics. We may have the example of Afghanistan where they follow the dress code very strictly. Also per the dictates of religion, a particular time which has been fixed for religious prayers, players have to stop the game and have to participate in the said prayers. Gender discrimination is another problem of the Religious-political countries. Girls cannot take part in sports and games. They cannot even watch the matches of their country's sportsmen. Further some of the nations because of their say in the world, boycott the Olympics on one or other pretext, just to settle their political scores with other nation. Boycotting of Olympics serves no purpose in reality. Rather nations indulging in such un-sportsmanship like acts deprive of their athletes who have been preparing for a long time and waiting for the opportunity to show their talent.

4. Views of Baron Piere De Coubertin:

The Modern Olympic Games were revived under the leadership of Baron Piere de Coubertin in with the aim to develop international understanding and goodwill among the youth of the world. He categorically stated that, the competition is between individuals or teams, not between nations. And although news papers often compare the total number of medals won by each country, that is strictly unofficial. There is no such thing a country winning 'Olympic Games'. In the words of Baron Piere de Coubertin, "The important thing in the Olympic games is not to win but take part, as the important thing, in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well. The spread of these precepts is to develop a more valiant, more strong, more scrupulous, and more generous humanity". Further, he was of the firm opinion that "the games have a potential for the promotion of social peace and justice. Therefore, the games could break down barriers not only between classes but also between nations; let us export rowers, runners, and fencers, there is the free trade of the future."

5. Conclusion:

No doubt, sport has the potential of being political in the highest sense, But, on a global scene such as the Olympics and other international sport competitions, sports has the possibility of providing a world dimension. That is extremely needed as the future unfolds and the earth becomes more of a village. Despite its number of draw backs and evils coming in, sport has the latent capability to promote international understanding and good will among nations and their youths. The nationalistic type of politics that now spreads through the Olympics can be changed. In fact, the endeavour should be towards the idea of sharing in the struggle, enjoyment, and achievement of mankind on international level rather than asserting the political-economical superiority of nations or races. Sports, at its best need not be a barrier against mindless isolationism, but rather a bridge to equality living and filling up a socio-economic, racial or religion, or political ideological gaps. The performance of Jesse Owns, Carl Lewis, Jim Thorpe and many more American Africans is an answer to the racial dominating international politics.

6. References:

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