

Voice of India

Athletic Development of Asia

by G. D. Sondhi,
member of the International Olympic Committee for India

The subject for discussion at this Seminar — Athletic Development of Asia and its Influence on the Lives of the Asian People, in the Social, Cultural, Historical, Health and Physical Aspects, is a very comprehensive one — indeed is too comprehensive to be dealt with in one Talk. I, therefore, will deal only with the Aim that our Athletic, i.e. Sports and Games activity, should have before it.

By and large, Asian countries are poor countries, and are what the advanced countries politely call, 'under-developed' countries. And compared to their existing economic resources, most of the are also over-populated.

These two factors — under-development and over-population — must be kept in mind when planning any programme of athletic development.

ROLE OF PLAY IN LIFE

Before proceeding further with the discussion of the aim of our Athletic Development, I would like to digress a little to consider the Role of Play in Life.

Participation in playful activities is instinctive with all living beings — human or animal. And, it is through these playful movements that all living beings acquire

control over their limbs and gain the co-ordination between brain and body. But the point to note is that the young indulge in the various bodily movements not of any set purpose, but because of the instinctive pleasure they derive from them. Personal pleasure is the sole motive of such activity. Soon enough, however, there is a change. Play-activity, it is seen, gives pleasure not only to the participants, but also to some extent to those who happen to be watching it. While young play, the elders watch. To personal pleasure is added an element of self-display and showmanship. Yet the personal pleasure from the game is the predominant motive.

Time and circumstances bring about another change still — a change in the motivation. Here and there, Games and Sports, instead of being played for the pleasure they give to the players, come to be played for the pleasure they give to the spectators. The motive is no more personal pleasure, but the making of a living through providing pleasure to others. Games and sports now enter the stage of professionalism, and there is an almost total suppression of the play motive.

Yet, by itself, there is nothing wrong in professional sports. A man is entitled to earn his living in any honest way he can. But what is wrong is that there are so many who, instead of taking active part in games and sports, are through force of circumstances, or through sheer laziness, turned into more passive onlookers. Vicarious second-hand pleasure, has replaced active and first-hand enjoyment.

Whatever be the excuses or reasons advanced for this, it is profoundly regrettable that human beings who ought to be actively enjoying wholesome activity as demanded by their instinct are reduced to being passive spectators. From the national and human point of view this is undesirable, indeed, is lamentable. It can boldly be asserted, that much of crime and misbehaviour is due to the frustration caused by the denial of outlet to the instinct of play.

Our best endeavour, therefore, should be that the largest number possible should take part in activities which their instinct demands.

SPIRIT OF RULE-ABIDING

In addition to the satisfaction, which play gives to human instinct, there is another powerful reason also for fostering sports and games.

Games and sports being group activity, i.e. involving more than one person, there arises the need of rules and regulations. For, while an individual playing by himself can do as he likes, the group or team cannot. Rules and regulations have to be evolved to enable the players to play in an orderly and decent manner. And what is even more important is that the restraint of rules is

willingly accepted by the players because it enables the game to be played in a more enjoyable manner.

Herein comes the most valuable contribution of games and sports to social-living. The spirit of Acceptance of Restraints, so essential in orderly living in society, is imbibed almost sub-consciously while engaged in pleasurable activity.

Enjoyable activity now comes to have a social purpose beyond itself. And the spirit of voluntary acceptance of rules is the basis of all civilized society. This use of pleasurable activity for moral and social living, is in full accord with the principles of education. As Alfred North Whitehead, one of the greatest educationists of our times, has pointed out, the best way to train the young to learn the moral, or any code, is through wholesome and enjoyable activities. Force and compulsions, may secure outward obedience but they cannot secure willing obedience. As the saying goes, 'a man compelled against his will, is of the same opinion still'.

We should, therefore, train people in decency of living and the necessity of law-abiding, through pleasurable activities. And games and sports provide these in a full measure.

From this, it follows that early in life we should train all the young, as our Prime Minister Nehru has said, to 'play the game in the spirit of the game'. Then we shall have the maximum number of actual sportsmen who will not only play the games in a sporting manner, but also play the more serious game of life, in the same sporting way.

So, our efforts should be to spread the cult of games not among a few but among the vast multitude that make our peoples.

BODY, MIND AND MORALS

Now, we may look at a parallel advance that has taken place as regards physical activity in the region of education. Though Games and sports and other forms of physical activity, were originally participated in for enjoyment, it came to be seen that they could also be used for bringing about a harmonious development of the whole body.

Physical fitness came to be a motive along with mere enjoyment, and to the pleasure from physical activity came to be added the pleasure from the 'body beautiful'. Physical Culture now comes to claim the attention of the educationists, and from being a rule of thumb art, becomes a science as well.

In time, there comes another advance in education. It comes to be realized that the body cannot be developed, or at least developed harmoniously, by physical activity alone. There must be a correlated development of intelligence, emotions and the moral sense. For, mere physical development

makes man a gladiator, mere mental development a prig, mere moral development, an obnoxious puritan. To be a worthy citizen, man must be developed harmoniously in all the three aspects of his personality. This brings us to the latest stage of advance — the stage of Physical Education, as distinguished from mere physical instruction.

DISTORTED ENDS

But while, some educationally advanced countries have become aware of the close connection of body, mind and spirit, not so all the countries. In some, games and sports are still a means of mere enjoyment. In others physical exercise — in the shape of formal drill and callisthenics — is still treated as a means of mere physical development, while in good many countries the supreme end of physical developments is considered to be success in international competitions.

It is rather saddening to note this shifting of emphasis from the threefold harmonious development of body, mind and spirit of the individual, to his development as a mere winner in physical contests. We seem to be reverting to the barbaric times of gladiatorial fights, with one difference: whereas the old-time gladiator fought for his own success and survival, the new-time gladiators are made to fight for National Glory. National Victory in Olympic and other contests, has become the final goal, and the individual and his moral and social developments are being lost sight of. And not only this. Instead of bringing about peace and goodwill, the Games now bring about jealousy and bitter rivalry.

To the end of international success, countries are now devoting more attention to coaching and to the establishment of costly coaching institutions, than to the real end of human activity — the development of physically, mentally and morally fit personalities of their peoples at large.

One sometimes wonders as to what Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, must be thinking of this development that has come about!

The Baron's main purpose in reviving the Olympic Games, was to develop the body in the context of human society. Games and sports were to make people not only physically more fit, but also more alert mentally and more peaceful and more co-operative.

But while the first purpose is being achieved and man is now running faster, jumping higher and further and hurling weights longer distances than ever before, it is doubtful if there is more of the mental and moral goodwill between the competitors and the countries.

Time has come to take stock of the situation and to consider whither we must go. It is for this reason that I think it most opportune that the Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation has organized this Symposium

on the occasion of its Golden Jubilee Celebrations. The Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation deserves the gratitude of all of us workers in the cause of sports and general recreation, for the step it has taken and I hope that much goodwill follow as the result of our deliberations here.

WHAT IS TO BE THE GOAL

The question now to consider is: to what end shall we bend our efforts, to what goal shall our athletic development be directed?

Just as the body is the first concern of the child, so also the bodily fitness must be our starting point. For, it is through the pleasurable bodily activities that we must learn self-control of our limbs, our minds and our spirits.

WANTED A SIMPLE AND CHEAP PROGRAMME

Now Asia, by and large, is a poor continent. We have not much in the way of economic resources to spend on athletic development. Our programme must therefore, be a cheap and simple one. The cheapest form of physical development is provided by track and field sports. To these we must give the largest share of our attention.

In this connection, I venture to draw attention to the schemes of Physical Achievement Tests, adopted in Sweden and recently in India. Under these schemes there are groups of graduated tests in speed, stamina and strength, which are set for the young and old to fulfil. Anyone fulfilling the first set of tests gets star one pin. Those fulfilling the higher tests get star two and star three pins. The merit of these tests is that they provide an incentive to run faster, jump higher and throw further, once the individual has taken them up.

And then there is swimming. Wherever there are streams and fresh-water tanks we should popularize aquatic sports.

There are cheap forms of games also, such as outdoor volley-ball, wrestling, basket-ball and football, and, in India, the game of Kabaddi. The merit of these sports is that they do not require costly equipment or large spaces and thus are within the competence of the poorest country, and can allow of the participation of millions of people.

ASIAN GAMES

At this point, one may be permitted to comment on the programme of the Asian Games. When the idea of starting the Asian Games was initiated, the main objective was to encourage the largest number of people in each country to take part in health-giving activities of the cheapest kind. But soon enough national considerations of prestige and success, introduced many expensive and in some cases, not-so-popularly-practised sports, in the programme. Whereas

in the first Asian Games there were 6 items, and a few more in the Second Games, in the third Games the number went up to 14, and there is a demand for the inclusion of still more items.

This is going beyond our means and our objective. The result of this, on one side, is that in each country, even the minor and not so popularly practised and yet costly games, have to be patronized at the expense of the more widely practicable and less expensive sports. Thus thousands, if not millions, are deprived of health giving activities.

On the other side, there is the heavier cost of entering the Games in all events, demanded by considerations of national prestige. For, no country wants to be known as being unable to bear the burden of full representation at the Games.

And, what makes the situation worse is that national prestige again makes countries spend large sums of money in entering not only the Asian Games, but also the Olympic Games. Thus there is a heavy financial burden to be borne every two years, and this has to be done at the cost of spending money inside each country for the benefit of its millions.

This is the general situation, though there are a few, very few countries that can afford to encourage many kinds of games and sports, and to send large contingents not only to the Asian Games but also the Olympic Games. But most of our countries are poor and cannot afford this lavish expenditure.

We must, therefore, revise the whole matter of the programme of the Asian Games. Our first duty is to minister to the welfare of the many who have no opportunity for joyous and personality-building-activities.

In view of our general lack of resources, the programme of the Asian Games must be restricted, to those few sports which are all-round developmental, are not costly and thus are practicable by large numbers. I would therefore suggest that the programme should include only track and field sports, swimming, wrestling, volleyball and football, at the most.

These sports are no doubt competitive and there is risk of national jealousies being accentuated. To some extent this cannot be helped, but yet the physical educationist should see to it that not mere success, but genuine sportsmanship, is made the objective of all their national participants. No doubt, on the side of spectators, there will be national groups who will only cheer their own side, yet the major part of the audience does appreciate sportsmanship and skill of the participants and does condemn breach of decency and good spirit. In this lies our hope. This spirit of honest appreciation must be fully encouraged.

The National Press too, must consider as its major function to praise sportsmanship

and friendliness among the competitors rather than to glorify mere national success.

GROUP DANCES

To take away emphasis from mere competition in physical prowess, and to invite attention to grace and rhythm, I venture to suggest that the programme of our Asian Games, and of all National Games should include group dancing, and play-production. The great merit of these is that though they involve the body, they also call forth discipline of mind and spirit and refinement of taste. They are thus more in accord with our real objective — the harmonious and simultaneous development of the three aspects of the individual.

The introduction of these two items, group dancing and drama, will also have a beneficial effect on the spectators. They will come to look at these displays not from the point of view of competition and national victory, but of general grace and rhythm and mutual appreciation. Instead of engendering tensions between both the participants and the spectators, they will engender appreciation and goodwill. Now I come back to my earlier point — to what end are to be our athletic programmes?

To put it briefly, our Games and sports are not to be for mere physical advancement nor mere national success in International Games, but for the threefold harmonious development — physical, mental and moral. And our programme must be for the largest number possible in each country. To these ends we must devote ourselves.