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One of the objectives of sports education in India is to provide skills for dealing with psycho-social issues in the school, home and the community. What does this mean? Sports could influence personal and social competencies such as self-confidence, self-discipline, body awareness, accepting rules, fairness, dealing with emotions, learning mutual respect, winning, losing, teamwork and communicative skills. Thus sports plays an important role as a socialisation mechanism and for teaching values of the society. It helps build certain social skills. The former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, says sports is a universal language that can bring people together, support the work for peace and help to achieve the Millennium Develop-



ment Goals¹. Sports has this capacity to transcend boundaries. Can it then play a role to bridge class, caste, gender and bring inclusiveness in India?

The following are the situations which are common in schools: Girls sitting under a tree during the physical education period; physically challenged persons staying back in the classroom and writing notes; girls standing near the boundary and cheering groups of boys who are playing; overweight or differently-abled children taking the role of scorer or umpire,

deciding the boundary line. The above examples depict how sports is accessible to only a few.

A 14 year old girl says, “I like basket ball, I have represented my school team, but now I have stopped because practice requires staying back till 6 or 6.30 in the evening after school which my parents do not allow.” Similar was the case with another girl student. She was a very good athlete and participated in the state level under 13. She won many prizes but after her puberty she stopped because it involved practicing on weekends and after school hours with a male trainer and travelling to various districts along with trainer or a coach for competitions. For girls, participation in sports after a certain age is taboo and many parents do not see sports as a suitable career for girls. Their assumptions are based on the cultural beliefs regarding the role of women. In the school I was teaching we tried to create a mixed football team. The boys could not accept girls in their team; they felt that their team would be weak. Very few girls showed interest

in the field. It was common for girls to sit after 15 minutes of running. Slowly the team thinned to just one or two girls. The girl who played enthusiastically was considered tomboyish and she was not accepted by her girl friends.

Having touched issues on gender let us analyse another important factor - class. A boy from a poor family was very good at cricket. He represented the school team but he could not afford to buy shoes or a kit for himself. His mother felt that the time he spent in

cricket could be used to help her fetch drinking water for the house. This indicates that sports can come only after basic needs. Sports could be a costly affair for many people and spending time in sports can happen only if one can afford leisure time. Similar is the case with the differently-abled. Discriminatory attitudes and practices tend to perpetuate through sports. Students with disability are usually neglected in school sports. They are advised to sit back in their classrooms or they become the silent audience of the class's football or cricket game.

The above examples seem to indicate that while sports can provide equal opportunity for inclusion, it actually excludes many students in our schools.

Research also shows that class, race, and gender inequities all play a role in participation, as well as achievement, in sports. The challenges and limitations of bringing in inclusion are due to:

- a) Socio-economic/cultural barriers: Many sports are the exclusive privilege of upper class children who have time to spare for leisure and physical activity. Also the notion of women's role in production and reproduction limit them from activities outside the home. Girls are usually prevented from playing outside. Street games for boys and girls are advised to play indoor games.
- b) Safety concerns: Dangerous physical environments like construction near the ground, debris, uneven play ground, and barbed wires could be an important safety concern for children. Any mishap on the play ground could affect the life of children. The risk is higher among poor communities who cannot afford treatment.
- c) Infrastructure: Provision of clean and proper changing rooms, access to sports field from home, adequate lighting and provisions during rain or excessive heat are matter of concern for women as well as physically challenged. Most of the schools do not have a proper playground and even in public sports centres such facilities are inadequate.

- d) Lack of role model: The coach or trainers are usually men and there is very little representation by women and physically challenged. The schools may be sensitive to physically challenged students but may not have a trainer who is disabled or a physically challenged teacher.
- e) Sports education: With the tendency of teachers to complete syllabus and prepare students for examination, physical education becomes the last priority. Sports are considered as an extracurricular activity. The resources for sports are usually minimal in the schools. The purpose of sports or its objective is completely forgotten and students just tend to play with the ball without any coach. Briefing about the game, its history, its rules, what it tends to achieve are seldom discussed with students.

The challenges and limitations in bringing in inclusion are due to socioeconomic/ cultural barriers, lack of role models, poor sports facilities and infrastructure, treating sports in isolation or as extracurricular activity instead of integrating with other subjects.

Though there are many limitations, I think it is possible to make sports more inclusive and to use the instrument of sport for a meaningful purpose.

Integration of Sport:

Physical education needs to be integrated with other disciplines. This integrated approach will not leave sports in isolation, it will be more holistic and the students will feel the need to participate; teachers may also have to find ways to make it inclusive as everybody needs to participate and learn. Instead of treating it as an extracurricular activity, which requires practising after school hours, integration within other disciplines would help find its place within the curriculum.

Pedagogical Approach to Sports Education:

The coach or trainer can help break the stereotypes

on the role of women and purposefully create mixed teams. He/she could also educate both boys and girls about equal participation and discuss the prevailing myth on gender roles. Sports which is inclusive in nature needs to be identified. Traditional sports which are context specific can be identified and used with a little variation. Making variations in sports and games can make it inclusive. For example, in western countries sitting volleyball has been tried to help disabled participate. The schools can help students play all kinds of sports instead of specialising in popular games. They can identify a sport for a term and keep rotating and inventing new ones so that all students get to participate in all games and identify their interest.

Holistic Approach:

Involvement of sports needs support from the family. Hence involving the community and parents and proper communication about their wards' participation would help. Information campaign and education to community regarding the myth about participations of girls in sports can be planned.

Infrastructure and Incentives:

Schools can be a common place for identifying talent and training. Sports scholarships, incentives for dis-

advantaged, and travel grants during district or state level representation may help in bringing children of all class, caste, gender or race on a common platform. Also it could be a place for access to all sports resources. Schools need to make conscious efforts to develop necessary infrastructure.

Research in Sports:

Research on participation and achievement in sports, effectiveness of integrated sports curriculum and many such areas can be identified. Any intervention like mixed school team can be studied and evaluated. Such studies may help in planning for sports education and show the path to move ahead for inclusiveness. Documentation and biographies of life of sports persons can serve as examples for aspiring students. Publishing books on women in sports and para-olympics achievers may help to motivate students to participate.

Many interventions to bring equity (through sports) have been tried in western countries, which have been successful. Systemic support could definitely help sports transcend boundaries and instrumental in bringing students of all class, caste, race, ability and gender together.

Reference:

¹ Kofi Annan, says "sports is a universal language that can bring people together, support the work for peace and help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals". Sports has this capacity to transcend boundaries. Can it then play a role to bridge class, caste, gender and bring inclusiveness in India?

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