



Original Article

SPORTS, CULTURE AND INDIAN LITERATURE

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“A Sound Mind In A Sound Body”

Abstract:

As the above proverb emphasis on the vital role that the sports and game play in our life. Without physical activity the body of a man does not become strong. When there is no strong body, there will not be a strong mind. That is why our ancestors had given much importance to the plays like Kabaddi, Kho, Kho and such other games that make our body strong. One of the world’s most well-known tennis stars, Serena Williams says, “Sport has literally changed my life. I’m here because of sport. It has given me a lot of confidence, a lot of courage, and a lot of discipline. It’s helped me to be the person that I’ve grown to be today.” “The history of sport and games is a part of the history of man as a social animal, his interrelations with other individuals and groups, his civilization and culture, and specially his play.” Subodh Kapoor.

Keywords: *Physical Activity, Literary Perspective, Aesthetic Dimensions, Rich Heritage, Anthropology, Dice, Elephant Taming, etc.*

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This article explores the world of sport and games in India from a literary

perspective. Sport has been extensively studied in terms of culture, politics,



economics, gender, anthropology, and other theoretical concepts; however, less emphasis has been given to the value and contribution of literature to the realm of sport based on its historical and aesthetic dimensions. Sport literature as a “mirror of the society” indeed reflects and records sport events; it also traces the development of those sports and games throughout history. Generally speaking, sport literature inscribes both fictional and non-fictional stories of sportsmen and women, whose lives are part and parcel of a social existence that belongs to a certain era and a geographical setting. India has a rich heritage of culture/s, which encompasses not only the art of games and sport activities but also the art of literature. A number of sportive activities such as polo, chess, etc. are believed to have their roots of origins in India. They have been practiced just as far as one could go back in history, and such a fact has been aesthetically recorded in forms of literary and nonliterary works. Evidences of sport activities date back to the Vedic era. The ancient sport culture of India is manifested in prominent works like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, Puranas, the writings of Kalidasa and Kautelya. In addition, Buddhist and Jain literatures contribute to the sub-genre of sport literature in the Indian Subcontinent. Autobiographies and biographies of sport practitioners from India have their own space in the shelves of bookstores and libraries across India and abroad. In other words, there has been a bond connection between literature and sport owing to the fact that the former serves as a reliable source, to a large extent, for studying the

history of sports and games Subodh Kapoor, an Indian author of books on history and philosophy of Hinduism, states that play is difficult to define. “Play demands nothing, play is innocence. Play is creativity. Play transmits no academic or social skills. It encourages an aesthetic appreciation of the world. When the reason for playing is to win, the play ceases to be a pastime or leisure.” I the term ‘game’ according to the Oxford dictionary “is a form of competitive activity or sport played according to rules” whereas Webster’s dictionary defines sports as “something to amuse oneself” since the antiquity till the present moment.

During the Vedic Period, people of the Indus culture practiced several sport and gaming activities mostly for creation such as dice, marbles, chess, racing on chariots, elephants taming, dancing, and dice, which was the most well-liked. The ancient Indian literature depict the sport culture of those times in a number of literary and historical works, for example, the Ramayana shows much interest in games and other sport activities. The epic displays how sport was important to the people of the major localities where the events took place like Lanka, Kiskinda, and Ayodhya. According to the Ramayana, people back then were engaged in several wars that involved training warriors. Sword battles, horse riding, archery and chariot racing were common. Sports and games were not only for entertainment; they rather were taken more seriously even at the times of war. However, hunting was known as one of the royal sports in those days. Rolling dice, for gambling, was one of the most prevalent



games of that period, when chess was also popular. In Arabic the game of chess is called *chaturang* which is the original name given by ancient Indians thousands of years ago. Furthermore, archery was popular then as in the Ramayana, Rama was famous for his great talent in such sport activity. Meeting in the forest, Parashurama says to Rama: “I have heard about your archery, prince; the people of earth speak of nothing else. I have heard that you broke Siva’s bow in Mithila and I have brought another bow to test you with as I don’t believe what I have heard”. It is Rama’s skills that enable him defeat Ravana and the demons.

Another remarkable Indian masterpiece is the Mahabharata written in the post-Vedic period. The epic is full of sport elements that involve both mental and physical activities. It seems that people paid enormous attention to the cultivation of both mind and body. Sport was a platform for choosing leaders and warriors. “A sound mind in a sound body” (Thales). The Mahabharata dedicates one chapter for sport activities. The game of dice is believed to be the hinge-axis point of the epic Mahabharata. The epic also mentions other games and sports such as archery, wrestling, hunting, and so on. Most of those games were practiced by men, only a few games that did not involve physical efforts were played by women”

Yoga, the exercise that is believed to create a harmony between soul and heart originates in India. The stone-carved figures in the Indus Valley, 5000 years ago, show some poses and positions of practicing yoga. Sports and games throughout history have

been mostly practiced for the purpose of developing human life spiritually, physically and mentally. Sport opens a gate for anyone in this world to change his/her life and even break the social and cultural barriers. *Lagaan* is a Hindi fictional melodrama (2001) evolves around cricket. The film has several themes, but the epic game of cricket between the local Indians and the colonial Britishers stands as a sublime in which the locals who are new to the game are able to defeat their opponents who have organized training. The story indicates how the Indians benefit from their physical fitness through their local games, which are slightly similar to cricket. The crux of this point is that the sport culture had been there within the Indians daily life. One of the remarkable players is an untouchable man given the name Kachra whose physical and social defects are treated through the game as he takes an essential part in the game as an extraordinary spinner. In his book *Nation at Play: A History of Sports in India*, Ronojoy Sen explains how some Western sports, especially cricket, were introduced to Indians, particularly the elites and royals. He further mentions that the ancient and medieval Indian rulers and maharajas were interested in sports using animals like horses and elephants, and how the elite rulers and princes adopted and excelled in the sports of western origins.

During the Islamic reign in the northern part of India, polo was one of the most popular games, which underwent some partial changes and development. The European merchants introduced the sport of cricket in the eighteenth century; even though, the national team started officially a



couple of decades before the independence from the British rule. Hockey is the national game of India. Kabbadi is another famous sport in the country; however, cricket has become more popular for Indians at both the national and the international levels. A number of prominent cricketers have written their autobiographies adding to the value of sport literature in India. For example, Kapil Dave, ‘the jewel of Indian cricket’ wrote an autobiography (2004) titled Straight from the Heart, which depicts personal as well as objective accounts of the sport in India after independence till the end of twentieth century. Other examples of excellent self narratives are authored by players like Sachin Tendulkar, Sunil Gavaskar, Yuvraj Singh.”

Conclusion:

Indian men and women also proved a prestigious position in the world records in various sports and Olympic Games. Mary Kom, known as the Queen of Indian boxing ring, has won Championships six World. She has contributed to sport literature with her inspiring book Unbreakable 2013. Listing a number of books on sports needs an encyclopedia, therefore, this paper just

traces the juxtaposition of the art of literature and that of sport in the Indian Society. The invention of games and sports is an uneasy task. India is the homeland of many games some of which are international known nowadays, such as, yoga, polo, ludo, chess, checkers etc. this is a clear evidence that the Indians consider the significance of sports and games for education and training both mind and body. There has been a bond connection between literature and sports and games within the Indian society proving the immense contribution to the world sport literature.

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