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Challenges and Opportunities at Paralympics

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Abstract

Paralympics is a major international multi-sport event for para athletes. The purpose of this research paper is to aware people about the Paralympics and also about the participation and performance of Indian para-athletes in the Paralympics since from its inception. Since 1968, India won several medals at Paralympics, even though some people are not aware about it. Various sports schemes have allocated sufficient funds for the creation of specialized sports infrastructure for persons with disabilities. Today, people with disabilities are winning several medals at international event and make our country proud. Most of these athletes belong to rural backgrounds and they worked so hard to succeed despite fund deficits, rampant corruption and overall apathy that outbreak our system. It is high time, the public and private sector should come together to lift the Indian sport sector from the present deplorable situation.

Keywords: Paralympics, Sports, Para-athlete, Disability, Participation and Performance.

Introduction

The Paralympics is a major international multi-sport event which involves athletes with a range of disabilities, including impaired passive range of movement, impaired muscle power (e.g. muscular dystrophy, paraplegia and quadriplegia, spina bifida, post-polio syndrome), limb deficiency (e.g. dysmelia or amputation), short stature, leg length difference, hypertonia, ataxia, vision impairment, athetosis, and intellectual impairment. There are summer and winter Paralympic Games. All Paralympic Games are governed by IPC (International Paralympic Committee).

The first edition of summer Paralympics held in 1960 at Rome, Italy. Recently, 2016 Summer Paralympics was organized by Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 07 to 18 September, 2016. Next Summer Paralympics is scheduled to be organized by Tokyo, Japan in year 2020. First edition of Winter Paralympics was held at Ornskoldsvik, Sweden in year 1976. Recently, 2018 winter Paralympic Games was hosted by Pyeongchang, South Korea from 19 to 27 March, 2018 and next edition 2022 will be hosted by Beijing, China.

Promoting a strong and vibrant Paralympic Movement across the Nation

PCI - Paralympic Committee of India is a non-profit and non-partisan organization and founded in 1994. Since then, Paralympic Committee of India has been solely working for the promotion of Sports among physically challenged persons including the persons with visual impairment in India. PCI is working for upliftment and development of the physically challenged sports, athletes with mobility disabilities, cerebral palsy, amputations, and blindness. PCI helps to identify the potential Paralympians and also provide assistance to the athletes for preparation of the competition by providing funds for sports equipment's, coaching, and travel in the lead up to the Paralympic Games. Further, PCI is also affiliated to IPC (International Paralympic Committee), and IWAS (International Amputee Sports Federation). PCI is also recognized by the MYAS (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports), Government of India as NSF (National Sports Federation). PCI has affiliated Sports Federations/bodies in all Stated/Union Territories.

Critical Analysis of India at Paralympic Games

India made its Summer Paralympics debut in 1968 Paralympic Games, competed again in 1972 Paralympic Games, and then was absent until 1984 Paralympic Games. The country has

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participated in every edition of the summer Paralympics since then. Further, India had never participated in the Winter

Paralympic Games. Table 1 indicates the participation and performance of India at Summer Paralympics.

Table 1: India at Summer Paralympics

<p>I. 1968 Summer Paralympics Organized - Tel Aviv, Israel Dates - 4 to 13 November, 1968 Competitors – 10 (Men-8, Women-2)</p>	<p>II. 1972 Summer Paralympics Organized - Heidelberg, West Germany Dates - 2 to 11 August, 1972 Competitors – 10 (Men-7, Women-3) Medals – 01 (Gold-01) Rank in Medal Table – 25th</p>
<p>III. 1984 Summer Paralympics Organized - Stoke Mandeville, Great Britain and New York City, United States Dates – 17 June to 01 August, 1984 Competitors – 05 Medals – 04 (Silver-02, Bronze-02) Rank in Medal Table – 37th</p>	<p>IV. 1988 Summer Paralympics Organized - Seoul, South Korea Dates – 15 to 24 October, 1988 Competitors – 02</p>
<p>V. 1992 Summer Paralympics Organized - Barcelona, Spain Dates – 03 to 14 September, 1992 Competitors – 09</p>	<p>VI. 1996 Summer Paralympics Organized - Atlanta, United States Dates – 16 to 25 August, 1996 Competitors – 09</p>
<p>VII. 2000 Summer Paralympics Organized - Sydney, Australia Dates – 18 to 29 October, 2000 Competitors – 04</p>	<p>VIII. 2004 Summer Paralympics Organized - Athens, Greece Dates – 17 to 28 September, 2004 Competitors – 12 (Men-11, Women-01) Medals – 02 (Gold-01, Bronze-01) Rank in Medal Table – 53rd</p>
<p>IX. 2008 Summer Paralympics Organized - Beijing, China Dates – 06 to 17 September, 2008 Competitors – 05</p>	<p>X. 2012 Summer Paralympics Organized - London, United Kingdom Dates – 17 to 28 September, 2012 Competitors – 10 Medals – 01 (Silver-01) Rank in Medal Table – 67th</p>
<p>XI. 2016 Summer Paralympics Organized - Rio de Janeiro, Brazil Dates – 07 to 18 September, 2016 Competitors – 19 (Men-16, Women-03) Medals – 04 (Gold-2, Silver-01, Bronze-01) Rank in Medal Table – 43rd</p>	

Indian Performance at 2016 Rio Paralympics

India participated in 2016 Paralympics which was held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 7 to 18 September, 2016. India sent large number of delegation than ever in history of summer Paralympic games with total 19 competitors (16 men, 3 women) for participation in 5 sports. Competitor’s categorization on the basis of sports consisted of Athletics (total-15, men-13, and women-2), Archery (women-1), Powerlifting (men-01), Shooting (men-01), and Swimming (men-1). Also, in terms of Indian performance at Paralympics, it has been considered India’s best ever performance in history of Paralympic games with total 4 medals (Gold-2, Silver-1, and Bronze-1). India has sent its largest ever delegation in the history of summer Paralympic games i.e. 19 competitors in 5 sports. Devendra Jhajharia performed better than his previous own world record

performance of 62.15 and set new world record with a throw of 63.97m and also won gold medal in Javelin throw event. Mariyappan Thangavelu won India's first Paralympic gold medal with an impressive jump of 1.89m in the men's T42 high jump event. Deepa Malik scripted history by securing second place in the women's F53 shot put event with a personal best throw of 4.61m. She has also become India's first woman and the oldest athlete ever to win a medal at the Paralympics. Varun Singh Bhati won bronze medal with 1.86m jump in men’s T-42 high jump event. India finished at 43rd rank in medal tally with these 4 medals. Table 2 indicates the medal won by Indian athletes at Summer Paralympics starting from 1972 to 2016. Further table 3 and 4 indicates the medal won by Indian athletes with sports classification and para-athletes honored by awards.

Table 2: Indian Medalist at Summer Paralympics

Edition	Year	Host City, Country	Name of Athlete	Sport	Event	Section	Medal	India’s Rank
IV	1972	Heidelberg, West Germany	Murlikant Petkar	Swimming	50m Freestyle	Men	Gold	25
VII	1984	Stoke Mandeville, New York and New York City, United States	Bhimrao Kesarkar	Athletics	Javelin Throw L6	Men	Silver	37
			Joginder Singh Bedi	Athletics	Shot Put L6	Men	Silver	
					Javelin Throw L6	Men	Bronze	
					Discus Throw L6	Men	Bronze	
XII	2004	Athens, Greece	Devendra Jhajharia	Athletics	Javelin Throw F44/46	Men	Gold	53
			Rajinder Singh Rahelu	Powerlifting	56kg	Men	Bronze	
XIV	2012	London, United Kingdom	Girisha Nagarajegowda	Athletics	High Jump F42	Men	Silver	67
XV	2016	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Devendra Jhajharia	Athletics	Javelin Throw F44/46	Men	Gold	43
			Mariyappan Thangavelu		High Jump F42	Men	Gold	
			Deepa Malik		Shot Put F53	Women	Silver	
			Varun Singh Bhati		High Jump F42	Men	Bronze	

Table 3: Medals won by Para athletes by sports

Sport	Medals			
	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Athletics	3	4	3	10
Swimming	1	0	0	1
Powerlifting	0	0	1	1
				12

Table 4: Para Athletes honored with Awards

S.No.	Name of Para Athlete	Sport	Name of Award	Year
1.	Murlikant Petkar	Swimming	Padma Shree	2017
2.	Devendra Jhajharia	Athletics	Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna	2017
			FICCI Para-Sportsperson of the Year	2014
			Padma Shri (first Paralympian to be so honoured)	2012
			Arjuna Award	2004
			Maharana Pratap Puraskar Award	2005
			Arjuna Award	2004
3.	Mariyappan Thangavelu	Athletics	Padma Shri	2017
			Arjuna Award	2017
4.	Varun Singh Bhati	Athletics	Arjuna Award	2018
5.	Girisha Nagarajegowda	Athletics	"Rajyotsava Award" by the Government of Karnataka	2012
			Padma Shri Award	2013
			Arjuna Award	2014
			"Ekalavya" Award by Government of Karnataka	2013
			2012"State Award" by Disabled welfare department Govt of Karnataka	2012
6.	Naresh Kumar Sharma	Shooting	Arjuna Award	1997
7.	Deepa Malik	Athletics	Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna	2019
			PadmaShri Award	2017
			President Role Model Award	2014
			Arjuna Award	2012
			Maharashtra Chhatrapati Award (sports)	2009-10
			Haryana Karambhoomi Award	2008
			Swawlamban Puruskar Maharashtra	2006

Challenges for Para athletes in India

Present situation of sports is on the ways for the improvement of sports ecosystem in India. It is vital for all to understand the factors those adversely affects sports in India and also need to be aware about steps taken by government to resolve the situation. Numerous reasons are there behind underdevelopment of para-sports in India, few were mentioned below-

1. Infrastructure is necessary for purpose of training and also to organize sports event. Non-availability of sports facilities and few or lack of access to few sections of society adversely affected the sports participation and also to the quality of a sportsperson.
2. Due to the mismanagement of sports authorities in India, few or little sports facilities were provided to the para-athletes before their performance at Paralympics. Still there are some sports authorities who are not able to manage or provide the sports facilities to para-athletes.
3. Economic and social inequalities have negative effect on the sports in India. Few or lack access to sports infrastructure due to poverty, lack of encouragement to girls to participate in sports, concentration of sports stadium and other sports opportunities only in cities, etc., have diminished the development of a positive sports culture in the country.
4. For the development of any sector, formulation and execution of an effective policy is essential. This is true for sports as well. Till date, the sports policy planning and implementation is centralized in the country due to the paucity of resources and the expertise by the State and local governments. Moreover, the absence of a separate ministry of sports at the union level reflects the apathy towards sports.
5. Compared to other developed and developing countries, allocation of financial resources is inadequate in India.

To remedy the situation, the union government has taken a number of initiatives in recent years. Some of them are -

1. In April 2016, the Central Sector Scheme, Khelo India – National Programme for Development of Sports was

approved by the government. It includes the erstwhile Rajiv Gandhi Khel Abhiyan, Urban Sports Infrastructure Scheme and National Sports Talent Search System Programme.

2. In September 2017, the Union Cabinet approved the Khelo India programme. The programme aims at mainstreaming the sport as a tool for development of an individual, community development, economic development and national development. Khelo India Programme would impact the entire sports ecosystem, including the sports infrastructure, talent identification, community sports, competition structure, coaching for excellence, and sports economy.
3. In March 2017, twelve Indian players of international reputation were appointed by the government as the National Observers for first time for development of various sports in India. Among other responsibilities, they evaluate the existing sports infrastructure/ equipment, quality of scientific backup and medical facilities at the venues of national coaching camps and also report the critical gaps if found.
4. Under the scheme of "Assistance to National Sports Federations", government has been providing financial assistance to recognized NSFs (National Sports Federations) for supporting girls or women exposure, participation and training at the national and international level.
5. In order to provide support and best possible help to the athletes for their training for upcoming 2020 Olympics, the government approved the appointment of foreign coaches and supporting staff.
6. Under khelo India scheme for promotion of sports among differently-abled persons, Ministry has recognized three National Sports Federations (NSFs) namely All India Sports Council of the Deaf (AISCD), Paralympic Committee of India (PCI), and Special Olympic Bharat (SOB). Government provides support to the differently-abled athletes, through their respective NSFs, for participation in national championships and international events. All the three NSFs for the differently-abled

athletes have been placed in the “Priority” category so that they are eligible for maximum financial assistance under the Scheme of Assistance to NSFs.

Conclusions

In India, an event like Paralympics was not known by common man before. Our country not much awaked for para athletes earlier but due to success achieved by Indian para athletes in 2016 Rio Paralympics awareness immerged among Indian. Several acts such as the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 and the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006 were developed to provide support to the need of individuals with disabilities so that they could participate in recreation and sports activities. In comparison to normal athlete, para athletes are often ignored and not having much social recognition. They have to undergo societal rejection and discrimination before making their appearance at international level. People are not aware about such competitions for para athletes. However, at recent 2016 Rio Paralympics, India performed well by winning four medals for India with first ever medal won in women category also. There is a major focus on the field events, and this led to the evolution of elite para athletes such as Devendra Jhajharia and Mariyappan Thangavelu. Since 1968, India has won total 12 medals in Paralympics, even though some people are not aware about it. To change the existing scenario in India for para athletes, the union sports ministry released huge amount in the previous financial year of 2018-19 under the Khelo India Scheme. This scheme has allocated sufficient funds for the creation of specialized sports infrastructure for persons with disabilities. Today, people with disabilities are winning several medals at international event and make our country proud. Most of these athletes belong to rural backgrounds and they worked so hard to succeed despite fund deficits, rampant corruption and overall apathy that outbreak our system. It is high time to understand and acknowledge the struggle and success that they have to endure to qualify for, and win medals in global sporting events like the Paralympics.

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