

Sporting Culture And World Peace

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Culture is a shared behavior, which is learnt by the individual as a member of the particular society and is passed from generation to generation, through the process of socialization. Every society has a culture of its own which flows from custom, tradition, language, value system etc. In short, culture is a way of life for the individual and it is a path to be followed from generation to generation in order to continue the social system.

Sporting Culture

It implies the culture in relation to sports. How people of the society evaluate sports? How they interpret sports? What type of attitude the people have towards sports? What is the contribution of sports towards society and vice-versa? Whether sports integrate or disintegrate the society? The discipline, the emotion, the attitude, in short the sporting behavior to be expected from the sports person in particular and from the coaches, the general spectators, sports fans and/ or connoisseurs in general.

Unlike the other aspects of culture like language custom, value system which vary from society to society, group to group, the culture of sports is widespread. The language of sports is communicated world wide in its own terms.

Sports is a cross culture phenomenon. It touches almost every aspect of society. Since sports play a significant role in the lives of millions of people throughout the world, sports are significant forms of social activities and they raise a wide range of issues. Some of these issues are conceptual and ethical in nature. Conceptual questions to the world of sports are – What are sports? What is involved in competition? Ethical questions raise moral concerns; Is there too much emphasis on winning any competition? Sports events facilitate the congregation of people from various parts of the country, at national level and various parts of the world & at the international level. Sports make people transcend cross cultural barriers and speak languages that is understood by all. The world sports congress, held in New Delhi emphasized that it could play a major role in promoting and propagating peace, provided one understands the spirit of global participation and philosophy of sports. This philosophy of sports is based on the assumption that a game will be played in the spirit of the game. Rules of decency and decorum will on no account be violated by all these related to sports. The spirit of sports is to embody a combination of qualities such as fairness, courtesy, generosity, grace and decency or in one word sportsmanship.

Needless to say, the physical culture, games and sports, now-a-days have become the object of universal attention not only in developed society but also in developing societies.

We can analyze the significance or importance of sports from various dimensions (sociological, biological, political, psychological etc. From sociological point of view, we can say sports are one of the most important realization of social life. They are capable of exerting an influence on social production, human behavior pattern & social relationship. They are important factors in ideological education – a means of uniting diverse elements, often more capable of social integration than religion, colour, caste and creed and of rational utilization of time. They represent an area of peaceful competition in a spirit of friendship between nations and their citizens. Biological dimension of sports highlights the influence of sports upon human beings. Biological nature that includes their body fitness, stamina & agility, endurance capacity etc. Psychological dimensions of sports lie in the fact that sports influence the psyche structure of both sports men and women, their killing instinct, moral confidence and personality structure. From political point of view we can find what are the prime factors in sports which are likely to create friendly relations and when it is likely to create hostile relationship. From economic point of view we find how different economic class/groups of society adapt/accept different types of sport i.e. sophisticated sports like tennis, golf, polo, billiards, badminton for rich/elite class and athletics, kabaddi for poor economic groups. How sports classifies the society on the basis of economic group? The field of world competition in sport arena symbolises as a mirror where the image of the country is reflected. The socio economic political standard of a particular country is reflected through their native participants' performance. Even if a small poor country it might be, it is highlighted/focused/illuminated by the glorious performance by its players in the sports arena,

Olympic Games and Relevance for Conflict Resolution

The Olympic games is not only signify a contest of superb physical prowess by the cream of world youth, it is also a movement to perpetuate and strengthen the noble ideals that 'Olympic' stands for: friendship, fraternity, harmony, mutual cooperation, international understanding and peace. Sportsmanship, fair play and amateurism are the pillars on which the ideals rest.

K.K. Katyal in his article "pitching for Olympic Truce" asks the readers as to how many of them were aware about the relevance of Olympic truce today. He reveals that Olympic truce is an integral part of the Olympic movement. It has special relevance for strife-torn areas. By following this line of action, a non governmental platform was set up to promote to ideals of peace, friendship and international understanding. Its symbolic seat is in Olympia, the birthplace of Olympic games. The message of the Olympic truce is simple:- it is a call for all conflicts and hostilities to cease during the duration of the games and seven days before and extends to seven days after the games began. The inherent ideals behind this, is that if we can stop fighting for a few days, may be we can do it forever". This concept was blessed by the U.N. with the general assembly adopting a resolution in 1993, urging member states to observe the Olympic truce. Two years later, it supported the ideals of a peaceful and better world through sports and Olympic ideals. It figured in the millennium summit declaration. The ideal of Olympic truce owes its origin to Greece in 8th century B.C. This was the time when the then warring kings after being tired of

fighting approached the God of poetry & music, to suggest the way out of incessant wars. They were told to organize sports contests in Olympia, as a means of fostering peace. That was done and simultaneously they signed what was to be the largest standing peace accord in history - the Olympic truce.

One might have been dissatisfied with the gender discrimination strategy of Olympic games, played in first Olympic where women as a section of participants had been debarred. Various distinguished scholars showed their dismay over this biased attitude of organizers of Olympic committee. Yet if we analyze the historical background of the Olympic truce, we can easily find the rationale behind this decision which highlighted that since the wars and conflicts of various section of people of the then societies were the exclusive domain of male members, they were motivated to abide by the peace accord (Olympic truce) to minimize the conflict in the war stricken areas. Perhaps that was the main reason women did not participate in Olympic games at that period of time.

The 3 most important virtual assets of Olympic truce which have been enshrined in the 'Olympic character' are: *altius*, *citius* and *fortius* which implies:-

- i). *Altius*: development of physical and moral qualities for games and sports.
- ii). *Citius*: the youth should be devoted to efforts of international peace though the medium of games and sports.
- iii). *Fotius*: creation of international harmony with the help of Olympic principles.

Sports, National Identity and Feeling of Nationalism

Even in primitive societies, sports were associated with the feeling of nationalism and group identity. The same feeling persists even today. When international events take place or test matches (cricket) are played between two nations, the feeling of national identity, national pride and national anxiety are reflected not only through the players but also through the spectators and commentators where national euphoria is created. It is not a mere coincidence that a match between two nations is called a test match. In fact, it becomes a test of the talent, virility and skill between the contesting nations. It is the sports where the creed is based on equality, the parochial loyalties based on caste, colour, religion or communities are submerged and what emerges as the victorious is the *esprit de corps*. It is here that we find the evidence of sports creed, sports culture & sports community. Young men and women are tempted to strive at most in sports and games because their national honour is involved in their performance. In totalitarian countries like China, the state not only involves itself in training sports persons from their young ages but also punishes the players failing in competitions.

Candidly speaking, sports has a role in the internal affairs of a country and in the external relations of that country with the world community. Internally, the major role is one of integration and conflict-avoidance; externally the role of sports is to maintain or improve status. The later is particularly crucial to developing nations that are seeking world class standing in the hierarchy of nations.

Sports is viewed as a major institution that helps societies overcome cultural religion, ethnic, religious and political diversity or conflict. While analyzing integrative and cohesive nature of sports. Reich says: "In many countries, especially in the less developed ones, sports serve as a uniting force in helping overcome tribal and linguistic pluralisms. For instance, heads of state in Africa, have encouraged sports development for this reason. They also have promoted sports as a cohesive force for unity in the continent as a whole.

The Nicaraguans emphasized mass sports in order to re-build internal institutions after a disrupting political change. They used base ball as the sports to glue society back together.

Sports enable society to cohere by linking diverse groups in a common frame of reference in which symbols share common meaning, transcending political and social barriers. The elite and the masses the brought together in the sports arena and status differences are neutralized and a semblance of democracy is established. Solidarity is enhanced and the community is unified in the face of opposition. Potential internal conflicts are avoided or neutralized by transferring the hostility and aggression form the street to the arena. This integration produces the national image of a unified and orderly political system. A positive national image subsequently promotes the status of a country in the international arena. Its utility is being reflected in the most diversified country like India where in spite of various difference among the people on the basis of case, religion, language and race, they forget everything when they find the Indian team on the field in the international events.

International Sports Events

The 'Olympic Truce' reminds us that sports is a war without weapon. It is a source of tension release without disruption. It is believed that sports works as a medium/instrument though which the aggression, hatred- ness of enemy counties are checked to some extent at least during the period of international sporting events when the enemy countries try to release their anger not by winning heads of each other but by wining medals or trophy.

But it is a mater of great concern today that international sporting events have blurred the lofty goals of the Olympic movement. The spirit of nationality has overridden the spirit of brotherhood. Participating nations have seldom put international understanding and the good will of the world community ahead of their own interest. The demonstration of superiority has been given a much higher priority than the achievement of understanding. The questions are very often raised in the mind whether international sporting events contribute to peace or to hostility. So they blur the differences between nations or do they intensify the awareness of differences polarizing the international community? Various empirical studies in this regard lead to conclusion that it can do both. Jay coakley in his study of political consequences of international sports events has shown: under certain conditions they are likely to create understanding and friendly relationships and under other conditions they are likely to create or increase differences and hostility between participating nations.

Sports is likely to create friendly relationship when:

1. Players emphasize the process and experience
2. The event is defined as an opportunity to establish or reaffirm social ties between the competitors
3. The existing relationship between the competitors is already friendly.
4. Athletes identify themselves in terms of athletic skills.
5. Media & spectators focus on athletes as individuals.
6. Symbols related to the event emphasize unity between opponents.
7. Public expectations focus mainly athletic excellence.
8. Victories are attributed to athletes.

Sports is likely to create hostile relationships when:

1. Players emphasize outcomes & competitive success.
2. The event is defined as an opportunity to establish dominance over the competitors.
3. The existing relationship between the competitors is hostile and polarized.
4. Athletes identify themselves in terms of nationalism.
5. Media and spectators focus on athletes as representative of nations.
6. Symbols related to the events emphasize difference between opponents.
7. Public expectations focus mainly on who wins medal.
8. Victories are attributed to sponsoring nations.

Now-a-days the contours of the Olympic sports are changing. All the participants are not practising the Olympic ideals; they are rather obsessed with the gold medal. Professionalism, communalisms, politics, narrow nationalism, apartheid and other unwelcome trend of negativism are degrading the mighty endeavour of Olympic movement. The ethos of the sporting culture is at stake.

Sports and Violence

George Orwell, remarked in the modern context that serious sport had nothing to do with fair play. It is getting bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence. Violence has always remained a part and parcel of sports. The legendary sporting event where slaves were thrown in the ring to fight hungry lions for the amusement of Roman emperor are not something very different from the boxing matches where the adults thrash each others heads into pulp. The nature of spectator involvement is also probably the same. Violence however, in the modern context is the result of solid perversion of the desire to win. Killer instinct is no doubt a pre-requisite to victory but this instinct has unfortunately become negative, intolerant, unthinking and destructive. Sometimes the players become so obsessed with the idea of winning the game that they forget all the principles of games. Recent indisciplined behavior shown in the rings by Mike Tyson who bit the ear of his opponent Evander Holyfield in third round of WBA heavyweight fight in 1997 attests to this fact. Similarly, the famous cricketer Dennis Lillee's remarks – "I want to see blood spattered on the pitch" – is an example of the manifestation of a violent spirit that will accept no defeat. For most players today, sportsmanship has secondary importance. In 1994 World Cup, Brazils' Leonardo knocked out American Tab Ramos with his elbow is an act of aggression. May be the worst instance of violence in recent times has been the killing of Columbian football star, Andres Escobar, by his fans for scoring a goal against his own country which helped the U.S. beat his team 2-1 in the 1994 World Cup soccer. The incident of stabbing on the back of the most successful woman tennis player, Monica Seles in 1993 by a fan of her main rival Steffi Graf, also suggests that the intense competitiveness that goes with the modern sports may breed violence as well. Sports violence is not restricted to a handful of nations; it has become a universal phenomenon. It is not only contestants who are involved in such inhuman acts but the spectators and fans as well commit violence to help their teams or players win simply out of anger and frustration.

A game today is not played in the spirit of the game. The mobility of a game has been lost as victory is all that matters and participation in an event is not enough. A game has become a cut-throat competition. Participants from other countries are not fellow sportsmen but rivals, ironically, the participation of countries in sports events has failed to increase international fraternity. A performance these days does

not bring joy, only success does. A cricket match between India and Pakistan tends to generate political bitterness and communal clashes in both countries, many would argue in India and Pakistan. In fact, the incidents of digging up of pitches in Bombay and throwing of empty cans and stones at Indian and Pakistani cricketers in India and Pakistan suggests how the cricket factor has played a role, even if it is a minor one, in India-Pakistan relations.

However, this does not mean that sports never creates understanding and friendly relationships. The above mentioned emerging dilemmas in the international sports events are the momentary reflections of the players, spectators, fans and officials. Yet, we have seen the use of sports as a diplomatic strategy – “ping - pong diplomacy” to establish a closer tie between the U.S. and mainland China during the early 1970’s; the use of a sport-aid programme expressing international solidarity with the suffering humanity of Africa, the use of sports against the drug addiction and the like. We have also seen the goodwill games and sports aimed at friendship and peace. One cannot also forget the way the military dictator of Pakistan, General Zua-ul-Haq used cricket diplomacy to convince the Indian authorities of his goodwill towards India. Further disregarding the political differences the participation of South Korea under one flag in the last Sydney Olympic, 2000, startled the eyes of many that sports has the potential to unify the most rivalry countries.

Conclusion

The Olympic Council of Asia has honoured Delhi as the venue for conducting the 1st Afro-Asian Games. However, the schedule (3rd to 11th Nov. 2001) is postponed for the terrorist attack on America. It is a bright opportunity for the Asian sportspersons to compete against the talented counterparts of Africa. The importance of the Afro-Asian Games lies in the fact that for the 1st time, an effort is being made to bring the people of the two containment together. For incorporating the above suggestions to ensure a ‘clean sport’ needs more and more discussions, debate, in this regard. This lies not only on administrators, but also on media, sports fan, players etc. If everyone of us unanimously realize its significance, a real sports – culture will be evolved in the world where there will be a peaceful coexistence. Still there is a light of hope when we recall the vibrant songs of one of the most popular Australian pop stars (Nikki Webster): “We will be one”, in the inaugural ceremony of Sydney 2000, Olympic. It still echoes in our mind and will ever remain in our mind forever.

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