



SPORTS- AN EFFECTIVE POLITICAL TOOL IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS THAN IN DOMESTIC POLITICS

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Abstract:

Introduction:

It is well established fact that the sports have been an important aspect of life whether individuals societal or in a life.

This fact of life has been very well accepted, when we read about the sports being described may eulogized in the VEDAS. This fact will bear it out beyond Provenance that in the Vedic age also, when the life was not so organized and to put it in simple words, was more tortuous than today's ease in leading life, the sports was not only meant to be entertainer, of course which was indeed entertainer and recreational, had the indulgence in sports was also thought to be an important as peed which enhances personality development and also helps in multi dimensional Vision being developed in regards to surroundings and overall life.

It may be appropriate to mention that in a great Indian epic authored by sage Vyasmuni Mahabharata all major twist in the narrative have invariably been come during sports competitions held and participated by Kauravas and Pandavas. The visceral animosity of Kauravas and Pandavas had been aptly depicted by Vyasmuni by using a sports event held at Hastinapur to showcase various martial abilities of Kauravas and Pandavas and he used the duel between Duryodhana and Bhima and an Archery competition between Arjuna and Karna. Lastly, who can deny the pivotal role played by the sport of dice which ultimately led to disastrous and tragic war between the main characters viz., Kauravas and Pandavas. It may appear that I have distracted from the main issue I have

undertaken to propagate but I have done this deliberately, by describing the events in Mahabharata in detail to show that the sports have always played very significant in the history of our nation since time immemorial.

However, I am aware that by the above narrative, it may be inferred that more often than not the sports has played a negative role in the political or social events, but the time where I have contextualize the role of sports in the foregoing paragraph is set in an another era where there were competing Feudatories or nation states in the Bharatvarsh but after the British colonial Raj the whole narrative regarding nationhood of India has changed dramatically and as we may see that sports has been playing a great role as a unifying factor in the late 19th and early 20th Century, especially the game of Cricket and Football.

Here I would like to emphasize that, after India gained Independence, sports has been an important factor in the life of peoples and has been immensely helpful in the exercise of nation building. I have used the term 'Political Tool' in this context as far as Domestic Politics is concern. Thus the utility of sports in domestic politics is of positive and constructive nature to unify the divergent social groups and growing affection in the citizenry towards Nationhood and spirit of oneness. It is also important that the sports has not been a very useful tool in the competitive politics and hence we can see that very often the popular sportsman have not done well in the electoral politics.

We have come across in recent times the conduct of sports events becoming hot political issues but that was not due to sports as such but for the corruption which was committed in such sports events. So necessarily in competitive politics sports have been a issue very often but due to other factors which have not connection with the spirit of sports. The debate in the Parliament regarding budget provisions and allocations to sports Ministry are so obscure that these get very negligible publicity and never sparks any debate in the media.

As emphasized earlier that the Sports have been playing its role in growing affection towards nationhood and spirit of oneness amongst the citizens of the nation, likewise when there international sports events between nations then the national team of competing nations carry the burden of national pride which every citizen of that particular nation see in the team. We have experienced this very often and especially when there are sporting events between India and Pakistan. It become a national shame for Indian citizen if any of its national team and then it does not only regarding cricket team, all sports teams loses to Pakistani team and same is true of Pakistani Team if it loses any event against the Indian Team.

And this phenomena of National Pride being attached to National Team is not restricted to India or Pakistan it extends to almost all nations across the globe as can be seen from the following instances.

The 1972 World Championship match between the American Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky of the Soviet Union. The match took place during the Cold War and Henry Kissinger is believed to have told Fischer "America wants you to go over there to beat the Russians".¹

However there are instances when the sports event was used to criticize the national policies and to name one instance, in 1968, the global stage of the Olympics was used to show the world the plight of the African-American struggle during the civil rights movement in their home country. The famous Black Power salute was performed by Tommie Smith and John Carlos during the medal ceremony in Mexico City.

So there is no denying that the sports has played important role in impacting the local policies of the government but it has not been used very often used as political tool in domestic politics to criticize the Home Government.

As the **Juan Antonio Samaranch, President the International Olympic Committee** has in an article said that " It is often said that sport and politics are two aspects of our society that have nothing in common. Yet the history of the Olympic movement has provided several examples of how they influence one another, directly or indirectly."² However this is true in International relations than in domestic politics and Samaranch was also referring to the role of sports which played a part in the relations amongst the comity of nations.

Let us see some celebrated instances of sports being used as a tool to further the political goal in International Relations

After the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Russia Western countries and their allies boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics to show their unity against the actions of Russia. This Boycott led to retaliatory boycott by Soviet Russia and its allies of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics games in response to the American-led Moscow games boycott.

During the Apartheid policies being followed by the South African Government the Nations across the globe have adopted the policy of isolating South African Government from many international sporting events. Of course this was also accompanied with other sanctions including economic among others.

As mentioned earlier that the international sporting events were used for criticizing domestic policies by the home government, likewise there are instances of the sporting events being used for slamming foreign occupying forces, as done by members of Iraqi Football Players in the 2007 AFC Asian Cup was another facet of sporting politics. "The victorious Iraq national football team came out despite ethnic factionalism in their country and an invasion by the American military to win the biggest Asian football tournament. Following a previous round win, Iraqi military

spokesman Brigadier General Qassim Moussawi said they wanted to stop "terrorists, Sunni extremists and criminals from targeting the joy of the people." There was controversy after the Iraqi captain Younis Mahmoud said he "dared not return to his homeland because of the conditions created by the U.S. occupation." President Jalal Talabani said it was disappointing they couldn't celebrate at home with the fans. Yet many hailed the victory as a show of unity. Iraq's Brazilian coach Jorvan Vieira signified the importance of the win in saying "This is not just about football...this is more important than that...This has brought great happiness to a whole country. This is not about a team, this is about human beings." Likewise, Saudi coach Hélio dos Anjos chimed in that "Iraq deserved to win today...They were very motivated and we knew the whole world was supporting this team." Likewise, the American leadership[who?] also came out in praise of the Iraqi win. However, Iraqi midfielder Ahmed Manajid said that if he was not playing for his country he would have fought in his native Fallujah against U.S. forces. He was one of several players who criticized then-U.S. president George W. Bush for using the team's success in his campaign speeches."³

The sport has been used as a international diplomatic tool between nations as is evident in the context of relations between India and Pakistan. In an attempt to replicate the cricket diplomacy of the past General Pervez Musharraf came to India in 2005 ostensibly for a cricket match. The trip, however, quickly took on the air of a summit as the sides were urged "to seize a historic chance to end their dispute over Kashmir." Often this rivalry has been tinged with a religious-political bent to it. A Pakistani fan in Karachi ran onto the pitch to attack the Indian captain, and fans threw stones at the Indian players during the match in Karachi. In 2000 right-wing Hindus dug up the cricket pitch in New Delhi to protest against the Pakistani team's visit. Following the Kargil conflict, and at various other times, there have also been calls to suspend cricketing ties between the two countries.

The events I have enumerated above have played a positive role in easing tensions or improving relations between nation states. However this has not been always the case and there were instances where the sporting events between two nations have led to serious crisis which ultimately resulted in war like the famous 'Falklands war' between UK and Argentina and the second one which also was between two South American neighbors - El Salvador and Honduras. But the sporting event being used as political tool to further the international political objective took a dangerous and lethal mode when in 1972, some members of the Israeli Olympic team were killed in an attack by Palestinian Black September gunmen that started at the Olympic village and eventually resulted in the deaths of 11 members of the Israeli Olympic team.

Hence from the above enumeration of quoted instances where sporting events have been used in the history of sports for furtherance political or social objective to some extent in domestic context but these instances are few and far between, however on the hand the sporting events have been quite often been used, especially in each and every sporting held in the later part of 20th Century, to try and score diplomatic brownie points against the International adversary by the members of the comity of Nations.

References:

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2. **Juan Antonio Samaranch**, President the International Olympic Committee writing for THESES A Journal of Foreign Policy Issues (<http://www.hri.org/MFA/thesis/autumn97/sport.html> accessed on 10th March 2017).
3. Taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_and_sports#cite_note-16 accessed 10th March 2017.
