

## RURAL SPORTS POLICY FOR SIKKIM

"India is a young nation. India is a nation of young people...We must build a new India of their dreams."

*-Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, Independence Day, 2006*

### PREAMBLE

Youth, as defined in the National Youth Policy (13-35 years) constitute nearly 47 per cent of India's population or some 500 million (50 crore). If we add together all children, adolescents, and young men and women in the country, the percentage rises to 77 per cent or close to 800 million (80 crore) – the largest body of youth in the world with an average age of about 25 years. As the Prime Minister highlighted in his Inaugural Address to the Knowledge Commission in August 2005, and reiterated in his address to the Moscow State University, December last year, this youth force constitutes our single most important competitive advantage on human resource terms in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century over all developed countries and even China as these young men and women are at their most creative and productive in comparison to the relatively ageing populations of the developed world and China. Thus, youth development constitutes a crucial dimension of nation-building if we are to "restore India in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to the vanguard position it has traditionally held in the advancement of human civilization"

Sports and Games constitute a critical component of youth development. Yet, according to figures furnished to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports by the University Grants Commission, not much more than 30 million (3 crore) students are afforded sports and games facilities in schools and universities. Perhaps another 20 million (2 crore) are afforded opportunities in sports and games through youth clubs, sports clubs etc. Thus, at least 700 million (70 crore) of our youth have no or only marginal access to organized sports and games. Of these, at least 450 million (45 crore) are boys, girls and youth living in rural India. Yet, the Central Government budget allocation for

rural sports was only Rs. 45 crore ( or one rupee per head per year) in 2004-05, it was abolished altogether the following year. Now, except for a small rural sports tournaments component of a larger sports promotion programme, the entire responsibility for promoting sports opportunities for rural youth vests entirely in State Governments. Anyone traveling through our village Panchayats would be aware of the overwhelming felt need and demand from these young people, their parents and elders for the provision of facilities for organized sports and games.

Apart from the role of sports and games in general youth development, it is only by exponentially widening the participation of this huge mass of young people in organized sports and games that we will be able to mine the huge reservoir of sports talent that undoubtedly exists in our country but languishes for want of attention. Thus, the number of “talented sportspersons” being trained by the Sports Authority of India (10,000) is a fraction of the number of talented sportspersons trained, for example, in Cuba – whose total population is less than even that of our capital city alone! China is reported to have 5 million young sportspersons, recognized as such and recipients therefore, of training and other related sports requirements. If in the international arena, India’s showing is the most pathetic among all countries of comparable size, that has a great deal to do with talent-spotting and talent-nurturing being confined to a very small fraction of our total youth population.

To presume from this, however, that they are more smart and talented than their counterpart in the villages would constitute an error in judgment and an expensive one, for a huge and an unforgivable number of gifted children would be consigned to anonymity without ever having been given a chance to display their ability and, more importantly, a fair chance to serve the country.

India still lags in the field of sports in the community of nations. The search light for spotting talents now needs to be directed from the urban areas, where facilities are always available to the ambitious youth, to the villages, where they are not.

The immortal lines from Greys' 'Elegy' can be appropriately recounted here, to serve as a reminder of an obligation owed to those who may have been forgotten:

'full many a gem of the purest ray serene, the dark unfathomed caves of the ocean bear,

Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, to waste its' sweetest in the desert air'

#### The Policy

The Rural Sports Policy has two pronged purpose:

- 1) To engage rural youth in sporting activities
- 2) To create a pathway for the talented towards national level competition.

The policy must, therefore, seek to be in tandem with the sports policy of the State and the work of the different associations overseeing the promotion of a particular sport in the State as a whole. Sports in the rural areas must, therefore, merge seamlessly with sports at the State level with international competition a logical conclusion to the former.

With this in view the policy aims at achieving the following broad goals:

#### 1) Broad basing

As suggested by the term, the aim here is to bring as many participants as is possible within the ambit of organized competition. However, as opposed to sports being organized by district and State associations for the general public, Rural Sports would integrate into existing organizational structures already prevalent in the villages, like the Panchayats and the Nehru Yuvak Kendra Sangathans.

This would retain the culture of the village and promote effective coordination. The added advantage would be the dovetailing of various rural programmes so sports can derive advantage from these, especially in terms of infrastructure development and acquiring extra funding for its' coaching camps and competitions.

Such broad basing and the exposure of large numbers of youth to sports activities would also entail the State associations to seek talents in the villages who could be groomed for higher level competitions. One of the great middle distance runners, an Olympic legend, Miruts Yifter of Ethiopia, emerged from a remote village in Africa to dominate the world of distance running.

Rural areas, i.e. villages are normally small in size with a limited population. It, therefore, stands to reason that sports chosen to be promoted must be limited in number, appropriate to the area and in which games talent can be found. In keeping this notion, the following sports are identified for promotion:

- 1) Archery
- 2) Football
- 3) Boxing
- 4) Distance running and throwing events(athletics)
- 5) Tae Kwando
- 6) Volleyball
- 7) Basketball
- 8) Kho Kho
- 9) Tug-of-war
- 10) Table Tennis

#### 2) Talent Search and Coaching Camps

This is a logical development to the broad basing of sports. Talented will be scouted at two levels – under 12 years olds and senior players and athletes, who display a high degree of ability in their sport.

This follow up will entail the teaching of basics to the juniors and communicating the names of the seniors to the State associations for inclusion in State level camps, thus providing an opportunity for the athlete to represent the State and to claim the benefits given to deserving sportspersons by the Government in keeping with its policy of encouraging sports.

#### 3) Equipment support

The dovetailing of sports with other rural programmes will be encouraged to enable the tapping of resources for the acquisition of sports equipments.

State of the art sports equipments are essential components in top class competition but rudimentary facilities can, paradoxically, develop a keener sense of neuro-muscular coordination. It may not be far fetched to say that some of the great Brazilian dribblers in football learnt their skills in the by lanes of Rio.

Innovation will, therefore, be the key method employed to make the most of what is available and to save on valuable resource. “Zig-zag” poles of fibre used for training in football and costing upto Rs.50,000/- can easily be replaced

by ones made of bamboo, for instance, which may be obtained free of cost in a village. Both would serve the same purpose.

Another example of innovation is the use of tyres and ropes hung from trees or a bar, making for excellent equipments for cultivating “athleticism” in children.

#### 4) Infrastructure

The Government of India have stopped providing grant-in-aid to the States for the promotion and development of sports.

Although grants for rural sports, especially, for the development of playfields is still made available. However, unlike the sports associations which function independently and are not community based organizations in the way a Panchayat is, Rural Sports activities such as the development of physical infrastructure, can be integrated into the other schemes of the rural development department e.g. the creation of an indoor hall facility in the Block Development Office buildings.

The idea of innovation can find expression in the manner in which the village terrain can be used for distance running, one of the sport the policy singles out for promotion. The hilly region is a natural track for training. One of the great milers of all time, the Australian Herb Elliot, ran on sand dunes as a part of his training.

The policy thus aims at making the promotion of rural sports a sustainable and a productive one and highlights the differences in the manner in which sports is promoted by the associations.

#### 5) Technical Infrastructure

For meaningful organization of competitions a trained cadre of referees, judges and other officials is necessary in keeping with the fact that the conduction of all sports fall within the ambit of the ‘laws of the game’.

The Rural Sports Committees will ensure that such a voluntary force is created. Since Rural Sports is ‘amateur sports’ in nature, the services of such persons as interested in umpiring a game or acting as time keeper for instance, must be voluntary. Existing facilities will be utilized to the maximum to meet the targets of the policy. The utilization of the services of Physical Education Teachers posted in the schools close by would be a case in point. Assistance of the State associations and senior sportspersons of the area would also be sought.

However, just as rural sportspersons can aim to represent the State and the country, interested persons in the technical aspects of a sport would also be so encouraged.

#### 6) Rural Sports Library

Sports is a technical subject and advancement in it can only be brought about through advancement in knowledge in the many dimensions that constitute it – from books on the history of a sport, its' personalities, the laws guiding it and the techniques and tactics employed in playing it.

#### Conclusion

The promotion and development of sports in the rural areas as outlined in the policy, has important sociological dimensions, as it engages the whole village, through its' elected members, in common cause.

Sports at one level is a lively recreational activity, an antidote to stress in the adult and restlessness in the young. It is, therefore, important for the health of the society. At another level, where it concerns the youth, it is a potent weapon that can counter balance the temptations to try drugs and alcohol to relieve frustration – a point that can hardly be overstated. It is today a major problem facing families and worried nations.

Sports is a creative activity that burns up energy which otherwise finds expression in undesirable, self destructive past time.

Organized and played properly it develops character in those who participate in it and for those who have talent, it can mean a profitable future.

The State Government realizes the vast potential lying latent in youth in the rural areas, it acknowledges its' responsibility in providing the facility and opportunity by which they can serve society.

The Rural Sports Policy seeks to achieve this goal in the field of sports.