

Filling The Policy-Law Gap in Indian Sports Governance: A Critical Legal Review

Dr. Shilpa Rao Rastogi^{1*}, Ms. Isha Dhanda²

¹Head of the Department & Associate Professor of Law, Vivekananda Global University, Jaipur, 303012, India

²Research Scholar of Law, Vivekananda Global University, Jaipur, 303012, India

*E-mail: ishadhanda@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The current article seeks to understand the need for a Sports Law in India by tracing the available literature especially in India in the area of sports. There have been several scholars who have addressed the various aspects of sports such as the politicisation, age-fraud, corruption, selection procedure and the like issues that are plaguing sports in India. A similar pattern is shaping the development of sports law in India. It looks into the various aspects covering sports and the ultimate decision making that must be made by the various sportspersons. The codification of the area of sports is being sought as a precursor to the existing legal scenario in which the various sports disputes are being understood as means for espousing the cause of sports and the future of sports in India. There has been ample literature for understanding the lacunae prevalent in sports which must be addressed by a carefully crafted sports law that must cover the areas of governance, regulation, competition policies, agendas, Arbitration techniques and the future of sports in India. The present paper seeks to delve on various aspects of sports and their outcomes in bringing about the much needed shift in sports in India. The setting up of a sports regulatory body and setting up of specific committees for looking into various aspects of sports in India has meant that the sports need a proper channel to address their disputes and manage the working of various sports bodies which have been exerting their influence and governing sports since a long time. It is the need of the hour to look into the monopolistic structure of these organizations and develop a mechanism to deal with these concerns of sports.

Keywords: Sports Law, Sports Disputes, Sports Arbitration, Sports Bodies, Sports Code

INTRODUCTION

The present article covers the various sports bodies that have been at the helm for managing sports in India and the committees that were set up for addressing various issues in sports in India. Some examples are the organizations that have been set up for looking into the various matters dealing with the games and the outcomes of the same in the overall scheme of the administration and management of sports in India. The policy procedures have for long been responsible for taking decisions in the context of sports.

All these aspects highlight the influence of the statements that is the policies on the sports in India. There are various other aspects also such as the various parties resorting to arbitration as an Alternative Dispute Mechanism for resolution of sports disputes in India. The Constitutional aspect of the coverage of the area of sports as a State Subject under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India has also been contested as a matter which must be shifted to the Concurrent List for giving the Centre equal powers for deliberating on the subject of sports.

The autonomy of sports bodies such as sports federations, organizations and associations is highly problematic due to the existence of a monopolistic structure of these instrumentalities which are also not considered state since they are not public authorities and hence not accountable under the Constitution of India but there are some instances in which the courts in India have deviated from this position. The same has been discussed further on in this paper.

The passage of National Sports Policy in 1984 and the sports policies passed thereafter casted a slew of statements and propositions that did not frutify in any concrete manner for upholding the needs, demands and requirements of sports sector in India. Even the Committee recommendations have not been done justice to in any form in the

form of their implementation. The current paper provides a critique of the various sports policies in India and the manner in which they have shaped sports in India.

THEORY

Several judicial pronouncements have stressed on the relevance of understanding sports in the context of legal framework. These are as follows. *Ajay Jadega v. Union of India* covered the question as to whether the sports bodies could be considered as public functionaries to be covered by the writ jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the High Court in India. This question was answered in the affirmative. Hence, it was decided that the sports bodies can be covered as public functionaries of the state to take decisions and influence the working of sports.

Zee Telefilms and Others v. Union of India & Others covered the question with regard to the inclusion of BCCI as a body that falls under the category of state. It was decided by the Supreme Court that BCCI does not fall within the category of state under Article 12 of the Constitution of India. It was in this case that the need for a uniform regulatory body for looking into the affairs of sports was recognised.

K. Murugan v. Fencing Association of India, Jabalpur underlined the importance of passage of a sports law in India. *Indian Olympic Association v. Union of India* stated that the National Sports Development Code, 2011 was valid. In the international jurisprudence, *Lindland v. United States Wrestling Association* flagged the onerous task of litigating sports disputes. As a matter of fact, sports disputes are usually sent for arbitration which is a form of alternative dispute mechanism and is a smart tactic to solve sports disputes.

From an international perspective, the existence of sports law in some countries of the world has established an important context for passage of a sports law in India as well. Some of the key issues plaguing the field of sports in India are mismanagement, non-accountability, misuse of funds, election frauds and unfair selection procedure. The above mentioned reasons have solidified the need for a sports law in India for advancing, improving and uniformly regulating sports in India. The implementation of the National Sports Policy has also not taken place.

Sports Law of India must take the following measures. Firstly, constitute a Sports Commission for identifying talent and increasing participation, advising Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, monitoring funding of sports federations including funding at the national and provincial levels and the implementation of sports policies in India. Secondly, inclusion of sports at the school level. Thirdly, maintenance of sports infrastructure. Fourthly, sports associations and federations would be listed under this legislation instead of being independent and self-governing. Fifthly, the legislation must provide for dispute resolution. This would include formation of boards/panels and punishing the offenders for not adhering to the principles or the code of conduct. Sixthly, SAI under this Act would organize sports activities in India on a regular basis. Thus, a Sports Law would become a means to an end in the case of sports in India.

METHODOLOGY

This is doctrinal and policy-based study involving a qualitative analysis providing a comprehensive overview of sports policies in India. The existent published literature on the topic has been covered. The focus is on the relevance of framing a sports law of India. The time frame that has been covered includes the present scenario, growth and development of sports in India.

The research questions are as follows.

1. How are the various stakeholders in sports being regulated in India?
2. How are sports governed in India?
3. Why is a sports law needed in India?

The present article covers the legislative framework on sports law in India using various sources for analysing the existent materials on sports law in India. There have been several research papers that have already been written on the existent sports law in India. These also include thesis that have been extensively written on this topic. The websites of the various ministries have also served as a viable background for referring to the various sports

policies that have been framed. Thus, the article is a doctrinal study of the existent text on sports law in India. One case law has also been analysed to understand the relevance of the need for a sports law in India.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present article traces the influence of commercialisation on sports in the form of agreements between players thereby calling for a need of Sports Law in place to bring about changes in the form of anti-competitive practices for tackling various sports issues across India. The lack of a uniform structure in sports and the increasing trend of bringing about business model in sports has called for new forms of regulation and governance of sports.

The present paper traces the various policies in India that have shaped an outlook towards sports in India by focusing on the need for a sports law in India. The working of numerous sports commissions has been analysed for properly understanding the significance of sports in terms of the impact that sports has on society and for understanding the manner in which sports can be governed in India. The working of sports bodies and the recommendations of the Lodha Committee form a substantial portion of the article thereby emphasising the need for a sports law in India.

The article stresses some key aspects in the area of sports that must be addressed through a law namely jurisdiction, manner and procedure of functioning in sports, sports policy in India, liability in the case of sports injuries, employment issues in sports, harassment in sports including sexual harassment as well as age, promotion and seniority of players, manner in which the game is organized, research on sports and therefore, the need for a sports law in India.

The article covers the importance of various laws in sports in the context of regulating the overall game that is played. The focus at hand is on the application of competition law in sports. It encompasses the manner in which sports must work and carry out the much needed reforms in the context of the game that is played. The competition in the games are seen as an indicator of the developments that must take place for bringing about changes in the context of the sports that are played. This type of work is intrinsic to ensuring that the level of working is up to the mark and is regulated and governed by the law in the correct manner. The key areas that have been highlighted in this text include administration of sports and a check on the unethical practices prevalent in sports.

A piece in a leading online website has referred to the latent potential of the Indian sports industry thereby focusing on the potential of sports in terms of the huge changes that must be brought in terms of the game, commercialisation, business, employment, market, tourism, manufacturing, goods and apparel industry, medicine, management, sponsorship and export. These have been the economically strong areas that must be focused on for the purpose of bringing about a sea level change in terms of the development of sports in India which has remained unexplored till now.

The issues of criminal charges being levied against the chief of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) found publicity in terms of the growth of politicisation in sports which has led to an emphasis on the level of serious matters that have been plaguing sports but have either gone unreported or unaddressed. The same has been the indicator of various matters that have not been highlighted either by the athletes or the associations. The search has been one of prominent importance and significance for highlighting the deficits prevalent in the present system of sports in India.

The article delves into the importance of state in looking into the various aspects of sports by considering the organisation of sports bodies and the role of private regulators in the same. The above mentioned study has been carried out in the context of France and Germany, the two countries where there has been a well demarcated structure to be proposed in sports. The same has been referred to for comparison of organization of sports in India from an international perspective.

The article has highlighted the growth of sports law in the context of games that are played and the manner in which sports are played. This inquiry is indispensable for understanding the legal structure that must be employed for understanding the new types of courses, programmes and awareness campaigns that are being promoted for bringing about a sea change in the context of sports law. This has been a key feature for understanding sports and

the importance that must be given to sports law in India given the pace at which it is growing and spreading its influence.

The main argument of the article lies in favour of bringing about transparency in the functioning of the regulator for cricket in India namely the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). This process has been instrumental for bringing about a sea change in the manner in which sports bodies are viewed. It is important to value the role played by sports in the determination of key aspects of human personality and the critical decisions that are to be made and therefore, the need for regulating sports in a systematic manner through the means of law.

The sports law in India is non-existent as has been unmasked during the course of this research. There are several policies that have been operational on paper in India. There is a constant demand for infrastructure in sports that is being made from across all the quarters. This has been consistently mentioned in all the sports policies that have been passed till now. There is no change in the new developments that are being made continuously for espousing the cause of sports and the impact of the same on the developments that are being made.

The Indian scenario on sports law is bent towards a policy framework instead of a legislative framework thereby sparking rumours about the impact of new parameters that are being added consistently in the field of sports for proper analysis of the context in which sports is being played, enjoyed, consumed and competed against across all the quarters. This has been of utmost significance for understanding the relevance of a legal understanding of sports in the appropriate realm.

The study has been an eye-opener for understanding the position of India in sports globally. There is no regulatory body for looking into the work of sports bodies, sports associations and sports federations. There has been constant interpretation of the policies that have been in place in case of the need for sports law in India. There has been a constant need for understanding the implementation and execution of sports policies. The manner in which sports has shaped the overall economy of India has also been understood. The future of players is often reflected in the manner in which these policies are framed and the lackadaisical manner in which these policies are structured.

There is dearth of material to be covered for the analysis of sports policies let alone their framework and the legislative perspective being offered for the implementation of the same. There is a total chaos around the idea of sports and the picture that the games entail in terms of the analysis of sports across all quarters of the economy. The idea that sports is played for a reference to be given in the context of the games brings about the much needed analysis of the sports that are played in India.

There is no problem in the games that are played in India. The real issue lies with the attitude of the various stakeholders who are themselves responsible for the sport that is being played. Starting with the players themselves, firstly there is lack of proper opportunities being provided to the sportspersons. Secondly, the sports managers, administrators and organizers do not agree with the sports code and policies. They have their own set of rules, regulations and by-laws that they follow. This creates an autonomic structure which further propagates the dictatorial mannerisms of these players and their event holders. This has a direct impact on the game as well as the players.

Thirdly, the legal experts know the current scenario as the harbinger of a time when it becomes imperative to have a sports law in India. There is gross injustice that is being caused to all the stakeholders of sports including sportspersons, sports managers, sports administrators, sports bodies, sports associations, sports federations, spectators, legal experts, coaches, trainers, sports teachers as well as other important people who are an intrinsic part of the game.

Fourthly, the common man who goes to watch a game or is a viewer on the media platform often wonders the consequences of playing a game and the possible after effects of the same in the form of the apparent factors that have a key role to play in the game. A spectator is often the most important part of the game who governs the work of the game and looks into the various aspects of the game that impact the shortcomings of the players and the future roadmap of the sport that is played.

Fifthly, the coaches and trainers are often the most neglected sections in the sports world. They are neither recognised nor valued as an important part of the game. They are seen in the context of the value that they add to

the sport and the after-effects of the outcome of a game that only they have to bear. They are solely held responsible for the resources, opportunities as well as problems that the players encounter in the course of their game. They are seen as the guides for the sport and are often held in high regard for the outcomes of the sport that is played.

The sports policies in India lack a concrete perspective on sports due to lack of a socio-legal study of sports. There is no proper structure that has been given to sports in terms of the policies that have been framed and the manner in which sports has shaped the outcomes of the games that are played in India. There have been lofty ideals that have been set without considering the needs of the players and other stakeholders and their problems. This has been analysed in the context of the games that have been played and the sports that have been played across various quarters.

The present study points towards a concrete shape that must be given to the arena of sports in terms of legal regulation and governance that can only be done with the help of statutory provisions on sports. This study would be important for understanding the critical aspects of sports and the intrinsic aspects that would be instrumental in bringing about a change in the sports policies and the impacts of the same in the context of the Indian landscape. The importance of a legal structuring of sports cannot be disregarded.

Legal regulation would bring in new aspects that must be brought in effect to bring new parameters for highlighting the new models for heralding a new era that would help in bringing about legal regulations, rules and by-laws to be implemented in sports. The present era of sports needs a proper direction that must be provided to sports. This manner of working would be given a prime importance in terms of the changes that are made for regulating the arena of sports and bringing about new changes in the manner in which games are played and new era would be heralded.

Laws have for long been a medium of regulating human conduct in a civilised society. Deterrence has been the main objective of laws that has been provided for regulating the human conduct and the organisation of activities in a society. This objective has been realised through the medium of passage of specific legislations in addition to the general legislations from time to time. Everyday new legislations are being framed to bring about changes to the context within which the laws operates that is the society itself which constitutes the various constituents of the game as well as the sport that is played.

This has been analysed in the framework of the sports that has often been brought to the forefront for understanding the context in which games have been played and various sports have shaped the society in which they are played and organised. The sports often find themselves in a new air of publicity which is brought about by the changes that they portray in terms of the changes to be brought in the structure of the society that is the context within games are played.

The article is an addition to the existing framework of sports policies in India by acting as a ready reckoner to be used for portraying the level of work that these contexts can provide for proper understanding of the games that are played and the manner in which they are played across various sections of the society. The level of working of sports bodies is carried out through the medium which is often served by the value that is prescribed by the various sports quarters across various mediums of the legal spectrum as well.

The legislative outlook towards sports would bring into check the existing framework of sports and the manner in which sports have been undermining the role of sportspersons in the society by making them susceptible to the whims and fancies of the various sports bodies, sports associations and sports federations. These laws would be up to the mark for understanding the context within which sports are played and organised at the level of the organization. This includes the manner in which sports are played and understood for proper development and growth of sports, sporting opportunities and the future of sportspersons in India.

A sports law would no doubt bring about changes in the context of the policies presently existent in sports in India. The implementation of these sports policies has not been up to the mark due to which it has become all the more important to have a sports law in place which would in turn regulate the sports in India and bring about the much needed changes in the arena of sports which have not been concretized till now due to the changing avenues of sports and the sporting contexts that have brought about changes in the manner in which sports is played.

Policies do not fill the gap that is being felt due to the absence of a Sports Law that would be the sole determinant of the future of sports in India. The future of any event is rightly judged by the present of the happening. The same is applicable to sports in India as well. It would not be wrong to say that sports are played as a leisure, entertainment as well as luxury in India. This has been proved by the statistics that have been provided by the sports policies in India.

The problems of infrastructure, sports facilities, resources, amenities, participation, doping, corruption, selection procedure, age fraud and many other aspects have been highlighted by the context within which these games are played and the environment that is available to sports in India. It is a viable ecosystem that is being demanded at the outskirts to see sportspersons in India flourishing and achieving new heights in the context of the games that are played.

A policy based perspective is not the right parameter to judge sports in India. It must be used as an index of the prevalent problems that have been pervading the arena of sports and creating new avenues for sportspersons and other stakeholders in sports in India. It goes without saying that the stakeholder most affected by sports in India are the sportspersons who must play in accordance with the various sports policies in India. But unfortunately that is not the reality of sports in India.

Sports in India are either in the hands of the corporate leaders who have influenced the game either as the owner of the teams in the commercialised version of sports such as the Indian Premier League of Cricket in India or the managers and administrators of sports such as the Former President of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), Mr. Brij Bhushan who has been held guilty of sexual harassment of female Olympic winning wrestlers of India namely Sakshi Malik and Vinesh Phogat amongst many others who have not opened their mouths or revealed their identity or raised their voices or filed complaints against the autocrat. The reasoning is simple the fear of end of their career as a sportsperson.

The same problem is reflected in the consequent election of Mr. Sanjay Singh, a close aide of Mr. Brij Bhushan, as the President of the Wrestling Federation of India. Some attribute it to the politics being involved in sports as well. There must be some truth to this allegation. There is no smoke without fire. Vinesh Phogat losing the silver medal at the recent Paris Olympics, 2024 in wrestling due to 100 grams of her weight bringing about disparity in her qualification due to not complying with her category weight in the game and the Court of Arbitration of Sport (CAS) ruling against her upholding the Rule of Law in sports highlight the need for a sports law in India.

These all facts do point towards politicisation of sports. The same problem is admitted by a lot of sportspersons themselves in addition to other stakeholders involved in sports. The present article seeks to bring about the much needed impetus for passage of a sports law in India due to the consequences of not having one till now and the utter dissatisfaction in all the sports in India due to the lack of a uniform sports law in India. Sports are different but there can be a Sports Law in India.

CONCLUSION

Is the current status of sports in India satisfactory? What are the shortcomings of the present sports policies in India? How can the legal framework benefit sports in India? How are the various stakeholders in sports dealing with the issues that arise in the game? Do sports require undivided attention in India? What is the future of sports in India? Is it feasible to have a sports law in India? Can a sports law be implemented in India? Is there a need for research on the topic of sports law in India?

The present article started with the study of sports policies in India due to the absence of a sports law in India. The sports policies have been comprehensively discussed in order to understand the good as well as bad points of these sports policies in India. There is no comprehensive procedure for implementation of sports policies in India. This is the sole reason for their unsuccessful role in sports in India. Instead of helping, promoting and developing sports in India, the sports policies have acted as the limitation for the promotion of a sporting culture in India.

The sports policies have failed in bringing about basic changes in the sports culture in India such as fulfilment of the requirement for sports infrastructure being provided in rural as well as urban areas, sports funding being

provided to various sports, lack of recognition being granted to indigenous sports, lack of financial sports being provided to all sportspersons, equal opportunities being provided to all sportspersons and lack of an incentive for sportspersons in India.

These are some issues that have been expressly mentioned in the sports policies themselves needing redressal but have not been addressed till now. This has been a cause of worry for all the stakeholders that have been involved in sports. Instead of achieving excellence in sports, the sportspersons are tackling the above mentioned issues at large and getting redressal for the sportspersons who have been an intrinsic part of the game. This poor condition has been highlighted by the sports policies themselves in the context of the Indian scenario that has been affected immensely by the changes that have been brought in the context of the sports in India.

Sports policies are certainly not the right model for structuring sports in India. Given the recently passed National Sports Policy, 2025, there is a dire need for stoppage in framing new sports policies in India. The need of the hour is a Sports Law that would bring about uniformity in sports in India and concretise the existent sporting scenario. Legal regulation and governance would be the right medium for bringing about the much needed recourse for addressing and resolving the issues plaguing sports in India.

Therefore, sports must be included in the Concurrent List to bridge the gap that has been left due to the lack of autonomy being given to the Central Government for regulating sports in India. The Sports Acts of the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and South Africa amongst other countries having a sports legislation would act as the ready reckoners for understanding the importance of passing a sports law in India and the structure to be followed for the same.

The various stakeholders involved in sports such as athletes, federations, regulators and spectators would be affected differently by the sports scenario in India and hence they need separate grievance redressal mechanisms for addressing their problems. It is imperative that the Sports Law of India must cover some key aspects that have been instrumental in governing and regulating sports in India such as registration, compliance, dispute resolution, doping and women's safety amongst other issues and matters that might be dealt with.

It is clear from the drawbacks of the policy framework existent in sports in India that there is need for a new Parliamentary Bill on Sports in the form a Sports Bill that must be drafted, cleared, passed, enacted and finally implemented in order to bring constructive change in the current situation existing in sports in India. The alternative to the above mentioned solution would be building on the National Sports Development Code.

A draft Sports Bill itself is the antidote that is needed for cutting across all the shortcomings of sports in India and heralding a new era marked with the proper redressal of sports issues in India. Sports policies have not, are not and will not serve the purpose of bringing about the much needed reforms in sports in India. Let alone the Mudgal Committee Report, Lodha Committee Report and the numerous recommendations provided from all the quarters, Sports Law is the new dawn of sports in India.

The scope of the proposed Sports Law would include interests of all the stakeholders namely sportspersons, sports bodies, sports coaches, spectators and legal experts amongst others. The structure of the authority would be hierarchical covering central, state as well as district level sports bodies and associations. A separate sports tribunal to be constituted under the Sports Act for athletes and redressal of all their grievances. Separate ethics and compliance boards to be set up for the purpose of demarcating proper model code of conduct to be adhered to in sports by all the stakeholders who are involved in the game.

The prime objective of a Sports Law must be to codify sports, enforce the law in sports and provide for a clear cooperation between the centre and the numerous regions of India for clear breakthrough in terms of the laws to be framed in sports successively as well as and when the need for the same arises.

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