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In the last couple of decades, there has been a surge in interest about the place of sports in our schools. Cricket, football and hockey have always been popular sports but more and more people are becoming aware of other international sports due to satellite television. The recent Commonwealth games in India have also added to this interest. Until quite recently, only a few sportspersons benefitted from their talent because it allowed them to use the sports quota for admission to higher education institutes or in finding jobs. With a growing number of sportspersons acquiring celebrity status, sports is also being recognised as a respectable, lucrative career option. This in turn has led to a growth in the avenues for learning skills associated with sports and numerous private sports coaching academies and camps for students have been set up

1. In recent years, the government has become relatively more conscious of the need to have good sportspersons
2. It has promoted many sports institutions and set up special schools to train children in specific sports.

A small section of parents are prepared to spend money to ensure that their children get the best coaching and opportunity to practise. In some ways, the motivation for this is not unlike that for providing children extra tutoring in school subjects. The impetus of all these activities is the desire and hope to be eventually considered capable of being selected for playing at the international level.

However, in the minds of students, teachers and parents, sports still has low impact. The fact is that by and large we still look for occupations that are considered secure and long term. Occupations in sport require

more in terms of initiative, practice and performance and are thus seen as less attractive. Options of such safe occupations are limited and require getting into higher academics. The anxiety to see their wards in 'good, safe, white-collared' jobs makes many parents think that time spent on sport is a waste. The bulk of parents and teachers still consider sports a major impediment to children doing well in academics. Not many schools make the effort to involve all students in sports and instead focus on producing individuals, a team or teams that can win matches and win tournaments. Providing opportunity for all children to participate in sports is not considered necessary. Sports is not seen as a part of the development of the personality of the child. Instead, many of those who do participate in sports see it as a means to get into a secondary occupation.

### Government Policies and Programmes

#### From National Policy on Education 1968

**(15) Games and Sports:** Games and sports should be developed on a large scale with the object of improving the physical fitness and sportsmanship of the average student as well as of those who excel in this department. Where playing field and other facilities for developing a nation-wide programme of physical education do not exist, these should be provided on a priority basis.

Similarly, the NPE 1986 spoke about development of comprehensive capabilities and the value of physical activity. As an outcome, under Operation Blackboard, schools were provided a football and some other assorted sports materials. While all this suggests a recognition of the importance of sports, the implementation was superficial. The sports equipment, much like the equipment for music and for reading, was of



## Changing the Face of Sports in Education/Schools

poor quality and did not reach the schools in a usable shape. The rules made for the stock entry and preservation of the material were such that no person could feel confident of using it. It was only much later that some of these stock entry rules were relaxed but no further sports materials was provided to the schools. However, neither the educational community nor the parents perceived this as a serious concern.

For example, the alternative for education, the Nai Talim movement was conscious of developing many values in the child. The key points included cooperation, participation in the economic and social life of the local community, respecting oneself and all other human beings, and being sensitive towards the environment. In spite of emphasis on head, heart and hand, Nai Talim did not have any element of sports in it. It included creative work, included responsible craft work, doing manual activity to recognise its worth but no sports. It tried to make working with hands respectable and valuable. The joy of creating and being socially useful added to the flavour. But it did not include another kind of 'H' and that is health. More recently, nutrition has been included as a component for younger children but it does not have much else. We must keep in mind that Nai Talim's principles would demand that the programme of health has to be a part of the complete whole. It has to develop the

health of the child but cannot stand separate from the rest as an add-on. There is another concern as well. This programme of health development has also to have some happiness in it.

While we speak about the goal of all round development and the slogan 'healthy mind in a healthy body', there is no one in the controlling system, or among the users, or in the schools, who is convinced about the relevance and importance of these. Sports is not an agenda of vital importance for most educators and therefore no concrete and clear plans have been formulated for making sports possible for all children in a school programme. Attempts at revitalising the elementary education in the country through the DPEP and the SSA, and the more recent attempts to revitalise secondary education have not included sports as an important component.

In the Indian context this is extremely important because the common view about education is that it is distinct from 'play'. Education is supposed to be a serious engagement that requires an element of forcible discipline as well. It is only recently that we have started talking about engaging classrooms that permit children to shift, move and actively participate in the classrooms. In this scenario the attitude to sports, which is considered to be a pastime, is not just of mere indifference but is actually hostile. Schools and parents are willing to send or even bring children back for tuition in maths or for English but not for sports, except for those who



would form the district or the state teams and are looking at sports as a profession.

The extensive exercise of developing a National Curriculum Framework of Education in 2005 noted the need for physical education. In recent years, the importance of physical development during early schooling has gained ground. The recognition that nutrition forms an important part of the physical development led to the mid-day-meal scheme. It is now a national programme and was perhaps also started to keep children at school longer and even to attract them to school.

In the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) development exercise, a position paper on health and physical education was also drafted. It is notable that this paper does not refer to sports at all.

### Physical Education As Opposed To Sports

In order to reflect upon the need and the possibilities of having sports as a part of the school programme, it would be useful to identify key aspects of a sport. Physical training (P.T.) programme that schools currently have may include regular physical exercises and in some cases even regular yoga classes. They may also have a nutrition and health programme. This in some sense also completes the requirements as laid out in the NCF-05. We need to, however, ask if this is enough. Is there any difference between this kind of training for physical development and attempting the same through participation in sports?

We may argue that physical exercises are more organised and have a more predictable outcome. The programme can have a calendar as well as trackable outcomes. This however, does not help develop the joy of co-operating, competing 'without stakes' and learning to try one's best. A good organised sport would also have its routine of exercise but much more. Sport has a framework of spontaneity and provides a variation of experience. The lessons that sports can teach are many. In contrast, for many children physical exercises are repetitive, dull and only add to the routine of the academic programme.

P.T. exercise gives no desire for strategising, planning and attempting to stretch one's self in order to achieve a goal. Team sports offer a possibility of building leadership, cooperation, planning and strategy. The choices available and decision making required in sports exercises the mind as well as the body. P.T. and yoga have exercises that also help the mind to discipline itself, and in this respect they resemble regular academic studies more than sports.

The focus of P.T. programme also becomes evident from the other functions that the instructor performs. In all schools, one of the most important roles of the P.T. instructor is to maintain discipline. He is often delegated to punish children and one form of punishment is to make children to do some physical exer-

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cise. It is not surprising therefore, that children look at the P.T. period as a punishment and being with the physical education teacher an unpleasant interaction. The instructor is also trapped in his role, and is often feared by students even if he is pleasant-mannered and cheerful. Sports on the other hand provides a situation where teachers can participate with children and interact naturally. They can express joy and frustration like the other players and break the barriers of distance and form.

For elementary schools some amount of P.T. is helpful to organise and discipline children's mind but they also require opportunity to relax and freely express their energy, which sports can help them do. As children grow, the engagement in the school requires effort and concentration and there is a need to break that routine with something that is important but is not in



the same genre. These can be games, sports or creative craft activities.

### Games Vs Sports

Games act as a pastime and an engagement that refreshes the mind and breaks the routine of formal abstract learning. Games such as 'buzz', 'mathsie' and antakshri, can be a part of the maths, language, EVS or any other programme. In fact many of the activities for different subjects can be created in a format that resembles a game. There are other games like chess, ludo, carom which develop strategising and motor skills and help develop a sense of chance as well. These, however, are generally individual and do not involve working in a group. They also do not have much physical activity. There is a rich variety of games both at home and in school and they can be modified to serve many purposes but cannot serve the same purpose as sports.

### Sports in Schools

For a long time in Indian school education, activities such as crafts, arts, music, and theatre were a part of the school programme but treated as extra curricular. Subsequent to the New Education Policy 1986, the concept of socially useful productive work (SUPW) became a part of educational parlance. All schools were expected to have regular space in the timetable for SUPW but even here sports were denied any space.

While there may have been a softening in the attitude of parents towards sports due to an increasing awareness of the job opportunities, the educational institutions themselves fail to mirror this attitude, even with the increasing use of the term all round development. This is largely due to two independent factors. The prominent role of schools is seen to function as sieves for higher education, particularly for professional education. The fear



of being excluded from this professional club implies that only a few students devote their energy to being good in sports.

The second factor is that organising sports of reasonable quality requires infrastructure as well as expenses in terms of coaches and teachers. It also requires space in the timetable. It is no surprise, therefore, that few schools have sports programmes that involve a larger number of children. Some schools have infrastructure and equipment but they restrict themselves to working with a few students who are good in sports. The energy is spent on attempting to make these children excel and become part of the district, state or national teams.

### What Kind of Sports

It is also important to consider what can be the nature of sports given the limitations of the school. There are sports that require a lot of time and others that are brisk and of short durations. There are some that require a lot of preparation and equipment and others that are not so elaborate. In some, only a few children can participate at given point while in others many can be simultaneous participants. While all of us are free to choose our own options, these have to be managed within the school programme and have to include all children. These two requirements eliminate sports that require elaborate preparation.

If a lot of equipment is required or long drawn ground preparation is needed, it cannot be sports for all. Watching a cricket match can be very relaxing and enjoyable but the spectators can't be considered as participants. Cricket particularly is also not suitable as a school sport in terms of the time, field and equipment requirements. It may be better to avoid sports which can only engage a few children at a time. It would turn most of the other children into spectators.

Even with limited resources, if the

children are allowed free time and given some material they can innovate and create their own games and in fact that is what all children do and have been doing. So why at all have any manner of organised sports? The improvisations in such games do not give children many elements that sports can and it is precisely this reason that we need to recognise. It is important to guide them to organise their sports so that they learn to play better. The school must make an attempt to ensure that everyone is playing and it is not only the best that play and form the team.

It is perhaps also important to consider whether sports that we have in schools should be with a sense of competition or should be without that entirely. There can be a lot of tension among players in sports and situations of individual competition. However, since it is also true that exerting to win is an important part of self-development, we cannot separate playing to win and struggling for it.

Sports has an important role to play in the lives of girls. The idea of fun and time to play may not be something that is as easily accepted for girls as is for boys. For girls the reluctance to jostle and physically push and pull even each other may be socially and culturally ingrained. Improving the status of sports in schools may provide the impetus necessary for break-

ing some of these taboos in the minds of girls and their parents. Any policy formulated and programmes designed must ensure the participation of girls as well as boys.

### Conclusion

Sports is a refreshing activity that engages the whole person and develops the person in a natural process. It is not only about the intellect, the strategy, the appreciation of change, but also the physical movement and coordination. Sports makes one strive to excel at every step.

It is important to have diversity in choices of sports which match the culture, experience and temperament of the children. We need to think about robust team sports that do not require much materials or preparation and can also fit the school time table: sports such as kho-kho and volleyball that involve most of the students and do not require big fields or elaborate equipment. Sports teams in school should have shifting members and the emphasis must be on doing the best rather than merely winning. This will include helping children to understand ethics of sports, its implications for life and help them in relating to each other as well. This can and must bring together teachers and children in an informal setting as equals.

### Notes and Reference:

1. A simple Google search for “Sports academies in India” sends up the names of several private sports academies many of which have been set up in the last two decades.
2. Indian Railways to set up 5 Sports Academies in India <http://www.breakingnewsonline.net/sports/954-indian-railways-to-set-up-5-sports-academies-in-india.html> accessed on 09-09-2011
3. <http://education.nic.in/policy/npe-1968.pdf> accessed on 09-09-2011

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