



The Role of Sports in Promoting Social Integration and Inclusion

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Abstract:

This paper aims to analyse the role of sports in promoting social integration and inclusion in a diverse community. It examines how sports play a major role in inclusion in society by bridging social and cultural differences. The study looks into various examples from different aspects like historical, sociological and contemporary, looking into the role of sports to unite persons, groups and nations. The study admits the challenges faced in this like gender inequality, racial discrimination and socio-economic and cultural barriers. With the help of case studies and literature, the study analysis the importance of sports in promoting social integration and inclusion and also the action required to make a beautiful society.

Keywords: Sports, Social Integration, Inclusion, Social Cohesion, Marginalized Communities, Gender, Race

Introduction:

Sports provides confidence, ethics and integrity to the community. Sports offers opportunities to the community in building bonds, interaction and physical fitness. It provides a space and identity to various young achievers. It brings unity and consider as a universal language across the globe. The experiences and mutual respect shared during sports activities show the understanding and integration of the game. The role of sports in providing integration and inclusion becomes necessary in society.

Sports is not only considered as entertainment, it is also a social element that brings inclusivity which removes the barriers of economic status, race, gender and ethnicity. There are physical inequalities and discrimination in the field of sports. Inclusivity in sports creates stronger communities. This paper examines the role of sports in creating integrity and inclusivity. It also highlights challenges and issues faced by the sports personalities in India.

Peacebuilding and understanding are the major tools for sports culture. Promoting inclusivity in sports goes back to the historical context. The activities play an important role in creating a peaceful community. The trust between two countries in playing a game demonstrates the inclusivity and integrity. The fall in inclusivity happens when there is no equality in selecting the participants. Indian government promotes physical activity among the disabled as it recognises the people with disability with freedom of rights to be part of the sports activity organised in the country. "Sport activities improve physical, psychological and social development of people with disabilities and affect their physical, cognitive, social and

psychological developments positively and make their adaptation to social life much easier" (Levent et. al, 2012).

Sports can serve as a platform for women, disabled individuals and marginalised community. Participation in sports is not only a way to gain fame and obtain higher positions but also empowerment in all the sectors of society. Sports removes traditional and societal barriers for women and disabled. It gives opportunity for them to come to the mainstream society.

Case Studies and Examples of Sports Promoting Inclusion:

International Events: The Olympic Games:

The Olympic Games demonstrate a key idea of how sport facilitates the concept of unity and integration of society. Sport performers from over 200 countries cross the threshold; besides presenting themselves as perpetrators of even physical performances, they represent different cultures, races, and ethnicity. Olympics mean competition, but also understanding between Nations, mutual respect, and acceptance carried forward by games. But there are problems like racism is illustrated by tensions between races in Olympic history; political isolation illustrated by boycotts; and sexism, which was evident in the inequality of women in the Olympics. Local Initiatives: Sport for development programmes: There are numerous community-based programmes that employ sport as a means to enhance social integration with a focus to vulnerable areas. For instance, the FIFA backed Football for Hope, an organization that seeks to relevant issues like poverty, inequity and education through football. In enhancing social relations, these programmes facilitate young people to play in safe environment that enhances interaction amongst the

young one across different backgrounds. Therefore, such programmes enhance social cohesion by bridging the perceived divide and fostering harmony and mutual appreciation. Same to the cases of programmes such as special Olympics provide persons with intellectual disabilities with chances to workout in sporting activities, boost on their self-esteem, and be occupied in the society.

Gender and Sports: Women's Participation:

Sports were very limited to male participants only but in recent times more efforts are put in to fight sexism in sports. Sports participation has increased, this has ensured that there's increased visibility as women get involved in sports activities. Soccer especially through the FIFA Women's World Cup has been at the forefront in pulling down barriers to women in various parts of the world. Gender discrimination, unequal pay for equal work done and time, and lack of media coverage to women sports are still a problem facing gender equity in the sporting world.

Race and Ethnicity in Sports:

Sports lend themselves well towards speaking out against injustice in the black community. For example, in the United States of America we have athletes like Jackie Robinson and Muhammad Ali who spoke against racial discrimination. Likewise, the Take A Knee protest by NFL player Colin Kaepernick began in 2016 in response to police brutality and racism as again, sports use a form of protest and conversation. Nonetheless, racism in sports, even in the modern world both on elite and amateur level persists. It is very evident that many minorities are discriminated, called racially wrong names, and denied equal opportunities in a number of sports. Sports can be a powerful medium for the integration of society for enhancing unity among people having different social ranking, but at the same time, there are limitations to this function.

These challenges include:

Cultural Barriers:

Culture may play a great extent of influence over group participation and integration in sporting activities. Language and communication gaps create misunderstandings, making the rest individuals with other cultural backgrounds fail to connect effectively and hinder group participation. Moreover, sports that some communities favour due to their cultural practices may make it difficult for different kinds of people to participate since they may not be familiar with, or be interested in, those kinds of sporting activities. Gender roles in some societies further emphasize these barriers because conventional expectations of society may limit the participation of women in sports, thus hindering attempts to ensure complete integration.

Socioeconomic Barriers:

Socioeconomic barriers do play a significant role in limiting participation in sports and group activities. It could be that the cost of involvement, encompassing sporting apparatuses, uniforms, and membership payments, makes it impossible to allow kids from lower-income backgrounds into the game of their choice. Second, availability of facilities is a huge challenge because people from deprived backgrounds or areas are at times not lucky to enjoy quality sporting amenities. This limitation limits their opportunities to participate in events that are quite essential to social integration, thus widening the gap between the economic classes.

Socio-economic factors are also present because reaching for the equipment, practice and other sporting facilities may be expensive especially for the low-income earners. Should the governments fail to invest in the development of sports infrastructure and grassroots, we may find sports becoming the preserve of the elites, which is contrary to the issue of social integration.

Discrimination and Exclusion:

Prejudices and exclusion are significant constraints to participation in sports and group activities. Racism and other forms of prejudices lead to exclusion of minority players, hence, deterred others from joining or even staying in such a group. Besides, sexism and homophobia form further disadvantages, especially when people experience bias in the popular male sports. Gender stereotypes further isolate female athletes mainly because of reduced opportunities to participate. In addition, people with disabilities are often excluded because of lack of access to facilities and social stigma. People with disabilities make minimal attempts to include them in well-structured sports, which further isolates them from meaningful participation. "Sports presents the image of equality and fairness discriminating against the particular groups". (Coakley, 2014, p. 102). This quote, therefore, brings out the fact, sports are launched as an equal opportunity initiative but marginalization due to many factors persists to limit many participants. Further, many people with disability suffer from low support, poor facilities and generally low participation in most opportunities in integrated sports. Members of the LGBTQ+ community or athletes always experience homophobia and transphobia from fellow players and associations relating to sports. Not only do these forms of exclusion discourage participation, but they also assert efficiencies that work to perpetuate stereotypically negative views and discrimination. For any sports organization to open a sporting event for participation to all the members of society, there is need to eradicate discrimination with

experimental realization of anti-discrimination regulations throughout the entire sporting structure.

Lack of Inclusive Policies:

Unconscious Bias in Leadership is as serious issue. Coaches and even administrators may have no care for diversity or may lack policies that make for diverse participation. Lack of representation is another issue where a lot of disparities in funding, media coverage and opportunities are there for female compared to male counterparts. For instance, according to a report by the Women's Sports Foundation, "women's sports receive only about 4% of all sports media coverage, the 2019 Women's World Cup gathered a much lesser share of the global sports media attention than the men's".

Competitive versus Recreational Approach:

Due to overemphasis on competitiveness, sport has a tendency to discourage participants who are relatively inexperienced or not very skilled in a sport as they will be expected to go physically against members of their own gender. Most sports programmes are usually provided in a highly competitive leagues hence missing out on more of the occasional user who may want to play sports radically.

Speech and language disorders:

Language barriers can often be a barrier to full group inclusion, especially in international or multicultural teams, where an athlete may not know the language of their teammates or the crowd.

Political and Nationalistic passions:

While events like Olympics or world cup may in some occasions create an impression to the people in the various countries to come together as one, it may sometimes may rather contribute to nationalism and therefore increase conflict between two or more countries. As in many ethnic conflicted countries people may support or join certain sports teams depending on ethnic background.

Approaches to Promote Social Inclusion by Playing Sports:

For the purpose of achieving the outlined goal in assessing social integration through sporting activities, a number of strategies need to be pursued. First thing to be done is sports policies, bodies and organizations should promote inclusivity that allows all genders, races, ages, abilities, and economic classes to participate. These policies should cover and eliminate the gender pay gap, diversity and tenure, and staffing and budgets for marginalised employees. Second, sports as a form of intervention carried out by communities to reach out for under privileged or disadvantaged groups in the society can cause a decrease in the gap between the haves and the have nots. These programmes should aim at increasing the availability of resource friendly accessible environments, establishing 'scholarship'

plans and promoting the architecture of inclusiveness.

Third, the projects aimed at increasing the population's awareness of the organisation of sports for diversity and inclusion are significant. Promoting respect theme-based campaigns are effective because they are able to target prejudices and ACLU campaigns make this possible. Fourth, partnerships with NGOs and social development organizations can then produce powerful sports for development programmes that harness the potential of sports to affect other social challenges such as poverty, discrimination and education. Last, one can increase the role model and athlete activism to foster change. These players are a critical voice and can effect change in perceptions about minorities, diversity in an effort to increase divorce in sports and in the world. Tying all these approaches together, sports could be the strong vehicle for integration, cooperation, understanding, and tolerance.

Conclusion:

It will be interesting to see organized sports bring about a more connected community of people. Sports when used as a tool for recreation can lead to construction of social relations among different population groups since it can be used to bring members of population together, enable them to work together and in the process, break barriers that are usually hindering integration of the population. However, what is going to develop a concept of social integration through sports will not be complete without resolving such problems as the economic inequalities, discrimination, and opportunities.

However, for all the principles of sporting activities as enunciated above to be fully realized, conscious efforts and appeals of equal opportunities for diversity and access must be made. Raising awareness on disability by creating an awareness plan helps the disabled to communicate and be active in sports. On the same note, it is impossible to ignore the importance of sports also in promoting social stories and giving out a message against all types of injustices.

Having growing numbers of athletes take a stand against racism, gender inequality or other forms of injustice means that sports itself can be a driving force for change in society. Therefore by federating and endorsing these conducive activities that champion the spirit of togetherness through sports, advancements in policies, programmes and legislation for the purpose of giving inclusive worth and value to members of the society, policies, organization and communities stand to benefit through the formation of long term overall strategies and programme that work towards the establishment of socially inclusive societies in future for the societies needs of the lacks and the left out.

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